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# Ter and Its Multireligious Past: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives from the Ancient to Early Medieval Period

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**Abstract**

*Ter, also known as Tagar in ancient times, was a prominent town of the early historic period. Situated on the banks of the River Terana, the town forms part of the present-day Dharashiv district in the state of Maharashtra. Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, the important foreign account of the early historic period, mentions this town as an important trade center. Beyond its role as a thriving trade center, Ter also developed into a significant religious hub, as evidenced by archaeological discoveries spanning Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.*

*The discovery of the Stupa during the excavation by K. N. Dikshit connotes Buddhist affiliations during ancient times. Apart from these, Architectural features of the Trivikram temple sanctum reveal affinities with Buddhist chaitya-griha design, suggesting cultural and religious overlap. Ter flourished in all aspects, specifically during the Satavahana period. Though Satavahana kings were associated with the Vedic religion, they patronized all three main religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. The transformation of the Trivikram temple into Vaishnavism highlights evidence of Hinduism at Ter. The Uttareshwar and Kaleshwar temples are other evidence of the Hindu religion. During the Rashtrakuta period, on the Dharashiv hills, Jain caves were excavated. Numerous sculptures of Jain tirthankaras discovered at Ter are now housed in the Ramlingappa Lamture Government Museum and the Atikshya Kshetra Mahavir Jain temple.*

*Together, these archaeological and epigraphical records illuminate the political history of ancient and early medieval dynasties, while revealing the dynamic coexistence and patronage of multiple religions at Ter. Hence this paper will try to review the multireligious past of Ter.*

***Keywords**: Ter (Tagara), Multireligious, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Archaeology*

## Introduction

Ter, also Known as Tagar in ancient times, was an important town of the early historic period. Situated on the southern bank of river Terana, the town forms a part of present day Dharashiv district in state of Maharashtra. The region of Ter formed the part of *Ashmaka Mahajanpadas*. The rule of *Satavahanas* was the most prosperous period for this town. *Ter* flourished as one of the important trade centers during Indo-Roman trade, along with the other centers such as *Paithan* and *Junnar*. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, an important foreign account of the Early Historic period, refers to *Ter* as one of the two principal inland trade centres of the Deccan. It mentions that *Paithan* was situated at a distance of about twenty days' journey from *Bargyaza*, while *Tagar* lay approximately ten days' journey east of *Paithan*. *Ter* is also referred to by Ptolemy in his geographical accounts.

The site of Ter was excavated for the first time in 1958 by P. M. Joshi, K. D. Banerjee, and B. N. Chapekar. These excavations revealed a continuous cultural sequence of occupation at *Ter*, ranging from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE (Chapekar, 1969). This excavation unfolded the *Satavahana* period occupation at the site. Findings consist of coins, figurine, beads, glass beads and also some brick architecture. Subsequent excavations were carried out during 1967–68 by Dr. M. G. Dikshit under the auspices of the Maharashtra State Department of Archaeology. The most significant discovery of this excavation was a brick-constructed Buddhist

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stupa, providing important evidence for Buddhist activity at Ter during the Early Historic period (IAR, 1967-68).

Archaeological excavations at Ter were subsequently undertaken in 1975 by S. B. Deo and T. V. Pathy. The significance of this excavation lies in the discovery of the remains of a wooden palisade encircling the settlement, indicating the presence of fortification at the site. Classical sources, notably Pliny, refer to the existence of thirty fortified cities during the Satavahana period. In light of this evidence, it has been reasonably inferred that Ter was likely one of these fortified urban centres (IAR, 1958-59). Many other explorations and excavations have been undertaken around the ancient town by research scholars, Maharashtra State department, Deccan College, Pune and Solapur University. All these attest that Tagar was an important trade and religious centre from the early historic Period.

**Literary and Epigraphical records**

The earliest literary reference of Ter is to be found in the 'Periplus of the Erythraean Sea' written by one of the Greek sailors during the first century of the Christian era. The 51 chapters of this book talk about the important trading centers of *Dakshinapath*. He wrote about Ter: "Among the market towns of Dachina bad, there are two of special importance; Paethana, a distant about twenty day's journey from Barygaza; beyond which about ten days journey east, there is another very great city, Tagara. They are brought down to Barygaza from these places by wagons and through great tracts without roads, from Paethana, carnelian in great quantity, and from Tagara much common cloth and other merchandise brought there locally from the regions along the sea-coast." (Schoff, 1912: 43)

Through this we know about facts, viz. First, Tagara was situated in *Dakshinapath*. Second distance of Ter from Barygaza and Paithan and third extensive trade of Ter.

Apart from Periplus, Ptolemy, the Greek geographer wrote about Ter in his travelogue. He states - "This city is inland from the coast and is located in the region of Ariake, and located northeast to the capital of Baithan (Paithan), the capital of the King Siri Ptolemaios (Shri Pulumavi of the Satavahana dynasty)." (Jamwadikar, pp. 12)

In the Medieval age Ter was known by another name *Terapur*. A significant Jain literature Karakanda-chariu of Kanakamara which was composed during 10th century A.D. refers to Jain caves at Terapura which are identifiable with existing caves at Dharashiva near Osmanabad. The caves were possibly excavated during the Rashtrakuta period.

A local Purana, 'Ter Mahatmya' composed in 1757 CE, states, "The town was called *Satyapura* in the *Krutayuga*, *Shantpur* in the *Tretayuga*, *Kankavati* in the *Dwaparyuga*, and *Siddhasram* in the *Kaliyuga*". Pipilika river, Kalkunda, Nagvapi and Kukulykund were located in ancient Ter. Uttareshwarling and Bilweshwarling are also located in Ter. According to the Fleet (1901: 537-552), 'Pipilika' is the ancient name of the River Terna.

The epigraphical records are not as old as literary ones. It testifies to the existence of this great city from the 7th century to 17th century A.D. The original name Tagra seems to have changed into Ter sometime after the 11th century A.D. In a Western Chalukya inscription of 612 CE, it is mentioned about Jeshthasharman, to whom the donation was made as 'Tagaranivasi' (residing at Ter). (Deo, 1986: 2). Another record of A.D. 997 describes the Silahara prince Aparajita of the northern Konkana as Tagara-pura-paramesvara. (Hultzsch, 1894-95, Vol III, 1894-95: 269,273). A Silahara inscription of A.D. 1058 calls Marasimha of the Karhad branch of the family by the title Tagara-puravara-adhisvara and further describes his grand-father Jatiga II as Tagara-nagara-bhupalaka. (Burgees, 1877: 102-103)

A heavily worn Nagari inscription found in a Jain temple to the west of present-day Ter mentions the place as Ter or Tair and records a date corresponding to A.D. 1598. (*Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandala Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, 1983: 83). A copper-plate grant acquired locally by Cousens, written in Persian, records that the Qazi of Ter confirmed certain privileges granted to the head of the Teli community on a date corresponding to A.D. 1659. (ASIAR, 1902-03: 196)

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By looking at all these literary and epigraphical records, we can say that Ter seems to have been occupied since the dawn of Christian era. It flourished as a trade centre during the first two centuries as it is described by foreign visitors. In the following period, Ter was ruled by the Chalukyas, with extant temples providing clear evidence of Chalukyan architectural and building activity. Also, as epigraphical records shows that this city passed under the sway of branches of Shilahara, i.e. North Konkan and Karhad. In the medieval period, Ter came under the dominance of Mohammedan as it was annexed by Ala-ud-din-Khilji during the early part of 14th century CE. Later it became a part of Bahamani kingdom, and after the dissolution of that monarchy it fell into the hands of the Sultan of Ahmednagar and Bijapur. Further Aurangzeb comprised this region during his Deccan conquest, till the foundation of Nizam's state in the early 18th century CE.

**Buddhism at Ter: Archaeological and Architectural Evidence:**

Ter or Tagar, a flourishing trade hub during the early historic period, also emerged as an important centre for religious and socio-cultural activities. Archaeological and historical studies carried out over the last century clearly demonstrate that Buddhism flourished at Ter, particularly between the Mauryan and Satavahana periods, reflecting the close association between trade networks, urban growth, and Buddhist patronage in the Deccan region. The recovery of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) sherds from the site indicates activity during the Mauryan period. Furthermore, the reign of Emperor Ashoka played a crucial role in the dissemination and institutionalization of Buddhism across the Indian subcontinent, which likely contributed to the establishment and growth of Buddhist centres.

***Buddhist Stupa and apsidal temple***

As mentioned earlier, remains of brick constructed stupa have been unearthed during 1967-1968 excavation by M.G. Dikshit. This finding attests that Ter was an important centre of Buddhists activity during early centuries. The total diameter of the stupa was twenty-six meters, with a chakra plan. The stupa had circular brick ribs with eight spokes and four *Ayaka* platforms with a pradakshina *path*. The stupa has been assigned to the first half of the second century CE on the basis of an inscription recovered from the site, which records the names of the masons involved in its construction, together with the discovery of a coin issued by the Satavahana ruler Pulumavi. (IAR, 1967-68).

Alongside the stupa, excavations exposed the remains of another significant architectural feature in the form of an apsidal brick-built temple. A stupa was housed within this structure, while the front portion was provided with a wooden *maṇḍapa*, as indicated by post-holes. Structural evidence points to three distinct phases of renovation, reflecting its prolonged use and enduring religious importance. The recovery of coins of Pulumavi from the associated stratigraphic levels further assists in dating the structure, (IAR 1968-1969).

Collectively, the architectural and material evidence highlights Ter as a significant centre of Buddhism during the Early Historic period. The discovery of a large stupa, an apsidal shrine, associated inscriptions, successive phases of structural renovation, and related artefactual assemblages points to long-term Buddhist presence and enduring patterns of patronage, likely facilitated by mercantile communities and urban elites. These findings firmly situate Ter within the broader religious, economic, and cultural landscape of the Satavahana Deccan.



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(Image credit - Wikipedia)

***Trivikrama Temple-***

*Trivikrama* temple at Ter is significant early architectural evidence for temple activity in Maharashtra. It is a unique example of early brick architecture in the region. Currently worshipped as a Hindu temple was originally a Buddhist Chaitya. Its architectural features also allude to this thing. However, its early religious affiliations are debatable issues among scholars. Henry Cousens suggests its Buddhists affiliations and later conversion to Brahmanical temple, were as Mate M. S. assigned this architecture originally to Vaishnava sect. Henry Cousens visited Ter in the early 20th century, and also visited the *Trivikrama* temple. A brief report of which can be found in the Archaeological Survey of India Annual report for year 1902-03. Cousens reports that it was originally a Buddhist *chaitya*, later converted into Vaishnava temple. He describes the temple as an east facing structure consisting of a shrine and flat roof mandapa or hall. The main shrine is nearly twenty-six feet long and twelve feet wide with apsidal roof and wagon vaulted roof. Briefly he describes the temple and its iconographical features.

Another interesting observation regarding the religious affiliation of trivikrama temple has been recorded by M.S. Mate. According to his notes, this temple was originally a Vaishnava temple, similar to early Pallava temples in ground plan. He observes similarity between apsidal plan at Mahabalipuram temples as well.

Currently, the temple houses the idol of *trivikrama (Vaman)* , one of the incarnations of God Vishnu.

On the basis of its architecture style Cousens dates the temple to a later period of 4th century CE and Percy Brown ascribes it to 5th century CE, whereas Mate dates it to 7th century CE.

To sum up, Buddhism at Ter represents a crucial phase in the town's long and complex religious history. The excavated stupa of 1968, associated chaitya remains, and the Buddhist architectural imprint visible in the Trivikrama temple together demonstrate that Ter was an important Buddhist centre during the Early Historic period. This Buddhist phase laid the foundation for the town's later multireligious character, where Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain traditions successively flourished, interacted, and transformed the sacred landscape of Ter.



(Trivikrama temple)



(Idol of Trivikrama)

**Jainism**

After Buddhism, Jainism was the next major and important religion in this region. The spread of Jainism in the Deccan is closely connected with mercantile communities. As Ter was a major trade center mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, merchants traveling through the region contributed to the growth of religious institutions. Jain traders and guilds are believed to have supported the establishment of temples and religious establishments in Ter.

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Various dynasties like Satavahana, Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, Shilahara patronized Jainism and it spread in the Ter and surrounding region including Dharashiva, Kunthalgiri, Pratishthan, Verul, etc. Especially during the period of Chalukya's of Badami, Jainism reached its zenith. During the period of *Rashtrakuta* (8th century AD), one of the famous Jain texts called 'Karkandachariu' mentioned about Jain caves of Dharashiva. During this period, Ter was known as '*Terapura*'.

***Dharashiva Caves***

Dharashiva caves situated about 5-6 km from Dharashiva town in Maharashtra. Built during the Rashtrakuta dynasty (8$^{th}$ century AD). There are a total of 6 Jain caves. According to Dhavalikar, these caves were originally Buddhist which might have been replaced by Jainism around the Shilahara dynasty (9$^{th}$ – 10$^{th}$ century AD). Cave no. 2 and 3 are elaborative and beautifully carved sculptures of Jain tirthankara's in seated and standing position, and other 4 caves are simple in nature.

Apart from these, there are Jain temples present in the Jain settlement of Ter, which dated back to 12-13$^{th}$ CE. Where we found various sculptures of Parshvanath, Mahavira and Rishabhanath along with the Mahavira as a main deity situated in the main shrine.



(Image credit - Wikipedia)

**Hinduism**

Over the period of time, Buddhism and Jainism started declining in India and Hindu religion started gaining popularity amongst the Indian society. Excavations and surface finds at the site have revealed terracotta figurines, cult objects, and fragments of Hindu iconography indicating the worship of various deities. These finds suggest that local forms of Brahmanical religion were practiced alongside other faiths.

Major dynasties like *Satavahana, Gupta-vakataka, Chalukya, Rashtrakuta, Kalchuris of Kalyan, Shilahara and Yadava* propagate Hinduism on a larger scale. Major architectural structures are Trivikram Temple, Uttareshwara Temple, Kaleshwar Temple, Tripurantkeshwar Temple, etc.

***Trivikram Temple***

The temple is considered one of the earliest surviving structural temples in the Deccan and a significant example of early Hindu architecture at Ter is the Trivikram temple, dedicated to Vishnu in his Trivikram (*Vaman*) form. The Trivikram temple is situated in the heart of the town, consists of a long shrine with an apsidal end, wagon-vaulted ridge roof, brick walls and low flat-roofed closed Mandapa. It is originally a Buddhist temple subsequently converted into a Hindu one. The shrine represents a chaitya while the mandapa is a late addition. The object of worship in the Buddhist days was a stupa which was later replaced by the image of Trivikram. The structure is dated to a period not later than the 4$^{th}$ Century A.D. (Chapekar, 1958: 5). The temple demonstrates the transformation of religious spaces and the interaction between Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions.

***Uttareshwar Temple***

Another important shrine is the Uttareshwar temple, dedicated to Shiva. The temple is a small dilapidated edifice of the 6$^{th}$ century A.D. situated in the town. Built exclusively in bricks, it consists of a *garbhagriha* and a porch in front with a Mandapa added later. Its wooden door-frame is beautifully decorated with a floral design enclosing figures of gods and demigods in high relief. (Chapekar, 1958: 5).

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(Image credit - Wikipaedia)

Apart from this Kaleshwar temple, Tripurantkeshwar temple, Siddheshwar temple are the other examples which give past evidence of Hinduism in the Ter and its surrounding region.

**Conclusion**

The study of Ter, identified with ancient Tagara, highlights its importance as a major trade and cultural centre from the early historic to the early medieval period. Archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence indicates the presence and development of multiple religious traditions in the region.

The coexistence of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism demonstrates that Ter functioned as a vibrant multireligious centre, where different communities flourished over time. This religious diversity was closely linked with the town's commercial prosperity and patronage by merchants and local elites.

Overall, the evidence from Ter reflects a dynamic religious landscape that contributes significantly to understanding the cultural and historical development of the Deccan region.

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