

## EKVIRA GODDESS IS A FORM OF GODDESS DURGA/PARVATI RESIDING IN KARLA CAVES IN MAHARASHTRA MORE THAN 2000 YEARS

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### ABSTRACT

"Ekvira" has multiple meanings, primarily referring to a Hindu goddess and also signifying "unique hero" or "brave one". As a goddess, Ekvira is a form of Renuka Devi, a kuladevi worshipped by communities like the Kolis in Maharashtra. In other contexts, "ekvira" (or ekavīra) is a Sanskrit term meaning a singular or unique hero, a concept found in ancient Buddhist texts.

Here's a breakdown of the different meanings.

#### 1. Goddess Ekvira:

Form of a Goddess: Ekvira is a revered Hindu goddess, considered a form of Goddess Renuka, Durga, or Parvati.

Cultural Significance: She is the kuladevi (family deity) of the Koli ethnic group and is also worshipped by the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu community.

Temples: Famous temples dedicated to Ekvira include the Ekvira Devi Temple in Karla Caves and the Ekvira Devi Temple in Amravati.

Festivals: The Koli community celebrates a festival in her honor every year at the Karla Caves.

#### 2. "Unique Hero" or "Brave One":

Sanskrit Origin: The term can also be a Sanskrit compound word, "eka-vira" (एकवीर), meaning a "unique hero" or a "singular hero".

Context in Buddhism: This meaning appears in ancient Buddhist texts like the Vajratuṇḍasamayakalparāja, referring to a powerful entity or a mantra capable of performing any task.

Other Linguistic Contexts: The name is also said to mean "brave" or "courageous" in Punjabi.

**KEYWORDS:** Karla caves, Ekvira goddess, Lonavala, Koli community.



Figure-1: Ekvira Goddess.

**Overview:** Ekvira (also spelled as Ekveera) is a Hindu goddess, regarded to be a form of the goddess Parvati, Yamai and Renuka Devi. She is the kuladevi of the Koli ethnic group and also worship by Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu community. Every year Kolis pay respect to Ekvira and celebrate the festival in Karla Caves. The Ekvira Devi Temple in Amravati is dedicated to **Goddess Ekvira**, a form of Goddess Renuka or Durga. Goddess Ekvira is considered a powerful deity and is worshipped mainly by the Koli and Agri communities in Maharashtra. The Karla Mata (Ekvira Devi) Temple is located at Dahivali, Lonavala, in Maharashtra, India, near the ancient **Karla Caves**. It is accessible from Lonavala, with a turning from the old Pune highway towards the temple, which is situated at an elevation. The Karla Caves are located in the Indian state of Maharashtra, near the town of **Lonavala in the Western Ghats**. These ancient Buddhist rock-cut caves are known for their exquisite architecture and are considered a significant site for studying early Indian Buddhist art and history. The Ekvira Temple has a new, stricter dress code that requires devotees to wear traditional attire like sarees, salwar-kameez, or kurta-pyjama, while banning shorts, mini skirts, Western outfits, ripped jeans, and other revealing clothing. The temple has implemented this rule to uphold its sanctity and traditional customs, with the aim to ensure that visitors dress in a manner that reflects respect for the religious site.<sup>[1]</sup>

**Ekvira Devi stotra** 'ॐ श्री एकविरा देव्यै नमः॥' है, और एक

प्रसिद्ध स्तुति 'या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्ति-रूपेण संस्थिता। नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः॥' है, जिसे एकविरा आई की कुलदेवी के रूप में भी पूजा जाता है। इसके अलावा, एकविरा देवी की आरती भी है, जो कार्ला गढ़वासिनी को समर्पित है।

**एकविरा आई मंत्र:** ॐ श्री एकविरा देव्यै नमः ॥

**एकविरा आई स्तुति:** या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्ति-रूपेण संस्थिता। नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥

#### Acceptable Attire

**For Women:** Saree, salwar-kurta, or other traditional Indian outfits.

**For Men:** Kurta-pyjama, formal shirts, and trousers are acceptable.

Prohibited Attire Shorts and half pants, Mini skirts and short skirts, Western attire and revealing clothing, and ripped jeans.

**Purpose of the Dress Code:** The temple trust implemented this dress code to maintain the sacredness and traditional decorum of the temple, emphasizing that it is a place of worship and reverence.

**Key Details:** Location: Near Lonavala, Maharashtra, India.



Figure-2: Karla caves.

**Significance:** They are among the oldest Buddhist cave shrines in India, known for their well-preserved rock-cut architecture and intricate sculptures.

**Features:** The caves include a prominent Chaitya hall (prayer hall) with a grand stupa and were built as

sanctuaries and monasteries for Buddhist monks.

**Location & Context:** The temple is known as the Ekvira Aai Mandir and is a site of worship for the Aagri and Koli people.



It shares its location with the Karla Caves, an important site of ancient Buddhist rock-cut architecture. The temple is approximately 10 km from Lonavala's main market, towards Pune on the old highway. From the old highway, you need to take a right turn to reach the temple, which involves passing through a small ghat section with slopes and turns.

The nearest railway station is Malavali, which is on the Pune-Lonavala route. You can take a local train from Pune or Lonavala to Malavali and then get a bus or taxi to the temple.

**Temple:** The Ekvira Aai Mandir is a Hindu temple located near the Karla Caves near Lonavala in Maharashtra, India. Here, the worship of the goddess Ekvira is carried on right next to the caves, once a center of Buddhism. The temple is a prime spot of worship for the Aagri and Koli people. The Koli community refers to several groups across India, most notably the coastal fishing communities of Mumbai and Maharashtra who are known for their maritime traditions and cultural heritage, and the agricultural Koli caste found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and other states, categorized as an Other Backward Class (OBC). There are also forest-dwelling Mahadev Koli tribes, recognized as a Scheduled Tribe, and an ancient Koliya Kshatriya caste. The Koli community in general maintains unique cultural practices, festivals, languages, and social customs, with the Mumbai-based fisherfolk being the original inhabitants of the city. The temple-complex originally consisted of three similar shrines built in a row all facing west. Of these, the central and the southern shrines are preserved in full, and the rest of the structures are preserved only on plan. The maha-mandapa, varsha-mandapa and gopura are situated in front of these three shrines and these three shrines are surrounded by sixteen shrines of additional parivara devatas. The devotees throng the temple on all occasions of Navaratri and Chaitra Navratra to worship and celebrate. It is believed

that the goddess has magical powers. The temple is on a hill. One needs to ascend around **500 steps** to reach the temple. It is surrounded by the Karla caves, which are now protected by the Archeological department. While the main deity is Ekvira, she is accompanied by a murti of Jogeśvarī Devi. Ekvira is a Hindu goddess, regarded to be a form of the goddess Renuka. She is the kuladevi of the Koli people. The Ekvira Devi Temple requires climbing approximately 500 steps to reach the top of the hill where the temple is situated. Devotees ascend this path to reach the shrine, with the climb offering a view of the hilltop and the surrounding Karla caves.

#### Details about the steps

**Total Steps:** The generally accepted number of steps to reach the Ekvira Devi Temple is around 500.

**Location:** The temple is located on a hill, and the steps are the pathway to reach it from the base.

**Surroundings:** The temple is situated in the vicinity of the Karla caves, which are also located on the hill.

**Accessibility:** The climb can be tiring, and it is not recommended for those with leg pain or lack of fitness.

**Alternatives:** For the elderly or less mobile individuals, a "Palki" (a sedan chair) service may be available for the climb, though it requires prior arrangement. History & Mythology. The Ekvira Devi Temple is believed to have been built during the Pandava era and is associated with Mahabharata legends. According to mythology, Goddess Ekvira appeared before the Pandavas and instructed them to construct the temple in her honor. According to legend, the Pandavas constructed the temple during their 14-year exile in the forest. The Ekvira goddess appeared before them and issued a divine command to build a temple for her before dawn. The Pandavas, true to their word, worked tirelessly overnight to complete the temple. **Devi Sati's** head had fallen here.

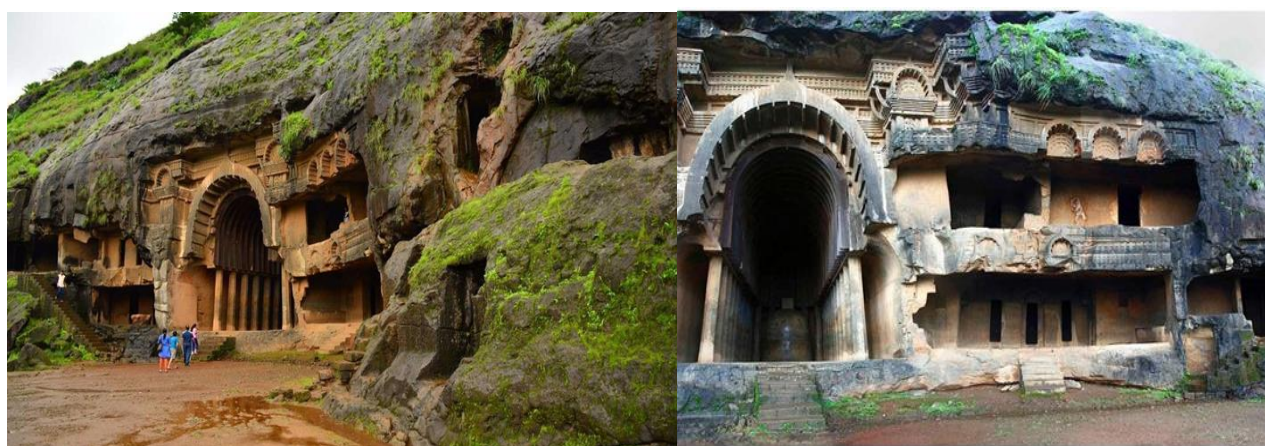


Figure-3: Karla cave entrance.

Ekaveerika Shakthi Peeth is located on the banks of Panch Ganga River near a small village Heure in Mahur, Nanded District, Maharashtra. Ekaveerika Shakthi Peeth is a small shrine with one hall and a sanctum Sanctorum.

Only the head of the deity is here. **Goats and chicken** are sacrificed at the temple of Ekvira adjacent to the Karla caves in Pune district. Festivals- Navratri is celebrated with great enthusiasm, attracting thousands of

devotees. The Ekvira Devi Temple in Amravati is dedicated to Goddess Ekvira, a form of Goddess Renuka or Durga. As per this decision, the Devasthān has clarified: Devotees must wear traditional Indian attire when coming to the temple. **If they wear revealing or body-exposing clothes, they will not be permitted to enter the temple.** The Karla Caves were built by

Buddhist monks, with significant financial patronage from traders and rulers like the Satavahana dynasty and Western Satraps. Construction began around the 2nd century BCE and continued for centuries, serving as a monastery and a haven for passing traders along an ancient trade route.<sup>[2]</sup>



Figure-4: Sculpture in Karla Caves on the wall of rock.

### Construction and Patronage

**Buddhist Monks:** The monks of the Mahāsāṃghika school of Buddhism were instrumental in building and using the caves for prayer and meditation.

**Traders:** The caves' location near a major trade route made them a vital lodging and resting place for merchants. Many inscriptions detail donations from various traders and towns, including Greeks (Yavanas).

**Rulers:** The Satavahana rulers and Western Satraps also provided substantial grants and patronage for the construction of these caves, as evidenced by their inscriptions.

### Historical Context

**Origin of Name:** The ancient name for the caves was Veluraka.

**Early Rock-Cut Architecture:** The Karla Caves are among the oldest and largest surviving examples of Indian Buddhist rock-cut architecture, illustrating the evolution of this architectural style.

**Hinayana and Mahayana Phases:** The caves were initially built during the Hinayana phase of Buddhism and later saw some expansion and additions during the Mahayana phase. The "discovery" of Ekvira Mata is a mythological event where the goddess appeared to the Pandavas during their exile, demanding that a temple be built in her honor before dawn. The Pandavas completed the temple overnight, pleasing the Devi, who then blessed them with a boon to remain undiscovered during their exile. This narrative is the origin story for the Aadishakti Aai Ekvira Devi Temple located in the Karla Caves near Lonavala, Maharashtra.

**The Setting:** The event took place during the Pandavas' *agyat vaas* (exile), when they were in hiding to avoid

their enemies.

**The Goddess's Appearance:** Ekvira Mata, an incarnation of Renuka Devi, appeared before the Pandavas.

**The Divine Request:** She commanded them to construct a temple for her in a single night.

**The Boon:** Pleased with their dedication and swift action, Ekvira Mata granted the Pandavas a blessing: they would not be found by their enemies during their period of exile.

### Significance of the Discovery

**Origin of the Temple:** This event explains the origin of the ancient temple dedicated to Ekvira Mata in the Karla Caves.

**Connection to the Pandavas:** It links the temple to the epic Mahabharata and the exile period of the Pandavas.

**Cultural Significance:** Ekvira Mata is the Kul-Devata (family deity) of the Koli and Agri communities, who hold the temple in high reverence. While traditional offerings of sweets like pedhas are available, devotees at the Ekvira Mata temple near Lonavala also offer animal sacrifices, primarily goat or chicken.

### Traditional offerings

**Sweet pedhas:** These traditional sweets are a popular offering available at the shops near the temple.

**Bhojan:** The temple trust serves an afternoon meal as prasad (a sacred food offering) every Tuesday.

### Non-vegetarian offerings

**Animal sacrifice:** The practice of offering animal

sacrifices, such as goats and chickens, has a long history at this temple.

**Fish dishes:** As Ekvira Aai is the Kuldaivat (family deity) of the Koli fishing community, fish dishes and other non-vegetarian food are commonly available and offered near the temple.

## CONCLUSION

The Karla Caves are named after their location, Karli, near Lonavala in Maharashtra, India. They are a significant ancient Buddhist rock-cut complex of shrines, monasteries, and prayer halls built between the 2nd century BCE and the 5th century CE. Their meaning lies in being a historically important center for Buddhist monks and traders, a testament to India's cultural heritage and Buddhist architecture, and a site of worship that includes a revered shrine dedicated to the local goddess Ekveera. The caves are over 2,000 years old and were built as sanctuaries for meditation, prayer, and religious activities.

**Buddhist Heritage:** They served as a vital hub for Buddhist monks and were developed by them over several centuries.

**Architectural Marvel:** The complex features the largest rock-cut chaitya (prayer hall) in India, showcasing the craftsmanship of the Satavahana period.

**Cultural Importance:** The caves are known for intricate carvings depicting Jataka tales and scenes from Buddha's life, offering insight into ancient Buddhist teachings and cultural values.

**Trade Route Connection:** The caves arose near an ancient trade route that connected the Arabian Sea to the Deccan region, indicating their importance in ancient economic and social life.

**Local Reverence:** A notable shrine within the complex is dedicated to Ekveera Devi, a revered local goddess, highlighting the blend of ancient Buddhist practices with local traditions. Karla Caves feature sculptures carved into rock, including depictions of elephants, celestial beings, and figures of men and women, found on columns, the main chaitya hall's horseshoe façade, and the impressive Sinha Sthambha, a pillar with four lions on top. These intricate carvings, created using hammers and chisels, showcase early Buddhist art and architecture from the 2nd century BCE to the 5th century AD.

## REFERENCE

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karla\\_Caves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karla_Caves)
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekvira>