

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bhojashala, Dhar: The Proof from the Records

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After the verdict of the Indore High Court, there are some ignorant of applying historiographical methodology of study who have come up with statements in the Bhojashala debate is that “there are no records for Bhojashala, while the Kamal Maula Mosque has a continuous claim of nearly seven centuries”.

This argument sounds strong only until the evidence is read carefully. The issue is not whether the structure had a later Islamic phase. The real question is whether there are credible pre-modern records for a Sanskrit learning centre and a Sarasvati temple at Dhar before, or underlying, that later phase. On that question, the evidence is neither vague nor recent. It comes from literary texts, inscriptions, and physical finds associated with the very site.

The first important evidence is the *Prabhāvakacarita*, composed by Prabhācandra in 1277 CE. The text describes an event placed around 1140 CE, when the Chalukya king Siddharāja Jayasīṃha attacked Dhāranagara, that is Dhar. There he encountered students studying in what the text calls “Bhoja’s Pāṭhaśālā” — भोजस्य पाठशाला. This is extremely significant. Even if the modern popular term “Bhojashala” became prominent later, the older Sanskrit expression means exactly the same thing: the school or seat of learning associated with Bhoja.

The description is not casual. The *Prabhāvakacarita* says that the institution taught the grammar established by Bhoja himself: तत्र व्याकरणं श्रीमद् भोजराजविनिर्मितम् -tatra vyākaraṇaṃ śrīmad bhojarāja-vinirmitam. This directly connects the school with Bhoja’s intellectual legacy. It also fits well with what is independently known about Bhoja, namely that he composed the celebrated grammatical work *Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*. The text further suggests a rigorous scholastic environment, where students studied day and night and learned scholars gathered for discussion. In other words, the reference is not merely to a building, but to a functioning scholastic culture.

The next major evidence comes from an inscription found inside the structure now known as the Kamal Maula Mosque. This inscription was published in *Epigraphia Indica*, Volume VIII, and belongs to the period of the Paramāra king Arjunavarman, around the early thirteenth century. The inscription contains a Sanskrit drama titled *Pārijāta-Mañjarī*. Its content is decisive because it states that the play was to be performed in the temple of the goddess Śārādā, that is Sarasvatī or Bhārati, at Dhāra.

The wording is striking. The temple of Śārādā is described as a jewel-like ornament of the city of Dhar and, even more importantly, as the chief of all temples in the eighty-four squares of the city of Dhar. This is not the description of an obscure shrine. It is the description of a major

sacred and cultural institution, central to the city's intellectual life.

Equally important is the findspot. The inscription was reportedly discovered in November 1903 inside the so-called Kamal Maula Mosque, attached to the northern wall of the principal mihrab, with the writing turned inward. The published notice describes it as a black stone slab, about 5 feet 8 inches by 5 feet, bearing a Sanskrit inscription. This is not a loose manuscript brought from somewhere else. It was a physical epigraphic object embedded in the structure itself. That fact alone makes it impossible to dismiss the Sarasvati-temple evidence as a late invention.

The content of the inscription also suits a temple-theatre setting. The drama was not merely literary; it was meant for performance. In medieval India, temples often functioned not only as places of worship, but also as centres of learning, performance, recitation, and public culture. If a dramatic inscription connected with Śāradā/Sarasvatī is found within the present structure, and if its text places the performance in the Sarasvati temple of Dhar, then the burden of explanation falls on those who deny the earlier temple association.

The third important textual witness is Merutuṅga's Prabandhacintāmaṇi, composed around 1304 CE. It mentions the temple by the name Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa. This is not an accidental name. It recalls Bhoja's own grammatical treatise of the same title and strengthens the connection between Bhoja, Sarasvatī, grammar, and the intellectual institution at Dhar. A temple carrying the name of Bhoja's grammatical work is precisely what one would expect in a city remembered for Bhoja's scholarship.

The physical evidence also includes the famous serpentine inscriptions found inside the Kamal Maula Mosque complex. These inscriptions depict alphabets and grammatical rules in the form of snakes. Their pedagogical purpose is evident: they were mnemonic devices, meant to help students remember grammatical structures. Such inscriptions make sense in a Sanskritic educational setting. They are difficult to explain as merely decorative Islamic architectural elements. Their presence strongly supports the view that the site was once associated with Sanskrit learning.

Taken together, the evidence forms a coherent pattern:

- The Prabhāvakacarita records “Bhoja's Pāṭhaśālā” at Dhar and links it with Bhoja's grammar. The Pārijāta-Maṇjarī inscription from the site itself refers to the temple of Śāradā/Sarasvatī in Dhar and describes it as the chief temple of the city.
The Prabandhacintāmaṇi remembers a temple named Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa, directly linking Bhoja's grammatical work.
The serpentine grammatical inscriptions found within the complex point to a Sanskrit pedagogical environment.

Therefore, the claim that there are “no records” for Bhojashala is not sustainable. At best, one may say that the exact modern name “Bhojashala” became prominent in recent usage. But that is a weak objection. Historical institutions are often remembered by slightly different names

across time. What matters is whether the core idea is attested: a school of Bhoja, a Sarasvati temple, and a grammar-centred scholastic culture at Dhar. On all three counts, the evidence is present.

The argument that the Kamal Maula Mosque has existed for around 700 years also does not settle the matter. A later mosque phase and an earlier temple-university phase are not mutually exclusive. Across medieval India, structures were often reused, altered, renamed, or repurposed. The real historical question is not whether the mosque phase existed, but what existed before it and what the embedded inscriptions reveal about the earlier life of the site.

In the case of Dhar, the evidence points clearly to a major Sanskrit institution associated with Bhoja's intellectual legacy and with the worship of Sarasvatī/Śārādā. The inscriptions and texts are not twentieth-century inventions. They are medieval records and archaeological finds. To ignore them is not caution; it is selective reading. Dhar was also remembered as a seat of learning, grammar, poetry, performance, and Sarasvatī. Any serious discussion of Bhojashala must begin there.

About the author

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Dr. Ramadevi Sekhar is a distinguished academician and researcher specializing in the intersection of Sanskrit literature and Indian heritage. As a National Gurukul Fellow, she conducted this extensive research on Nallur settlements under the direct mentorship of Dr. R. Nagaswamy.

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