CHAPTER 4

VAISHNAVA PILGRIMAGE CENTRES

Just as some parts of the human body are held to be purer (than others), so some localities on the earth are held to be very holy. Tirthas are held to be holy on account of some wonderful characteristics of the locality on account of the peculiar striking ness (or grandeur) of some watery place or on account of the fact that some (holy) sages resorted to them (for bathing austerities etc.).

This statement of the Padmapurana gives an idea of the concept of ‘tirtha’. In Sanskrit literature, the word ‘tirtha’ has been described in various ways. The meaning of this word is ‘passage’, ‘way’, ‘road’, ‘ford’, ‘a river’, ‘bathing place’, and ‘a place of pilgrimage on the banks (tīra) of sacred streams of water’. The term ‘tirtha’ was in vogue in Vedic period too, but not in that sense they meant today. In Rgveda water in general and rivers specifically are referred to as holy and purifying (punānah).

2 Anandāśrama edition of Padma Purāṇa, cited by P.V. Kane.
4 Kane, Dr. P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, vol.IV, p.555.
*Gautama* (19.14), *Baudhāyana* (I 11.10.12) and *Vaśiṣṭha* (22.12) *Dharmasūtras* state that the *deśas* (localities) that are holy and hence destroyers of sin are all mountains, all rivers, holy lakes, places of pilgrimage, the dwellings of sages, cow pen and temples of the gods.5 *The Vanaparva* of *Mahābhārata* has a separate section on pilgrimage. With the passage of time more and more sites came to be considered as ‘*tīrtha*. The *Padmapurāṇa* (II.39.56-61) included the places where the *agnihotra* and *śrāddha* are performed, a temple or a house where a *Veda* is being studied, a cow pen, a place where the *soma* drinker dwells, parks, a place where the *aśvattha* exists, a place where *Purāṇa* is being recited, where one’s teacher stands, a chaste housewife dwells and where a father and a worthy dwell.6

Among the scholars of ancient Indian history the concept of ‘*tīrtha*’ remains an enigmatic topic. There have been various opinions about the meaning of the word ‘*tīrtha*. *Diana* Eck considers *tīrthas* as the ‘crossings’ in the sacred geography.7 A *tīrtha* is a “crossing place” or “ford” where one may cross over to the far shore of a river or to the far shore of the worlds of heaven. There is an excellent comparison of the *tīrtha* with the rivers. Crossing the great rivers of India in the time of full flood has long been a challenge to travelers, who have sought out the fords with their ferries and rafts to make a safe crossing. *Samsāra*, the ceaseless flow of birth and death and birth again, was likened to a river and the far shore became an apt and powerful symbol of the goal of a spiritual traveler as well.

*Tīrthas* can also be compared with the *Avatāra* system.8 The *avatāra* “crosses downward,” opening the doorways of the divine in this world so that these thresholds might be crossed in other direction by the humans. The place of *avatāra* is the *tīrtha*, for there the crossing might be readily and safely made.

This concept becomes all the more relevant when we think in terms of the *avatāras* of *Viṣṇu*. All the *avatāras* of *Viṣṇu* can be considered as different *tīrthas* itself. With the help of them the crossing to the other side of the world can be easily made.

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5 Kane, Dr. P.V., *History of Dharmasūtras*, vol. IV, p.560.
6 Kane, Dr. P.V., *History of Dharmasūtras*, vol. IV, p.564.
8 Ibid, p. 15.
Any place on the earth can be a tīrtha. Diana Eck\(^9\) considers that no place in the world is too small to be called as tīrtha. A small temple can also be called a tīrtha. Temples are especially consecrated as a crossing place between the heaven and earth.

The development of tīrthas was a slow process. Initially when the natural forces were considered as gods and goddesses, the holy or sacred places used to be a natural spot: be it a river, mountain or lake as described in the Rgveda. The striking natural landscapes generated a sense of awe, grandeur, respect and sometimes peace in the mind of the ancient Indians. In these places they found the presence of god and accordingly these were worshipped as the sacred places. Slowly the scope and the meaning of the word ‘tīrtha’ were inflated to include physical, mental and spiritual spaces. Among them the highest tīrtha is considered to be the purity of mind.\(^10\) The ancient texts classify tīrthas into four divisions – daiva (created by gods), āsura (those associated with such asuras as Gayā), ārsa (those established by the sages such as Prabhāsa, Nara-Nārāyaṇa) and mānuṣa (created by kings like Ambaraśa, Nanu, Kuru) and provides that each one is superior to each succeeding one.\(^11\)

The tīrthas thus evolved, attracted the devotees from the nearby areas. Thus the concept of ‘tīrthayātrā’ emerged. The motive behind these pilgrimages is both spiritual and mundane. According to S.M. Bhardwaj\(^12\) the high level sacred places (pan Hindu supraregional) are visited largely for general purification. On the other hand, the visits of pilgrims to the regional and sub-regional level shrines seem to be specific purpose oriented. The Mahābhārata (Vanaprava 82.9-12) lays the greatest emphasis on the cultivation of the high moral and spiritual qualities if the full reward of pilgrimages is to be reaped.\(^13\) The pilgrimages may help in removing the sins of men and acquire religious merit.

The removal of sins and gain of religious merit is of some importance. In the earlier period, the sacrifices were supposed to do these things. The sacrifices are by nature

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\(^9\) Diana, L. Eck, 'India's "Tirthas": "Crossings" in Sacred Geography', p.325.  
\(^10\) Skanda Purāṇa, Kāśikhanda, 6.  
\(^12\) Mahābhārata, Vanaprava, 82.9-12.  
\(^13\) Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, voll. IV, p.
expensive. The *Vanaparva* (82.13-17)\(^{14}\) makes a comparison between the sacrifices to gods and pilgrimages. The sacrifices require numerous implements, collection of materials, the cooperation of priests and the presence of wife and so they can be performed only by priests or rich man. The reward that a man gets by visiting holy places cannot be secured by performing such sacrifices as *Agnihiotra* in which large fees are paid (to priests); therefore visiting holy places is superior to sacrifices. The *Padmapurāṇa* (IV.80.9) remarks: sacrifices, *vratas, tapas*, and *dāna* cannot be carried out fully in the *Kali* age; but bathing in the Ganges and taking the name of *Hari* are free from all defects.\(^{15}\)

The *tīrthas* thus draw a comparatively larger group than the sacrifices did. Hence these *tīrthas* grew popular among the masses and some of the *tīrthas* like Hardwar, Prayaga, and Ujjain attracted masses from all parts of India.

Apart from being less expensive, the *tīrthas* have another speciality. It has relatively democratic character. The Indian society, as we all know, is a mixture of various castes, ethnic groups, regional identities and linguistic groups. The *Dharmaśāstra* writers often follow a taboo on the performance of sacrifices by various groups. But the right to pilgrimage was available to each and every one. The *Viṣṇu Dharmaṭtara Purāṇa* (III.273.9)\(^{16}\) puts the matter very clearly –

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sarveśāmeva varnānāmi srvaśramanivāsināni} \\
\text{Tirthani phalapradam jñeyam nātra kāryā viśāraṇā.}
\end{align*}
\]

A holy place yields fruit to men of all *varṇas* and *āśramas*.\(^{17}\)

The ancient texts took a liberal view of the pilgrimage and the eligibility to undertake *tirthayātrās*. The *Vanaparva* (82.30-31)\(^{18}\) provides that *brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas* and *śūdras*, when they are bathed in holy places they are not born again. The same work further states that whatever sin a man or a woman may have committed

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\(^{14}\) Kane, Dr. P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstras*, voll. IV, p.561.
\(^{15}\) Ibid, p.563.
\(^{16}\) Ibid, p.563.
\(^{17}\) The Venkateshwar Press edition of *Viṣṇu Dharmaṭtara Purāṇa*, cited by P.V. Kane.
\(^{18}\) *Mahābhārata, Vanaparva*, 82.30-31.
from birth, the moment he/she takes bath in the holy Puṣkara all that sin vanishes. Therefore not only men but women also had the right to undertake tirthayātrā. The Brahma purāṇa safeguards the interest of women when it says that a householder whose wife is alive and is chaste must go on a pilgrimage with her otherwise he would not reap the benefit of the fruit of the pilgrimage. The Padmapurāṇa (Bhumi khaṇḍa, chapter 59-60) narrates the story of a vaiśya called Kṛkala who went on pilgrimage without his virtuous wife and did not reap the fruits of a long pilgrimage. However, the women and the śūdras were not permitted to undertake pilgrimage without the husband’s permission in the case of a woman and in the case of a śūdra not indifference to the primary duty (to wait upon learned brāhmaṇa).

It was also provided that there was no question of untouchability while bathing in holy waters-

\[ \text{Tīrthē vivāhe yatrāyāmi sangrāme deśa viplave} \\
\text{Naṅgra grāmadāhe ca sprṣṭāsprṣṭirna dusyatī} \]

(Bṛhaspati quoted by Kṛtyakalpataru on Śuddhi, p.169)

At holy places, in marriages, in a religious festival or procession, in a battle, when there is an invasion of the country and when a town or village is on fire, no blame attaches on the ground of incurring contact with untouchable persons or things.

Thus the tīrthas provided a relatively democratic face of the ancient Indian society. The popular participation and the mass base became the corner stone behind the proliferation and expansion of the pilgrimage centres. This democratic outlook of the tīrthas started in Mahābhārata itself. Here sage Pulastya (Mbh. 3-80. 34-40) says that sacrifices are out of the reach of the poor people. The sacrifices require many utensils and a large variety of materials. People without means could not perform them. The sage classifies pilgrimages as having merit equal to those of the sacrifices.

19 Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, vol. IV, p.
21 Bhārtyaṃ vinī yodharmah sa eva viphalo bhavet, 59.33; Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, voll. IV, p.568.
22 Ibid, p.569.
23 Ibid, p.569.
24 Kṛtyakalpataru, Gaekwad Oriental Series, cited by Dr. P.V. Kane.
To make this pilgrimage accessible to the poor sections of the society too or in other words to encourage the practice of pilgrimage, the Viṣṇu Dharmaśāstra²⁶ provides that no money should be demanded from a pilgrim or by a ferryman or by a toll officer and that if he took money from such persons he was to return it.

The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa²⁷ says that to make a pilgrimage on foot is the highest tapas (austerity) and that if a pilgrimage be made in a conveyance the pilgrim will reap only the reward of the path. The idea behind this statement is to make the pilgrimage more rigorous to gain more spiritual rewards. But it certainly reduced the burden of the expenses during tīrthayātrā and made it accessible to the common mass of the society. Thus the tīrthayātrā has remained as one of the cohesive forces of the society.

Another aspect of tīrthayātrā as one of the cohesive forces of the Indian society is the concept of circulation involved in it. Various texts often provide a list of tīrthas, which the tīrthayātrīs have to cover in a particular fashion. Only after that full reward of the pilgrimage is attained. Some places may be the focal points for pilgrim from the entire continent. Others, more modest places may serve as centers of congregation of devotees from the immediate vicinity.

Diana Eck²⁸ finds the tīrthas as being ‘central for the shaping up of an Indian sense of regional and national unity’. The recognition of India as sacred landscape, woven together north and south, east and west, by the paths of pilgrims, has created a powerful sense of India as Bhārat Mātā- Mother India. The author further stresses the fact that in the thousands of tīrthas recounted in the māhāmyas of the Purāṇas and the Epics, there is an appearance of the divine in the form of Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Śiva or Goddess. Often in its māhāmya, the local tīrtha will subscribe to the larger all India tradition by linking its sanctity to the great events of the Epics and the Purāṇas. This might be seen as the geographical equivalent of the Sanskritization.

²⁶ Viṣṇudharmaśāstra, V.132-133, cited by Dr. P.V. Kane, p.571,
²⁷ Ibid, pp.576-77.

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Bhardwaj\textsuperscript{29} finds several intermediate levels in between these two levels of extremes. The narrator of the great *Mahābhārata* suggests a clockwise circular pilgrimage of India.\textsuperscript{30}

Turner\textsuperscript{31} has stressed the eminent importance of the travel aspect of pilgrimage. It leads the devotee beyond the sphere where he lives and works, both in a social and geographical sense. Many social taboos and restrictions break away in these travels. Over a period of time, the travelers developed common religious practices and rituals despite a great variety in the local practices.

Religion practiced in the context of pilgrimage centres provide a population following similar rules and regulations at a particular time which the other politico economic processes could hardly generate. Thus religion assumes an important role in generating a circulation mechanism in which all the social strata of Hinduism participate. The pilgrimage centres played a major role in the integration of a society.

The development and expansion of the pilgrimage centres remained a continuous process in the society. New *tīrthas* were added from time to time and the monetary benefits derived by the permanent residents and particularly by the *tīrtha* priests led them to produce numerous *māhātmyas*.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that Vāyu declared that there are 35 millions of *tīrthas* in the sky, in the aerial regions and on the earth and all of them are centred in the Ganges.\textsuperscript{32}

The ancient texts mention clustering of holy places in the Ganga plain and the Kurukṣetra region, the main foci of the domain of the Aryans. The only region in the Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh region that is mentioned in the texts as the pilgrimage centre is Narmada – Ujjain area. Other areas – a large part of Madhya Pradesh and whole of Chhattisgarh – are by and large devoid of this list of sacred

\textsuperscript{29} Bhardwaj, S.M., *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*, p.
\textsuperscript{32} Kane, Dr. F.V., *History of Dharmaśāstras*, vol. IV, p.567.
places assigned in the texts. These areas are the ones occupied (even to this day) by a considerable portion of the pre-Aryan tribes. Bhardwaj\(^{33}\) says that the areas least desirable for plough agriculture were least aryanized. Hence lesser number of \(tīrthas\) figures in these regions in the texts.

The texts, which mention pilgrimage centres, show strong regional biases. The \(Kṛtyakalpataru\) of Bhatta Lakṣmīdhara, compiled about 1110 A.D., mentions mainly the sacred centres of Northern India.\(^{34}\) None of the major \(tīrthas\) mentioned by him is located south of the Narmada River. The \(Tristhalīsetu\) of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa\(^{35}\), a 16\(^{th}\) century text, mainly focuses on Prayaga, Kashi and Gaya. Other texts like \(Catuvarga Cintāmanī\) of Hemādri (1260-70 A.D.), \(Tīrthacintāmanī\) of Vācaspati (1450-80 A.D.) do have similar attitudes.

Moreover, these texts belong to a later period than my period of research (c.A.D. 600-1300). It is a mammoth task to present a picture of Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh with the help of these texts. The only region mentioned in the texts – Narmada-Ujjain region – is associated with the Śaiva faith, though there is no apparent enmity in between the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva faith. At Ujjain, the temple of Mahākāla is especially sacred to the Śaivites, while the river Śīprā and the Ankapāda area just outside Ujjain are venerated primarily by the Vaisnavites.\(^{36}\)

Sometimes pilgrimage has been identified as a geographic subject,\(^{37}\) by trying to determine the catchment area or ‘pilgrimage field’ related to a sacred site, calculate frequency of the of pilgrim travel distance or map pilgrim activity spaces at sacred places. Holy cities are complexes of many holy sites. Vidyarthi\(^{38}\) applies the term “sacred complex” to the whole city and designates the smallest unit of worship as “sacred centre”. As a rule the most important object of veneration, an idol or a linga is housed in a temple and sacred centres of every description are scattered all over the


\(^{34}\) Kane, Dr.P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstras*, vol. IV, p.565.


city. The territory of the holy city is called as kṣetra. It need not coincide with the city in a civil sense, but is sharply delimited.

The concept of ‘kṣetra’ was slow to emerge. Every small centres or temples are related to the particular deity within its ‘kṣetra’. Often a tradition or the story prevails in the region, which connects these centres with the pan-Indian centres. The māhātmya of the pilgrimage centres cover the territory the ‘kṣetra’. Some times a temple built by a ruler and patronized by dynasty takes the form of small pilgrimage centres. These centres often skip the eyes of the ancient text writers. My effort in this chapter will be to look for these centres and to find out if any connection exists between the local and the pan-Indian centres.

The Purāṇas do seem to have strong regional biases, as shown by the efforts to promote the sanctity of certain tīrthas. This may have been done by the priest in order to attract more pilgrims and thereby to benefit from the fee paid by the pilgrims for the performance of the rituals. Bhardwaj says that this process may have ultimately resulted in the establishment of vested interests of the class of religious specialists called the tīrtha purohita or pāṇḍās.39 Not only the priests but the Indian rājās and the princes seem to have vested interests in the tīrthas because of the revenue received from the temples. This curious mixture of vested interests of the priestly class and the ruling class led to the biased attention of the texts towards certain tīrthas in India.

There is a concept of journey involved in the tīrthas. The travel part of the tīrtha is the most important part of a tīrtha. The devotees are often asked to travel from one place to another place to secure the merit of tīrtha. The more difficult a path the greater is the fruits attached to undertaking that journey. The big or the famous tīrthas are often situated on far off places and on mountains. The difficulties of the journey gave these tīrthas more sanctity than attached to other tīrthas. Among the famous tīrthas on the mountains are Badrinath, Kedarnath, Vaishno Devi, Manasa Devi, Gomukha, Amaranath, and etc. The devotees are asked to take land route and to avoid comfortable journey to secure the greater merit of visiting these places. The tīrthas reached after long journeys are difficult to access (durlabha) and hence the award is

multiplied. On the whole the rites performed at the tīrtha do not differ from those performed at home; it is the journey and the place itself, which make the ordinary extraordinary.40

I

The Purāṇas are excellent sources for the māhātmyas of the various pilgrimage centres. But as mentioned earlier, the Purāṇas and other texts basically focus on the Narmada and Ujjain region. In this section, I will take the help of various Purāṇas to trace out the sacred Vaiṣṇava centres and their māhātmyas. It is not always possible to demarcate the place and period of the tīrthas mentioned in the Purāṇas. And also different sections of these Purāṇas belong to different periods of time. Many of them have a later time period than my period of research work (c.A.D. 600-1300). However the pilgrimage centres have a larger time period than a few years. It is quite possible that they were in existence in the early centuries of the first millennium, so that they found a place in the texts of the later period (2nd half of first millennium A.D.).

The focus of this section would be mainly on Narmada and Ujjain region – the only landmarks of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – mentioned in the epic Mahābhārata, Purāṇas and other texts.

Narmada is a highly venerated river in the texts. The Matsya Purāṇa41 states “the waters of the Sarasvati purify after one bathes for three days, those of Yamuna in seven days, those of Ganga at once, while the water of Narmada purifies a man at a sight of it. Śiva is the presiding deity of the Narmada region. Amarakantaka, the place from which Narmada originates, is considered as holy. According to Kūrma Purāṇa42, on the mount of Amarakantaka, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra (Indra) are present along with groups of Vidyādhāras. The same text mentions a religious circulation, which derives merit to the devotees. Most of the places are related to Śiva, but some of them are dedicated to Viṣṇu and his forms.

41 Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, vol. IV, p.566.
Śulabheda\textsuperscript{43} is a particular spot where if a pure man observes fast after duly performing the ablution rites, he goes to Viṣṇu’s reign. The tīrtha is situated on the northern bank of Narmada.

In the same circle comes the Koṭitīrtha, which rids a man of all his sins.

Another tīrtha mentioned on the northern bank of Narmada close to Viṣṇu tīrtha.\textsuperscript{44} It is well known as Yodhānipura. Here Vāsudeva fought with the demons. One who bathes here shall have the glory and the splendour of Viṣṇu. By observing fast day and night, one can keep off (the sin of) the murder of a brahmaṇa.\textsuperscript{45} The Padmapurāṇa (Bhūmi khaṇḍa 39.46-47) says that all rivers whether flowing through a village or a forest are holy and that where no name of a tīrtha on rivers is known it should be called as Viṣṇu tīrtha.\textsuperscript{46}

Thereafter one should go to Kāmatīrtha\textsuperscript{47} on the southern bank of Narmada. It is the place where Kāma worshipped Hari. One who bathes here is honoured in the Viṣṇuloka.

In the same circle comes the peculiar tīrtha called Janārdana\textsuperscript{48}. Here Viṣṇu is in the form of a Līṅga. This is a typical example of the syncretic conception of gods.

Another tīrtha which deserves attention in this list is Kapila tīrtha. It is mentioned in the Tiwarkhed inscription of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa Nannarāja.\textsuperscript{49} In this inscription, the king donated land in the villages Tiverekheṭa and Ghuikheṭa on a solar eclipse at Kapila tīrtha. The inscription is dated in Śaka era 553 (631 A.D.). It means that other tīrthas mentioned here might also have been of the same period or a few centuries later.

The concept of Tīrthas started pervading the religious spheres in the region as early as 7\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. Bhrgutīrtha\textsuperscript{50} and Varāhatīrtha\textsuperscript{51} are the other two centres associated

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[43]{Ibid, p.583.}
\footnotetext[44]{Ibid, p.586.}
\footnotetext[45]{Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, vol. IV, p.561.}
\footnotetext[46]{Kane, Dr.P.V., History of Dharmaśāstras, vol. IV, p.560.}
\footnotetext[47]{Kūrma Purāṇa, pt.II, p.586.}
\footnotetext[48]{Ibid, p.587.}
\footnotetext[49]{Hiralal, Rai Bahadur, ‘Tiwarkhed Plates of Rashtrakūṭa Nannaraja; Saka 553’, EI, vol.XI, pp.276-80.}
\footnotetext[50]{Kūrma Purāṇa, pt.II, p.591.}
\footnotetext[51]{Ibid, p.592.}
\end{footnotes}
with Viṣṇu in this list. Of them Bhrguṭīrtha is a place where Paraśurāma regained his energy taken away by Rāma, the son of Daśaratha. This place is now a day called as Bheraghat (12 miles west of Jabalpur), which has the temple of 64 Yoginis.

It is also said that Nara-Nārāyaṇa also visited the bank of Narmada. The Badarīkāśrama penance grove has been made by them. This place was formerly mentioned by Śambhu as the most meritorious and excellent tīrtha. Arjuna became a siddha here. A Linga was also installed here. There is a stream called Nara-Nārāyaṇa or Devadronī where one should perform holy rites.

There is another tīrtha called Jalaśāyi on the northern bank of Revā (Narmada). Here Viṣṇu went to sleep after killing the demons. The demon named as Tālāmēgha became a source of nuisance for the gods and Śiva and Brahmā. He started harassing the gods to the extent that their weapons lost their brilliance. Indra, the slayer of the Vṛtras, had his glory checked by the demon. Varuṇa resembled like a helpless snake whose vitality was sapped by his mantra. Similarly, Yama and Ādityas too lost their brilliance. Along with gods Maheśa (Śiva) too became morose. Collectively, these gods went to Brahmā, who advised them to go to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu, described here as Mādhava and Keśava, was found sleeping on the Ocean of Milk. All the gods started eulogising Viṣṇu. Hearing their words Viṣṇu woke up from the nidrā. After hearing the distress of the gods Viṣṇu became ready to kill the demon.

The demon has been described as living in the Himalayas with a huge military of innumerable horses, chariots and elephants. Viṣṇu thought about Garuḍa who is the destroyer of the multitudes of enemies. It seems natural to take the help of Garuḍa for the demon was formidable as described by the gods to Viṣṇu. Not only Viṣṇu took the help of Garuḍa but also he took all his weapons śankha, cakra and gadā. Apart from his usual weapons the god is shown wielding the bow, the pestle and the plough. On reaching the city of the demon, the god blew the Pāñcajanya conch to raise terror in the heart of the demon. There ensued a fierce battle of Viṣṇu with the demon in which the god succeeded in finally killing him with his discus.

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53 Ibid, p.308.
54 Ibid, pp.292-301.
After killing the demon Viṣṇu came back to the banks of the Narmada. Here Narmada is described as the Ocean of the Milk on whom the god is sleeping. Along with Lakṣmī, Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) lay down on the serpent Ananta on the northern bank of Narmada. The discus, which was polluted by the killing, was washed by the waters of Revā and was purified. The place is also called as Kālaghanāsana and Cakratīrtha because of these two reasons.

Then the narrator of the story goes on to say that, as Ananta is the most famous of all the serpents, Janārdana of all the gods and Mārgaśīrṣa of all the months, so also Narmada famous of all the rivers. Henceforward, in the month of Mārgaśīrṣa, on the eleventh day of the bright half, a man devoid of lust and anger should go to Jalēśa. This is evidently referring to Viṣṇu. The sins like brāhmaṇa slaughter are destroyed at this centre. Men observing vratas like Paraka, Cāndrāyana and Pañcama vrata at this tīrtha get their everlasting goals.

The story places the glory of Narmada ahead of all the other rivers by treating it like the Ocean of Milk. Besides it glorifies the might of Viṣṇu who killed the demon who was otherwise invincible. All the gods became helpless before this demon including Śiva. Śiva has been given a place lower than Viṣṇu and even Brahmā. As described earlier Śiva is shown moving to Brahmā, then to Viṣṇu for help. It seems it was intended to show Brahmā as a mediator between Viṣṇu and Śiva.

Besides, here is a curious mixture of weapons of Viṣṇu with that of Balarāma. Pestle, plough etc are the characteristic weapons of Balarāma. This mythology may belong to the period when an attempt was being made to identify Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with Viṣṇu. At several places in this story Viṣṇu is called as Kṛṣṇa.

Most of the Vaiṣṇava tīrthas are on northern bank. Northern bank of Narmada seems to be the Vaiṣṇava region, while southern bank is Śaiva. Narmada separates the two regions.

All the places related to Viṣṇu / Nārāyaṇa recount a fight between Viṣṇu and the Asuras. This may allude to the faint memory of early fight between the brāhmanical cults and the tribal, though it is impossible to determine the period of the fight and the
subsequent conversion of the region into a tīrtha and the time taken by the event to find a place in the myths of the region.

II

Ujjain is famous for the Mahākāla temple. It is also called as Mahākālavanam. According to Skanda Purāṇa (Āvantiya khanda, section II, p.1) there are 84 Śiva temples or Śivalingas. Viṣṇu occupies ten sthānas (shrines) here.

Of the several names of Ujjain, the origin myths of two - Kuśasthali and Padmāvatī - are closely related with Viṣṇu. The dēvas and the dānavas were fighting among themselves. Brahmā sought refuge in Viṣṇu. The latter asked for a spot where he could make the universe stable. Brahmā took a handful of kuśa grass and went to the hermitage of Cyavana rsi. Here Puruṣottama came to the area of kuśa and hence the place is named as Kuśasthali.

The name ‘Padmāvatī’ is closely related with the story of the churning of the ocean and arrival of Lakṣmī, dēva-dānava fight and the final union of Lakṣmī by Viṣṇu. Here Lakṣmī is called as Padmā. The Suras praise Viṣṇu and say that after approaching Ujjayini they had become enjoyer of jewels due to the residence of Padmā, hence the name Padmāvatī. Viṣṇu has invariably been portrayed as Padmanābha in the various inscriptions of the region. Association of Viṣṇu with the lotus and Lakṣmī is mentioned in almost all the texts of ancient period.

The story of the name of Padmāvatī points towards the flourishing state of the city of Ujjayini. The city may have been a hub of economic centres, which gave rise to prosperity and by implication the name ‘Padmāvatī’ (the city of Lakṣmī). Padmāvatī is usually identified with Padma Pawaya near Gwalior. But Skanda Purāṇa identifies Ujjayini with Padmāvatī.

56 Skanda Purāṇa, pt.XII, pp.165-68.
57 Ibid, pp.177-79.
The excavation done by Shri N. R. Banerjee revealed the continuity of occupation of Ujjain from a date prior to 600 B.C. to the beginning of Muslim rule in Malwa.\textsuperscript{58} Of the four periods of the excavation the 2\textsuperscript{nd} period, corresponding to 3\textsuperscript{rd} -2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C., points to an age of prosperity. It is marked by the presence of a large number of coins, ceramics and the NBPW pottery. The excavation also yielded presence of a massive rampart, dating back to the earlier period to the advent of the Muslim rule. There was a major entrance to the fortification. The passage was in constant use during the entire occupation of the site. A large number of coins were also found in the deposits of the period II, III and IV. One of the terracotta coin moulds shows the effigy of the Roman emperor Augustus.\textsuperscript{59}

All these point to the prosperity of the region in an earlier period, which might have led to the name ‘Padmāvatī’. The presence of iron and trade with the Roman Empire may be the reason behind the prosperity of this region. The memory of the earlier prosperity might have led to the myth of name ‘Padmāvatī’.

Among the various Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres, the Ankapāda kṣetra\textsuperscript{60} is just outside the city of Ujjain. This was the place where Kṛṣṇa learnt all sixty-four vidyās in sixty four days in the hermitage of brāhmaṇa Sāndipani. At the end of his education, the teacher demanded the return of his lost son in lieu of fee. Sāndipani’s son was swallowed by a whale at Prabhāsa, while the ascetic was on his pilgrimage. When Kṛṣṇa approached the ocean, he was told by the latter that an Asura named Pāncajanya in the form of a whale swallowed the boy. The god killed the demon and took the Pāncajanya conch. But he did not get the boy there. From that place he went to Yama’s place and brought the boy back to his father. Sāndipāni being glad gave the boon that he who comes here (Ankapāda) and takes the holy bath will not meet premature death.

It seems from the above description that Prabhāsa on the coast of Gujrat was already a pilgrimage centre at the time when the stories about the Ankapata kṣetra was being formulated and crystallized. The Ankapata Kṣetra seems to be a small centre as

\textsuperscript{58} JAR 1956-57, Excavations at Ujjain, pp. 20-28.
\textsuperscript{59} JAR 1957-58, Excavations at Ujjain, p.36.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, pp.90-99.
compared to Prabhāsa Kṣetra. Even now it is considered higher in ranking as compared to the Ankapāda Kṣetra. Small centres are often connected to the bigger centres to legitimize it and to have religious sanction. The local priests and the brāhmīns of the region are often responsible for this act of legitimization. These small centres may have provided the crucial link between the pan-Indian centres and the local people.

The second most important thing is the story attached to the pilgrimage centre. It recounts the acquisition of the sacred Pāncajanya by Kṛṣṇa from the demon Pāncajanya after whom the conch was named. It appears that the place (Prabhāsa Kṣetra) was inhabited by non-Aryan people headed by Asura Pāncajanya. Kṛṣṇa defeated and took possession of the Pāncajanya conch from the demon. The sacred conch might have some religious and political sanctity for which Kṛṣṇa supposedly kept it with him for lifetime. This entire story might be counted as an attempt by the Kṛṣṇa cult to usurp new places and spread its influence to far off people.

Still another important thing about this mythology is the depiction of this place as the ‘Ankapatā Kṣetra’ or ‘Ankapāda Kṣetra’. Both these terminologies associate it with the centre of learning. Ujjain being an old centre it is quite possible that there are some good and renowned learning centres in this region. The story of Kṛṣṇa’s education is attached to give it more popularity and the sanctity.

The same text describes the five Viṣṇu shrines – Śaṅkhin, Viśvarupa, Govinda, Cakrin and Ankapāda – when completed in a circle reaps the fruit of the pilgrimage. The devotee who worships Ankapāda on the dvādasi day with sweet smelling flowers, incense and naivedya, should perform śrāddha. At the same place there is a pond called as Kārī kunda. One who takes bath in it and worships Viśvarupa becomes rid of all sins, while a person taking bath in the Cakratīrtha becomes an emperor.

The Skanda Purāṇa (Āvantya khaṇḍa, book II, section 1)\(^1\) mentions a Ramēśvara tīrtha in Mahākālavana. Here Rāma and Laksmana installed a Liṅga. One who bathes

\(^1\) Skanda Purāṇa, pt.XII, Book V, Sec. I, pp.119-22.
in the Rāma tīrtha and visits Rameśvara tīrtha gets rid of all sins. The same story says that there is no fraternal relationship here. Everyone attends to his personal interests. On the northern bank of the Śiprā, there is an idol installed by Nārāyaṇa. It is worshipped as Keśavāditya.\(^{62}\)

The intercalary month when it occurs is associated with Viśnu. In Mahākālavana, there is a tīrtha called as Puruṣottama tīrtha.\(^{63}\) When this month arrives, great festivities are organized. Even now a festival is organized in this place. The vrata should be observed on the 8\(^{\text{th}}\), 9\(^{\text{th}}\) and 14\(^{\text{th}}\) day of the dark half of this month. Kṛṣṇa is the presiding deity of the Adhimāsa. The person performing the vrata should observe fast and feed brāhmaṇas. At midday Viṣṇu with Laksṇī should be installed. On the eleventh day in the bright half of Bhādrapada, the devotee should observe fast and observe Jāgaṇaṇa. He should perform the adoration of Viṣṇu and conduct the aquatic procession of the deity everyday in the lake Puruṣottama.

There is another tīrtha related to Cāturāmāsa on the bank of the Śiprā, called as Karkarāja.\(^{64}\) When the Cāturāmāsa arrives, all the tīrthas and meritorious shrines are stationed with the support of Viṣṇu and that Viṣṇu depends upon the excellent Karkarāja tīrtha. Then the text compares the bath in various tanks during Cāturāmāsa. One such bath in Karkarāja tīrtha transforms the person to Viṣṇu himself.

To the north of Karkarāja tīrtha, there is a splendid tīrtha called as Nṛsimha tīrtha\(^{65}\) on the bank of Śiprā. It was at par with Vaikunṭha. Here Hiranyakaśipu was killed with a single blow of Hari, in the form of Man-lion. Ever since all the suras perform the midday prayer at the place. If one person casually performs the worship of Nṛsimha on the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) lunar day, which happens to be the day of Nṛsimha, he along with the goddess of fortune comes within the grasp of the person.

There are some other tīrthas in the Avantī region. There is a kunda called Sundara kunda\(^{66}\), where the top of Vaikuṇṭha fell upon during the turmoil of the end of the

\(^{62}\) Ibid, p.147.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, pp.285-87.
\(^{65}\) Ibid, pp.278-80.
\(^{66}\) Skanda Purāṇa, pt.XII, Book V, Sec. 1, pp.209-10.
kalpa. It is the place where Viṣṇu and Śiva with his Śakti are present. A man should stay here for a fortnight, as his residence shall invariably be in the Vaikuṇṭha for a hundred kalpas.

In Padmāvatī there is a Viṣṇu tīrtha. By taking holy ablution therein one should see Siddheśvarī. He shall be endowed with Rddhi (prosperity) and Siddhi (achievement of spiritual power). He is then honoured in the Viṣṇuloka. Here there is a strange connection between Viṣṇu and Rddhi and Siddhi, the well-known wives of Ganeśa.

To the south of Kuśasthali, there is an eternal ancient tīrtha – Nāga tīrtha. It is said that earlier it was the abode of Nāgas where Hari is present. That eternal brāhmaṇa Hari resorted to yoganindrā. He is well known as Śeṣaśāyi. There are other kundas of Dhananjaya, Vāsuki, Takṣaka, etc. There is another tīrtha Rāmasara, where the wife of Hari, Ramā lives. Nearby is the āśrama of Bali. Hari is also present there. This story about Nāga tīrtha gives some faint indications of the take over of the cult of Nāgas by the cult of Viṣṇu. Ensink says that the sacred places were not originally brāhmin institutions. They must have been held sacred already by other communities before the brāhmaṇas took them under their aegis. Thus the conversion or adoption of the non-brāhmaṇic institutions into the brāhmaṇic stronghold remained the characteristic of the spread of brāhmaṇical, Purānic cults.

Śiprā, on whose bank Ujjain is situated, is called as the daughter of Varāha, in the Skanda Purāṇa. There is a story of the birth of Śiprā. Jaya, the doorkeeper of Viṣṇu, was born as Hiranyakṣa. When Yajñavarāha killed Hiranyakṣa, the eternal river Śiprā flowed out of his heart filled with the water of bliss and became the bestower of boons. The river merged with a kunda in Padmāvatī. Since it merged with it, it is called as Nilagangā (Līnagangā). From Śiprā was born the lake of Varāha. By taking a holy bath here, drinking water, performing śrāddha and by giving a milch cow, one is honoured in Viṣṇuloka.

68 Ibid, pp.275-78.
70 Skanda Purāṇa, pt.XII, Book V, Sec. 1 , pp.203-08.
Śiprā River is also called as ‘Jvarāgni’ (fire of fever).71 There was a fight between Śiva and Viṣṇu. Their final missiles “Jvaras” clash with each other and submerged and extinguished into the river. Hence the river was called Jvarāgni. The fight between Hari and Hara was for the sake of Bānāsura. The story is mentioned in Harivamsa, but there is no mention of the river Śiprā there. Though it will be a far-fetched conclusion to say about the fight between Śiva and Viṣṇu as that of between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, it cannot be denied that there was some clash (may be of ideas). And it was finally settled.

Thus the region in and around Avanti was the centre of many beliefs and cults. They may meet, interact, sometimes even experience clash of interests, finally resolved. In some cases like the Nāga tīrtha, it was more of take over than settlement. However the peaceful coexistence of the two from centuries is in consonance with the purānic story.

Some other Vaiṣṇava tīrthas are Govindasvāmin and Vikramasvāmin in Avanti. Brahmā Purāṇa72 states that lord Viṣṇu is stationed as Govindasvāmin. He yields worldly pleasures and salvation to the devotees. Another Viṣṇu shrine is named as Vikramasvāmin. By visiting the lord, whether man or woman, attains the benefits mentioned above.

Thus the Purāṇas give a list of Vaiṣṇava tīrthas in the prominently Śaivite region of Narmada and Ujjain. It may be that the two sects – Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism – were at par with each other earlier. With the passage of time, the patronage of the rulers and the expansion of the Śaiva cult of Mattamayūras, Śaivism rose into prominence. Whatever may be the course of history, the ancient writers recognized the existence of others sects though preferably at a lower level. The devotees are asked to move from one Śaiva tīrtha to other Vaiṣṇava tīrtha and vice versa. The reference to some tīrthas in inscriptions points towards the historicity of at least some of them.

71 Skanda Purāṇa, pt.XII, Book V, Sec. I, pp.192-95.
The pilgrimage centres in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are not all limited to the Narmada and Ujjain region. The inscriptions, archaeological materials and Gazetteers abound in the list of temples, donation of lands, pilgrim records and festivals organized at various places. The Purāṇas and other ancient writers do not provide the list of tirthas and the mechanism of the circulation for these centres. But as the other parts of India list numerous pilgrimage centres, it is not possible that this part remained aloof.

It is not wise to comment further on these pilgrimage māhātmyas and specific rituals attached to the sacred centre in the absence of concrete evidences. The information so far available is not enough to construct the history of the local and regional pilgrimage centres. Moreover all the texts were written at a later period. By then many centres might have declined. They soon faded from popular memory and were denied a place in the texts. Despite their absence from the literature available to us, there is no doubt that they enjoyed a great degree of influence on the socio-cultural life of the region at that time. And hence they deserve a place among the pilgrimage centers of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh of the period 600-1300 A.D.

There are many regions in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which experienced the emergence of sacred centres long before other parts of India. The Heliodorous pillar of Besnagar73 is the earliest iconographic evidence of Vaiṣṇavism in India. The excavation reports of Archaeological Survey of India 1913-1474 and 1914-1575 point towards a well established brāhmaṇic centres. The findings of two kuṇḍas and the associated structures give indication of the performance of sacrifices at this spot. The drains quite near the kuṇḍas were no doubt connected with the sacrificial pits. The sealing of the donor Timitra appears to be Greek Demetrious who might have instituted the sacrifice. Thus there was a well-established sacrificial centre at this place. The Kham-baba Pillar mentions the word “Bhagavato prāsādotama--------”.76

73 ASIAR, 1908-09, pp.126-29.
74 ASIAR, 1913-14, pp.187-96.
75 ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 190.
76 ASIAR, 1908-09, pp.126-29.
It shows that there were more than one temples here of which this Vāsudeva temple was most beautiful before whom he caused the Garuḍa standard.

With a strong background of sacrificial religion (as appeared from the kundas) there is no doubt that this place emerged as the centre of Vaiṣṇava worship before the advent of the Christian era. The discovery of a Vaiṣṇava temple near the Heliodorous Pillar establishes the fact. This continued as the important Vaiṣṇava centre even during the Gupta period.

Situated on the fork between the two rivers Betwa and Beas, the place was a famous pilgrimage centre. And the story runs thus. The old city is generally believed to have been built by Rājā Rukmānagada. He neglected his wife for the sake of a damsel. One day the Vimāna (chariot) of Viṣṇu was stopped by a thorn bush. It was announced that this can be removed only by person who had fasted on the ekādasi festival. A Telin who had quarreled with her husband was found fit for it. And she removed the thorn. She in return asked Viṣṇu to take her with him. Meanwhile the king and his subjects also clung to the wheel of the Vimāna and the whole city was deserted. The new town Bhilsa is said to have been founded after the destruction of old Besnagar. However the new town Bhilsa was named after a Sun temple, Bhillasvāmin.

We do not have the evidence for the history of Vaiṣṇavism for a long period. But it was certainly there in 10th century A.D. Two inscriptions recovered from Bhilsa affirm the existence of a temple as early as A.D. 939-68. According to one inscription, one minister Vācaspati erected this temple during the rule of Kṛṣṇa, who may be taken as the Rāṣṭrakūṭa monarch Kṛṣṇa III. His known dates are A.D. 939-68. It places the date of destruction of the old Besnagar town somewhere between 8th and 9th century A.D. Thus the ancient Vaiṣṇava centre, which attracted a resident from Greek ruled state, was destroyed. This pilgrimage may have been an element of past now. But in the phase covered by this research i.e. 6th to 9th century A.D., it was an

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77 Khare, M.D., 'Discovery of a Viṣṇu temple near the Heliodorous Pillar', Lalit Kala, No.13, 1967, pp.21-27.
79 Ibid; this may have been Śiyādoni Stone Inscription described earlier. The date of this inscription coincides with it. Cunningham describes this inscription as found from Bhilsa.
important pilgrimage centre. But it did not survive to the period of the Purāṇas. Alberuni, though mentions Bhillasvāmin as the place of great religious antiquity.\textsuperscript{80} The place was named after the Sun god.

Deogarh in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh is a well-known site for one of the earliest temples of India – Daśavatāra temple. The temple complex and its ruins point towards the flourishing Vaiṣṇava centre. Deogarh Rock Inscription of Svāmībhatta\textsuperscript{81} contains the name of Vārāhī. It also refers to Keśava, Kṛṣṇa- the two names of Viṣṇu. This later Gupta period inscription points to the existence of Vaiṣṇava centre in this region. Siyādōnī Stone Inscription\textsuperscript{82} (903-68 A.D.) mentions the involvement of the traders in constructing and maintaining several Vaiṣṇava temples. Siyādōnī or Siron Khurd is about 10 miles west-northwest of the town of Lalitpur.

Dudhai, a village 18 miles south of Lalitpur has a small shrine of Varāha incarnation,\textsuperscript{83} a rock cut sculpture of Nṛsimha\textsuperscript{84} and the anthropomorphic image of Varāha\textsuperscript{85} of roughly 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. The Jhammar temple in Chandpur in Lalitpur district is also dedicated to Viṣṇu. It too belongs to 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. Besides there are numerous Vaiṣṇava sculptures in the Rani Mahal Museum, Jhansi collected from the above mentioned sites. It is clear that till 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} centuries A.D., this region was an important Vaiṣṇava centre. It must have attracted the pilgrims from far off places for which we have no record. After that these temples were abandoned due to faulty construction or it could not withstand the onslaught of Muslim invasion.

Eran or ancient Arikiṇā must have been an important Vaiṣṇava centre during Gupta period. Even the Hūna ruler Toramāṇa inscribed his inscription on the chest of the Varāha sculptures.\textsuperscript{86} But it could not continue as a pilgrimage centre beyond 7\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.

\textsuperscript{83} Field Trip to Deogarh and Associated Sites.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Pathari in Vidisha district was late to emerge as a Vaiṣṇava centre. The earliest evidence is the Pathari Pillar Inscription of Parabala, dated 861 A.D. It records the construction of a temple for Śauri (Hari). The temple in front of this pillar contains a Linga. But the lalātabimba of this temple containing Caturbhuj Viṣṇu indicates the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of it.

The village contains Daśāvatāras of Viṣṇu in a group of temples belonging to 10th century A.D. Among the avatāras – Kūrma, Buddha, Paraśurāma, Varāha, Vāmana, etc. are to be mentioned. The super structure of the main temple is completely in ruins. There is an open pillared hall probably for religious discourses. It may have been an important Vaiṣṇava centre. It might have attracted pilgrims from far off places. The tradition says that this place was originally called Barānagara (Varāhanagara) and was destroyed by Rājā Chatrasāla.

Gyaraspur is a village 24 miles northeast of Vidisha headquarters. It possesses the remains of several fine temples of the medieval period. The Bajra Math, originally a brāhmaṇical temple dedicated to the Trinity, contains the Jaina images. The central shrine is dedicated to Sūrya, the southern to Viṣṇu and northern to Śiva. After having been desecrated by the Muslim invasion, the temple remained deserted for a long time and then at a later date was appropriated by the Jaina.

Another building called Hindolā Torana is an ornamental entrance to a brāhmaṇical temple. It contains the twenty-four forms of Viṣṇu. The lower panel contains the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. Two portions of an inscription of 13 lines were found in the wall of the platform near the Torana. It contains the date in Mālavā Samvat 936 i.e. A.D.879. There are quite a number of shrines enclosed by a compound. One of these structures has a figure of Garuḍa on its lintel. The superstructure of this complex is once again completely in ruins. It may also be the result of Muslim invasion.

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88 Field Trip to Vidisha and Adjacent Sites.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
The importance and antiquity of Vidisha region is recognized by the ancient texts too. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* mentions Daśārṇa (Eastern Malwa, whose capital was Vidisha) along with other pilgrimages like Pryāga, Kālaṇjara, Naimiṣa and Kurujāṅgala.

Gwalior too was a Vaiṣṇava centre. The *Caturbhujā* temple at Gwalior was constructed in A.D.875-76. The Gwalior *Praśasti* of Bhoja assigns the epithet of Ādīvarāha to Bhoja. The inscription dated A.D.933 points to the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the king and the place. This did not stop here.

The Sās-bahu temple inscription further attests to the continuing Vaiṣṇava worship in this place. There is a short contemporary inscription of a pilgrim who records his devotion to Cetanātha – “Om Namo Cetanāthaya”. It presents an illusion to the name of the Jaina pontiff Cetanātha. However Cunningham opines that it is for a Vāyu god. It appears that the temple was occupied by the people of Jaina faith after it was deserted by the Vaiṣṇava followers.

The Telin temple is the highest building in the fort. The temple was dedicated in the year A.D.1092 and the inscription was engraved the following year. The whole of the building was once plastered over by the Mohammadans. The temple was not available for worship in the 13th and the 14th centuries as there is no pilgrim’s record of this period. On the eastern side of the wall, there is an incomplete inscription dated 1103 A.D., only ten years later than the opening of the temple. At the same place, there are two other dated records of A.D.1463 and A.D.1465, which shows that the temple was again used by the Hindus during the Tomara rule. This centre of Vaiṣṇava worship continued for almost six hundred years before being deserted.

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95 Ibid.
96 *CASIR*, vol. II, pp. 359-62.
The old town of Suhaniya is situated on the north bank of river Ahsin, 25 miles to north of Gwalior.\textsuperscript{97} It has an 8\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century Viṣṇu temple built by the queen Kākanavati. The temple contains the pilgrim record of 1440 A.D., which adores the shrine of Viṣṇu during the reign of Dunggara. Close to the village Suhaniya on the west side, there is a small temple of Ambikā Devī and another of Viṣṇu. The courtyard of the temple contains a number of sculptures including Vāmana, Durgā, etc. There are three inscriptions dated A.D.956, A.D.977 and A.D.1410. The Gujarati Mahal Museum, Gwalior, contains many sculptures from Suhaniya. The archaeologist of the museum opines that Suhaniya might have been a centre for sculpture construction.

The village Karitalai in Jabalpur district has the distinction of being a place of antiquity. In his stone inscription, the Kalacuri ruler Laksmanārāja II\textsuperscript{98} gives the description of a very high temple constructed by Someśvara. Various donations were made to the temple. All this is now in ruins. The principal figure, which is standing, is that of Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. There is another colossal Nṛsimha in white stone. The inscriptive reference to the huge temple and donations points towards once a flourishing Vaiṣṇava centres.

There is an interesting case of Dharmanātha temple at Dhamnar.\textsuperscript{99} It is a rock hewn brāhmanical temple, which enshrines a linga now a days. The temple was originally dedicated to Viṣṇu. Against the back wall of the shrine stands a statue of Viṣṇu, holding in his hands gadā, mālā, cakra and śaṅkha. Upon the dedicating block over the doorway to the shrine are seated Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. The god is holding the goddess round her waist through his left lower hand. Besides the doorway dedicated to Viṣṇu, there is no kārtimukha usually associated with the shrines of Śiva. Ganga and Yamuna are represented on their respective vehicles along side the doorway.

The temple is surrounded by seven minor shrines; the middle shrine at the back of the main temple contains a slab bearing Nārāyaṇa reposing on the serpent Śeṣa with Brahmā springing from his navel. Brahmā was attacked by the demons Madhu and

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, pp.399-401.
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{ASIAR}, 1905-06, pp.111-15.
Kaiṭabha who in turn were destroyed by Viṣṇu. In the sculpture the two demons are represented at Viṣṇu’s feet attacking each other.

The middle shrine on the north side is a slab bearing the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. There are nine compartments, the first on the left containing two avatāras- Fish and Tortoise. In the eighth compartment there is full-length image of Viṣṇu, a counterpart of that in the main shrine, which takes the place of the avatāras. Towards the right of the temple there is a slab bearing the representation of Śiva performing the tāṇḍava dance. The image is surrounded by four dancing goddesses- Pārvatī with Nandī, Viṣṇavī with Garuḍa, Indrāṇī with elephant and Brahmāṇī with goose. The name of the place Dhamnar appears to be derived from the name of linga, Dharmanātha. Other shrines of the temple are empty.

A large number of Vaiṣṇava shrines and the principal subsidiary shrine containing the image of Viṣṇu points to the Vaiṣṇava origin of the monument. The images are not worshipped now. It is possible that the shrine was desecrated during the invasion, possibly Muslim invasion. This attack might have dispersed the Vaiṣṇava attendants and left the shrine desolate. This desecration may have occurred more than once. After some time it was possessed by the people of Śaiva faith, who set the present linga there. The annual report of Archaeological Survey of India assigns a date of early Muslim invasion to this event. However if a short inscription (described later in the same report) is to be believed this may be a recent event.

There are two small stone pillars standing almost parallel to the temple and about 120 ft. from it. On the western pillar there is a short inscription inscribed in four lines which reads -

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Samvat } 1753 \\
\text{Nāgonada rā} \\
-\text{mājīn rā} \\
-\text{sa karāyā}
\end{align*}
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In samvat 1753, Nāgonand Rāmji established a rās. ‘Rās’ is a term usually associated with a particular dance associated with Kṛṣṇa and the gopis. If some such Vaiṣṇava festival was organized in 1753, it can be supposed
that till that date Vaiśṇava worship was carried in the monolithic temple. The occupation of the temple by the people of Śaiva faith was of considerable later date.

The local centres like this continued to be worshipped by the people for generations. Such an old temple would, no doubt, have attracted people from far off region. If the inscription is to be believed the ‘rāṣ’ was performed in a particular season. This might have taken the form of a small fair for which we have no evidence now. But the socio-cultural influence of the temple would have been great at least in regions nearby.

IV

Along with all these centres (located in Madhya Pradesh), Chhattisgarh too experienced the emergence of pilgrimage centres. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, Rājīvalocana temple was built by Nala king Vilāstūnga. The temple of Rājīvalocana stands in Rajim, a well known holy place, situated 28 miles south by east of Raipur. The temple underwent three to four successive changes corresponding to Śarabhapuriyās, Pāṇḍuvaimśins and the Kalacuri king Jayasimha period. It shows the popularity of this pilgrimage centre. It is visited by thousands of pilgrims on their way to Jagannātha in Orissa.

There are various legends attached to this temple. According to one the widow Rāju or Rājib, was an oil dealer of Chanda. She possessed a black stone, which she used as a weight in selling her oil. Jagat Pāl, another person of the town tried to possess it for the purpose of building a temple over it. The Telin asked for gold (either queen’s nose ring or gold equal to the weight of the stone). Also she asked for a promise that the temple should be named after her.

In the Rajim Māhātmya, it is stated that the Mahanadi River bore the name of Utpaleśvara above the junction at Pairi and that of Citropala below it. Sir Richard Jenkins says that previous to Rajim Telin name, Rajim was called as Kamala-kṣetra

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100 Mirashi, V.V., ‘Rajim Stone Inscription of the Nala King Vilāstūnga’, EI, Vol. 26, pp. 49-58.
101 Dikshit, M.G., Sirpur and Rajim Temples, pp. 27-32.
103 CASIR, vol. X, pp.8-9. Cunningham mentions of the māhātmya attached to this shrine of Viṣṇu, which I could not find out while my field trip to Rajim.
and Padmapura. At a later period, the bhandāra (treasury) and the rasoi (kitchen) were added to it. The kitchen is a necessary adjunct of every Vaiṣṇava temple for the preparation of Prasāda.

At short distance to the south, there is a comparatively modern temple built by Govind Lal, a banker of Raipur. The material for the temple is brought from Sirpur. On one of its pilasters there is a short inscription of a pilgrim in characters of the 8th-9th century A.D., reading ‘Śrī Lokabala’.104

There are several records of the visits of the pilgrims carved on the pillars of Rājīvalocana temple.105 Of them, numbers 4, 5 and 6 are of Gupta style.

No. 1- Śrī Videsāsitya Videsa.
No. 2- Śrī Purnāditya Udbhinna Chanda.
No. 3- Śrī Purnāditya.
No. 4- Śrī Salonatungga Śrī Mana Devī.
No. 5- Śrī Salonatungga.
No. 6- Śrī Mana Devī.
No. 7- Śrī Vandasuthauda.
No. 8- Śrī Vakaradhavalam.
No. 9- Śrī Bhaga Chapti.
No. 10- Śrī Ratnapuruṣottama.

These records point to the popularity of the temple. People from far off places visited this site. Even when I visited it, a family from Jhansi has arrived on a pilgrimage to this place.

There are some other places, which are connected to the Jagannātha tradition.106 Śabarīnāraśayana temple in Janjgir district is one of them. It is also an important centre of Vaiṣṇava worship. People from nearby areas undertook pilgrimage to this temple. The image worshipped as Śabarī is that of a male. But the popular tradition of Śabarī

106 Bilaspur District Gazetteer, pp.294-95.
gave it a female identity. In this connection the Śabari temple in Kharod about 2 miles from Seorinarayan needs attention. This temple too was dedicated to Viṣṇu as appeared from the image Garuḍa above the lalāṭabimbha. But now a day it enshrines a modern image of Cāmunḍā and is worshipped as Śabari.

These are some of the pilgrimage centres, which flourished in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Some centres declined while others are still continuing as a major or minor partner in the pan Indian framework.

There can be still more tīrthas in this part of India awaiting further investigations. The centres like Rājīvalocana, Śabarīnārāyaṇa were linked to the pan Indian centre of Jagannātha at Puri. Some of the centres did emerge as major pilgrimage centres but not as a Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centre. With the withdrawal of patronage enjoyed by these temples they declined as major centre, but continued as tourists’ spots, while others, which fell victim to the invasions and desecrations. In the broad Indian framework, once an idol of the god is broken or desecrated, it fell into disuse. It is considered as inauspicious to worship a broken image. And with the end of the dynasties, there was no one to take care of them.

The period of c.A.D.600-1300 saw the rise and decline of many Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In Chhattisgarh many centres like Rājīvalocana and Śabarīnārāyaṇa get affiliated to (may be at a later stage; It is visited by the pilgrims on way to Jagannātha) Puruṣottama kṣetra. These centres especially ŚabarīNārāyaṇa were attached to the local centres. The local tradition mentions a competition between the Janjgir and the Seorinarayan temple in a way connecting it to the pan Indian centre of Jagannatha. Rājīvalocana temple is connected with the story of Rajib Telīn. There is a temple of Telīn besides the Rājīvalocana temple. Thus the Telīn temple too was connected to the national level temples. These two in fact worked as the bridge between the local and the national level pilgrimage centres. They can be recognized as intermediate level centres.

107 Bilaspur District Gazetteer, pp.272-73.
Some centres were important otherwise too for example, the pilgrimage centre of Ujjain had the advantage of being a commercial centre too. It might have benefited from the trade route passing through it, while the cities of Besnagar, Udayagiri, Lalitpur declined as a commercial centre in 8th-9th century A.D. These two combined factors (invasion and the decline of cities) played havoc for pilgrimage centres. The Chhattisgarh pilgrimage centres by and large remained away from these developments.

The role of traders in development of pilgrimage centres cannot be doubted. The Siyādonī inscription (explained earlier) is a proof. Among the traders Telīn community was more associated with these centres, be it Rājivalocana, Siron Khurd or Besnagar.

The significance of tīrtha can be understood 'by taking account of the many strands of the Indian tradition which have converged in the tīrtha'. The tradition of making gifts, performing sacrifices and other rites has been substituted by the single act of undertaking pilgrimages. This act is less costly and more people friendly than the other acts of Hindu religion. The neglected section of the society particularly Śūdras and women do have rights of performing a pilgrimage. This comparative democratic outlook of this act gives it more popularity and sanction in the social sphere.

The less number of Vaiṣṇava tīrthas does not matter as long as the twin purpose of accruing religious merit and popular participation (though not forcefully envisaged by the authors or tīrtha māhātmyas) are fulfilled.

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108 Diana, L. Eck, 'India’s “Tīrthas”: “Crossings” in Sacred Geography', p.344.