CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Vaiṣṇavism and themes related to its study remained an intriguing area of research for scholars since the British era, although Viṣṇu and his incarnations caught the fancy of historians and Indologists quite early. Viṣṇu is the prominent male deity of one of the most widespread religions of India. Almost every pocket of this country has one or the other shrine dedicated to this god or some form of him. The followers of the Vaiṣṇava sect command a good respect even among the public personalities of India. Mahatma Gandhi has his favourite hymn (written by Narsi Mehta) related to Vaiṣṇava sect-

\[ \text{Vaiṣṇava jana to tene kahiye pīra parāyī jāne re.} \]

The non-violent aspect of this sect impressed Mahatma who was himself an epitome of Ahimsā (non-violence) and Satya (truth).

Though this sect emphasizes on the non-killing of animals and brotherhood in its teachings, how far this concept pervaded the Vaiṣṇava atmosphere in ancient times (when it had still to take its final shape as we see it today) can be a matter of debate and research. But despite the uncertainty over this aspect the sect enjoys wide popularity and following.

Vaiṣṇavism was supported and expanded by a group of Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas from south and north, Rāmānuja, Vallabhācārya, Nimbārkācārya, being a few of them. Vaiṣṇavism is largely regarded as the result of the Bhakti movement and preaching of these Ācāryas. It is considered as following the guidelines of them by and large.

Vaiṣṇavism like any other sect in India could not claim to have exclusive areas dedicated to the Vaiṣṇava deities. Besides, not all the areas have the equal representation of Vaiṣṇava deities. There are certain areas, which attest to the domineering presence of other sects. These areas are left by the historians and the
Indologists, who worked on Vaiśṇavism. Even for the new entrants in the field of Vaiśṇava research this does not seem to be a lucrative area. There are very few Vaiśṇava temples as compared to other sects, lesser number of inscriptions invoking Viṣṇu and his incarnations, and not so bright prospect of availability of material from these areas. The difficulty associated in the study of Vaiśṇavism and its developments in these regions drove away the scholars from them. As a result these areas were left neglected by the scholars. The sketchy references to these regions did not do much justice to the history of Vaiśṇava religion.

The history of Vaiśṇava religion is not only associated with the tracing of the path of development of the famous Vaiśṇava related places but also to the tracing of non-existence of it in some parts of India. The history of religion and for that matter any subject cannot be complete unless the pattern of incidence is compared with the pattern of its absence.

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh constitute one such region of India, which was left aside as far as the study of Vaiśṇavism in a regional context is concerned. This region came under the influence of Śaiva sects early in its historical period. This was the reason for which the development of Vaiśṇavism was left un-researched after the Gupta period. My attempt in this research is to provide the justice to this region or at least to make a beginning in this direction.

As a theme for my Ph.D. research, I intend to work in detail on the history of Vaiśṇavism in Madhya Pradesh and the recently created state of Chhattisgarh during the period c.A.D.600-1300.

Although this takes off from my M. Phil level initial research on Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh during c.A.D.300-600, the present research will move somewhat away from the structure of my earlier work. This period, especially from the close of the Gupta period onwards, saw intense activity of temple building in different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Diverse regional dynasties were ruling in different regions of this area. The Candellas were ruling in Khajuraho, Paramāras in Western Malwa, Kalacuris in Jabalpur and Ratanpur and, the Pratihāras and subsequently the Kacchapaghātas near Gwalior and Nagavamsis in Bastar.
Vaiṣṇava centres, which have been confined to one or other parts Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, now spread over the area. In this process of geographical expansion, forms of Vaiṣṇava worship too changed. Different avatāras of Viṣṇu were worshipped in Gupta period like Varāha avatāra in and around Eran, Sārāṅgin (one who has sāranga bow in his hand i.e. Rāma) form of Viṣṇu in Mandasor, while Hayagrīva (one with horse face) in central Madhya Pradesh. However, towards the end of the first millennium A.D., the Caturbhujā form of Viṣṇu image became prevalent.

In the present, an attempt will be made to find out evolutionary pattern of Vaiṣṇavism in diverse regions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and also to locate if any of these regional centres acquired a pan Indian character, thus developing into a major pilgrimage centre.

Vaiṣṇavism was not a phenomenon confined to Madhya Pradesh or Chhattisgarh only. But how far regional pattern of Vaiṣṇavism in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh influenced the historical development of this religion forms an important aspect of my study. In this connection, I would like to quote Prof. Kunal Chakravarti1 - “It is the making of regional traditions and the formation of regional identities which reveal the pattern of socio-cultural interaction between the pan-Indian and the local levels, so crucial for an understanding of the long term historical processes in India”.

Besides the regional character and the geographical expansion, I would like to look into the sources and the pattern of patronage extended to the construction and maintenance of these centre, which sometimes became crucial in the development of these centres from a local tradition to the larger tradition.

In the process of its evolution, Vaiṣṇavism interacted with other major and minor cults that were prevalent in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The nature of this interaction and the impact, which each bears upon the other, form other aspects of this research work.

Madhya Pradesh is known for long as the find spot of one of the earliest Vaiṣṇava inscriptions in India. The famous Heliodorous Pillar Inscription at Besnagar\textsuperscript{2} in Madhya Pradesh attests to the presence of Vāsudeva cult as early as the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C. This place may well have been a complex of Vāsudeva temples. In this connection, Bhandarkar\textsuperscript{3} refers to another base of a column, found in one of the streets of Vidisha. It contains a small inscription mentioning a Garuḍa standard made in connection with the best temple of Bhāgavata-

\textit{Bhagavato prāsādottamaśa Garuḍa-dhvaja kārate---}

The word 'prāsādottama' suggests that of many temples this Vāsudeva temple is the best of which the column forms a part.

Another site\textsuperscript{4} excavated in close vicinity of the pathway leading from Udaigiri to Besnagar shows the presence of the two kundas and one large hall. These further suggest the site to be a big religious centre.

With such an ancient record of Vāsudeva cult centre flourishing in this part of Madhya Pradesh, the region presents an interesting area to study the further evolution and spread of Vaiṣṇava cult centres.

We have abundance of research materials and books on Vaiṣṇavism and the incarnations of Viṣṇu. Of them, early works deal mainly with the evolution of Vaiṣṇavism.

R.G. Bhandarkar\textsuperscript{5}, one of the pioneers in the study of Vaiṣṇava religion, traces the origin of the religion from the 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. to 8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. with an emphasis on the avatāras of Viṣṇu.

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\textsuperscript{2} Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report (hereafter ASIAR), 1908-09, pp. 126-29.
\textsuperscript{3} Bhandarkar, ASIAR, 1913-14, P. 190.
\textsuperscript{4} Bhandarkar, ASIAR, 1914-15, PP. 12-18.
\textsuperscript{5} Bhandarkar, R.G., Viṣṇuism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems, Strassburg, 1913.
Monier Williams\(^6\) considered Vaiśṇavism as result of “abolition of triune equality of Brhamā, Śiva and Viṣṇu in favour of Viṣṇu”.

H.C. Raychaudhuri\(^7\) found Vaiśṇavism not a plagiarism from Christianity, but of indigenous origin, and owing its origin to Vāsudeva.

J. Gonda\(^8\), dealing with almost the same theme, throws special light on Viṣṇu’s relationship with kingship. Jan Gonda is recognised as one of the pioneer writers on the religions of India especially Vaiśṇavism. He throws special light on the connection of Viṣṇu with fertility cult. Time and again Viṣṇu in his different incarnations has been associated with Pṛthvī as his wife. This idea leads to the concept of Viṣṇu being the male partner of the goddess earth. This also emphasises the connection of Viṣṇu with king who is often related to one or the other incarnations of Viṣṇu. However this book suffers from the lack of chronological study. The author has endowed the god with those qualities, which could have been of late origin.

K.G. Goswami\(^9\) in his book ‘Study of Vaisnavism’ depicts the growth of Vaiṣṇava religion from a tribal cult (of the god of Sātvata tribe), slowly transgressing the geographical boundaries.

Suvira Jaiswal\(^10\), in her book ‘The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism’, studied the development and progress of Vaiṣṇavism from 200 B.C. to 500 A.D. in the context of its social base. The reference to Vaiṣṇavism cannot be complete without giving the book its place. This book tries to locate the origin of Vaiṣṇavism right from the Rgvedic period to the 5\(^{th}\) century A.D., though its period starts from 2\(^{nd}\) century B.C. it can be called a comprehensive work on the early history of Vaiṣṇavism (called Viṣṇuism in the book). The author took great pains to show the connection of Nārāyaṇa with that of agriculture and human sacrifice. At one place Nārāyaṇa is connected with the term ‘Bhagavata’ which means ‘to share’.\(^{11}\) According to the

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\(^7\) Raychaudhary, H.C., *Materials for the Study of Early History of Vaisnava Sect*, New Delhi, 1995, (2\(^{nd}\) ed.).

\(^8\) Gonda, J., *Aspects of Early Visnuism*, Delhi, 1969, (2\(^{nd}\) ed.).


\(^11\) Ibid, p. 38.
author if bhagavat, the possessor of the bhaga was Nārāyaṇa, the collective entity of the tribe, bhaga was the individual member who belonged to the bhagavat and received a share of the bhaga. At this primitive stage the communal wealth was identical with food that is why even in its early uses ‘bhakta’ means ‘meal’. When the culture, in which the concepts of the bhagavat and Nārāyaṇa originated, reached an agricultural stage, rice became the principal meal of the community and bhakta became synonymous with ‘boiled rice’.

So far the origin of Nārāyaṇa was connected with the agricultural settled community. But at another place she traces the origin of Nārāyaṇa in the hoary past when human sacrifices were a common feature. ‘The genesis of Nārāyaṇa appears to have had a sound material basis and may be traced to a state of savagery; the concept changed with the progress of civilisation’. The explanation for the involvement of Nārāyaṇa with human sacrifice is provided in the ritual of Nārāyaṇa-bali described in some Grhya Sūtras. The rite of Nārāyaṇa-bali, in the opinion of the author, is a remnant of some earlier ritual in which human beings were unnaturally put to death in honour of Nārāyaṇa. And the connection of Nārāyaṇa with the Puruṣamedha referred to in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa strongly suggests this interpretation.

Thus the author points to a curious origin of Nārāyaṇa when the society was still at the stage of primitive agriculture and human sacrifices for the fertility was practiced by the agricultural community. The concept of ‘bhagavat’ as described earlier indicates to the early mode of distribution of material wealth. The author gives a useful explanation for the origin and development of the worship of Sāṅkarṣaṇa Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa along with Śrī-Lakṣmī.

Urmila Bhagowalia in her work ‘Vaiṣṇavism and Society in North India’ did a similar kind of work in the context of its social implications.

Besides the evolutionary aspect of Vaiṣṇavism, avatāra concept remained popular

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12 Jaiswal, Suvira, Origin and development of Vaisnavism, p. 35.
13 Bhagowalia, Urmila, Vaisnavism and Society in North India, c.A.D.700-1200, Delhi, 1980.
among the scholars. Hermann Jacobi\textsuperscript{14} found the tenet of incarnations as fundamental to medieval and modern Hindu religions. D.D. Kosambi\textsuperscript{15} gave emphasis on the syncretic and assimilative aspect of the avatāras. The concept of ‘avatāra’ was basically to assimilate as many sects into the Vaiṣṇava faith as possible through the mechanism of rebirth and incarnations.

A specialized study of different forms of Viṣṇu is a part of two major works: ‘Elements of Hindu Iconography’ of T.A.G. Rao\textsuperscript{16} and ‘Development of Hindu Iconography’\textsuperscript{17} of J.N. Banerjea. Kalpana Desai’s ‘Iconography of Viṣṇu’\textsuperscript{18} also deals with Vaiṣṇava iconography. These books provide an insight into the form of Viṣṇu and his incarnations. The different forms of Viṣṇu came under the form of Viṣṇu and his incarnations. The different forms of Viṣṇu came under the banner of Vaiṣṇavism at different periods of time. The iconographic features though guided by the texts sometimes contain the regional features specific to a place. The iconographic evolution of the image of Viṣṇu was taken up by J.N. Banerjea in his book mentioned above. Different traits and weapons associated with Viṣṇu were the result of the continuous evolution of the image of the god till the early centuries of 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennium.

Similar kinds of studies, of the sculptures, are undertaken by different scholars on different parts of Madhya Pradesh at different periods. Some of them are J.C. Harle’s ‘Gupta Sculptures’\textsuperscript{19}, Krishna Deva’s ‘Temples of Khajuraho’\textsuperscript{20}, S. N. Mishra’s ‘Gupta Art and Architecture’.\textsuperscript{21}

The work edited by B.L. Smith\textsuperscript{22} and titled ‘Essays on Gupta Culture’ tried to point out the link between legitimacy and religion in the Gupta period and onwards.

\textsuperscript{17} Banerjea, J.N., Development of Hindu Iconography, Calcutta, 1936.
\textsuperscript{18} Desai, Kalpana, Iconography of Viṣṇu, New Delhi, 1973.
\textsuperscript{19} Harle, J.C., Gupta Sculpture; Indian Sculpture of the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries A.D., New Delhi, 1996 (New ed.).
\textsuperscript{20} Krishna Deva, Temples of Khajuraho, New Delhi, 1990.
\textsuperscript{21} Mishra, S.N., Gupta Art and Architecture with Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, 1992.
\textsuperscript{22} Smith, B.L. (ed.), Essays on Gupta culture, Delhi, 1983.
Devangana Desai in her essay ‘Patronage to Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho’\textsuperscript{23} shows the efforts of the Candella kings to glorify the origin of their dynasty in their inscriptions. She specially puts emphasis on the sculptures of Laksmana temple at Khajuraho, which clearly depicts the supremacy of orthodox Brähmanic religion over the non-Vedic heretical forces. For exploring the possible existence of Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres in our region, we shall start with the study of a few major secondary publications.

There are publications on pilgrimage centres like Diana Eck’s ‘Banaras, the City of Light’\textsuperscript{24}, Kanwar Lal’s ‘Holy Cities of India’\textsuperscript{25} and ‘Sacred Places of Vaiṣṇavism’\textsuperscript{26}, William Foster (ed.) Early Travels in India\textsuperscript{27} and so on.

However none of these works deal with the Vaiṣṇava centres of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. S.M. Bharadwaj’s ‘Hindu Places of Pilgrimage’\textsuperscript{28} is also mainly concerned with the pilgrimage centres in Garhwal region. Despite it being concentrated on the Garhwal region it provides an insight into the pilgrimage system, its mechanism, circulation and its role in the integration of regional cults into pan Indian cults. Every religion has sacred foci to which men of faith periodically converge. The book can be considered as an all-encompassing book as far as the concepts of ‘tīrtha’ and ‘tīrthayātrās’ are concerned. The book focuses on the origin and development of the tīrthas in the ancient texts and their expansion. It also emphasises on the motives behind the undertaking of tenuous and difficult journey of tīrthayātrās. The chief aim of this book is to understand the nature of interactions between the Hindu sacred places of different levels and their pilgrim fields in both the spatial and social dimensions. For a close and introspective look of the involvement of the masses the author examines the caste composition of the pilgrims. Besides, the organisational aspect of the temples and their hierarchy were also scrutinised by the author.

\textsuperscript{24} Eck Diana, L., Banaras : The City Light, London, 1983.
\textsuperscript{25} Lal, Kanwar, Holy Cities of India, Asia Press, 1961.
\textsuperscript{27} Foster William (ed.), Early Travels in India, Oxford University Press, London, 1921.
Kunal Chakravarti’s ‘Religious Processes; The Purāṇas and The Making of a Regional Tradition’ mainly deals with the Bengal region based on the evidences of the Purāṇas. This is quite introspective book based on the regional tradition of Bengal. The idea of regional tradition was carefully explained and expanded to enrich the knowledge base and the process of assimilation of regional tradition in the context of Bengal.

The concept of regional traditions and their impact on the mainstream religion cannot be complete without the reference of The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa. It is a comprehensive volume dealing with the rise and development of the cult of Jagannath from a local tribal cult to a pan Indian cult. About the regional traditions, the book observes, ‘the various regional traditions—form not only literally the “central portion” of India’s tradition, but also the true melting pot of the local and all India tradition’. It is true that the all India tradition is in fact the compendium of the local traditions in the making at various parts of the country at different stages of development but playing the undeniably important part in the pan Indian traditions. Each part of the country has its own characteristics suiting to its geographical and socio-economic milieu. These characteristics construct and reconstruct a regional tradition, which were subsequently appropriated and assimilated in the all India traditions.

This volume is an anthology of research articles written by members of the Orissa Research Project, sponsored by the German Research Council (DFG), Bonn. The project was a part of the South Asia Interdisciplinary Regional Research Programme at the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg. It attempts a comprehensive study of the origin and development of the Jagannath cult, the temple city and pilgrim centre of Puri and its role in the formation of the regional tradition of Orissa. It is thus a contribution to the study of India’s “neglected” regional cults, their sacred places (tirthas), and their religious and socio-economic networks. The sacred places are at the same time a nucleus of the regional tradition as well as the

"transmission belts" between the local and the all India tradition.

The regional tradition of Orissa was characterized by a chain of tribal-Hindu continuum. This characteristic feature of Orissa still finds its lasting manifestation in the Jagannath cult of Puri. According to its authors the archaic iconography of the cult images on the one hand and their highest iconology on the other as well as the existence of former tribals (daitas) and *Vedic brāhmīns* amongst its priests are by no means an antithesis, but a splendid regional synthesis of the local and the all India traditions.

Hermann Kulke in his article, 'Royal Temple Policy and the Structure of Medieval Hindu Kingdoms',31 tries to establish the role of temple making in the development of nuclear areas of sub regional power. Prof. Kulke points to the royal patronage of autochthonous deities as an essential presupposition for the consolidation of the political power and its legitimization in the Hindu tribal zone of Orissa. The process of integration and thereby legitimization was achieved through three measures -

(i) the royal patronage of the important places of pilgrimage,
(ii) a systematic and large scale settlement of Brahmans and
(iii) the construction of new "imperial temples" within the core region of the kingdoms.

The settlement of these *Brāhmaṇas* in and around the nucleus was to give moral strength to the king. These *Brāhmaṇas* in return prepared the lengthy genealogies of the king linking him to some mythical hero or even god (here Arjuna, Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhira or some form of Viṣṇu). This clearly strengthened the legitimization process of the king and his dynasty. The third and the final stage was the construction of new monumental temples of a hitherto unknown height. Through the construction of these temples the *Rājās* tried to create a new and centralized ritual structure focussed on the new temple and its cult.

This aspect can be useful for the study of the development of the state system in Chhattisgarh, which was originally a tribal belt, and the use of religion (here

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Vaiśṇavism) in the process of legitimization of the kings. The Śarabhapuriya kings of early Chhattisgarh took the recourse of Vaiśṇavism to get legitimacy. Not only the Śarabahpurīya rulers but all the rulers of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh took the help of temple and brāhmīṇ priests to legitimise their rule. The process of construction of high temples so characteristic to the early medieval period was a phenomenon in this region too.

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh being a predominantly tribal belt passed through the almost similar process of assimilation and integration as observed in the case of Orissa: Being adjacent to Orissa proved to be another advantage to this region. In fact a temple in Chhattisgarh known as Rājivalocana temple is connected to the Puruṣottama Kṣetra of Orissa. Probably the presence of a strong state patronized cult in nearby region prevented the Vaiśṇava temples of Chhattisgarh to acquire an independent identity, that too in the face of lack of royal patronage. Though there were donations made to the Vaiśṇava temples of this region, they were quite few in number as compared to those given to Śaiva Ācāryas and their mathas. The presence of organisational institution of Mattamayūra cult stole the scene out of the hands of the Vaiśṇava temples.

Given the kind of disparities existing in different parts of India, detailed regional studies are necessary. Even the different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh do not experience the same kind of development regarding Vaiśṇavism.

Thus this study attempts to focus on regional variations and development of Vaiśṇava pilgrimage centres in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh over the time span of A.D. 600-1300.

II

The present research work also attempts to study the pattern of historical change over a span of time. During the course of my M.Phil research I found that geographical distribution of Vaiśṇava centres did not remain the same between c.A.D. 300-1000. While the Northern and central parts of Madhya Pradesh had many sites showing Vaiśṇava affiliation, southern Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are marked by their
absence in the Gupta period. New centres emerged and flourished in Chhattisgarh region from c.A.D. 600-800, while the other parts of Madhya Pradesh does not attest to this development. From c.A.D. 800-1000, once again all the parts of Madhya Pradesh show that Vaiṣṇava affiliated sites more or less evenly distributed.

The last phase of the chronological span covered in my research work i.e. c.A.D. 1000-1300 saw a cluster of Vaiṣṇava sites and inscriptions in the Chhattisgarh region. The Somavamśis were ruling in this part of the region. Though they called themselves Śaivas, their inscriptions show that land grants were given to the Vaiṣṇava temple sites.

Besides the distribution Vaiṣṇava centres, the shift in the form of Viṣṇu being worshipped is closely observed in the coming chapters. Earlier phases like the Gupta period and post Gupta period (c.A.D. 600-800) do not attest to the presence of some of the avatāras of Viṣṇu like Matsya, Kūrma, while Varāha, and Nṛśimha and Vāmana appear to have been the dominant form of images. As we are approaching towards the end of the first millennium A.D. there emerged a trend towards the worship of the Caturbhuja form of Viṣṇu. Other syncretic forms like Harihara images too were found in the Khajuraho temple. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which is roughly dated to 6th century A.D. attests to the Aṣṭabhuja form of Viṣṇu according to R.C. Hazra. J.N. Banerjea’s observation may be remembered in this context that the more deified a God, the more hands are attached to it. Probably, in this period cult worship of Viṣṇu image became more deified and prominent than the avatāras of the same. All these are discussed in the subsequent chapters of this research work.

Not only geographical distribution and iconographic evolution, but also the patronage accorded to these centres and change in the form of it with the passage of time are the areas of concern. While in the Gupta period, Gupta rulers remain stick to the symbolical meaning of religious legitimacy, the Candella rulers of Khajuraho

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32 Hiralal, 'Sihwa Stone Inscription of Karnaraja, the Saka Year 1114', Epigraphia Indica (hereafter EI), vol. IX, pp. 182-90.
openly patronise Lakṣmaṇa temple. The Pratihāra ruler Bhoja assumed the title of "Ādivarāha. 36 Though the prominence Varāha as a dominant deity of the temple was somewhat relegated to the background it continued to be used by the kings ‘as a rescuer of the earth’ in their inscriptions, especially when they tried to promote their image as a protector and a rescuer.

The way Vaiṣṇavaism affected different segments of the society is an important area to look into for understanding the spread of Vaiṣṇavism. If we move back to the Gupta period, we find a continuous tradition of Vaiṣṇava worship for four generations. The Eran stone pillar inscription of the time of Budhagupta 37 refers to Mahārāja Mātri Viṣṇu with his brother Dhanya Viṣṇu creating a flag staff (dhvaja-stambha) of Bhagvata Janārdana. His ancestors are mentioned as Indra Viṣṇu, Varuṇa Viṣṇu and Hari Viṣṇu. Further moving towards Chhattisgarh, I find the engraver or the composer of an inscription often bearing a Vaiṣṇava name. The Śarabhapuriya rulers have often their engravers named as Keśava 38. Even in late 12th century and early 13th century, I found a Sethi Keśava 39 or Nṛsimha 40 as engraving and composing different inscriptions, while the inscriptions are Śaiva in character. Thus I find a literate class of composers or engravers regularly using the Vaiṣṇava names. And the term ‘Sethi’ suggests that they were from an affluent section of the society.

III

Emergence of pilgrimage centres or Vaiṣṇava tīrthas or of sacred Kṣetras will be another important aspect of this study. The Sanskrit word ‘Kṣetra’ with a particular degree of generality, refers to physical space of all types: field, landed property, enclosed spot of ground etc. However, here ‘Kṣetra’ has a different connotation, the sacred space or the spiritual space. Only a cluster of tīrthas of spiritual significance is given the term ‘Kṣetra’. The conception of sacred space found its greatest development in the Purāṇas. All spaces are not suitable for sacred performances. The effectiveness of a place depends on its association with gods, sages, ancestors, spirits

and primeval events. And here comes the role of the Purāṇas. Purāṇas often glorify a particular place; various mythological accounts were associated with it. And soon it developed into a pilgrimage centre. Apart from a distinctive objective i.e. worship of a particular god/goddess, there is a hierarchy and the circuit of the tīrthas.

Pilgrimage centres do not emerge in isolation. Devotees are enjoined to go in search of merit, from one site to another to complete the circuit of the pilgrimage. And these tīrthas are arranged hierarchically. A major religious centre is often associated with numerous small centres. And the attempt to give tīrtha a pan Indian character is often reflected in different Purāṇas, which Prof. Kunal Chakravarti calls as “the cultural negotiation implicit in the Purānic records”.41

Sometimes a particular vrata has to be performed in one site of a region. In this connection, the description of Puruṣottama tīrtha of Avanti42 in Skanda Purāṇa’s Avantī Kṣetra Māhātmya is important. It says that at the end of the three years, the Adhikamāsa (extra month) appears, when there is no transit of the sun. In the form of Puruṣottama, Kṛṣṇa always has the presiding lordship of Adhimāsa. The tīrtha is in Mahākalāvana. Different vratas and associated auspicious days are mentioned in this text, which have to be performed in this month in this region. The list of vratas performed in this part and as found in various inscriptions of this period is to be prepared to show the prevalent religious practices.

We still have two sacred lakes – Puruṣottama Sāgara and Šola Sāgar in Avanti region43. People come here during adhikamāsa to bathe and offer pūjā at the neighbourhood temples.

Another famous vrata associated with Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is the Satya Nārāyaṇa Vratakathā44. Two versions of the Satya Nārāyaṇa Kathā are found in the Purāṇas. One of these versions is a part of Revākhandā of the Skanda Purāṇa and

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41 Chakravarti, Kunal, Religious Processes, New Delhi, 2001, p. 32.
According to the story Śaunaka and other sages assembled in the Naimiśāranya (Nimsar), requested the Paurāṇika sūta to narrate a vrata, which fulfils of desires and annuls all pangs, pains, and miseries. And the story goes on, how various people observed the vrata and gained prosperity. In the narration of the Satya Nārāyaṇa kathā the Bhavisya Purāṇa refers to the Narmāṭata, which tends to suggest that probably the name of this Kathā is the Narmada valley. This Kathā also illustrates very vividly the social and religious reformist activities conducted by the different members of the four varnas i.e. Brāhiṃṣa, Kṣatriya, Vaiṣya and Śūdra. However some of the scholars consider this Purāṇa of a later origin.

Vaiṣṇava cult centres were not emerging in isolation. Various other major (like Mahākāla in Ujjain) and minor cults were flourishing in different parts of Madhya Pradesh at the same time. How did Vaiṣṇava cult interact with them and in return get influenced by them, will form a part of this research.

IV

Sources for this research work are mainly archaeological, epigraphical and textual (mainly Purāṇas). Archaeological evidences and epigraphic materials offer possibilities of studying them which are more chronologically accurate and region specific. They thus can be used for analysing regional patterns over a period of time. The inscriptions are also excellent sources indicating the extent of royal patronage enjoyed by the religion. Vaiṣṇava epithets like Paramabhāgavata / Parama Vaiṣṇava and Vaiṣṇava names of persons show the inclination towards this religion. And the localities, in which the land donations are made to the particular temples, show the extent of the influence enjoyed by the presiding deity of the temple. Sometimes Vaiṣṇava vrata and auspicious days are mentioned in the inscriptions, which are very useful in estimating the nature of Vaiṣṇava religious practices prevalent in that part of the region.

Archaeological remains show the iconographic evolution of the deity. They reveal the particular form of Viṣṇu worshipped in different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. For example, Eran in Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh has a series of Varāha sculptures right from the Gupta period down to the 8th century A.D. An image of goddess Vārāhī, the female counterpart of god Varāha, is found from this place, belonging to 8th century A.D.

_Purāṇas_ are excellent sources in describing the mythological accounts associated with a particular site. This indicates the attempt of the authors of the _Purāṇas_ to glorify the site. They also describe the rituals and pilgrimage network associated with the site. However there is a problem in determining the chronology and spatial specificity of the text. These texts were written over a long period of time, often spanning centuries. They often refer to vague and mythological dates, which can’t be used for historical purposes. Sometimes they represent famous religious centres to places of their interest just to further glorify the religious importance of the place concerned. In spite of all these problems, some of the places are well recognised in ancient India like Avantī, Revākhaṇḍa, Mahākāla, Narmada River, Ujjain, Padmāvatī, Kuśasthāli, Amarakāntaka, etc.

Of all the _Purāṇas_, _Skanda Purāṇa_ is the biggest text. In it, many pages are devoted to pilgrimage centres and their _māhātmyas_, which may have been crucial in determining the importance of the site in ancient period. This _Purāṇa_ along with others like, _Varāha Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Agni Purāṇa_ will be extensively used in this research work.

Other texts such as _Prabodhacandrodaya_ written by a court poet of Candella rulers may prove helpful in showing the Vaiṣṇava affiliation and effort to project its superiority over the non-_Vedic_ heretical sects like Kāpālikas, Kālāmukhas, etc. These texts may also throw a ray of light on the prevalent social conditions and the faith among the local people. _Sthala Purāṇas_ associated with particular sites may also prove beneficial.

46 Bajpai, K.D., _Sagar Through the Ages_, Sagar, 1964.
Gazetteers and census reports will also be used for determining locations of present day Vaiśṇava sites and festivals associated with it. They may provide the ethnographic evidence for the Vaiśṇava centres of antiquity.

V

This research work, apart from analysis of primary written sources, is supplemented by field trips to various Vaiśṇava sites / pilgrimage centres and museums of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Some of the centres like Mahākāla in Ujjain are famous for Śiva worship. However, there are small Vaiśṇava centres in its close vicinity. They might have been popular in ancient times, as is reflected in some parts of Avanti māhātmya of Skanda Purāṇa. One such site is Ankapāda Kṣetra in Avanti. The story of the survival of Sāndīpāni’s son is associated with this site. Not only this, but there is a circuit of pilgrimages mentioned in this text including the sites – Śānkhin, Viśvarupa, Govinda and Ankapāda. It is till the most important place for the Vaisnavites in Ujjain. It is known as the Ankapāta Kṣetra. Probably the lord Kṛṣṇa used to clear the slates in the tank here and so the name Ankapāta (according to D. K. Samant). During the Kumbha Melā, the Vaiśṇava ascetics camp at this place. Of the various temples of this site, one is the Sāndīpāni āśrama (the teacher of Kṛṣṇa).

My objective while visiting these places was to collect the materials and to enquire into the present day significance of these sites.

Fieldwork also includes collection of the materials regarding the varieties, iconographic features and find spots of Vaiśṇava sculptures. It required visit to various museums – Gwalior, Jhansi, Chanderi, Raipur and Khajuraho Museums, apart from other collections.

VI

My thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is of introductory nature dealing with main issues and historiography. There is a section giving reasons why I

selected Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as an area of my study. This specifically deals with the history of Vaiśṇava religion in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh before my period (c.A.D. 600-1300). There is a classification of the sources, which I used during my study and fieldwork. A part of this chapter deals with the major issues and approaches used in the present work.

The chronological span c.A.D. 600-1300 of the present work is divided into two chapters the second chapter (c.A.D. 600-100) and the third (c.A.D. 1000-1300).

These two chapters try to identify, list and locate the Vaiśṇava centres in the respective periods. They take into account the iconography, icons and the monumental and dimensional aspects of the temple. These are mainly based on archaeological and epigraphical evidences. The regional variety of Vaiśṇavism emerging from this exercise is taken into consideration. The rationale behind the division of the period of this research work into two chronological parts is to get a clear picture of the development of Vaiśṇavism and its various aspects. The first period corresponding to 600-1000 A.D. saw the rise of Vaiśṇavism in various parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The local and imperial dynasties patronised this religion and new centres of Vaiśṇava sect come up. This was the period when the Mattamayūra sect was gaining ground in this region. But the influence of this sect was still to come up.

In the next period 1000-1300 A.D., the decline of Vaiśṇavism in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh set in. It was the period of the rise and expansion of the Mattamayūra sect in this region, which stole the lustre out of Vaiśṇava sect. Though there were centres of Vaiśṇava worship, but the decline of it was largely visible all over this region:

Apart from this aspect the first period saw the gradual disappearance of the incarnations of Viṣṇu from the sanctum sanctorum of the Vaiśṇava temple in favour of Caturbhujā form of Viṣṇu. In the next period the reference of incarnations of Viṣṇu as the main deity of temple is almost non-existent. However we do not have an idea if the incarnations of Viṣṇu are kept in the garbhagṛha in the Gupta period or even earlier. The evidence in support or against of this hypothesis is not available.
Whatever temples of Gupta period have been found mostly represents the above-mentioned incarnations standing on a platform. Some of the forms of Viṣṇu are represented in caves like Udaigiri cave temples as will be shown later. Even the Daśāvatāra temple do not testifies to this idea. The sanctum of the temple is empty.

However the distinct change in the popular form of worship of Viṣṇu prompted me to bifurcate the time span of my research work into two parts. Its rise and decline too played a crucial part in dividing the chronological span into two chapters.

The fourth chapter describes the major cult centres and their pilgrimages. The study of pilgrimage centres of Vaiṣṇava sect in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is the important aspect of this study. The archaeological materials, epigraphical reports and the paurāṇic evidences and also field report, gazetteers and census reports- all of them will be utilized to identify these cult centres. The evolutionary aspect of the cult and the circuits of pilgrimages is specially dealt with. The mythological accounts of different Purāṇas glorifying particular cults or cult centres are quite helpful in determining the place of that cult/centre in the pan-Indian panorama. The associated vratas and rituals are also mentioned.

The fifth chapter deals with the interaction of Vaiṣṇavism with other cults. It will study the distribution pattern of all the Vaiṣṇava centres and the nature of relationships, which they developed with each other and with cults over the period of time. It enquires into reasons why there is an appearance or disappearance or replacement of a cult by another cult. This also tries to find out the shifts in the distribution pattern. Whether the change of dynasty or discontinuity of the patronage leads to the shift forms another aspect of this study. The nature of interaction varies from the cooperation and assimilation to conflict and subordination.

The sixth chapter is an attempt to sum up the distribution pattern of Vaiṣṇava cult centres, pilgrimage, patronage, regional variety and possible implications of all the above. It briefly presents the historical nature of Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres and Vaiṣṇavism itself in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the time span of c.A.D. 600-1300.
Map I: Vaiśnava Centres (Temple Sites) in Gupta and Pre Gupta period
The chronological span of the present work starts with the exit of the Imperial Guptas from the political scene. But any work regarding the spread or evolution of Vaiṣṇava sites in Madhya Pradesh has to begin with the Heliodorous Pillar Inscription, the earliest evidence of Vāsudeva in inscription. D.R. Bhandarkar⁴⁹ in his excavation report of Besnagar gives a detail description of the site and archaeological findings. As we all know the pillar records the erection of this pillar as a Garuḍa-dhvaja in honour of the God Vāsudeva by Heliodorous, son of Dion, a Greek ambassador from the Indo-Bactrian king Antialkidas of Taxila to the court of local prince Bhāgabhadra. Heliodorous in this inscription calls himself Bhāgavata- “Heliodorena Bhāgavatena”. He refers to Vāsudeva as the god of gods and uses the term Garuḍa standard.

Both these terms are significant, keeping in view of two facts: first, supremacy of Vāsudeva over other gods and second, Garuḍa standard as being the symbol of the same.

Close beside this pillar are found three retaining walls of an old platform on which the old shrine of the Vāsudeva may have been erected. This place may well have been a complex of Vāsudeva temples. In this connection, Bhandarkar refers to still another stump of a column, which was lying uncared for in one of the narrow streets of Vidisha. It contains a small inscription which says-

“Bhāgavata, son of Gotamī, caused a Garuḍa standard to be made in connection with the best temple of Bhāgavat (Bhāgavato prāśādottamasā Garuḍa-dhvaja kārate…), when Mahārāja Bhāgavata had been crowned twelve years.”

Next he refers to an image, originally with four hands found from this site by Mr. Lake. The features, the crown and the headdress behind it, the peculiar earrings, the necklace, the breast ornament and lower dress of this image are exactly like that of the figure of Viṣṇu carved in the verandah of Udaigiri. But this figure is round. Hence

Bhandarkar\textsuperscript{50} assumes that this is the image of Garuda, which crowned the Kambaba column (Heliodorus Pillar). He also suggests that the Heliodorus Pillar was crowned by this image of Garuda by the Gupta ruler (Candragupta) when he came here.

Towards the south of the pillar is found the foundation of an old dwelling with fragments of tiles, pottery, nails, tanks and a domestic mortar. This may be the house occupied by the family of the worshippers who were in charge of the Vāsudeva temple.

The site has a history of habitation from the pre-Maurya period. The remnants of an irrigation canal prove it. Another site\textsuperscript{51} excavated in close vicinity of the pathway leading from Udaigiri to Kambaba yields an old stūpa and two kūṇḍas, of which one resembles, the yoni-kūṇḍa. Brāhmaṇas offer sacrifices in these kūṇḍas. Two drains and one large hall are also found. Fragments of potteries and 26 clay pieces bearing impression of seals are found from the site. Bhandarkar\textsuperscript{52} calls the structure the spacious hall constructed for the accommodation of large gathering of the people who must have come for the sacrifices for which the kūṇḍas were laid on the ground. Further down he found a flat stone with Bhikhuniyā (by the nun) incised on it in characters of the Maurya or Śunga age. He says that a stūpa of Maurya or Śunga period was originally standing here, which was later on occupied for the dwelling purpose.

With such an ancient record of habitation, the site was bound to become a big religious centre. This fact is visible in the seals and sealings found from the site. All the seals are affixed to the document, which came from outside the yajñāsālā or sacrificial hall. A sealing contains the legend – ‘Timitra-dātrisyas(ṣa)-ho tā-p(o)-tā mamtra-sajana’.\textsuperscript{53} It means ‘the donor Timitra accompanied by hōtā, potā, by hymnkinsmen and …’. Timitra or Demetrius was the dāta or the yajamāna who instituted the sacrifice. A mould of Indo-Bactrian type steatite stone and another bearing the effigy of Dragon and name Huviūsya show the involvement of three foreign people

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid, p.77.
in *Brāhmaṇic* sacrifices.

In the area adjoining the Kham-baba pillar to its southwest, remains of one of the earliest temples have been exposed by M.D. Khare. A huge retaining wall made of rubble stones has been found whom he calls the enclosure of the Vāsudeva temple. The superstructure of the temple was of perishable material. Probably timber was used in the plinth. The age of its construction cannot be ascertained. The excavations only point to the fact that it was finally destroyed by the heavy floods in the river Betwa. After the first damage to the temple the site was raised artificially by making an embankment of earth. According to Khare, the desire to give eminence to the temple and also to secure it from the floods seems to have dictated the building of the temple on a high platform. It was during this period that the Greek ambassador Heliodorous from Taxila visited Vidisha. That more than one pillar has been erected and is in one alignment (north-south) outside the eastern rubble wall is indicated by traces of several pits at uniform distances with a similar filling as that of Heliodorous pillar. At least three more pillars are excavated on the plain in the trenches on the eastern side of the mound.

Occurrence of two northern black polished shreds and six square copper punch marked coins from the deposit of period I indicates that the temple is dated to the end of 3rd century B.C. 55

Thus we have traces of Vaiśṇava temple as early as 3rd century B.C. With such a background, Madhya Pradesh presents an interesting field of research for the further development and expansion of Vaiśṇavism.

**VII**

The next important period in the field of rise and development of Vaiśṇavism commences with the rise of the Guptas. R.G. Bhandarkar characterized this period as

55 Ibid, p.27.
the era of 'vigorous Brāhmānic revival and renovation'. This 'Brāhmānic revival' was reflected to a great extent in the spread and development of Vaiṣṇavism too. However Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism cannot be said as Brāhmānic revival in proper sense. This revival was traced to the period of Śunāgas. According to Prof. D.R. Bhandarkar57, the popular deities of Gupta period- Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya cannot be said as Brāhmānic deities in true sense. Gupta period inscriptions do not attach priests to the temples of these deities. Hence the idea of Brāhmānic revival has some limitations as far as Gupta period is concerned. But the revival of Bhāgavatism was a reality.

The great rulers of the Gupta dynasty - Candragupta I, Samudragupta, Candragupta II, Kumāragupta and Skandagupta dominate the history of India of the fourth and fifth century A.D. All the Gupta rulers are too well known to require an introduction. They came into power after the rule of the Kuşānas over North India. Apart from the patronage enjoyed by Vaiṣṇavism in this period, it is also noted for the connection of the royalty with the religion and the legitimation derived out of it by the rulers.

There were several Vaiṣṇava centres that sprang up and flourished in this period. I will start from the caves of Udaigiri, situated within the radius of a dozen miles around the modern town of Vidisha. These caves have a unique distinction of being the only site, which can be personally associated with a Gupta monarch.58 These caves are twenty in number. According to Harle59, the images in these caves are fairly evenly distributed between the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava pantheon. However quantitatively as well as qualitatively (size and structural evolution), Vaiṣṇava sculptures are in a dominant position.

Cave 6 contains an inscription of the time of Candragupta II.60 The inscription records the excavation of the cave as a religious benefaction (deya-dharmah) to that of god by Sanakānika, son of Viṣṇudāsa and son’s son of Mahārāja Chaggalaga. Chaggalaga is

59 Ibid.
60 Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Udaigiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II, yr.82', CLI, vol. III, pp. 242-244.
not a familiar Indian name. The person concerned may be of foreign origin, whose
son Viṣṇudāsa (slave of Viṣṇu) converted to Vaiṣṇava faith, as it appears from his
name. Though this inscription does not name the god, the figure of four armed Viṣṇu
just below the inscription points to the fact that the cave was dedicated to Viṣṇu.
Four-armed Viṣṇu is shown standing in samapāda mudrā (stiff legged) with his lower
hands placed on Gadādevī and Cakrapuruṣa. Other sculptures of this cave include
figure of twelve-armed goddess and a crudely carved image of Ganeśa. ⁶¹

Cave 5 contains the famous Varāha incarnation scene. ⁶² The Varāha is shown
rescuing the goddess Prthvī(earth) from the depths of the ocean. This sculpture is
most widely known among the Udaigiri sculptures partly due to its size and partly
due to the allegorical meaning it is supposed to convey. No other bas-relief panel in India
is as large as this figure, roughly measuring 7m×8m. ⁶³ The Boar is sculpted in human
form with an animal head, holding the human figure of Prthvī. Śeṣa with a canopy of
thirteen hoods in two layers is in worshipful attitude. The god of ocean is represented
by bottom figure of the sidewalls with a turban like headdress. In effective contrast to
the dynamic personality of Varāha are the rows of small figures of amazed spectators,
almost static and carved in low relief. These represent sages and demigods. On the top
left row is represented Śiva, Brahmā and Agni. Two large figures on the proper right
are shown worshipping the Boar. The first is a serpent king. Behind him, holding a
lotus stalk in his right hand is a large kneeling figure of a man. The large human
figure may well be the donor, one of the local Mahārājas mentioned in the
inscriptions at the caves. According to Harle, since this panel far outranks in size, all
the other sculptures, this figure can be Candragupta himself. ⁶⁴

The image seems to serve as a remarkable allegory for the unification of the empire
under Candragupta II, according to F.M. Asher. ⁶⁵ Saving earth from the dismal state
of affairs at the end of a cosmic age offers a comparison between the cosmic feats of
an incarnation of Viṣṇu and the human achievements Candragupta II. This allegory
gets credence from the fact that large part of India including Malwa (area in which

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⁶³ Harle, J.C., Gupta Sculpture, p. 11.
⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 35.
Udaigiri is located) remained under the authority of Western Kṣatrapas before Candragupta’s victory over it. The political allegory of the Varāha panel lies in the projection of the Gupta ruler as mighty conqueror. In consonance with this fact, sages standing in worshipful posture may recall local kings like the patron of relief who paid homage to the paramount Gupta sovereign. Asher found resemblance between the costume of the sages and that of the Kuśāna rulers. Further merging of Ganga and Yamuna into a mighty ocean may symbolise Samudragupta unifying disparate states of India into one central authority.

Royal connection of this Varāha image is strengthened by another Udaigiri inscription of Candragupta II. It records the construction of cave 7 and its dedication to god Śambhu by SabaVirasena, a resident of Pāṭaliputra. The emperor was present there.

Other notable Vaiṣṇava images of these caves include a colossal statue of Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu in cave no. 3. This is one of the earliest images of the Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu. Cave 19 contains the Amṛtamanthana scene with the panel of Navagrahas. This cave is now occupied by lots of Śivalingas. According to the archaeologist Narayan Rao, this cave was originally dedicated to some form of Viṣṇu as is evident from the Amṛtamanthana scene over the entrance of the cave. It might have been that at a later stage in historical period it was occupied by the people of Śaiva sects. There are other images of Jaina tīrthankaras, Kārttikeya and other deities.

Eran in Sagar district has yielded the earliest known Vaiṣṇava inscription of the Gupta period in Madhya Pradesh. A stone inscription of Samudragupta is found to the west of a ruined temple of Varāha. It refers to something that was erected at Arikinā (Eran). The name of this object is lost. The lintel of this temple contains the figure of Viṣṇu on Garuḍa, which shows that the temple was dedicated to Viṣṇu. According to the inscription, to show his devotion to the feet of Acyuta (Acyuta-pāda-pītha), the king set up the temple of Janārdana here. The enshrined statue of Viṣṇu has four arms with one of the left hands resting on his hip.

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69 Ibid, pp. 40-41.
71 Ibid.
The king is said to have left the kings like Prithu and Rāghava back in generosity (giving gold). There seems to be emphasis on the wealth and status of the god as it refers to Samudragupta who is equal to Dhanada (Kubera) and Antaka in joy and wrath respectively. At another place the king is said to have paid the purchase price of the goddess of wealth by his manliness and prowess. Samudragupta seems to have conquered many territories and accumulated wealth. This fact is corroborated by the well-known Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.

Another stone pillar of the time of Budhagupta (dated c.A.D. 485-86)\(^2\) is found engraved on a red sandstone column further north of the above-mentioned temple. The column stands about half a mile to the west of the village Eran. This column seems to be specially connected with a double temple. The inscription refers to the erection of a dhvaja stambha (flag-staff) of Janārdana by Mahārāja Mātriviśṇu and his younger brother Dhanyavīśṇu for the religious merit of his parents. The capital of the pillar of the time of Budhagupta is surmounted by a huge square abacus with a pair of lions on each side.\(^3\) Above the abacus a large cakra is surmounting the stand against this stand is a pair of two armed figures standing back to back. It may be the Garuḍa. Another such wheel is found from Pawaya (Gwalior), as a crowning figure of a monumental pillar.\(^4\)

The younger brother of Mahārāja Mātriviśṇu is named as Dhanyavīśṇu. He was the son of Hariviśṇu, grandson of Varunaviśṇu and great grandson of Indraviśṇu. There is a reference of a family probably adhering to worship of Viṣṇu as is indicated by their names. Mahārāja Mātriviśṇu is described as the head of the Maitrāyanīya School of the Yajurveda and performed sacrifices-

\[ Sva-karm-ābhiratasya kratu-yājī(ahr) adhita-svādhya-ayasya \]

\[ vipr-arser=Mmaitrāryanīya-vṛṣabhasya.\]

Since Mahārāja Mātriviśṇu belongs to the Maitrānyya Upanisad, its influence is evident clearly in all the inscriptions of this region. A passage in Maitrānyya Upaniṣad foreshadows the eventual merging of the two deities namely, Viṣṇu and

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\(^3\) Harle, J.C., \textit{Gupta Sculpture}, p. 12.


Nārāyaṇa. It identifies the soul (Ātman) with several gods enumerated as Īṣāna, Śāmbhu, Bhava, Rudra, Prajāpati, Viśvasrj, Hiranyakartha, Satya, Prāna, Hamsa, Śāstā, Acyuta, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa.\(^{76}\) Besides the order of the gods suggests that Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa are closely associated. The name of Viṣṇu as Acyuta appears in the previous inscription found from this area. Mahārāja Mātrīviṣṇu seems to have inculcated the tenets of this Upaniṣad and played a crucial part in the worship of this form of Viṣṇu in his area.

Besides this reference to the Bhāgavata family of Mātrīviṣṇu, this inscription is also noted for the reference of the Caturbhuja form of Viṣṇu. The inscription starts with the obeisance to Viṣṇu, who is four armed- whose couch is the extensive waters of the four oceans; who is the sole cause of continuance, production and destruction, etc. of the universe; and (whose) ensign is Garuḍa-

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jayati vībhūś} & = \text{catur-bhujaś} = \text{catur-arnnava-vipula-salila-paryyankah} \\
\text{Jagataḥ sthity} & = \text{utpattinya (y-aika)-hetur} = \text{Ggarūḍa-ketuh}.^{77}
\end{align*}
\]

This inscription identifies the nidrālu form of god which connects it to the Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa of the Puruṣa-sūkta hymn according to Prof. D. R. Bhandarkar.\(^{78}\) Besides Viṣṇu is also associated with Garuḍa. In Rgveda (X, 149.3), there is mention of Savitri’s strong pinioned (suparna) Garutman who obeyed his law forever. Since Viṣṇu is a solar god this association of Garuḍa with Viṣṇu is a development from the Rgvedic period.

F.M. Asher found the significance of this wheel beyond the customary personification of the god’s weapon.\(^{79}\) He recalls the notion attached to the Cakravartin, the age-old ideal king whose very name means wheel-turner, extending his righteous rule to the four quarters. The reigning monarch is to be seen as the righteous universal monarch.

An anthropomorphic Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu is brought from the ruins near the

\(^{76}\) Quoted by Suvira Jaiswal in Origin and development of Vaisnavism (200B.C.-500A.D.), p. 49, Maitri Upanisad, Cowell’s ed.,VII.7. For Acyuta as an epithet of Viṣṇu in this Upanisad, see VI.23; and VI.38.


\(^{79}\) Asher, F.M., ‘Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art’, pp. 60-61.
pillar of Budhagupta. On flat surface beneath the left foot, a short inscription in two lines in Gupta characters is found:

"Sri maheśvara-dattasya varāha-dattasya"

i.e. the joint gift of Maheśvara Datta and Varāha Datta. It was venerated by Maheśvaradatta who could be a devotee of Śiva as indicated by his name. The other person can be called as the devotee of Varāha. These two persons could have been considered by their respective families as the gifts of lord Śiva and lord Varāha. Even now a days there is a tradition of naming the child after the god to whose (supposed) gift, it is considered. Though the Varāha has been identified with Viṣṇu in Gupta era, it was worshipped by people of other sects too. This also refers to the prevalence of the god Varāha in this region.

Eran Stone Inscription of Toramāna is found from the same place. The inscription is inscribed on the chest of a colossal red stone statue of a boar. It is recorded by DhanyaViṣṇu, the younger brother of Mahārāja MātrViṣṇu, known from Budhagupta inscription. It extols the image of Varāha and calls him as the protector of the world, the god Nārāyaṇa (jagata pārāyanasya Nārāyaṇasya...).

Toramāna, the Huna chieftain, who came from Punjab, overthrew the Guptas from this area and established himself as the ruler of Malwa in Central India. MātrViṣṇu and others who were feudatory of the Guptas accepted the supremacy of the Hunas.

The inscription starts with describing the various deeds of Varāha, and immediately after that follows a description of the strength of Toramāna and his family. Perhaps Hunas were conscious of their foreign origin and felt a need to assert their sovereignty through this image. Thus, according to Asher, this Varāha image serves as a visual metaphor and Varāha’s acts as allegory for Toramāna’s usurpation of authority in Eran.

One more inscription from Eran deserves mention. Eran stone pillar inscription of

80 Harle, J.C., Gupta Sculpture, p. 35.
82 Asher, F.M., ‘Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art’, pp. 57-58.
Bhānugupta is found from this place. It is a small pillar, afterwards converted into a linga or phallic emblem of Śiva, which stands under some tall trees near the left bank of Bīnā, about half a mile to south-east of Eran. The pillar is sixteen sided. The upper most part of the pillar is octagonal. The faces of this part of pillar contain the sculptures of men and women, who are probably intended for Goparāja and his wife and friends mentioned in the inscription. The inscription does not refer to reign of any particular king but mentions one Bhānugupta who, though he may not have been a sovereign, was last of the contemporary scion of the Gupta family. It is dated in the year one hundred and ninety one (510-11 A.D.), on the seventh lunar day of the dark fortnight of the month of Śrāvana (July-August). It is a non-sectarian inscription.

The object of the inscription is to record that, in the company of Bhānugupta, who was a great ruler, his chieftain or noble named Goparāja came to Eran and fought a battle with the Maitras. Goparāja was killed and his wife accompanied him, by cremating herself on her funeral pyre apparently near the place where the pillar was set up. The father of the feudatory chief Goparāja is described as Mādhava. He is also described as the daughter’s son of Śarabha king. There are two facts, which seem pertinent from this description. First that this family could be devoted to Viṣṇu (judging by their names) and secondly, king Śarabha was related to this chief who too may have had some influence of Vaiśṇavism on him. Later on we see that the scion of this king established Śarabhapurīya dynasty in ancient Chhattisgarh, which was Vaiśṇava in belief.

Eran has a complex of temples. It has four dilapidated east facing temples assignable to 5th-6th century A.D. The northern most Nṛsimha temple is the earliest shrine at the site. Images of GajaLakṣmi and Vaiśnava Pratihāras are also found here. Immediately to the south of Nṛsimha temple is a shrine with two cells. To the south of this shrine is the Viṣṇu temple. This is a great piece of sculpture to whom the collection of shrines and relics are dedicated.

One of the important centres in Western Malwa from which evidence relating to

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Vaiṣṇavism is available in Mandasor. Located in the northwest corner of Madhya Pradesh, Mandasor has a number of inscriptions dedicated to Vaiṣṇava deities. The earliest Gupta inscription from this area is that of Naravarman, a feudatory prince of Candragupta II. A shrine of Kṛṣṇa adjoining the orchard is situated from where the inscription is found. It is dated in A.D. 405-06. The inscription starts with obeisance to thousand headed Puruṣa whose soul is boundless and who is sleeping on the waters of bed like four oceans-

\[
\text{Sahaśra-sirase tasmai puruṣāya = āmit-ātmane} \\
\text{Catus-samudra-paryyanka-toya-nidrālave namaḥ}^{87}
\]

Prof. D.R. Bhandarkar says that the first verse of the inscription reminds us of the Puruṣa-sūkta hymn of Rgveda (X, 90), which opens with sahasra-sirase-puruṣah. The second half of the verse reminds of Manu (I, 10), where it is told: “The waters are called nārāk; the waters are indeed the offspring of Nara; as they were his first residence (āyana), he is already remembered as Nārāyaṇa”. Thus in the verse in the question, Nārāyaṇa is identified with Puruṣa. The composite deity called as Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa.

From the smaller fragment of the inscription it appears that there was a shrine of Kṛṣṇa adjoining an orchard and that it was this orchard, which was apparently given by Satya-

\[
\text{Nānā-vrkso-latā-gulma-sampa(yukta)} \\
\text{Dhanyo bhavatu mangalyah pu(tra)-(puatra-samanvitah)} \\
\text{Kṛṣṇena = āddhyusita-tāva(t).}^{88}
\]

This verse connects Gopālā-Kṛṣṇa with Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. Thus Viṣṇu of the Gupta period is the vedic Puruṣa-Nārāyan and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa welded into one. At another place, it refers to Vāsudeva (Vāsudevam jagad-vāsam) whose abode is the world, who is inscrutable, unborn and all pervading.

The grant has been given on the festival of Indra approved Kṛṣṇa. It alludes to the Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu. It shows the subordination of Vedic deity Indra to Kṛṣṇa. Of the four

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88 Ibid, p. 265, lines. 3-5.
months of the rainy season, Āśvina and Kārttika belong to Kṛṣṇa while Śrāvaṇa and Bhādrapada belong to Indra as I have explained later in this work. The grant was made on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Āśvina (verse 5).

Kṛṣṇa of this verse is Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa. The association of Kṛṣṇa with cows and cowherds is a well-known fact. The ancient texts speak of the story of Kṛṣṇa lifting up mountain Govardhana to afford refuse to the cowherds from the havoc caused by deluge sent by Indra. Kṛṣṇa refused to perform the festival of Indra and forbade other cowherds too. It was described in the Purāṇas that thereby he proved himself to be Gavām=Indraḥ and came therefore known as Govinda.89

The inscription of the feudatory chief Bandhuvarman90 of the same dynasty refers to the construction and rebuilding of a Sun temple at the request of the guild of silk cloth weavers who migrated from Lāta. Mandasor or more properly Daśor, from where the inscription is found, is the chief town of the Mandasor district of Madhya Pradesh. The inscription is engraved on a sand stone slab, which was originally built into the flight of the steps leading to the shrine of Mahādeva on the river, and consequently to the Mahādeva ghat called after that god. It is obvious that after the decay or destruction of the temple the stone slab was used into the flight of the steps.

Verse 3 of this inscription mentions Kumāraḥupta (I) as the suzerain, and, verses 24-29, Bandhuvarman, son of Viśvaḥrman as the ruler of Daśapura, during whose reigns the religious benefaction was carried out, namely the building of the temple. It refers to two dates- first, A.D. 437-38 of the construction of the temple and second, A.D. 473-74 of its repair.

Towards the end the engraver hails that the temple lasts as long as a garland of full bloom lotus flower clings to the shoulders of Śāraṇgīn (one who holds bow and arrows, a form of Viṣṇu)-

Vikāṭa-kamala-matam = aimśa-sakṭam ca Śāraṇgī bhavanam.91

Elsewhere it is also compared to the Kaustubha jewel of Śārangin-
Śaśin-eva nabho vimalam kaustubha-manin-eva sāraṅgāno vakṣah.\textsuperscript{92}

Thus the Sun temple is close to the chest of Śārangin. It may be an attempt to link the sun worship of migrated silk weavers to the faith to which they (the Guptas) adhered.

Another inscription of Mandasor of a later date begins with the creed formula of the Bhāgavatas ( jitam bhāgavata) and praising Viṣṇu who is said to move about in a chariot of Garuḍa (Garuḍa=mad rathayāyin).\textsuperscript{93} The inscription records the excavation of a tank by Mahārāja Gauri. It is probable that he was ruling over Daśapura (Mandasor) after the invasion of the Hunas. Mahavayans, as the new dynasty was called, probably established themselves as a result of extirpation of Gupta dynasty after Huna invasion.

The above-mentioned inscription relates the Sun worship with that of worship of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu is considered as a solar deity. There remains a kind of soft tone towards each other in the inscriptions referring to Sun or Viṣṇu worship. Indore copper plate inscription of Skandagupta\textsuperscript{94} further emphasises this fact. The inscription refers to the reign of the Imperial Gupta king Skandagupta, whose officer, the Viṣayapati Śarvanāga, was administering Antarvedi. It probably denotes some doab touching the Ganges, which was not far removed from Indrapura and of which it could be the head quarters. It is dated in words, in the year one hundred and forty six (464-65 A.D.) and in the month of Phālguna. The object of this inscription is to record a perpetual endowment, by a Brāhmaṇa named Devaviṣṇu, for the purpose of maintaining a lamp in a temple of the Sun at Indrapura i.e modern Indore. Though the inscription refers to the Doab region, it throws light on the amicable relationship between Viṣṇu worship and Sun worship in the Gupta period. The Vaiṣṇava Brāhmaṇa was associated with the Sun worship.

The description of Gupta period temples of Vaiṣṇava faith cannot be complete

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, verse 42.
\textsuperscript{93} Sircar, D.C., 'Mandasor Fragmentory Inscription', \textit{EI}, vol. 30, pp. 127-32.
\textsuperscript{94} Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Indor Copper Plate Inscription of Skandagupta: year 146', \textit{CII}, vol. III, pp.308-312.
without the mention of Daśāvatara temple at Deogarh. Although located in the Lalitpur district of present day Uttar Pradesh, the site of Deogarh is brought under the purview of the present discussion because of its geographical proximity to the sites in Madhya Pradesh and because of its significant position in the history of temple based Vaiṣṇavism. Deogarh Daśāvatara temple is the earliest known temple of Pañcāyatanā type. That temple is dedicated to Viṣṇu is clear from the image of four-armed Viṣṇu on the lalātabimba (door lintel) of the door way as the central figure. Other figures of the doorway include those of Nṛṣimha, Ganga-Yamuna and the Vaiṣṇava Pratihāras (Jaya and Vijaya). The image in the garbhagrha is missing.

The story of Gajendra-mokṣa appears for the first time in a niche at Deogarh. Here the four armed Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa in his liberator image is helping the elephant standing in the lotus pond.

Another figure shows the presence of Nara-Nārāyaṇa and Gajalakṣmī scenes. The southern niche contains the famous Anantaśayi Viṣṇu with all its paraphernalia and subordinate gods and goddesses. Nārāyaṇa is sleeping on seven-hooded cosmic serpent. Lakṣmī is sitting at the feet of Viṣṇu with Bhūdevi holding a camara behind him. The upper part of the panel represents Brahmā seated on a full-blown lotus. He is not connected with the navel of the Viṣṇu, presumably emerging from behind the coils of cosmic serpent. Flanking him to the right are the figures of Indra on Airāvata holding vajra in his right hand, Kārttikeya on peacock and towards left Hara-Gaurī on the Nandī bull.

Besides these, the panels on the plinth consist of well known Rāmāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa – lilā scenes. While Rāma is everywhere depicted as an adult, Kṛṣṇa is depicted as a child. Rāma redeeming Ahalyā in his liberator form, Rāma-Lakṣmanā fighting with rākṣasas in Daṇḍaka forest, Rāvaṇa stealing Sītā are some of these scenes. Kṛṣṇa’s story starts with his birth and revolves round in Vraja along with Nanda, Yaśodā, Gopīs (cowherd women) and killing of Karīsa (in Mathura).

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95 Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', Memoirs Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter MASI), No.70
96 Ibid, p. 20.
100 Ibid, pp. 16-20.
Among the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Vāmana and Nṛsimha are present. A projection on the plinth contains the story of Sunda and Upasunda. Some later Gupta temples contain images of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and the scenes of Daṇḍaka forest, fight of Bali and Sugrīva, monkeys etc.

This temple also contains a Gupta period inscription in two lines-

Śrī Govinda Keśavapuravasvāmīpādiya bhagavat Govindasya edam nāma.

It refers to Bhagavata Govinda, a votary of Lord Keśavapura. Lord Keśavapura may refer to the image of Viṣṇu installed in the temple under the name of Keśavapuravāmī. It may have been the presiding deity of Deogarh, then called Keśavapura. The Vaiṣṇava leaning of the region is well reflected in the name of the place itself, Keśavapura.

The reference to the name ‘Govinda’ deserves some comments. As I have shown earlier the name ‘Govinda’ is related to Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa. The other identification of Govinda comes from Śāntiparvan (Chap.342, verse 68) of the Mahābhārata. It says: “When in days of yore the earth became submerged in the waters and lost to the view, I found her out and raised from the depths of the ocean. For this reason the deities adored me by the name of Govinda”. In other words, gām (=prthivim) vindat = iti Govindah. The same story is given in Ādiparvan of the Mahābhārata.

This temple, though called as Daśavatara temple, nowhere shows the Matsya, Kūrma, Buddha or Kalki avatāra. In fact, no Gupta period sculptures or inscriptions are of the above four incarnations of Viṣṇu.

A Varāha temple in ruined condition is found in the midst of a thick jungle to the southwest of the fort Kīrti Durga. The sanctum contains the anthropomorphic image of Varāha as the deity on a pedestal in the centre. Varāha has a plain circular

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103 Ibid, pp. 25-27.
104 Ibid, p. 29.
halo at its back, suggestive of its early date. He wears a vanamālā and is attended by Śridevi standing to his right Ganga and Yamuna are shown at the base of the jambs but without their vāhanas. On the south a panel of gajendra-mokṣa shows Viśnu sitting on a winged a Garuḍa and dealing with the elephant below. Nara-Nārāyaṇa panel is on the western wall. The third panel is that of Anantaśayi Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī at the feet. Other images include fight of Madhu-Kaitabha, Viṣṇu, Śiva-Pārvatī, etc. Banerjee gives a date of early Gupta period to the temple, earlier than the Daśāvatāra temple.

Ramgarh village, about 4-5 miles west of Pathari district in Vidisha, has a group of rock carvings of Viṣṇu and his incarnations. An early Gupta date has been assigned to these carvings. These represent a series of Vaiṣṇava themes- Varāha, Nṛṣimha and Trivikrama. An image of Mahiśāsuramardini has also been found. Other images include seated Ganeśa, Varāha, Viṣṇu, Trivikrama, Nṛṣimha, etc.

Some of the Gupta period sculptures and temples are found in and around Jabalpur. Devri is a Gupta period site situated on the south bank of the river Ken in Jabalpur district. The Vāmana stone temple locally known as Marhia is located here. Vaiṣṇava deities like Nṛsimha and Hayagrīva are presented in central panel. The lintel of the temple contains the image of Garuḍāśīna Viṣṇu. The sanctum of the temple is empty. In all probability the image of Vāmana lying outside the sanctum is the main deity of this temple. On the basis of the style of the sculpture, Pramod Chandra assigns a date towards the end of 5th century A.D.

Another small temple site depicting Viṣṇu worship in the form of Hayagrīva is found in Jabalpur district. It contains the figures of Bhūvarāha, Hayagrīva, Kṛṣṇa and four-armed Viṣṇu.

Sindursi is a site located about 1km west from Bahuri Band, perched on the Kaimur Hills in Katni district. This region was on the main original route between Kausambi

109 Meister and Dhaky, Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture; Foundation of North Indian Style, p. 18.
and Tripuri in 3rd century B.C. Gupta period rock cut sculptures (dated 5th century A.D.) are found here locally known as Jogini Mai. The sculptures include Śeṣaśāyi Viṣṇu, Sthānaka Viṣṇu, Nṛsimha, Mahiśāsuramardini, etc.

Similarly two sculptures of Viṣṇu and his Garuḍa were discovered by C.B. Trivedi at Dithwara, which lies about 15 km northeast of Katni in Katni district.111

Baghelkhand area in Madhya Pradesh shows Vaiṣṇava sites. The earliest known inscription is found from Supia, of the time of Skandagupta.112 Dated Gupta era yr.141 (460-61 A.D.), it records the construction of the bala-yaṣṭi (memorial pillar) which was a gotra-śālikā (family stone) by Varga-gāmkā for increase of his own merit, glory and fame. Skandagupta in this inscription is described as Rāma in righteous conduct:-‘Rāma tulyo dharma’.

This area came under the rule of Parivrājaka Mahārājas. Mahārāja Jayaṇātha of the same dynasty granted the village Dhavaśandikā for the purpose of resources for the temple of god Viṣṇu under the name of the Bhagavat113:

\[ \text{Bhagavat pādevyaḥ devsgrahāro tirsṭaḥ ebhiscattra pratiśṭhah...} \]

The Khoh copper plate inscription of Mahārāja Sarvanātha114, issued from Ucchakalpa records the grant of village Āśramaka (north bank of river Tamasā) for the purpose of a shrine of Viṣṇu under the name of Bhagavata and a shrine of Āditya.

The plate on which inscription is inscribed contains a relief on a countermark surface at the top, Garuḍa, the vehicle of Viṣṇu. It may be the influence of the Gupta rulers who augmented the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in this area.

Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism can be reflected in the Bagh copper plate inscriptions. Bagh caves are found about one kilometre from the modern town of Bagh in Dhar district. This area (called as Valkhā in inscriptions) was probably one of the forest kingdoms

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of the Allahabad Praśasti of Samudragupta.\textsuperscript{115} This place has 27 copper plates issued by different rulers. Of them Bhuluṇḍa, the first ruler makes grants in the name of Viṣṇu. Grant of Bhulunda of year 47\textsuperscript{116} records the grant of five villages on the southern bank of Narmada, namely Ukkāripadraka, Dubhodikā, Bhetunkalika, Sajjarhradaka and Karmānta. The inscription is dated in Gupta era and belongs to 4\textsuperscript{th}-5\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. Here Mahārāja Bhuluṇḍa is described as the devotee of Nārāyaṇa (svāmīNārāyaṇa dāsasya mahārāja bhulundasya – line I). It also praises Viṣṇu in his various forms.

Another inscription of the same ruler\textsuperscript{117} records the donation of the village Pippalojjhara on the southern bank of Narmada to the temple of Nārāyaṇa for the sake of the performance of the bali, caru and sattra rites. The deity of the temple is called as Nārāyaṇadeva. After a year the ruler granted the god Nārāyaṇa a plot of wasteland along with other donations.\textsuperscript{118}

The ruler Bhulunda might have been the tribal king who acknowledged the lordship of Samudragupta and accepted his faith too. The Gupta period Bhāgāvatism has an impact on this area.

Apart from the Gupta inscriptions, the only Vākāṭaka inscription found from Madhya Pradesh is in Betul district. Pattana, a village in Multai tehsil of Betul district has yielded five copper plates of Pravarasena II.\textsuperscript{119} All the grants were issued from Pravarapura, the capital and at the victorious office of justice. The grant is made for the maintenance of a sattra or charitable hall in honour of the foot prints (Pādamūla) of Mahāpurusāh. The grant was made at the request of Nārāyaṇarāja.

Thus the period of Gupta rule saw the flourishing of various Vaiṣṇava centres in Madhya Pradesh. This provided the basis for the further development of Vaiṣṇavism in this region. Among the various incarnations Varāha, Nṛsimha and Vāmana were the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[115] Ramesh, K.V. and Tewari, S.P., \textit{A Copper Plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh}, New Delhi, 1990, p. viii.
\item[117] Ibid, Grant of Bhulunda of year 50, pp. 6-8.
\item[118] Ibid, Grant of Bhulunda of year 51, pp. 8-10.
\end{footnotes}
prominent deities. Prof. Bhandarkar says that it was only in *Gupta* period that Boar came to be identified with Viṣṇu.\(^{120}\) This may have been a local cult deity of the Malwa region, which was incorporated and identified as the incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Besides he also emphasizes that only Varāha and Vāmana incarnations were being worshipped in the Gupta era. However this does not seem to be so. Numerous images of Nṛsimha and temples in which he appears in various places namely Eran, Deogarh and others testify to the existence of Nṛsimha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. *Jalaśāyi* image of Viṣṇu was also quite popular among the rulers and the subjects of the Gupta era as evidenced by the reference to *Anantaśāyi* Viṣṇu in various inscriptions and his representation in sculptures. The *Caturbhujā* form of Viṣṇu though known to the period was not much in worship.

The temple sites of the Gupta period were more or less concentrated in northern and north-eastern Madhya Pradesh. Of them the sites of northern Madhya Pradesh were basically connected with the rulers of the Gupta Empire. The sites like Khoh in Satna district, Mandasor in Mandasaur district and Bagh caves in Dhar district were results of patronage from the feudatories of the Gupta rulers. In Khoh and Bagh caves there were clear references to the donations made to the other deities, which could have been objects of local worship before the advent of the Guptas. Thus the donations made to these deities continued. However, some donations to the Vaiṣṇava deities started along side the earlier deities. Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism was more or less guided by the Gupta rulers.

The geographical distribution of the sites showing Vaiṣṇava temples, inscriptions or sculptures are quite uneven. Area around Vidisha and Jabalpur can be called as the hub of Vaiṣṇava centres. Deogarh temple in Lalitpur district could be called as the associated site of the Vidisha region. Mandasaur and the adjoining areas were another sites. Rest of the Vaiṣṇava sites of Madhya Pradesh include Devri, Piparia and Bagh caves. These were isolated sites. And among them Bagh caves cannot be called as proper Vaiṣṇava centre for it has the temples of other sects equal in number if not more. Thus more or less northern and northeastern Madhya Pradesh remained under

the influence of Vaiṣṇavism, while Chhattisgarh remained aloof of this development at least for this period. Of the Vaiṣṇava centres of Madhya Pradesh, Gupta rulers were directly associated with Vidisha and Udaigiri region. Other areas were under the rule of the feudatories of the Guptas who were responsible for the rise and development of Vaiṣṇavism there.

The cult of Viṣṇu or Vaiṣṇavism emerged from this period and assimilated many different sects into its pantheon with the period of time. The chapters of this research work deal with the evolution of the sect and its transformation from a local to the cult-based religion through post Gupta centuries.