Chapter I

Introduction

My study is confined to the southernmost part of Mahāraṣṭra comprising Kolhāpūr, Sāṅgli, Sātārā and Ratnāgiri districts which are adjacent to one another. This area is contiguous to Karnāṭaka which has many centres abundant in temples for example Badamī, Aihole, Paṭṭadakal, Halsī etc.

This topic has been chosen for study, firstly, because no detailed cultural study of the region with emphasis on temple architechture had previously been undertaken.

Generally, temple study in various regions, is dynasty wise. Temples of major periods and dynasties are known. In order to have a through knowledge of temple architechture, iconography etc. temples in other regions, less known must also be studied.
Temples in Marāṭhwādā and also those in the northern parts of Mahārāṣṭra have been studied by experts like Cousens, Varma, Deglurkar etc. Similarly, in Karnāṭaka, the Chālukyan and Hoysała temples have been studied to a considerable extent.

Southern Mahārāṣṭra acts as a link region, between temple styles in Northern Mahārāṣṭra with monuments at Āṃbarnāth, Nāsik, etc., and Aihoḷe, Badāmi, Pattadkal in Karnāṭaka. This part shares the history, traditions and culture of a larger region i.e. Lower Deccan, ruled successively by the Banavāsi Kadaṃbas, the Chālukyas and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas.

Unlike temples of some regions, which are in ruins most of the temples in this region are fairly intact and a great many are still in worship. Some of them have rich traditions. eg. the Mahālakṣmī temple in Kolhāpūr.

A detailed study, therefore, of these temples would obviously be fruitful and would help in understanding and co-relating the temple traditions in western Mahārāṣṭra and northern Karnāṭaka.

Secondly, this region yields several inscriptions many of which are in Kannada. This is because the region was under/sway of kings who were Kannadigas and often ruling from Karnāṭaka from about the 4th C. A.D. Most of these
inscriptions have been studied in detail by scholars like Mirashi, Tulpule, Kundangar etc.

**Epigraphical Studies**

Extensive epigraphical survey, as done in the southern part of Karnāṭaka resulting in the publication of prestigious volumes of *Epigraphia Carnatica*, has not been undertaken in this region at all.

This is a great handicap for further research, as the published inscriptions available for study are few and far between. A few inscriptions had been published in the *Indian Antiquary* volumes.

However the first serious attempt at studying the inscriptions found in the Deccan was undertaken by Khare (1930).

Next Kundangar (1939) published a booklet in which he included the inscriptions from the Kolhāpūr state also. He gives the readings as well as the summaries of the inscriptions, some of which are in Kannada.

Panchamukhi (1951) from 1939-51 had conducted the study of Kannada research in the then Bombay state which included parts of Kolhāpūr state too.

Tulpule (1963) next took up the study of ancient Marāṭhī inscriptions.

All the above works, though important in their own way, are not as adequate as Mirashi's volume on Śilāhāra inscriptions. Southern Maharashtra with the exception of Kundangar's work had not been studied intensively till Mirashi (1974) took up the study of the inscriptions of the Śilāhāras.

Since two branches of this dynasty ruled over the four districts under study, we get a good picture of the medieval history, society and religion. This book stands out as the main source for epigraphical study in this region and for this period.

The various volumes of Epigraphia Indica, Indian Antiquary and the Annual Reports on Epigraphy do help to some extent.

Previous study conducted in this region

Fergusson studied the Buddhist caves at Dābhūḷ Chiplūṇ, Saṅgameśvara and Wāde-Pāḍel during 1829–47. Some more temples of this region were first mentioned and briefly described in the gazetteers.

Henry Cousens (1926, 1931–37) was the first to study a few temples belonging to this region. He has given brief
descriptions of the temples of Koppēśvara in Kidrapur (1926), with appropriate illustrations giving a fairly good idea about the architectural details of the temples. The work is a testimony of the meticulous hard work involved.

Kundangar’s work (1929) on the Mahālakṣmī Temple is the only example in this region of a work devoted to the study of a single temple. He gives a detailed description dealing with the historical and architectural details of the temple, historical chronology, festivals and poojās in the temple. It is a very rare and good monograph in this field and in this region.

Mate (1962) has studied the temples at famous pilgrimage centres like Kolhāpūr, Pangharpūr, Tuljāpūr etc. and has emphasised the religious, cultural aspects of the temples. Soundar Rajan’s study (1980) of the Deccan temples includes only 4 temple sites, all in Sātārā district, from my region. Here too the study is brief and with no illustrations.

Deglurkar (1974) deals with most of the famous temples in Mahārāṣṭra. But his study is not intensive and the descriptions are too brief with scanty illustrations. Of all the temples in my region only the Koppēśvara temple is included in his study.

Almost all the above mentioned scholars give very brief descriptions of the temples with poor photographs and
illustrations. There is no attempt made to analyse and correlate the data, to pin point the influences, recognise the style and trace the movement of architectural influences. There is also no attempt made to study or group the temples chronologically.

Methodology:

The study is based on the two actual important sources, inscriptions and temples. All the published inscriptions pertaining to the subject are surveyed. Field survey in temples, in the select areas under study, was undertaken and fifty temples were studied in detail. Of these 15 were studied for the first time.

All those temples known through Gazetteers etc. and those noticed for the first time are studied in detail on the spot. Photographs of the sculptural and architectural aspects of these temples have been taken selectively. The religious affiliations, the sculptural and architectural aspects are coordinated with relevant portions of the inscriptions such as date, grant given etc. and thus a picture of the cultural aspects of the temples in Southern Mahārāstra has been reconstructed in the following chapters with appropriate illustrations.
So far as my study is concerned, it is essentially on temples and their cultural aspects. Therefore, no attempt has been made here to further explore inscriptions systematically and to edit them as well as to re-examine the published ones. The published inscriptions have been utilized to reconstruct as far as possible a picture of cultural activities and their significance in relation to temple study.

Besides the epigraphical and temple studies, the archaeological excavations and explorations in the region have also been taken into account.

The ancient site in Brahmapuri discovered in 1877 was first excavated in 1944 by Kundangar resulting in the discovery of the most valuable Roman bronzes, out of which the image of Posidon, the Greek Sea God is very well known.

Later it was most systematically excavated by a team from the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, under the directions of Sankalia (Sankaliā, 1952). Besides exposing remains of a township of 1st C. A.D. with brick structures, they also found Śātavāhana and Śilāhāra coins, Śātavāhāna pottery, bangles, beads of various types, quern and pestle, mortars, terracotta figurines, Śilāhāra bangles, querns, mortars etc. It is pertinent to note here the occurrence of certain cultural links of religious significance that have a bearing on our study, especially
from the point of view of the antiquity and nature of religious activities in the region. They are fragmentary plaques of Lajjāgaurī connected with fertility cult and later with tantricism and a Brāhma inscription mentioning the gifts to Buddhist stūpas.

While analysing the data collected during fieldwork, it was realised that a study of all these temples scattered over a fairly vast region without the survey of the in-between areas would be rather incomplete, cumbersome and perhaps erratic. And also, it would be difficult to isolate and define the different architectural styles depicted, and to recognise the various influences at work in any work of architecture or sculpture. Hence the temples located in Kolhāpūr district only have been chosen for the study. Some of these have been referred to in the district Gazetteer and other works (Cousens 1929, Soundar Rajan 1980).

It should be mentioned here that temples of the Marāṭhā and modern periods are not considered for the study as indicated in the very title of the research topic. Almost all the temples referred to in the Gazetteers and inscriptions have been surveyed. However, it is not claimed that the survey has been so thorough, as to include all the temples of the period extant, in the region under study.
Geography of the region:

The region is naturally divided into

1. Coastal Plain or Down Ghāṭ region.
2. Western Ghāṭs.
3. Maidān Areas.

The Coastal Plain and the Western Ghāṭs:

The chief mountain range of this region is the Western Ghāṭs. They run quite close to the sea, having only a narrow strip between them and the Arabian Sea. The strip forms the coastal plain. The Ghāṭs are predominantly covered up with Deccan Trap which on weathering has given it a landing stair aspect. Denudation has shaped the trap formation into natural citadels and fortresses which dominate the crests of the hills and they served as military positions of vantage. The Western Ghāṭs run quite close to the sea and form the water shed of the peninsula. The coastal plain is rather narrow.

The Ratnāgirī district forms part of the greater tract known as Koṅkaṇa. The Western Ghāṭs are the source of a number of rivers that flow through the Ratnāgirī, Kolhāpūr, Sātārā and Saṅglī districts. The rivers that flow through Ratnāgirī district are small, rather stream like, but during the monsoon they are large, swift flowing floods, effectively cutting off the district from the rest of the region.
rivers that flow through Ratnagiri district are Sāvitrī, Vāśiṣṭhī, Sāstrī, Muchakuṇḍī, Sukā etc. The rivers of the Sātārā, Kolhāpūr, Sāngli districts are large. They are Krishṇā, Koyanā, Tāraṇā, Panchagāṅgā and the Yenna.

**The Maidan Region:**

This is the plain land that lies to the east of the Western Ghats. It is fertile and forms the bread-basket of the region.

From the above survey it may be observed that the narrow coastal strip is amenable for good ports facing the west Asian region known as the "Fertile Crescent". The strip and the western ghats are with heavy rainfall and evergreen forests and related fauna. The Maidan area is interspersed with the network of Krishṇā, the most important river in the south, and her tributaries, the Panchagāṅgā, the Vēdāgangā, the Dūdhagāṅgā, thus providing a perennial water supply. The Krishṇā valley is very fertile. All these ecological factors would help people to promote agriculture, trade and spiritual pursuits. It is because of these favourable ecological conditions, there emerged many ports along the coast and cities like the one excavated in Brahmapurī (Kolhāpūr) and religious centres such as the Śākta pīṭha with Mahālakṣmī temple in Kolhāpūr.
It is these favourable ecological conditions that account for numerous temples being erected in course of time by patrons following various religious faiths.