CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted a comprehensive study of the Muktesvara temple in all its aspects - architectural, sculptural, historical and iconographical.

The historical evidence as well as a study of the monument shows that the Muktesvara may be assigned to the Somavamśi period and, a date in the 10th century may be considered appropriate. The Muktesvara is an important temple in the context of evolution of temple architecture. This temple signalled the end of the first phase and ushered in the second phase of temple building in Bhubaneswar. In its process of development, it retains certain elements of the preceding phase. It has certain stylistic innovations which continue in the subsequent epoch. The introduction of the pyramidal jagamohana, the graha slab with nine grahas and other iconographical programmes indicate that the time was particularly notable for new experiments and new ideas. The overall effect on the temple is a unique treatment, combining early and later features.

The temple retains an archaic look and the early features of the tryaṅga-bāda. It attains a full fledged pañcha-ratha
status and the pābhāga has five mouldings. Another notable feature of this temple is its jagamohana, which now is a piṭhā-deul. The sculptural programme of the interior, particularly on the ceiling of the jagamohana is unquestionably rare in the context of development of Orissan art. Other innovations include the nāga-nāginī columns, decorative inter-laced chaitya arches on the gaṇḍī, and the bho motif on the rāhā-pāga. Its most extraordinary feature is the low decorated enclosure wall and the magnificent toraṇa which was conceived as part of the original temple complex. These two features have neither any precedents, nor any subsequent use in Orissa. It is again the Muktesvara, which for the first time in Bhubaneswar projects a perfect and natural joining of the deul with the jagamohana. In this temple we do not see the crude overlapping of the sanctum decoration by the jagamohana roof. Hence, we can say that the two structures were conceived as a single architectural unit.

This temple has introduced some new concepts as regards iconography. The introduction of ketu as the ninth planet in the graha panel is a question to be probed, because, even if the people were already aware of the concept of the nine grahas, Ketu was being left out till then. Other iconographic introductions are the association of the cock with Kārttikeya, the presence of the mouse as Gaṇeśa's mount, and babies in
the arms of the Saptamātrikās. The exterior of the temple hints at the variety of religious concepts at work in Orissa during this period.

A remarkable feature of this temple is the absence of erotic sculptures. As already mentioned, the entire temple complex has just one erotic scene on the Western wall (South side) of the deul, on the lower element of the nāga pilaster. This is another aspect which needs further study. In the transition of temple building from the first phase to the second phase the stress was on vertical continuity and on achieving an overall sense of smoothness. And it is the Muktesvara temple in which this was first achieved. It is here in this temple that for the first time we see similar treatment of the walls of the deul and the jagamohana. Henceforth, in temples built after the Muktesvara, the emphasis was on identical treatment of the walls of the two structures. Though every inch of this temple's exterior walls is carved and all are integrally linked with each other, a certain amount of restraint has been imposed. One cannot say that the sculptors were obsessed or that there was a craze for carving. The sculptors were always conscious to strike a balance between proportion and elegance; between grandeur and beauty. And the natural outcome was a monument in which sculpture and architecture were in complete harmony with each other.
There is a lot that we do not know about the Mukteśvara temple. Even the origin of its name is not known. Mukteśvara or "Lord of the Spiritually Liberated" is a general epithet of Śiva, used in the naming of his temples. The name Mukteśvara is used in Ekāmra-Chandrikā, a pilgrim's guide to the temples of Bhubaneswar; but generally, this is not regarded as an ancient text.

The context of the Mukteśvara's iconography particularly the concept of the Maṇḍala for the ceiling of the jagamohana needs clarification with reference to the practices of Śaivism and tantric rituals. Further study of local texts used as pilgrim's guide for the temples of Bhubaneswar should be conducted with regard to their dates and contents. More historical information about Bhubaneswar, particularly as a centre of Śaivism and pilgrimage is needed. No early text has given much importance to Bhubaneswar and by the 13th century we see that the Jagannāth cult had overshadowed all other cults. The present study, however gives a description of the temple, its characteristics and iconographical programme.

On the whole, the Mukteśvara is a notable monument for new artistic experimentations - both stylistic and iconographic. Finally, our picture of Orissan temple architecture would have been more specific had we known something about the patronage received during that period. What we can say, however, is
that in the 10th century A.D. conditions were congenial in Orissa for new adventures in the process of temple evolution. And it has been rightly said that the temple that best integrates the new architectural facets and decorative motifs, with the indigenous tradition, is the Mukteśvara.