THE TEMPLES - CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of the temples at Kumbhārīā is a vexed problem. This is mainly due to the nature of sources available and the inclination of the student with regard to labelling one or the other as more authentic. Unfortunately the ground is open for speculation as none of the sources can be called conclusive. There are dedicatory inscriptions carved on the various images, then there are numerous references in Jaina literature, most of it of a mythological nature and later date and which often embody current beliefs and lastly is that vague something called 'architectural style'. The shortcomings of each one of this class are almost self-evident. The images on which the inscriptions are to be found are not and need not be contemporary to the structures in which they are housed today. Worse, the images may not have been meant to be in the same place, i.e. the same structure, where they are found today, thus turning sour any attempt at linking the two. Thus the inscription of Saṃvat 1087 (1030 A.D.) mentioning Nannachārya, could not be in its original place as the Sāntinatha temple in which it is located today is placed in 1057 A.D. (Śrī Visalvijayaji,
1951, 38). Literary references are of a date mostly later than the event they describe but the tradition they embody cannot be dismissed out of hand. Finally stylistic differences could serve very well if the objects to be compared are distant from each other in time; if they are removed by short periods - say of twenty or thirty years - any chronological order is bound to develop faults, as progression of forms is both a mental as well as physical process. Some forms might have been anticipated; more elaborate versions need not be necessarily later than their plainer counterparts.

As if this confusion is not enough, constant renovations and additions confound a scholar in the case of the Jain temples. The meticulous skill with which traditional craftsmen go about making these additions, makes things more difficult.

Thus it would become clear that one does not have a clear-cut choice before him. A combination of so many factors will have to be taken into account, giving due attention to probability.

Previous scholars who have studied the problem have arrived at conclusions that are widely divergent.
Traditional scholars like Śrī Vishalvijayji (1951, 54) believe that the tirtha of Kumbhārīa was wellknown and frequented at least since the beginning of this millenium and that it was probably patronised by Vimal Shāh, whose temple at Abu is more famous. On the basis of an inscription found in the Śantinātha temple, they argue, that the Mahāvīra temple can be dated to 1030 A.D., the same date assigned to Vimal-vasāhi at Abu.

K. Deva (1975, 302), Dhaky (1971, 34) and more recently Harihar Singh (1982, 189) have put the Mahāvīra temple to Saṃvat 1118 i.e. 1061 A.D. on the basis of the image pedestal inscription in the temple of Mahāvīra. And the other temples are arranged on the basis of inscriptions as well as stylistic peculiarities in the following order (Singh, 1982, 189-198).

1. Mahāvīra 1061 A.D.
2. Śaṅtinātha c 1081 A.D.
3. Parsāvanātha 1100 A.D.
4. Neminātha 1134 A.D.
5. Sambhavanātha c 1250-1300 A.D.

The scheme seems to be unexceptionable except that
it leaves a couple of questions unanswered. First, how to account for the persistant sectarian tradition that these temples existed from circa 1000 A.D. or so? Second, how to account for the pedestal inscription of Saṁvat 1087 whether we have to conclude that loose but large images were donated but there were no temples to house them? In other words is it to be presumed that this was a venerated spot, frequented by Jaina ācāryas but having only temporary and unassuming structures? Such an assumption would probably meet the requirements of the situation although not entirely satisfactorily. And as such the above chronological scheme as presented by Singh (1982) is accepted here with the provi...
Cousens goes on to state that the temple originally consisted only of the mulaprasada and the rangamaṇḍapa and the devakulikās came much later on. In fact Cousens postulates a pre-Vimal-Shāh date for the structure. This contention hardly finds acceptance, but his more fundamental observation that the mulaprasāda and the surrounding structures belong to different periods is accepted by all. There are various candidates to claim credit for the rangamaṇḍapa and the devakulikās, like Vimal Shāh's own son Caliha and brothers Valiha or his cousin etc. However, Singh (1982, 186) has shown that it was Prithvipal who can rightfully claim the credit. The date for these additions would be the last quarter of the eleventh century.

It should be borne in mind that in the case of the Mahāvīra temple of Kumbhārī, no such chronological differentiation within the various portions can be made. An examination of the architectural content - not sculptural - has failed to reveal any factors that could break the complex into chronological 'phases'. In other words the Mahāvīra temple was originally conceived and provided for the housing of all the rest i.e. 23 Jinas. The Vimal Vasahi was earlier, but it followed the earlier
models and had a single-shrine, subsidiary shrines being built after the Mahāvīra at Kumbhārīa. The Mahāvīra has to be therefore considered the earliest Ājīvalaya that gives tectonic expression to the idea of the Caturvimsati worship. As made clear in the subsequent sections, this temple is a trend-setter.