Chapter- 4

Religious Trends and the Expiation of Sin: Text and Practice

Socio-cultural interactions revolve around the belief system in a society. The ideology propounded, myths enumerated and various other religious acts form a part of the belief system. These practices help to understand the social organization in a plausible manner. Here an attempt will be made to understand religious trends in Central India with the help of the Purāṇas and inscriptions. The influence of Śaivism was well-marked among both the dynasties, the Vākāṭakas and the Kalacuris. Worship of Śiva as a deity was pronounced in the epigraphic and iconographic records of the region.

The Purāṇas are normative Brāhmaṇical texts, which eulogize various deities. They describe various gods and sometimes the goddesses, celebrated with many legends and emphasize on their divinity and ‘protector of all’ image. Besides containing myths, the texts specified various religious acts to be performed in order to please deities. Religious acts were recommended for prosperity, peace, and progeny. Expiation of sin was also a strong motive for ritual action as portrayed in the Purāṇas. H. Kotani points out that the dreadful result of sin was three fold; experiencing hell after death, transmigration into lower creatures such as the dog, pig, or grass and the last was rebirth as a human with physical deformities.1 The Purāṇa reiterated the need to perform various religious rites in order to attain freedom from all sins. This was related to the Kali yuga paradigm. The Purāṇas, because of their need to bring more people into their fold, made the religious acts simpler. The most important transformation from the earlier Brāhmaṇical texts such as the Vedas was the initiation for women and śūdras into the Brāhmaṇical realm. The Purāṇas popularized religious acts such as going to a tīrtha, performed vrata, and śrāddha for not just the elites but also the masses. The Purāṇas, thus, had adopted measures to gain popularity among the people.

Most inscriptions recorded grants made in honor of a deity. They help to understand the regional religious trends, especially among the elites. The records reflect a fluid situation

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as both Brähmanical and non-Brähmanical deities were mentioned. It was a method of accepting the prevalent trends and claiming legitimization as well as popularity. Sometimes kings, queens and in many cases the donee were compared to gods and their consorts as has been discussed elsewhere. This was seen as a method to claim divinity and legitimacy.

It is generally recognized that one of the common methods to claim legitimacy was to support religious institutions that were important in the region. By giving patronage to different cults, elites proclaimed control over land and revenue. Cynthia Talbot opines that the legitimization of a ruler rested on his role as donor. This mode of religions patronage had a wide territorial spread and acceptability. It was also a source of social prestige and a method of allocating surplus resources in the locality to those institutions and social groups that supported the donor. Even the Purāṇas proclaimed that a rightful ruler was one who gave dāna and performed sacrifices, thus upholding the Brähmanical traditions.

We undertake the study of the Matsya Purāṇa and the Vākāṭaka and Kalacuri inscriptions from a gender perspective. The emphasis will be on the position of women and men and how they were placed in the ideological system of the region. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first deals with invocations and descriptions of gods and goddesses in the Matsya Purāṇa and the inscriptions. The section will also be supplemented with sculptural evidence. The second section is divided into four subsections dealing with sacrifices, śrāddha, tīrtha, and vrata respectively, as mentioned in the text and the inscriptions. The last section will compare the sources and look at the trends in Central India over the period of study.

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2 For detailed discussion refer Chapter-2.
Most religious texts start with invoking a deity/deities. The invocation can consist of only paying obeisance or of a more elaborate description of the form of the deity. The *Matsya Purāṇa* starts with an expression of veneration to both Viṣṇu and Śiva. As the name suggests, the *Matsya Purāṇa* was a Vaiṣṇavite text but it glorified Śiva as well. It belonged to a fluid phase as it maintained a balanced attitude towards both the sects. This could also have been a period when sectarianism was not prevalent.

The text began with a salutation to Ganeśa and Vāsudeva and then paid obeisance to Bhava, Śiva addressing him as the one ‘...who shook the diggajas at the time of his dance, tāndava’ and who disperses all obstacles (*MP*: Akhtar, 1.1). Then the text saluted Viṣṇu, who in his matsya avatāra, had narrated the text and would save one from all evils (*MP*, 1.2). Since the text was revealed by Viṣṇu in his matsya avatāra, therefore it was called the *Matsya Purāṇa*. The text then paid obeisance to Nārāyaṇa, Nara, Narottama and Devi Sarasvatī. It then saluted Brahmā, who was described as unborn and manifested himself for the creation and was known as Nārāyaṇa and Triguṇa. After these salutations, the Purāṇa starts with the story of creation and the matsya avatāra of Viṣṇu. Thus the text was adhering to the Purāṇic trend of worshiping the Trimūrti, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā along with Śakti and other deities associated with them.

The invocation was simple and referred to the various epithets of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Śiva was referred to as ‘Bhava’ which was a passive form of Śiva. As for Viṣṇu, many epithets were used. This is possibly because the text represented the period of the formation of the composite god Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. There was no mention of the consorts of the deities. Besides referring to Sarasvatī there was no mention of any goddess. Reference to Sarasvatī at the beginning of the text would show that probably she was invoked as the goddesses of learning and not as the Vedic river goddess. Another plausible reason

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7 Ibid, p. 9.
could be her association with Viṣṇu. In the Dharmaśāstras, Sarasvatī was offered sacrificial water along with other deities related to Viṣṇu.11

The Purāṇas are a store house of stories and fables about the various gods and their incarnations. The main aspect was the image of the god that was created and was infused with various religious practices. Levi Strauss in the analysis of a myth opines that a myth has to be understood in terms of its embedded structure.12 The meaning lies not in the narrative, rather in the network of the formal relationships among the constituent parts of the myth. In this section, I will discuss some of the legends and emphasize on the forms of the deity mentioned and correlate it with the incipient and iconographic evidence.

Viṣṇu was a popular Purānic deity also seen as the preserver in the Trimūrti. Viṣṇu was related to kingship and various other aspects associated with it.13 The Matsya Purāṇa begins with a reference to the various names of Viṣṇu, such as Keśava, Hṛṣīkeśa, Jagannātha, and Jagaddhāma (MP, 1.26). Then it described the creation of the universe from Svayambhū also known as Viṣṇu. He created water and the brahmānda, Brahmā’s egg (MP, 2.28-30). Since he created the Sun from his glory, he was called the Āditya. This was contradicted in the later chapters where Viṣṇu was called Āditya as he was the son of Aditi. Viṣṇu was described with special reference to the Vāmana, Varāha, and Nyśimha avatāra. In terms of avatāra syncretism these incarnations could be seen as examples of the acculturation of tribal cults.

Of the various forms, the first description was of Śrīkṛṣṇa but not as an avatāra of Viṣṇu as dealt with in other Vaiṣṇavite texts. The text described Śrīkṛṣṇa as Prajāpati and lord of all (MP, 47.1). The text mentioned the story of the birth of Kṛṣṇa to Vasudeva and Devakī in the family of the Yādavas. He was described as having lotus eyes, four arms, wearing the śrīvatsa jewel. He was born to Vasudeva as the later had performed tapasyā. He was taken to the house of Nanda where he was declared as the one who would kill Kaṃsa. He incarnated to save the world from the asuras and to establish order. Thus, the


143
image of the god as protector was established through the text. According to the legend he was born in the Vṛṣṇi family and had sixteen thousand wives, amongst whom the most prominent were Rukmini, Satyabhāmā, Satyā, Subhāmā, Śaivyā, Gandhārī, Laksmanā and others (MP, 47.11-14).

The text then mentioned the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. The first was Nṛśimha who killed the dāitya king Hiranyakasipu. The Vāmana avatāra made the dāitya king Bali a captive. The Varāha incarnation killed the dāitya Hiranyakṣa with his tusks and divided the ocean into two. The next avatāra was linked to Indra who at the time of the churning of the ocean to obtain nectar killed Virocana, son of Prahlāda. The next incarnation was at the time of the Ādiwaka war when Śiva killed the dāitya Tripura. In the Vṛtra-nāśaka war Indra was helped by Viṣṇu to kill Vṛtrāsura. The other incarnations were at the time of the Dhātri, Halāhala, and Kolāhala wars (MP, 47.41-53). Interestingly, the incarnations were again referred to in the same chapter but in terms of sacrifice and yuga. The text mentioned that Viṣṇu would take birth to establish righteousness and to destroy the asuras (MP, 47.235). The first incarnation was as Dharma at the end of the Cākṣusa Manvantara. The gods performed a sacrifice where Brahmā was the purohita or officiating priest. The second incarnation was in the form of Nṛśimha for the destruction of Hiranyakasipu, where Rudra was the officiating priest. The third was the Vāmana avatāra during the time of Bali, when the purohita was Dharma. These were the celestial incarnations of Viṣṇu and the remaining seven were the human incarnations. The fourth incarnation was as Dattatreya, when Mārkaṇḍeya was the officiating priest. The fifth was as Cakravarti Mandhātri during the fifteenth Tretā with Uttānga as the priest. The sixth incarnation was as Parasurāma to annihilate the kṣatriyas when Viśvāmitra was the priest. The seventh incarnation was as Śrī Rāmacandra, son of Daśaratha to kill Rāvana, with Vasiṣṭha as the officiating priest. The eighth incarnation was as Vedavyāsa, son of Paraśara, with Jātukarṇya as the purohita. The ninth incarnation was as the Buddha of divine splendour, devasundarārūpena, with Dvāpāyana as the priest. The last incarnation would take place at the close of the Kali yuga as Kalki in the house of Viṣṇuyaśa with Pārāśarya Vyāsa as the priest. During this manifestation Yajñiyavalīkya was present (MP, 47.237-249). According to Sukumari Bhattacharji the first few incarnations represent
evolution and the rest belong to the mythical epochs. The list did not include incarnations such as Kūrma, Kṛṣṇa, and Matsya, who were generally included as the avatāra of Viṣṇu. The text however describes these incarnations, as the form of Viṣṇu in separate chapters. The image of Viṣṇu was related to kingship as he was related to the various wars between the gods and the demons. According to the text, Viṣṇu had taken different incarnations to protect the universe and establish righteousness. There was also emphasis on the sacrifice as evident in the mention of the officiating priest, purohita for each incarnation.

The next description was of Janārdana resting on the serpent, Śeṣa. He was described as adorned with ornaments along with Lakṣmī (MP, 119.26-33). Again the royal aspect was highlighted in the way he rested on the serpent wearing jewels.

The story of the incarnation of Viṣṇu as Nṛsimha, man-lion form was said to be a dispeller of great sins (MP, 161.1). The incarnation was to save the universe from the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu in the Satya yuga. Viṣṇu was described as one who was the creator and the destroyer and the source of power to all (MP, 163.97). Viṣṇu in this form was compared to the sacrifice and sacrificial offerings.

The next detailed description of Viṣṇu was again related to the creation myth. Here Viṣṇu described himself as Nārāyaṇa, the creator and the destroyer. He was also known as Ananta, Sahasrasīśa, Śeṣa etc. (MP, 167.51), in these legends Viṣṇu was the creator of all. He was described in his cosmic form as he killed the demons Madhu and Kaitabha (MP, 170). Viṣṇu was described as all powerful, restorer of order in the universe.

The text described the Vāmana avatāra in detail. According to the story, the image of Vāmana was installed in Kuruksetra, which was known as a sacred place for the worship of Vāmana (MP, 244.3-7). According to the story, he was born from Aditi and Kaśyapa in order to annihilate the demons who had usurped Indra’s kingdom. He was called Hari, Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa, Nṛsimha, lord of all, unborn and the Supreme Being. Brahmā gave him a deerskin, Brhaspati provided him with the sacred thread, Marīci gave him the danda, Vasītha gave him the kamanḍala, Aṅgiras gave him kuśa grass and the Vedas, the sage

Pulaha gave him the aksasutra and Pulastya provided him with white clothes (MP, 245.83-85). Thus one can see that he was visualized in the image of a brähmana. In fact, Viṣṇu was generally born as a brähmana or a ksatriya in keeping with the Brähmanical notion of caste. Surprisingly, Bali was performing a sacrifice and Viṣṇu in his Vāmana form came for gifts. Thus Bali was acting according to the Brähmanical norms, but since he was a demon and more powerful than Indra he had to be punished. He was given the boon of a good life and later on he would become Indra (MP, 246.72). However, it seems that Bali was one who was following the rituals and norms without giving a share to brahmaflas in the form of daksinā. The importance assigned to the story is evident from the statement that even listening or reading this story would liberate a person from all sins (MP, 246.92). Further one who thinks of the discussion between Bali and Prahlāda or Bali and Śukrācārya or Bali and Viṣṇu would be freed from all doubts, would never be ill or deceived. A king who had lost his kingdom would regain it and those separated from his dear ones would get them back (MP, 246.93-95). The myth represents a link between the symbols of creation such as the brähmana, sacrifice and the dwarf as well the cosmogonic act of the three steps. Another aspect was the resultant benefit from listening to a part or the entire legend. The gains were spiritual as well as worldly.

The Varāha incarnation was also described in detail, with Viṣṇu as the savior of the earth in his boar form. Various names of Viṣṇu such as Ananta, Akṣaya, Viṣṇu, Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Govinda, Hṛṣīkeśa, Vāsudeva, Samkarṣaṇa, Pradyumana, Anirudha etc. were mentioned (MP, 248.35-51). Viṣṇu was described with the Vedas as his feet, sacrificial post as his tusk, fire as his tongue and kuśa grass as his hairs. All the Vedic texts were represented in him and he was symbolic of the sacrifice and the Brähmanical order. In this form he saved the earth for the welfare of all.

Viṣṇu in his Kūrma incarnation was described as well. Viṣṇu as tortoise provided the base to churn the ocean for amrta (MP, 249), although in this myth, Śiva played an equally important role of the protector. The role of Viṣṇu was minimized in this legend. The other incarnations of Viṣṇu were not described in detail. This may have been the period when the other incarnations were not prominent yet.

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Śiva was an equally important deity. Although the *Matsya Purāṇa* was, as the name suggests, a Vaiṣṇava text, it was full of legends about Śiva. Śiva was described in the prayer of Śukrācārya. He was described as Śītī kaṇṭha, Kāvyā, Karāla, Kapardin, and Saṁstūtā besides others. He had the epithet of Bhārgava, Hiraṇya, Sthānu, Dundubhi etc. He was described as the forester, householder, and controller of passion besides other forms (*MP*, 47.128-167). Thus unlike Viṣṇu, Śiva was described as the god of the masses. He was extolled as the friend of the *brahmanā* but not a *brahmana* himself. Śiva’s victory over Tripura and the killing of the demon Mayāsura was described in details (*MP*, 133-140). Śiva was called Bhava, Śarva, Rudra, Paśupati, besides being the destroyer of all ills etc. (*MP*, 132. 21-28). Śiva’s marriage with Pārvatī was again described in great detail (*MP*, 154). The legend included Pārvatī’s birth, her marriage to Śiva, destruction of Kāma, austerities performed by Pārvatī, birth of Vināyaka and Kūmara Kārtikeya. This chapter is one of the longest with five hundred and eighty eight verses. These legends portray the image of a householder with a family, unlike Viṣṇu. Thus Śiva was described as an ascetic as well as a householder. In other words, both passive and destructive manifestations were extolled.

Brahmā, the creator in the Trimūrti was not as important as the other two deities. He was described as the creator of the universe. Besides the creation of mountains, rivers, seven oceans etc., he also created the *brahmana* (*MP*, 2.33-35). He was called Prajāpati, a four-headed deity, although this epithet was used for Viṣṇu as well. Viṣṇu was also given the role of creator. This may indicate that Viṣṇu was taking over the role of Brahmā gradually. Brahmā was full of *rajuguna* and was also known as Mahātman and Mahatsatva (*MP*, 2.36-37). He was linked to creation of the Vedas and other texts as well as the sages. He thereby represented priesthood, religion, and the sovereign aspect of kingship. Elsewhere in the text Brahmā was described as an inferior deity. He was not given a position equivalent to that of Viṣṇu and Śiva. He was described as having *sattvaguna* and working for creation through his mind under the guidance of Viṣṇu (*MP*, 170.8-9). He was described as a yogi performing *tapasyā* and was lotus born. He was linked to Viṣṇu and was not a powerful deity.

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Of the consorts, Lakṣmī was not worshipped as an independent deity. Śrī or Lakṣmī was associated with kingship and thus was related as the consort of Viṣṇu. The goddess was associated with fertility and fortune. Among the goddesses, the cult of Pārvatī was a prominent one. Many legends were associated with Pārvatī, as consort of Śiva and also as an independent deity. She was eulogized as a goddess in the story of Dakṣa’s sacrifice. The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned the hundred and eight names of the goddess and the sacred places associated with her. She was worshipped as Lalitā in Prayag, Lingadhārini in Naimiśāranya, Jayantī in Hastinapura etc. (MP, 13.26-53). The sacred places included mountains such as the Himalayas, Vindhyacala, and Citrakuta etc. The waters considered sacred included Gangasagara, the banks of the Ganga, Sarasvatī, Godavari, Narmada, and Yamuna etc. There was mention of pious lakes such as Mānasa, Bindusāra, and Acchoda. Regions such as Puskara, Kuruksetra, and Prayag etc. were mentioned. Among the cities Ayodhya, Kasi, Ujjayini, and Haradvara etc. were referred to. One who would read the names and worship the goddess would be liberated from all sins and would reside in Śivaloka for a kalpa. The text also mentioned that one who would recite the names before Śiva on tritīyā and aṣṭamī would be blessed with many children. One, who would repeat the names at the time of giving away a cow in charity, or on the occasion of the śrāddha in honor of the departed spirit or at the time of worship, goes to the realm of Brahmā (MP, 13.54-59). After worshiping Pārvatī, Arundhati obtained the highest yoga, Pururavas became a rājaśī, Yayāti begot progeny and Paraśurāma obtained wealth. Here the reference is to Paraśurāma who was an epic figure and not as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Similarly many devas, daityas, brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras obtained various siddhis (MP, 13. 62-64). Besides Pārvatī was well described in various myths related to Śiva. She was described as Caṇḍikā, the destroyer of Śumbha and Niśumbha, Devī, Bhagavatī etc. (MP, 158.14-19). Thus among the goddesses, Pārvatī could claim an identity which was beyond her position as the consort of Śiva. A huge portion of the text described her and one could benefit even from reading the names of the goddess on

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148
certain days. This would reflect her popularity as a Purāṇic deity. According to Vijay Nath the popularity of the cult of Śakti was linked to the rise of Tantricism.²⁰

Of the goddessess, the divine mothers were described in the legend of Bhairava and the killing of the demon Andhaka. The divine mothers were created to drink the blood of the demon. These were Māheśvarī, Brāhmī, Kaumārī, Kapālī, Kālī, and others (MP, 179.33-35). But unfortunately the demon could not be killed and then Viṣṇu created Śuṣka-Revatī who finally annihilated the demon. She was created from the Nṛsimha form of Viṣṇu. Thus there seems to be a conflict between the Vaiṣṇavites and the Śaivites. Instead of Śiva, the annihilator image of the Nṛsimha avatāra of Viṣṇu fits into the role of destroyer.²¹ The text then mentioned the thirty-two divine mothers such as Ghanṭākarnī, Trailokyamohini, Lekhanī, and others created by Viṣṇu (MP, 180.66-72). The Mātṛkās created by Śiva were controlled by those created by Viṣṇu. Śiva was related to the creation of the Sapta-Mātṛkās who were worshipped. Thus, the divine mothers were associated with both the principal male deities who claimed to create them. This would probably suggest that since the divine mothers were well known and worshipped; therefore both the Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas wished to include them into their cult. The names of the goddesses suggest aboriginal origins. J.N. Tiwari opines that the Mātṛs were originally a group of analogous goddesses of cruel demonic aspect and were outside the Brāhmaṇical realm.²² They were later incorporated and delimited in number referring only to their kind nature.

The inscriptions contain information regarding the religious belief of the donor and the donee, and thus are an important source to understand religion.²³ Both the dynasties, the Vākāṭakas and Kalacuris proclaimed to be Śaivites. The inscriptional records mostly refer to Śiva in their invocations. References to other deities such as Viṣṇu, and the Buddha were also prevalent.

The Vākāṭaka records contain simple and single line invocations. They proclaimed themselves to be ‘mahābhairava bhakta’, devout worshippers of Śiva.\(^\text{24}\) The records did not describe the form of Śiva or of any other deity. The grants by kings invoked Bhairava, which was an ugra, violent form of Śiva. In the Vatsagulma/ Western branch inscriptions, kings do not pay obeisance to Śiva or any other deity. Of the total of thirty-four records, sixteen invoked Śiva, while eight referred to other deities. In the rest of the records, the invocation was either lost or missing. The Vākāṭakas do not refer to any goddess in their inscriptions. The kings, except Rudrasena II, who was said to be graced by Cakrapāṇi, Viṣṇu,\(^\text{25}\) referred to Śiva. A.M. Shastri holds that Rudrasena II played a pivotal role in popularizing the Bhāgavata religion in the region.\(^\text{26}\) It was believed that the Bhāgavata religion had strong linkages with the Sūrya cult but later it was identified with Viṣṇu.\(^\text{27}\) H.T. Bakker believes this to be an example of the influence of Prabhāvatīguptā.\(^\text{28}\)

Of the records by women, Prabhāvatīguptā gave grants in honor of Viṣṇu and claimed to be ‘bhāgavata bhakta’. She claimed a different identity i.e. not referring to Śiva, the royal deity. She issued the Riddhapur grant from the footprints of the lord of Ramagiri, Rāmagirīsvāmin.\(^\text{29}\) It clearly implied her devotion to the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. The Ramtek inscription, by Prabhāvatīguptā’s daughter, recorded a grant to the temple of Nrṣimha i.e. the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. The deity was named Prabhāvatisvāmin. The Masoda plates given by the queen of Pravarasena II paid obeisance to Śiva and was similar to the grants by the kings in other aspects such as titles used, officers mentioned besides others.

The Pattan inscription of Pravarasena II invoked Bhairava but the dāna was given in honor of Mahāpuruṣa, Viṣṇu. This grant was given at the request of Nārāyanarāja. The name of the donor suggested a Vaiṣṇava affiliation. The donor invoked Śiva as it was a royal charter. This would reflect that elite women and men other than the king shared

\(^{29}\) Riddhapur plates of Prabhāvatīguptā, CII, Vol. 5, p. 35.
similar beliefs and practices. The king maintained a different identity by giving grants in honor of Śiva only.

The later grants by feudatories and ministers recorded donations in honor of the Buddha. These records belonged to the Vatsagulma branch, in which other deities such as Viṣṇu were invoked as in the Hisse-Borala inscription of Devasena. In the Ajanta Cave inscription of Varāhadeva, Ghatotkacha Cave inscription of Varāhadeva and Ajanta Cave inscription, the Buddha was invoked. It was relevant to note that kings of this branch did not invoke any deity in their records. This was probably because other elite men could invoke as well as gave grants to non-Brāhmaṇical sects. Thus the non-Brāhmaṇical sects were recognized and given donations, but by elites other than the king. It can be said that they claimed social prestige by patronizing alternative traditions and were perhaps trying to assert their autonomy. This would show that there was a differentiation between grants given by the king and the other elite men and women which included the queen as well.

The Kalacuris also invoked Śiva in most of their inscriptions, using various epithets such as Maheśvara, Mahādeva, Kīrtiśvara, Kedāra, Jaṭādhara etc. They also referred to the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu, Gaṇapati, the Buddha, Jaina tīrthaṅkaras, Revanta, and goddesses such as Ambikā. The Kalacuris styled themselves as ‘parama-māheśvara’. The Narmada region was associated with worship of Śiva and the Kalacuris were linked to this region as Māhismatī and Tripurī were situated on the bank of the river. Unlike the Vākāṭakas, the Kalacuri kings paid obeisance to Śiva as well as other Brāhmaṇical gods and goddesses. In their records they not only invoked the deity but described the form and sometimes mentioned the Purāṇic legends related to them.

The Kalacuris recorded several donations in honor of Śiva in their inscriptions. In the grants by kings, most of the grants invoked Śiva, although there were donations in honor of Viṣṇu and other gods as well. They used epithets such as Jaṭādhara as in the Choti

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Deori Stone inscription of Śaṅkaragana I. In the inscription the description of Śiva was simple:

"May (that) Śaṅkara, who wears matted hairs, who has the crescent moon on his head, who wears a garland of skulls, who is grey with white ashes, who destroys the evil-minded, who has bracelets of serpents, always cause your welfare..." *(Verse I)*

By the 9th-10th century CE, descriptions in the inscription became more detailed and referred to the Purāṇic myths. Of the grants by ministers, the Rewa Stone inscription of Kanha, year 800, invoked and described Śiva. The Tewar stone inscription of Gayakarnadeva34, year 902 after saluting Śiva gave the following details:

"May that eight-formed (Śiva) grant you fortune! - (he) who is the architect of the mansion of the three worlds (and) the noble poet of the composition of the three Vedas and whose effort, knowledge, and will are eternal. (Verse I)

Glorious is the digit of the moon which is, as it were, the silver-shell held on the head of (Śiva), the destroyer of Smara, by (Pārватī), the daughter of the mountain, who felt very thirsty on the account of fire of the (third) eye on (his) forhead" *(Verse II).*

Thus Purāṇic myths, such as burning of Kāma by Śiva, were reiterated in the record.

The invocations referred to myths related to Śiva. He was mentioned as having matted hair; the Ganga flowing through his hairs, serpents around his neck along with Nandi. In many inscriptions a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī was described, which would portray his role as the householder deity. For example in the Ratnapur stone inscription of Prthivīdeva II, year 1207 and the Gurgi stone inscription of Kokalladeva II, interestingly the eulogy was in the form of conversation between Śiva and Pārватī. This appears to be similar to the Purāṇas where the discussion was usually in the form of a dialogue between the sages and gods or narrator and sages etc. In the Ratnapur stone inscription of Prthivīdeva II,35 the invocation of Śiva was followed by the narration:

"...May Rudra protect you!- (he), who at (the time of) sexual enjoyment is engrossed in persuading (thus) the daughter of the mountain (i.e. Gaurī) – 'How can the lord of

serpents who uses his eyes as ears be able to see us? And (how can) this crescent moon also which is in the state of infancy (know of it)?

May the leader of the Gaṇas (i.e. Gaṇapatī) grant you prosperity!- (he) the surface of whose unique frontal lobes is smeared with large masses of powder of excellent vermillion, who, with all violent dance of his trunk, adorns the (extensive) pavilion of all region of the sky...(and) who is engaged in the sport of uprooting multitude of trees..."

The discussion was in the form of a conversation, and at the same time was dramatic. It is interesting to note that in nearly all the descriptions of Śiva, Pārvaṭī was referred to as the daughter of the mountain. Her identity was as a daughter and wife. The inscriptions in their allegory, mention the mundane aspects. The philosophical part of the Purāṇas was not dealt with in the inscriptions. Probably it was an attempt to be more popular by referring to real life situations. Thus the Purānic style of conversation was reproduced in inscriptions. Śiva was mentioned along with his consort, Pārvaṭī, and family including Gaṇeṣa and Kārtikeya.

Non-Brāhmaṇical deities such as the Buddha and the Jaina tīrthaṇkaras were described in the Sārnath Stone inscription of Kārṇa and Rewa Stone inscription of Vijayasimha, year 944 respectively. The Rewa stone inscription described Mañjūghoṣa, who was a Buddhist god of learning as follows:

"Having bowed to Mañjūghoṣa, who is as white as the snow-mountain, who is (seated) on a lotus-seat, who is the full moon resembling a wheel of eight spokes, (and), who has a sword and a book in his right and left hand (respectively)..."

The Gurgi Stone inscription of Kokalladeva II invoked Somanātha, Śiva and mentioned the construction of the temple of Īśvara along with the images of Umā, Hara-Umā, and Kārtikeya with Gaṇeṣa and Sarasvatī at the gates. The record mentioned deities associated with Śiva. The Sarkho Plates of Ratnadeva II, year 880, did not invoke any deity; instead it invoked brahman, i.e. the one without any attribute, who was all pervasive, eternal and the cause of the universe. The Kasia stone inscription in the

invocatory verses described Rudra, the Buddhist goddess Tārā, the Buddha, and also Viṣṇu, as the destroyer of demons.\(^\text{39}\) Since the record was fragmentary, the objective of the grant could not be known. But the record mentioned all the prominent cults and would reflect a period of fluidity in the belief pattern.

Of the grants given by the kings there were records, which invoked only Viṣṇu such as the Bandhogarh rock inscriptions (No. III),\(^\text{40}\) which mention the image of a tortoise, i.e. the Kūrma *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. As the record was fragmentary, the rest of the details were not known.

In the grants by elite women, queens gave donations in honor of Śiva. The Bhereghat stone inscription of Narasimhadeva records a grant by Ālhaṇadevī, which invoked Śiva and gave the grant in honor of Vaidyanātha.\(^\text{41}\) The Bhereghat Gauri-Śaṅkara temple inscription of Vijayasimhadeva, mentioned a grant by Gosaladevī in honor of Bhagnakidra, the destroyer of diseases.\(^\text{42}\) The records by women other than the queen included a grant in honor of the Buddha.\(^\text{43}\) It described the Buddha as the dispeller of darkness, who was known for his splendour and virtues. This grant was given by Māmakā who was a follower of the Mahāyāna sect. She caused a copy of the *Aṣṭaśadhaśrīkāpajñā* to be written and also made some donations to the monastery. No kings or queens gave any grants to the Buddhist deities. This may suggest that women other than the queens could and did support alternative cults. She claimed to be *parama-upāsikā* in the inscription.

The joint donations such as the Karitalai Stone inscription of Lakṣmanaṛāja II invoked the Vāmana form of Viṣṇu.\(^\text{44}\) It mentioned the temple of Viṣṇu built by the minister Someśvara. The Bilhari stone inscription of Yuvarājadeva II invoked Śiva and referred to the temple of Śiva known as Nauhaḷesvara.\(^\text{45}\) The grant also mentioned the Śaiva ascetics Hṛdayaśiva. The Mallar Stone inscription of Jājalladeva II which was a joint donation of


\(^{44}\) Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmanarāja II, *CII*, Vol. 4, Pt. I, p. 188.

the king and his minister invoked Śiva. It was donated in honor of Śambhu and also mentioned Gaṇapati.\(^{46}\)

In another grant by a minister Vappulla, there was mention of the temple of Śrīvatsa surrounded by small shrines; Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa was one of them. It also mentioned a five-shrined temple of Śiva known as Vappulesvara. There was also reference to an image of Umā-Maheśvara constructed by his wife, Nayanāvalī.\(^{47}\) Thus the record not only mentioned the pious works of the minister who claimed a higher status by naming the deity as Vappulesvara. At the same time it mentioned the image of Umā and Maheśvara donated by his wife. The construction of the image of a god/goddess was a Purāṇic mode of expressing devotion which was open to women. The Akaltara stone inscription of Ratnadeva II mentioned the temple of Revanta being built, although it invoked Śiva.\(^{48}\) The Raipur museum plates of Prthivīdeva II invoked Śambhu and began with ‘Om-nama Śivāya’.\(^{49}\) There was also reference to other cults as in the Bahuriband Statue inscription which mentioned the temple of Śāntinātha, the Jaina tīrthaṅkara built by some Mahābhoja.\(^{50}\) The colossal image was consecrated by acārya Subhadra. It is evident that the Jainas had a considerable following in the Kalacuri country.\(^{51}\) However none of the inscription of the Ratnapur branch referred to any grant to Buddhist or Jaina institutions.

The Kalacuris also referred to the goddess Ambikā, as in the Alha ghat stone inscription of Narasimha (Vikrama) year 1216\(^{52}\) which mentioned the construction of the ṣaṭasadika-ghāṭ. The Sheorinarayana inscription of Jājalladeva II year 919, recorded obeisance to Śiva and mentioned the temple of Candracūḍeśvara and Durgā.\(^{53}\) The Kharod inscription of Ratnadeva III mentioned the construction of temples of Śiva, Durgā, Viṣṇu and Tuntā Gaṇapati.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{46}\) Mallar Stone Inscription of Jājalladeva II, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. II, p. 513.

\(^{47}\) Rewa Stone Inscription of Karna, year 812, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. I, pp. 278-89.

\(^{48}\) Akaltara Stone Inscription of Ratnadeva II, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. II, p. 431.


\(^{50}\) Bahuriband Statue Inscription of Gayakarnadeva, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. I, p. 311.


\(^{52}\) Alha-ghat Stone Inscription of Narasimha, (Vikrama) year 1216, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. I, p. 322.

\(^{53}\) Sheorinarayana Inscription of Jājalladeva II, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. II, pp. 521, 524.

\(^{54}\) Kharod Stone Inscription of Ratnadeva III, \(CII\), Vol. 4, Pt. II, p. 539.
Another prominent tradition was Vaiṣṇavism. Śaṅkaragaṇa II styled himself as ‘parama-
vaiṣṇava’. The Khairha plates of Yaśahkarna traced his lineage to the ‘lotus-navelled
god’ i.e. Viṣṇu and also referred to the Paraśurāma incarnation of Viṣṇu. The Rajim
stone inscription of Prthivideva II of the Ratnapur branch paid obeisance to Nārāyaṇa.
Except Śaṅkaragaṇa, Gaṅgeyadeva and Yaśahkarna, all the kings of the Tripuri branch
were followers of Śaivism. However, it was queens who invariably gave grants to show
allegiance to the Śaiva ascetics.

The Makundpur stone inscription of Gaṅgeyadeva year 772, recorded the construction of
a temple of Jalasayana i.e. Viṣṇu. Coins of Gaṅgeyadeva also used Lakṣmī and the lotus
motif. This would imply that Gaṅgeyadeva supported Vaiṣṇavism. Thus, Vaiṣṇavism
was also prominent in the Kalacuri kingdom. The Kalacuri belief pattern seems to have
incorporated all prominent cults. These would indicate a flexible religious attitude
amongst the elites.

The Śaiva ācāryas received special patronage from the Kalacuris, especially those of the
Tripuri branch. Yuvarājadeva I invited the Śaiva ācāra Prabhāśīva of the Mattamayūra
clan and the tradition of Śaiva ācāryas as the spiritual preceptor of the kings was
mentioned. The Jabalpur stone inscriptions of Jayasimha, year 920, recorded the
construction of the temple of Śiva by the Śaiva ascetic Vimalaśīva, the spiritual preceptor
of the king Jayasimha. Thus, the Śaiva ascetics gained prominence during this period.

Mirashi mentions that it is likely that because of the influence of Nohala, the wife of
Yuvarājadeva I, the Śaiva ācāra of the Mattamayūra, came to Cedi. Similarly, he points
out that the Kalacuri queen Ālhaṇadevī who hailed from Mewar, placed the Pāṣupata
ascetic Rudraśī of Lāṭa in charge of the temple of Śiva and made grants of villages to
him. It is very interesting to note that these queens gave grants to Śaiva ascetics while the
kings gave grants to brāhmaṇas. This indicates that although the kings had Śaiva ascetics
as their spiritual preceptors, they did not make grants to them. It was queens who gave
grants to Śaiva ascetics although as women they probably did not have the Śaiva ascetic

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as their spiritual perceptors. They were supporting the trend of giving grants to the brāhmaṇas and at the same time extending patronage to various sects.

In some inscriptions such as the Jabalpur inscription, the rājagurus of the Kalacuris were mentioned among the royal officers, who received grants of villages, land etc. In many of the Kalacuri grants the rājaguru was addressed among administrative functionaries, informing them about the donation of the grant.60 In the Umariya plates of Vijayasimhadeva, the rājaguru Vimalaśiva was mentioned as a mahāmantrin. This shows that their role was not restricted to religious matters, but extended to the political sphere as well. The rājagurus under the Tripuri branch had attained royal status and were part of the administrative machinery.

Śaivism was divided into four broad sects- Pāśupata, Kaula, Kāpālika and Śaiva siddhānta sects. Except the Kaula and Kāpālika sects, insitational evidence of the other sects was found in the Kalacuri records. The Pāśupatasūtra, the doctrine of the Pāśupatas, was linked with the Narmada region.61 This would probably account for the connections with the Kalacuri dynasty.

The Bilhari stone inscription of Yuvarājadeva II described the king as engaged in the worship of Śrīkanṭha. Śrīkanṭha probably founded the Pāśupata sect.62 The Tewar stone inscription of Gayakarna referred to Bhāvabrāhmaṇa, a disciple of the Pāśupata ascetic Bhāvatejas.63 The Bhera ghat inscription of Narasimhadeva also mentioned the Pāśupata ascetic Rudrarāsi of Lāṭa lineage as in charge of the management of the temple endowed by Ālhanādevī.64 This would imply that the ascetics of the Pāśupata sect held a prominent position in the Tripuri branch.

The Siddha sect was referred to in the Rewa inscription of Vijayasimhadeva year 944, which described the genealogy of Malayasimha, a feudatory, who was eulogised as siddhārthayogin. This inscription mentioned that Malayasimha erected the shrine of Rāma and opened with an invocation to Maṇjughoṣa, a Buddhist god.65 The record then
mentioned the Narmada as sacred and praised by the Siddhas and as a river that removes sins by the mere sight of it. This description was similar to that mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa*.

According to V.S. Pathak the building of the shrine of Rāma was striking. He further states that the tantraloka mentioned Rāma as Śiva, the highest reality. The commentator Jayadratha explained Rāma as a form of Śiva which pervaded the whole universe. Rāma was frequently mentioned in the later Siddha literature. He further mentions that Mañjughosa was also accepted as a Siddha deity. This would suggest an attempt to integrate various cults.

The patronage to the Śaiva-siddhānta sects could be inferred from the Bilhari, Candrehi, and Gurgi inscriptions, which gave the genealogies of the Śaiva ācāryas of the Mattamayūra clan. The various sects of Śaivism were mentioned in the grants by the elites. However women other than the queen do not refer to the Śaiva sects. This would suggest that only members of the royal family had access to Śaiva sects.

Both the Vākāṭakas and Kalacuris patronized Śaivism. The kings claimed legitimacy by making invocations and grants to Śaiva shrines and emphasized their religious affiliations. Among queens, Prabhavatīguptā marked a deviation by invoking Viṣṇu and giving donations to the Vaiṣṇava shrines. As in other aspects such as gotra, and the presentation of her genealogy, she seems to have maintained a separate identity. In the case of the Kalacuri queens, they supported the Śaiva ascetics. It was also notable that elite men other than the king could make grants to many deities such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Durgā, Ambikā, Gaṇapatī etc. but grants by women were restricted to Śaivism in the case of the queens and Buddhism in the case of women other than queens. Women played a relevant role in promoting the Śaiva ācāryas. But it was the kings who mentioned the Śaiva ācāryas as spiritual perceptor. Elite women other than queens could probably support alternative traditions. Thus, elite men and women claimed a different religious identity.

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67 For the details on the spiritual genealogy refer Chapter- 3.
The Kalacuris, unlike the Vākāṭakas, followed the Purāṇic traditions in their inscriptions. Overall, the inscriptions indicate that belief patterns were more fluid in society than was portrayed in the text. This diversity was more pronounced with the Kalacuris who gave grants in honor of different gods and goddesses, both Brāhmaṇical and non-Brāhmaṇical.

The evidence from the two sources can be corroborated with the sculptural evidence from the region. We take into account deities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Ambikā and the Buddha. These deities were prominent in the inscriptions and were popular as seen from the sculptures found in the region.

Most of the architectural evidence pertaining to the Vākāṭaka period is lost. But the remains of the temples show that there were Śaiva as well as Vaiśṇava temples. In the sculptural remains, the Vidarbha traditions appear as predominantly Brāhmaṇical and the Vatsagulma/Western branch was primarily Buddhist. The sculptures can be roughly assigned to the rulers' reign as follows:

Prthivīsena (350-400 CE): Ramtek sculptures.
Pravarasena II (420-450 CE): Paunar sculptures.

In sites such as Mandhal, various Śaiva images such as Lakulīsa, Aṣṭamūrti and Sadasiva forms of the god have been found. The various finds in Mandhal included the sculpture of Maheśvara. It was a figure of a standing male, who carries one tier of four heads with matted hair on one neck. The two shaven faces on the two upper arms represent the second tier. Two more faces are situated on the thighs, constituting the third tier. Within each tier the heads or faces are virtually identical, with the exception of the adorsed head.

The cloth of the dhoti, which trims the forehead with three lines, covers heads of the lowest i.e. third tier. Though no other wrapping of the turban are visible, the two heads can be said to denote usnīsin. The head of the second tier is bald or shaven (mūnda). The

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70 Ibid, pp. 172-73.
72 Ibid, pp. 95-96.
four heads of the first tier wear an ascetic coiffure. These heads are connected by a headband (bhāla paṭṭa), which binds strands of matted hair smoothly combed back over the first cranium.

The image is two armed. The right arm is broken off at the shoulder. Its left arm holds the water/ elixir vessel (kāla) from which a stalk (nāla) emerges. The deity was without ornaments. The elongated ear lobes were pierced. Only the head on the reverse had a vertical third eye.

The three tiers possibly point to a theological conception that involves a sequential manifestation in three arrays: yogin, brahmacārin, and uṣṇīsin. The uṣṇīsin represents Śiva's manifestation in this world (sakala) on which the turban (uṣṇīsin) bestows royal dignity. The brahmacārin, the religious aspirant, stands halfway between this world and the reality of the yogin, his shaven head (mūndin) indicates his detachment.

Many other sculptures of Śiva or those which can be associated with Śiva have been found such as that of the Sadaśiva form etc. In Nagardhan, a Gaṇeśa image was found. Besides these, icons of Pārvatī, Durgā, Gaṇeśa etc. were also found.

In the nearby region, sculptures pertaining to the Vaiṣṇava pantheon were found. These probably belonged to the Monḍśavāmin temple.73 Another important ritual centre was Ramtek/Ramgiri hill. This was again a Vaiṣṇava centre. In a nearby hillock was a group of five shrines containing Varāha and Nṛṣimha mūrti images which belonged to the 5th century CE.74 From Mandhal a Vāsudeva image was found. The bust was adorned with a yajnāpavīta, and a necklace (ekāvalī), while jeweled earrings (ratna kuṇḍala) rested on the collarbones. Snail-shells curls fall on his shoulders. A faint impression of what seems to be a śrīvatsa mark was visible on the breast. It was a four armed deity with a mukuta. There was also an image of Samkarṣaṇa, a Vṛṣṇi image found at Mandhal. At Nagardhan and Ramtek more Vaiṣṇava images were found. Both images and inscriptions from the region suggest that Vaiṣṇavism was popular. That the Nṛṣimha and the Trivikrama

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160
incarnations were popular in the region around Ramtek was well established from excavations.75

The Ajanta Caves were good example of the prominence of Buddhism in the area. It was during the reign of Hariśena that Buddhism gained prominence. Thus inscriptions indicate that both Brāhmaṇical and non-Brāhmaṇical deities had considerable following in this region.

By the Kalacuri period the religious fluidity in art and architecture was evident.76 In the region, temple complexes were found such as the Choti Deori, Rewa, Sohagpur, Jabalpur, Bheraghat, Candreche, Deotalao etc. Forms of Śiva such as Āliṅgaṇamūrti, Śiva-Pārvatī marriage, Sukhāsanamūrti, Vṛṣbhāruḍhamamūrti, Samhāramūrti, Nrtyamūrti, Bhairava, Lakulīśa, Trimūrti, Ardhanārīśvaramūrti etc. were found. The images of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya were found as well. The images of Viṣṇu such as Lākṣmī-Narāyaṇa were found in Umarai, Bilhari, and Gurgi etc. Most prominent were the Daśāvatara images such as Varāha, Nṛśimha, Kṛṣṇa, and others. Sculptures as the Śeṣāśayinnmūrtis at Bandhogarh, Sohagpur, Shahdol, Marai, and Rewa were also found. Beside these, there were separate images of Gaja-Lākṣmī, found at the Vīraṭeśvara temple at Sohagpur. Images of the Saptā-mātrkās were also found in Gurgi. Images of Cāmuṇḍā were discovered at several places such as Tewar, Baragaon, and Khajuha etc. The Causath-Yogini temple at Bheraghat reflects the presence of the Sakti cult in the region.

The presence of Jainism in the region was attested by the occurrence of images of the various tīrthaṅkaras such as Rṣabhanātha and Śāntinātha at Bahuriband, Neminātha at Jabalpur and Rewa as well as those of Pārśvanātha. Images of Tārā were also found in the region. Thus the sources reflect that various cults had gained prominence. The relevance of these cults was also seen in the inscriptions where a number of gods and goddesses were mentioned.

As the textual, epigraphical, and iconographical records would show, Central India during this period was fluid in terms of religious beliefs. It was not only the Brāhmaṇical

deities but the other alternative traditions had a considerable following. Vaiṣṇavism was a popular religion. But the kings did not support the Vaiṣṇavas. The kings restricted themselves to being ‘parama-mahēśvara’ i.e. devout worshippers of Śiva, in terms of religious beliefs, except Rudrasena II of the Vākāṭaka dynasty, who proclaimed himself to be a Vaiṣṇava. The Bhāgavata religion was promoted by Prabhāvatīguptā. She as usual had a distinct identity when compared to other queens. Another grant which was given in honor of Viṣṇu was by some Nārāyaṇarāja besides some reference to grants in honor of Viṣṇu by men. The Vatsagulma branch does not refer to any myth or record any grant as a tribute to Viṣṇu. Prabhāvatīguptā’s daughter also gave donations in honor of Nṛsimha, thus continuing the worship of Viṣṇu. In the Kalacuri dynasty, except a few rulers who mentioned Viṣṇu, most of the kings mentioned Śiva. Grants by men other than the king recorded grants in honor of Viṣṇu.

With reference to Śiva, the Vākāṭakas mentioned not just themselves being Śaivites but also mentioned their matrimonial alliance with the dynasty of the Nāgas who were described in their records as follows: “...the royal family of Bharaśivas was created by Śiva, who was pleased by their carrying the līṅga of Śiva like a lord placed on their shoulder and who were besprinkled on their head with pure water of the (river) Bhāgirathī that had been obtained by their valour...” This could be seen as a reference to līṅga worship, which got conventionalized by the Gupta period. In this period līṅga worship was a well known form as shown in Purāṇic texts and sculptures. The Kalacuris were provided more descriptions of the forms of the gods and mentioned the legends associated with them. In this process they not only mentioned the gods and goddesses but also other epic charcters which were popular. This was also seen in the context of comparison to the deities, that they compared themselves not only to the deities but also to popular epic characters.

It was specifically the Śaiva ācāryas of the Mattamayūra clan who were well known in the Tripuri branch. The tradition of spiritual preceptors started with Yuvarājadeva I,

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79 | Appendix 2.2
who invited the Śaiva ācārya Prabhāśiva. The Mattamayūra form of worship was prominent in Central India.  

It was affiliated to the Śaiva Siddhānta school. Malayasimha, a feudatory, was described as ‘siddhartha yogin’. The genealogy of the Śaiva ācāryas was also mentioned in the inscriptions.

The Buddha was mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa* as the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu. This can be seen as the acculturation of non-Brahmanical deities into the Brahmanical fold. It was because of his popularity that he was included in the Brahmanical fold. The *Matsya Purāṇa* however gave no detail about the Buddha in the text. The inscriptions as well as iconography showed that Buddhism was significant in the region. In the case of the Vākāṭakas, inscriptions of the Vatsagulma branch referred to the Buddha unlike the Eastern branch, which mentioned only Brahmanical deities. The grants in honor of the Buddha were given by ministers and feudatories. They mentioned the Buddha as ‘sugata’. Thus the elite men other than the king could follow alternative traditions which were reflected in the iconographic evidence as well. In the Kalacuri records women other than the queens gave grants in honor of the Buddha. The inscriptions also mentioned grants in honor of Jaina tīrthankaras. The popularity of Jainism was also attested by the sculptural evidence.

As compared to the Vākāṭakas, the Kalacuris show the integration of various cults and also emergence of various sectarian practices. They in their records mentioned Purānic legends and used the conversational form of describing the deities. The attempt was to make the deities more accessible. Probably the religious trend in Central India was more flexible as both the *Matsya Purāṇa* and the inscriptions especially the Kalacuri records reflect integration of diverse practices. The iconographic evidence also supports the trend shown in the inscriptions.

Elite men and women used different markers in terms of religious beliefs. In terms of the religious practices which reiterated the need of expiation of sin, the Kalacuris followed

Purānic practices. Practices such as sacrifices, śrāddha, tīrtha, and vrata, as mentioned in the sources will be discussed in the following sections.

II (a)

As Kunal Chakrabarti opines, religious performance offered an ideal opportunity for communication in traditional societies. The advantages of such communications were two-fold, according to Gumprez: first, it takes place in public spaces and was capable of reaching a large number of diverse social nuclei. Second, being religious in nature they overcome the usual limitations of the society. They can be easily incorporated in the functioning of the society. This was seen in rituals such as tīrtha, vrata, śrāddha etc., which were open to all the sections of society irrespective of gender and caste. Among the religious acts, the construction of a temple in honor of a deity was considered one of the pious acts. But it was restricted to the elite section of the population as it required resources. The Purāṇas formalized the rituals for the masses. They explicitly mention the religious acts, methods, and rules to be observed to get the desired result which included benefits in this world and the next. Of these results, liberation from sins was specially mentioned. Vijay Nath perceives these traditions as an ideological construct for social control. The emphasis was on prayāscitta, sin-expiation, hence dāna, vrata and visting a tīrtha was enumerated in the Purānic texts.

The textual sources mentioned sins incurred because of the Kali yuga and proclaimed various religious acts for expiation. Thus, the text established the role of brāhmaṇas and emphasized the relevance of the Brāhmaṇical texts. Of various rituals, dāna, yajña, vrata, tīrtha, and śrāddha were considered important means of attaining worldly and other-worldly gains. Romila Thapar holds sacrifices as a ritual for legitimization of power and opines that it was an exchange, in which the gods were the recipients of bali i.e. offerings, the priests were the recipients of dāna and dakṣinā, gifts and fees, and the

85 As cited in Kunal, Chakrabarti op. cit.
87 For further details refer Chapter- 5.
ksatriya, one who ordered the ritual was the recipient of the benevolence of the gods and status as well as legitimacy among men.  

Of the prominent sacrifices the soma sacrifice was well documented in early texts. According to the Gautama Dharmasūtra there were seven forms of soma sacrifice agniṣṭoma, atyāgniṣṭoma, ukthya, sōdaśin, vājapeya, atirātra, and āptoryāma. The agniṣṭoma was the model of all soma sacrifices and was an integral part of the jyotistoma. The two sacrifices were similar. And according to the Jaimini Dharmasūtra, it was compulsory for the three higher varnas. The agniṣṭoma was to be performed in Vasanta, spring, every year and on the new moon day. The sacrifice was to be performed by the sacrificer and his wife. It was supposed to be a five-day long sacrifice with rituals such as choosing the priest, consecration of the sacrificer, setting up the vedi, purchase of soma, animal sacrifice, pressing of soma etc. The animal sacrificed was mostly a he-goat, chāga. The animal was generally sacrificed in honor of Indra-Agni, Sūrya or Prajāpati. Although the animal sacrifice was an independent sacrifice, called the nirūḍhapaśubandha, it formed an important part of the soma sacrifices i.e. the agniṣomīya paśu. The ukthya, sōdaśin, atirātra, āptoryāma were to be performed by one who desired cattle, vigor, progeny and all objects. In these sacrifices, specifically the goat was offered to Indra and Agni. In the sōdaśin sacrifices, an additional ram was sacrificed in honor of Indra. The fee was a reddish-brown horse or a female mule.

The atirātra sacrifice was referred to in the Rgveda. As it extended to the next day it was called atirātra. Besides the sacrifice of animals mentioned above, an ewe or ram was offered to Sarasvatī. The āptoryāma sacrifice was similar to the atirātra. According to the Asvalāyana Dharmasūtra, one who desired a good breed of cattle or one whose cattle

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90 Cited in Kane, P.V., op. cit.
91 Ibid, p. 1134-1135.
92 Ibid, p. 1117.
93 Ibid, p. 1204.
94 Ibid, p. 1205.
do not live, should perform this sacrifice. The fee was more than a thousand cows and the hotṛ should be given a white chariot with female mules attached to it.

The vājapeya sacrifice involved collective drinking, animal sacrifice, and a chariot race. The Taśtriya Samhitā held the vājapeya as one of the principal ceremonies among kings as it was an indication of a superior monarchy i.e. sāmṛājya. The ritual was to be held in autumn. It was originally an agricultural sacrifice for the purpose of food and drink. As compared to other sacrifices it was more festive and included people’s participation. The number seventeen was predominant in the sacrifice. There were seventeen stotras, seventeen Śāstras, seventeen animals to be sacrificed for Brhaspati, seventeen objects to be distributed as fees, even the sacrifice lasts for seventeen days besides seventeen chariots to be used etc. The first ritual was collective drinking, wherein seventeen cups of surā and seventeen cups of soma were to be presented and was linked with notions of fertility. Then a symbolic chariot race would take place, in which many members of the clan took part. The rite was performed by one who desired ādhipatya, over-lordship or prosperity or svārājya, independence. It was a symbolic contest between the gods for supremacy. The rāja wins the game; it was a kind of legitimization process where the higher position or status of the king was proclaimed. The vājapeya was a form of jyotiśoma and it followed the procedure of the sloṣaṅin sacrifice. Many early texts believed that the rājasūya sacrifice was higher in status than the vājapeya. It was believed that the vājapeya was performed by the brāhmaṇas who wished to be raised to the position of a purohita. The vājapeya was followed by the brhaspatisava in the case of the brāhmaṇa and rājasūya sacrifice for the king.

The rājasūya was a long sacrifice and continued for a span of two years or more. It comprised of many soma sacrifices along with animal sacrifices. The characteristic feature of this sacrifice was that it could be performed only by a ksatriya. Among the

98 Ibid, p. 112.
100 Ibid, p. 102.
rituals, there were twelve offerings called ‘ratnīnām havīmsi’ performed on twelve days, one after the other in the house of the ratnas, literally jewels. It included the king, queens, and other state functionaries.  

Offering were to be made in honor of Agni, Brhaspati, Soma, Rudra, Mitra, Varuna, and others. It was mythically connected with the consecration of Varuna or Indra and displayed many popular elements. With the performance of this sacrifice, one would achieve sāmrājya, overlordship, svārājya, self-rule, vairājya, sovereignty, pārāmeṣṭhya, royal greatness, māhārājya, superior power, sārvabhauma, absolute power, and a long life.

The aśvamedha yajña was another major sacrifice with a political connotation. Even in the late Vedic period, this was a major sacrifice. This sacrifice was mentioned in the Rgveda as well, but it only referred to the killing of the horse. According to N.N. Bhattacharyya, during the early phase, the horse-sacrifice did not have connotations of kingship. Paramount power was not the only expected result of the sacrifice; the Taittiriya Samhitā mentioned that the sin incurred by brāhmaṇa-hatyā could be expiated through the aśvamedha yajña. Similarly the Rāmāyaṇa mentioned that Daśaratha performed this sacrifice for the sake of progeny. Thus the sacrifice had other implications as well. The Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa associated the ritual with kingdom and abundance of food and cattle. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa mentioned that the sacrifice would lead to fulfillment of all desires. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa details of the various rituals associated with the sacrifice were mentioned. The rituals included the bathing of the sacrificial horse in a pool and then purification by sprinkling of water. After that the horse was set free for one year and was guarded by many princes. Then the horse was sacrificed and a dialogue took place between the chief queen and the priest. Sexual intercourse was enacted. It required a lot of resource mobilization and was an important sacrifice. The enormous resource required for this sacrifice could have been a reason why

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106 Cited in N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p. 4.
107 Cited in N.N. Bhattacharyya, op. cit.
it lost its relevance. Alternatives for the aśvamedha yajña were proposed. By the Purānic period, the emphasis was on other less expensive rituals, such as observing vratas, going to a ārtha etc.

On the issue of sacrifices, the Matsya Purāṇa progressed from the Vedic strictures. It condemned the killing of animals during the sacrifices, although in the initial chapters, it mentioned performing sacrifices as an important quality of a good king. But, there was no reference to any particular sacrifice. The aśvamedha yajña was mentioned in the case of Ila/Ilā. The sacrifice was performed by Ikṣvāku, brother of Ila and as a result Ila/Ilā became a kimpurusa, hermaphrodite (MP, 12.1-11). But details of the sacrifice were omitted. Another instance of the sacrifice was related to the Vṛṣṇis. Nala, also known as Nandanodaradundubhi, performed the aśvamedha yajña with the desire to get a son and by the end of the atirātra ceremony, his son Punarvasu arose from the sacrificial pool (MP, 44.64). He was known for his love for sacrifices and charities. This would show that the aśvamedha sacrifice was not just related to kingship but had other connotations as well.

Another sacrifice mentioned in the text was related to Bharata. According to the legend the king performed a big sacrifice with the aim to obtain a son, but he failed. Then he performed the marutasoma sacrifice (MP, 49. 28). The Maruts being pleased with him gave him Bhāradvāja, illicit son of Brhaspati and his brother’s wife, Mamatā.

The Matsya Purāṇa then mentioned that one must perform five sacrifices daily in honor of the deva, pitṛ, manuṣa, bhūta and ṛṣis (MP, 52.13). Further the text mentioned that one should worship the deva by performing sacrifices to the fire, ṛṣis by recitation of the Vedas, pitṛ by performing śrāddha, manuṣa by honoring guests and bhūta by scattering food for them on the ground. Those who devotedly follow the kriyā yoga and read the Vedānta, Smṛti and Śāstra, would attain everything (MP, 52. 26).

Another sacrifice dealt with in the Matsya Purāṇa was the navagraha yajña. The sacrifice was to be performed by those who wish to acquire wealth, peace, longevity and want to save themselves from the malignant effects of the planets, graha (MP, 93.2). The nine planets were divided into two, śubha-graha, auspicious i.e. Brhaspati, Śukra, Budha
and Soma and krūra-graha, inauspicious such as Śani, Maṅgala, Rāhu and Ketu.\(^{109}\)

According to the text, the nine planets to be appeased were Bhāskara, Sun, to be placed in the centre of the vedī, Lohita, Mars in the south, Guru, Jupiter, in the north, Bhārgava, Venus in the east, Soma, Moon, in the south-east, Śani, Saturn in the west, Rāhu, in the south-west, Ketu, in the north-west and Budha, Mercury in the north-east (\(MP, 93.11-12\)). Then it further mentioned thirty-two gods invoked such as Śiva, Pārvatī, Skanda, Brahmā, Indra, Aindri, Viṣṇu, Vināyaka, Durgā, Aśvinīkumārās, and others besides the nine planets. The text also mentioned the correlation of the planets with colors, such as the Sun should be symbolized with red, the Moon and Venus with white, Mercury and Jupiter with yellow and so on. The deities should be worshipped with rice, sugar, milk, curd etc. as well as fruits, flowers and incense. After performing the rituals with proper mantras for each planet, dāna and dakṣinā should be given to brāhmaṇas. Among the gifts, cow, land, and gold were important.

The Matsya Purāṇa later denounced the sacrifice of animals as a sinful act (\(MP, 143.11-15\)). It reiterated that the killing of animals cannot be dharma. It mentioned that rṣis could not perform an act of himsā, violence, in the course of sacrifice, although the text mentioned a discussion on what was the correct procedure, yajña or tapasyā. And finally it exalted asceticism as being higher than yajña. It highlighted tapasyā, as the underlying root, mūla, in the universe (\(MP, 143.41\)). The Matsya Purāṇa mentioned sacrifices such as the aśvamedha yajña, whose benefit could be gained by performing other religious acts such as dāna, for example, the kalpāpadā mahādōna (\(MP, 277\)), gosahasra mahādōna (\(MP, 278\)) and vrataś, such as Śiva caturdaśi and other rituals. By suggesting these alternatives, it undermined the importance of sacrifices. The emphasis was more on Purāṇic rituals. Thus a paradigm shift in the perspective of the Brāhmaṇical culture could be seen in the Purāṇas.

The inscriptions, especially the Vākāṭaka records mentioned sacrifices such as the agniṣṭoma, āptoryāma, ukthya, śoḍaśin, atirātra, vājaṣeya, bhṛhaspatisava, sādyaskra, jyotiṣṭoma and aśvamedha performed by Pravarasena I\(^{110}\) and Vindhyāśakti II.\(^{111}\) In the

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109 Burgess, IAS., 'Navagraha or Nine Planets and their Names', \(IA\), Vol. 33, 1904, p. 61.
111 Basim Plates of Vindhyāśakti, \(CI\), Vol. 5, pp. 137-55.
inscriptions of the Eastern branch, the āsvamedha sacrifice was also mentioned for Bhavanāga of the Bharasivas, matrimonially linked to the Vākāṭakas.112 Among the queens, only Prabhāvatīguptā mentioned the āsvamedha yajña, but that was performed by Samudragupta.113 It was noticeable that Prabhāvatīguptā did not mention the sacrifices for herself, although elite women did perform sacrifices as the Nanaghat inscription mentioned the donations and sacrifices performed by the queen Nāganikā.114 In fact the Śāstras were not unanimous on the issue of women performing sacrifices.115

The kings of the Vākāṭaka dynasty referred to the various sacrifices, but as being performed by an ancestor. They claimed the performance of sacrifices by an ancestor to legitimize their rule. The inscriptions, especially those of the Vākāṭakas, mentioned various sacrifices emphasizing on older Brāhmaṇical traditions. The attempt probably was to portray sacrifices performed by their ancestors, in a way following the Brāhmaṇical norm. But none of the later rulers claim to perform them. It would suggest that the sacrifices were losing relevance as a ritual. Alternatively, while the more recent members of the lineage were not able to perform such sacrifices, they could attribute these to their more illustrious but remote predecessors. Both inscriptions and the Purāṇas mentioned the āsvamedha sacrifice. But the Vākāṭakas mentioned it as being performed by an ancestor and the Purāṇas mentioned rituals which gave results equivalent to the āsvamedha sacrifice. In other words, the relevance of the sacrifices was undermined. By the Kalacuri period, there was no reference to any sacrifice performed by the ruling elite. They used Purāṇic methods for claiming ritual legitimacy. Probably, sacrifice as a norm was no longer relevant. There were references to other rituals such as the śrāddha and tīrtha instead of sacrifices. The image of kingship had shifted from a dharmic one, to one where bravery and beauty were more important.

II (b)

Among the religious acts, the śrāddha became a prominent ritual in the Purāṇas. The Brahma Purāṇa defines śrāddha as follows: ‘...whatever is given with faith to

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112 For details refer Chapter- 3.
115 Ibid, p. 159-60.
brāhmaṇas intending it to be for the (benefit of) pītṛs at a proper time, in a proper place, to deserving persons and in accordance with the prescribed procedure is called śraddha.116 The Mitākṣara on the Yājñavalkyasmrī similarly defined it as abandonment of articles of food or some other thing for the departed. The śraddha denoted three things, homa i.e. offering of pīṇḍa and gratifications of brāhmaṇas invited to a meal. According to texts such as the Agni Purāṇa, the pītṛ after being gratified bestow on men long life, progeny, wealth, learning, heaven, liberation besides all happiness and a kingdom.117 These were perhaps meant to make the ritual more relevant as it not only pleased the ancestors but also granted desires. Manu specified that three generations of a man viz., the father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather were to be identified with three orders of superintending pītṛ deities, Vasus, Rudras, and Ādityas, as the śraddha was performed.118 According to Manu, a householder should perform śraddha with food or water or with milk, roots, and fruits daily to please the fore-fathers.119 The śraddhas were further divided into three categories, nītya, naimittika, and kāmya. The nītya śraddha was to be performed daily or on a fixed day such as amāvasyā or the new moon day. The performer should not expect rewards. The naimittika was to be performed on an occasions such as the birth of a son and the kāmya śraddha was to be performed when one wished for a reward. Such performance of the śraddha, on kṛttikā or Rohini was done to achieve heaven or progeny.120 In another classification it was divided into ekoddhiṣṭa and pārvana. The first was offered to one deceased person while the pārvana was performed on amāvasyā or sankrānti and offered to three paternal ancestors.121 Manu classified the śraddha into five, nītya, naimittika, kāmya, vrddhi, and pārvana.122 The Gṛhyasūtras associated the mother, paternal grand-mother and the paternal great-grandmother with their respective husbands in the monthly śraddha.123 A śraddha could be separately offered to the mother in the Anvastakā rites, in Vṛddhi śraddha at Gaya and on

117 Cited in P.V. Kane, op. cit.
118 Cited in P.V. Kane, op. cit., p. 335.
119 Cited in P.V. Kane, op. cit., p. 369.
122 Ibid, p. 381
123 Ibid, p. 474.
the anniversary of her death. Generally it was believed that the mother partakes of the śrāddha food along with her husband. The concept of the śrāddha was also linked to inheritance. According to the Dāyabhāga, whoever performed śrāddha and offered pīṇḍa was entitled to be preferred as heir to the wealth of the deceased.

The Matsya Purāṇa discussed śrāddha in chapter 14-23. The first reference to śrāddha was regarding Manu the king making a libation of water for the deceased, pītrtarpanam (MP, 1.16). The Purāṇa also mentioned the progeny and the regions of various pītr, dividing them on the basis of caste. The first was the Barhisāda pītra whose chariot was pulled by peacocks. These pītras were venerated by devas, asuras, apsarās, gandharvas, rākṣasas and yaksas (MP, 15.2-3). These pītras possessed yogic powers and were givers of safety and freedom from fear. Their mānasā kanyā, daughter was Pivāri. The next region was Jyotirbhasas, where even the śudras performing śrāddha go to the heaven. The mānasā daughter of this pītra was Go (MP, 15.12-15). In the Maricigarbhas, kṣatriyas perform śrāddha. The mānasā daughter was Yaśodā (MP, 15. 16-18). The vaiśyas worshipped in the Kāmadughas and Virajā was the mānasā kanyā (MP, 15.20-24). The Narmadā was the mānasā kanyā of the Somapa pītras and it purified people with its sacred water (MP, 15.28). Further the text mentioned that the Manus came from the pītras and their progeny performed śrāddha. Offerings were to be made to Agnisoma and Yama.

Places were mentioned where one could perform śrāddha such as in water, in the hands of a brāhmaṇa, ear of a goat or horse, cow-pen etc. (MP, 15.32-33). The articles to be offered included water, kuśa grass, sesame, flesh, cow’s milk, sweets, honey, śyāmaka rice, sugarcane, white flowers and other such things. Things which should not be offered included hemp, ripe black mustard, lotus, masūr, milk of goat etc. In return the pītra when pleased would give robust health, heaven, and children. The text mentioned that the pītra should be satisfied first and then the Sun who was the lord of the pītras. As earlier, even by reading or listening about the family of the pītras, one would gain life and virtue (MP, 15.43). The śrāddha, according to the Matsya Purāṇa should be performed daily with grain, water, milk, roots and fruits (MP, 16.4). There were three kinds of śrāddha viz., nitya, naimittika and kāmya (MP, 16.5). For the nitya śrāddha no arghya, oblations,

125 As cited in Kane, op. cit., p. 510.
invocation, or Viśvedeva worship was required. The naimittika śrāddha was to be performed on the fourth and eighth day of each half month or on the full moon or half moon (MP, 16.6-7). The text also laid down the rituals to be performed, whom to invite for the feast along with the specification of what and how the brāhmaṇas were to be fed and treated. The invitees included a brāhmaṇa who was well versed in the Vedas, a brahmacārin, srotriya brāhmaṇa, minister who belonged to a good family, a devotee of Śiva, Pitr, Sūrya and a Vaiṣṇava (MP, 16.9). Besides a daughter’s son, a friend, preceptor, head of the vaiśyas, maternal uncle, kinsmen, and others should be invited. Another list of people to be avoided was also provided, which included the fallen, cursed, eunuch, diseased person, those having deformed nails, a younger brother who marries before the elder brother, inhabitants of the Mleccha country, non-Aryans, besides others (MP, 16.14-17). The pitr accompany the invited twice-born in the form of air and sit along with them at the time of the feast (MP, 16.18). Then one should perform the rituals according to the Gryhasūtras. The text mentioned that after the male ancestors, the wives, patni, of the ancestors should be invoked and dismissed in a similar manner (MP, 16.41). The performer should not be angry, and should concentrate on Nārāyana Hari (MP, 16.45). This was called the Anvāhara śrāddha, which was also called Pārvana.

The third kind was the kāmya śrāddha which was to be performed in a similar manner. It should be performed on amāvasyā and the characteristic feature was that the ball of rice in the middle was to be given to the wife, patni. This śrāddha was performed to get progeny (MP, 16.53). The text further mentioned that the host and those who partake in the ritual should not take food twice, should not go out of the village, or approach their wife. The Veda should not be read on that day (MP, 16. 56-57).

There was a long list of days when the śrāddha could be performed (MP, 17). The expected results differ accordingly. By performing the śrāddha on amāvasyā, fifteenth day of the krṣṇapakṣa, gajacchāyā i.e. when the full moon falls on a Monday, the third day of Vaiśākha, and the ninth day of Kārтика, one gets bliss and merit (MP, 17.2-5). By performing the śrāddha on the anniversary of the manvantara such as the ninth day of Āsvin, twelfth day of Kārтика, third day of Caitra and Bhādrapada, amāvasyā in Phālguna etc. one gets merit and the pitras are satisfied (MP, 17.6-8). Further by giving only water and tila on the seventh day of Māgha, called Rātha saptami, one gets the merit of
performing śrāddha for a thousand years (MP, 17.9-10). Two brāhmaṇas should be invited for daiyya śrāddha and three for pitriya śrāddha. First the brāhmaṇas invited for the daiyya śrāddha should be invited and interestingly ‘śanno devī’ should be invoked (MP, 17.15). Then the rituals such as offering flowers, chanting mantras, offering food and water to the pīträ etc. should be done. The pīträ were fond of flesh, mānsa. Offering of fish keeps them satisfied, trpta for two months, that of deer for three months, cattle for four months, sākū累累 bird for five months, goat for six, pārsata’s flesh for seven months, ena’s flesh for eight months, buffalo for ten, hare and turtle’s flesh for eleven, milk of cow and rice cooked in milk, for a year, flesh of ruru for fifteen, lion’s for twelve years, Kālaśāka and flesh of rhinoceros for a great number of years, cow’s milk with honey and rice cooked in cow’s milk and ghee made from cow’s milk satisfies the pīträ to a great degree (MP, 17. 31-36). Among the gifts to be given to the brāhmaṇas were sandal, lamp, flower, rice, besides the dakṣinā of cow, land and gold given according to the means of the worshipper (MP, 17.51). Afterwards the performer should scatter food on the ground, ucheśana for the attendants of the pīträ known as Āstika and Akutila (MP, 17.57). This was called the Sādhāranā śrāddha. This can be performed even by those who did not have the sacred thread, janayu, those who stay in a foreign land, and those who do not have their wives with them. Even the śūdras can perform this śrāddha but without reciting the mantras (MP, 17.64).

Next mentioned in the text was the ābhhyudikam or vrddhi śrāddha. It was performed on auspicious occasions such as festivals, utsava, a big sacrifice, yajña, marriage, udāhādimāṅgala etc. Surprisingly, in this ritual first the mother, then grandmother, great grandmother followed by father, grandfather and great grandfather and Viśvedevas was to be worshipped (MP, 17.66). The brāhmaṇas should be gifted with clothes and gold etc. Instead of tila, sesame, yava i.e. barley should be used. This ritual was also called the nāṇdimukha śrāddha (MP, 17.69). Śūdras could also undertake the vrddhi śrāddha with uncooked grain and by uttering the formula ‘namah’ in place of the Vedic mantras. Thus, the Purāṇa was discussing the possibility of Brāhmanical rituals such as the śrāddha being performed by śūdras, although it reiterated that a śūdra would achieve all ends by giving dāna, which was considered the best thing for him (MP, 17.71).
The Matsya Purāṇa also mentioned the rituals to be performed after the death of a kinsman, sapinda. By the death of a sapinda, a brāhmaṇa remained defiled for ten days, a ksatriya for twelve days, a vaiśya for fifteen days and a śūdra for a month (MP, 18.2-3). After the death, a lump of food called pātheya should be offered to the deceased. According to the text the departed was not carried by the attendants of Yama, rather he would observe his sons, wife, and other members of the family to see whether they provide for his long journey (MP, 18.6-7). Thus the ritual was important for the family members. A brāhmaṇa on the eleventh day after a death in the family should feast eleven brāhmaṇas whereas the ksatriya and others were to feed an uneven number of brāhmaṇas. After this period of defilement, ekoddīṭa śrāddha should be performed with all the above mentioned rituals (MP, 18.8-10). The śrāddha should be performed every month. Dāna of articles of daily use such as a well-bedecked bed should be given to the brāhmaṇa and his wife. They should be well dressed with ornaments and then worshipped. Then an image made of gold should also be given. Besides a bull should be freed and a cow and pitcher full of water and other eatables should be given away (MP, 18.11-14). After a year the sapinda karaṇa śrāddha should be performed. After this the deceased becomes eligible for a portion of the pārvana śrāddha and was to be worshipped in the vrūddhi śrāddha. The householder also becomes eligible to perform the nāndimukha śrāddha and other such śrāddha (MP, 18.17-18). After the sapinda karaṇa śrāddha the deceased would join the pītrs and become a part of the Agnisvāttta group of the pītrs (MP, 18.21). And if one does not follow the proper order, i.e. leave the ekoddīṭa śrāddha, and perform the Pārvana, one would commit the sin equal to the murder of father, mother, and brother and would go to hell (MP, 18.24). It was recommended that one should perform the ekoddīṭa śrāddha for a year and if a pitcher full of water along with grain was given, then the performer gets the benefit of the aśvamedha sacrifice (MP, 18.26).

The text also discussed how the pinda offering on the earth would reach the pītrs. According to the text, recitation of the name, and clan of the pītrs using sacred mantras with devotion, would carry the offerings to the pītrs (MP, 19.3-4). The Agnisvāttta and others were the rulers of the deceased and they carry the offering to the ancestors even though they might have been born under another name, clan, place, and time. The pītrs
carry the ball of food offered in the form of nectar if the deceased ancestor had become a 
de\textit{deva}, through his good \textit{karma}, actions. If the ancestor had taken birth as a \textit{dāitya} then the 
offering would reach him in the form of worldly pleasures. If he had taken the form of a 
beast then as grass, if a serpent then as air, if as yakṣa then he would get the offering as 
wine. Those who had taken birth as \textit{rākṣasas} would receive the offering in the form of 
flesh, if a \textit{dānava} then in the form of māyā, delusion, if as a ghost then in the form of 
blood and water and if as a human then he would receive the offerings in the form of 
grain, water and other objects of enjoyment (\textit{MP}, 19.5-9). Further it mentioned that the 
flowers offered during the ritual took the form of the following worldly objects, \textit{rati\textsc{sakti}}, 
sensual enjoyment, \textit{strī kāntā bhojya}, the power to enjoy beautiful women, along with 
good food, wealth, power of charity, beauty as well as health (\textit{MP}, 19.10). The fruits 
offered in the \textit{śrāddha} were attainment of brahman, good age, sons, wealth, knowledge, 
heaven, and bliss. In return the \textit{pitr\textsc{s}} would give kingdoms to their devotees (\textit{MP}, 19.12). 
The desired results were worldly in nature.

The \textit{Matsya Pur\textsc{ā}na} also mentioned the sacred places, \textit{tīrtha} which were most suited for 
performing the \textit{śrāddha}. The performance of the \textit{śrāddha} at such places would lead to 
ever-lasting benefits. Gaya was regarded as the principal \textit{pitr\textsc{tīrtha}. If one performed 
\textit{śrāddha}, the \textit{aśvamedha} sacrifice or set free a black bull, it would satisfy the \textit{pitr} (\textit{MP}, 
22.6). Then there was mention of Varanasi and Prayag, which were also known as 
\textit{pitr\textsc{tīrtha}. Of the other sacred places related to the performance of \textit{śrāddha}, there was 
mention of Daśāśvamedha, Gangadvara, Nanda, Lalita, Mayapuri, Mitrpada, Kedara, 
Ganga-sagara, Kurukssetra and other such places. There was also mention of sacred places 
near rivers such as Brahmasara near the Satadru river, Gangobheda near the Gomati, 
Ikṣumati \textit{tīrtha} at the confluence of Ganga. Besides there were references to sacred rivers 
such as the Sarayu, Iravati, Yamuna, Devika, Kali, Drisadvati, Candrabhaga, Venumati, 
Vetravati, Nilakunda, Rudrasarovara, Manasarovara, Mandakini, Acchoda, Vipasa and 
Sarasvati, which were sacred and dear to the \textit{pitr\textsc{s}} (\textit{MP}, 22.19-23). There was also 
mention of other \textit{pitr\textsc{tīrtha} such as Bhadreśvara, Viṣṇupada, and Narmadādvāra. The 
performance of the \textit{śrāddha} at these places was considered as an act of purity. It was 
considered that the rituals performed at these places would wash away all sins. Besides 
these mentioned above, there were various places and rivers which were mentioned as
sacred and performing śrāddha at those places would give immense satisfaction to the pitṛ and the performer gets a long life. One who reads or hears about the holy places for śrāddha would be wealthy and those who reside in those places should recite the name of the places to dispel all sins (MP, 22.93). Further the text mentioned that the śrāddha māhātmya was the dispeller of all sins and it was venerated even by the gods (MP, 22.94).

Interestingly, the story associated with śrāddha and its benefit was related to the killing of a cow and was situated in Kuruksetra. The story was of seven sons of rṣī Kauśīki, one of whom was a devotee of the pitṛs. After the death of their father there was drought and they decided to kill a cow. The younger son thereby sacrificed the cow for the pitṛs and performed the śrāddha. Thus they ate the flesh of the cow. As a result of their sins they were born in the house of a hunter but since they had performed the śrāddha with proper rituals, the pitṛs favored them. They could remember their past and thus spent their entire life in meditation. Then they were again reborn as deer on the Kālañjara Mountain and because of the glory of the pitṛs they recollected their past. They again devoted themselves to the worship of the pitṛs and Śiva. Then they were born as cakravāka birds. Later the youngest son wished to become a king and another two brothers wished to become courtiers and the rest did not have any wish, so they were born as brāhmaṇas. The youngest son, Pitṛvartī was born as the king of Pañcāla, Brahmadatta and his wife was the cow which was sacrificed. Thus if the pitṛs were satisfied they bestow long life, knowledge, heaven, emancipation, comfort and empire (MP, 21.40). Besides, one could enjoy the benefit of Brahmaloka from reading, hearing, or even relating the story of the pitṛs and Brahmadatta (MP, 21.41).

Thus the ritual of the śrāddha was discussed at length in the Matsya Purāṇa with details regarding the rites, place, and time. These rituals were taking the place of the earlier sacrifices and the text gave more stress on the performance of these rituals. Another aspect was these rituals were for the masses, unlike the sacrifices and dāna which were for the elite section of society. To popularize the ritual further, mere reading or listening to the śrāddha māhātmya was considered beneficial.
The Vākāṭakas in their inscriptions did not give much importance to these rituals. The records of the kings and queens do not mention any such rituals. The Pandhurna plates of Pravarasena II mentioned *tilavācana*.126 But according to Mirashi it was mentioned in the third plate, which was spurious.127 It mentioned that an additional twenty-five *nīvartana* of land along with land for building a house, was given on the occasion of the *śrāddha* in favor of the *brāhmaṇa* Somārya, who was one of the donees of the original grant. Probably, during this period the concept of *śrāddha* at a *tīrtha* was not very popular.

The Kalacuri records referred to the ritual of *śrāddha* in the inscriptions. The Banaras plates of Karna, year 794 mentioned the *śrāddha* performed by Karna at Prayag in honor of his father, Gāṅgeyadeva. The record mentioned:

"From his glorious and victorious camp fixed at Prayaga, the parama-bhāṭāraka, mahārājādhirāja, and paraṃēśvara, the illustrious Karna... Be it known to you that on Saturday, the second (tīthi) of the dark fortnight of Phālguna, on the occasion of the first annual *śrāddha* of our father, the illustrious Gāṅgeyadeva at this very place. We, having bathed in the Venī, having worshipped with great devotion and with five kinds of offering made with a collection of food and having performed the *śrāddha* with unequalled faith, have given as a grant with a libation of water, the village Srusī included in the bhūmi of Kasi..."128

This record not just mentioned the performance of the ritual but also its connection with a specific place, i.e. Prayag in this case. It also referred to the rites, as well as the offering and giving land as a gift to the *brāhmaṇa*. The Simra stone inscription of Karna also mentioned the deaths of certain Hemadopali, Malorāgarā, rāut Taipa Suvasthala, and Kaidehī.129 But since the record was fragmentary, the objective of the grant was not clear. The Rewa plates of Jayasimha, year 926 also referred to the *śrāddha*, although the term was not used. According to Mirashi the *tīthi* mentioned in the record was related to the death of the father of the donor *mahārāṇaka* Kīrtivarman.130 The record mentioned that the donor gave an offering, *pinda*, on the fourth *tīthi* of the bright fortnight of the month

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127 Mirashi, V.V., *CLI*, Vol. 5, p. 64.
of Bhādrapada in the year 926, in honor of his father rānaka Vatsarāja. The benefit desired was religious merit for his parents and self.

The Kalacuris mentioned the śrāddha in their records along with references to the rituals and places associated with it. These rituals were popular as records of both king and feudatories mentioned them. But none of the records by women mentioned these rituals. The śrāddha was performed at a tīrtha known for the purpose. Thus the Kalacuris practiced Purāṇic traditions unlike the Vākāṭakas. They did not refer to sacrifices but mentioned the śrāddha. Again women did not have the access to these rituals as is evident from both the texts as well as the inscriptions.

II (c)

Purāṇic traditions lay emphasis on visiting sacred places. Large rivers, mountains, and forests were venerated as the abode of the gods. In the Rgveda, the term tīrtha denoted a road or a way. The tīrtha were revered on three counts, natural characteristics of the locality, the peculiarity of water body or austerities performed by sages. The spot was one where one could accumulate merit. According to the Skanda Purāṇa, a spot on the earth resorted to by the sages for attainment of merit was called a tīrtha. They were generally related to the water bodies. According to the Padma Purāṇa all rivers were holy, whether flowing through a village or a forest. Rivers were commonly deified and were revered as sacred. It was believed that they not only purified one physically but also freed one from the sins incurred. Mountains were also considered sacred. According to the Vāmana Purāṇa, the seven forests in Kuruksetra were sacred and remover of sins. The Purāṇas placed pilgrimage above the sacrifices. In the Mahābhārata, a comparison was made between sacrifices to gods and pilgrimages: the sacrifices needed a priest, materials, wife, and money; thus they were only for the elites. On the other hand, pilgrimage had no such preconditions. Purity of heart and actions was the only

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133 Ibid.
134 As cited in Kane, op. cit.
135 As cited in Kane, op. cit., p. 560.
136 As cited in Kane, op.cit., p. 561.
requirment for pilgrimage. The *Brahma Purāṇa* classified tīrtha into four divisions i.e., *daiva*, created by gods, *āsura*, those associated with *asuras* such as Gaya, ārṣa, those established by sages and *mānuṣa*, created by kings. They were categorized according to a descending order of superiority. Going to a tīrtha and performing penance was highlighted as the best among the religious acts. Performing *śrāddha* at a holy place was also considered pious. As discussed in the earlier section, *śrāddha* at a sacred place was an appropriate religious act according to the Purāṇas.

Vijay Nath holds the tīrtha as representing an acculturation of tribal culture by introducing Brāhmaṇical religious acts in remote areas, as most of the pilgrimage centers were away from the Brāhmaṇical core cultural zone. The tīrthas were seen as a common ground for different religious traditions, formed by a new class of ritual specialists. According to G.P. Upadhyay the growth of cities as the centre of trade and the seat of political power made an important contribution towards the formations of tīrthas. He perceives that there was a connection between agriculture, especially plough cultivation, as the basic factor for the rise and growth of the tīrtha. For instance, Prayag was related to the sacrifice of Prajāpati, which was linked to ‘prakṛṣṭa yaga’ in the Purāṇas. This term was related to the art of ploughing. The traditional importance of Prayag was as a centre of cultivation. Thus, places which became relevant throughout the historical period were considered auspicious or sacred and were proclaimed as a tīrtha. The most important point was that people were encouraged to go to such places to attain religious merit, as opposed to the earlier method of performing sacrifices and giving huge gifts.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* gave detailed information regarding pilgrimage and the various places known as a tīrtha. Interestingly, the text also proclaimed that those who could not leave their homes could also observe tīrtha such as satyatīrtha, observance of truth.

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138 As cited in Kane, op. cit., p. 567.
dayātīrtha, performance of charity and indriyānītīrtha, control of passion (MP, 22.80). Visiting a sacred place was considered equivalent to the Vedic yajña and could be performed by all, irrespective of their sex and caste. This would imply that pilgrimage was open to women and śūdras. The Purāṇas mentioned a huge list of tīrtha; the most prominent ones were Prayag, Kasi, and Gaya. The Narmada as well as the Ganga and Yamuna were held as prominent sacred rivers.

The first reference to the tīrtha was in the story of Dakṣa and Sati. Places associated with the worship of the goddess were mentioned as tīrtha. Performing austerities at such places as well as reciting the name of the deity was considered fruitful (MP, 13.24-25). The names of the goddess and the places associated were Viśālakṣī at Kasi, Lingadhārinī at Naimiśāraṇya, Lalitā at Prayag, Kāmākṣī at Gandhamādana hills, Kumudā at Manasa Lake, Bhadrakārṇikā in Gokarna, Maṅgalā at Gangatīrtha, Amṛtā at Veṇā, and other such names and places. In all, the text mentioned hundred and eight places and names of the goddess (MP, 13. 26-54). As usual even hearing or reading the names of the places or bathing in the tīrtha, one would accrue the benefit of being liberated from all sins and would go to Śivaloka and stay there for one kalpa. And one who resides at those places would attain nirvāṇa, liberation (MP, 13. 55-56). Although separate places and names of the goddess were mentioned which would reflect her independent status, the text at the same time related her to Śiva.

In the text, chapters 103-12 described the importance of Prayag as a tīrtha. According to the text, the Prayag māhātmya was related to the Mahābhārata war. According to the legend, Yudhiṣṭhira wanted to wash off his sins after the war and the best place to do so was Prayag as suggested by the sage Mārkandeya (MP, 103.23-25). It was called the Prajāpati ksetra. Further, people who bathe there go to heaven and those who die there would be liberated from the life cycle (MP, 104.4-5). One would wash away sins by mere recall of the sacred place. According to the Matsya Purāṇa, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā, all resided in Prayag. Further, it mentioned that there were five channels at the Prayag and the Ganga was the central one. Just by mentioning the Ganga one could cleanse all sins. Those who were free from all vices would be liberated from sins and attain their desires at this confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna (MP, 104. 15-16). Even the devas, dānavas,
rsis, Siddhas and Cāranas go to heaven after taking a bath at Prayag (MP, 104.19). But there was no mention of the other channels at Prayag.

The resultant benefit from bathing at Prayag was gendered. According to the text, the weak, diseased and old who give up their lives at Prayag go in a bright vimāna surrounded by apsarās and all their desires get fulfilled. If he desired rebirth, he would be honored in heaven with precious gems and the apsarās would sing beautiful songs (MP, 105.3-6). Again the desire was not glory or emancipation; rather it was luxury that was desired. Further, he would take birth in the house of a wealthy man. Even if one thinks of Prayag on his death bed, he would go to the region of Brahmā. The text further described the earthly benefits such as going to the land full of gold, attainment of all desires, the company of sages and being surrounded by several beautiful women, Siddhacāraṇas and Gandharvas and then he would be born as the king of Jambudvīpa, Jambudvīpapati (MP, 105.9-11). Further, if one gives cows and gold as gifts during the deva or pītā worship, one would attain great merit and virtue. However, it was advised that a brāhmaṇa should not accept gifts at sacred places. At the same time, it is suggested to give a gift of a pale red cow with horns and hoofs plated in gold and silver along with a milking pot, cloth, and jewels, to a dispassionate brāhmaṇa well-versed in the Vedas. The resultant benefit was residence in heaven for innumerable years (MP, 105.15-19). The gift of a cow to a brāhmaṇa was considered very pious (MP, 105.22). Furthermore, giving dāna at a sacred place within one’s means enhances merit and entitles one to live in heaven till dissolution (MP, 106.10). One who dies near Akṣayavata in Prayag goes to the region of Śiva. Sprinkling the sacred water would give benefits equal to the aśvamedha and rājasūya sacrifices (MP, 106.20-21). Thus, once more sacrifices were undermined to highlight the importance of tīrthas, especially Prayag. Those who go to the Prayag according to the prescribed rules would be freed from all sins and liberate oneself from Rāhu. The place itself was said to contain sixty crores and ten thousand holy places (MP, 106.23). Among these places, the hamsaprapta tīrtha i.e. north of Pratisthana and on the eastern bank of the Ganga was well known. By taking a bath there one could get the benefit of the aśvamedha sacrifice and would reside in heaven (MP, 106.32-33). As earlier, one of the benefits of dying at Urvaśīramana was that one would go to heaven and enjoy the company of the apsarā Urvaśī; later he would become the lord of ten thousand grāma and
hundreds of maids like Urvasī would take him as their husband, pati. The imagination did not end here, as it is further mentioned that he would wake up from his bed to the music of their jingling of waist chains and anklets and he would enjoy all the luxuries (MP, 106.34-39). Thus the resultant benefit was again earthly gains and the emphasis was on sexual and sensual gratifications. One who would wear white raiments and had meals once a day and maintain sexual purity would become a king, mahābhūpati and get hundreds of beautiful women, nārī, adorned with fine ornaments. He would rule over a vast territory (MP, 106. 40-41). Similarly there were others places such as the Daśāvamedha tīrtha, where one would reap the benefit of the aśvamedha sacrifice (MP, 106.46-47). Overall, the river Ganga was extolled as the purest of all and taking a bath in it would liberate one from all sins. Those who bathe especially at the Gangadvara, Prayag, and Gangasagara would go to heaven and would never be born again (MP, 106.54). The text further mentioned various other places and how they liberate one from all sins and lead to the attainment of luxuries in the other world. Every step taken in the Prayag would reap the benefit of the aśvamedha yajña (MP, 108.4). After the details on the purity of the Ganga, the text then mentioned Yamuna, daughter of the Sun, Tapanasya sutā. According to the text, both the rivers were dispeller of sins. The mere sight of the river gives happiness and seven generations would be purified by taking a dip and sipping the holy water. One would be emancipated by dying there (MP, 108.23-26). One who reads or hears the māhātmya in the morning would be freed from all sins and would go to the heaven (MP, 108.34). The twice born, who reads this māhātmya gets purified and would go to heaven (MP, 110.15). Thus there was a reference to the caste hierarchy, which was much more prominent in the section dealing with fines and punishments, as seen earlier. In the end, the text mentioned the relevance of the tīrtha i.e. it was the method by which the poor could attain emancipation and get the benefit of various yajña mentioned by the sages (MP, 112.12-15).

Thus proclaiming the tīrthas as equivalent to the sacrifices undermined the importance of the sacrifices and at the same time it made benefits of the yajña accessible to the masses. The emphasis was on going to sacred places or even just reading or listening to stories about them so as to reap the benefits. The result of visiting such places was not just liberation from all sins but luxuries in the next world as well as in the next birth.
The text in later chapters shifted the most pious tīrtha from the Prayag to Kasi. Chapter 180 extolled Kasi or the avimukta kṣetra as the most the sacred place, where one could attain mokṣa (MP, 180.57). The concept of tīrtha was mentioned in a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī. In chapter 180-185, the text described the glory of Kasi. The text mentioned in its conversational manner that the avimukta tīrtha was the best and charities, sacrifices, meditations, ascetism and other similar deeds performed there would lead to everlasting benefit and sins get destroyed as one enters the sacred place (MP, 181.14-18). The text then specified that all i.e. brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiṣyas, śūdras, vaivarṇasaṅkara, kṛmi, mleccha, kīṭa, pipilikā, mrga and paksi who die in Kasi in course of time would attain the realm of Śiva and become Rudras and wear the moon on their foreheads and also get eyes on the forehead and thus would become like Śiva (MP, 181.19-21). But women were not included in this category, or, if they were implicitly included, this was not specified. Other places such as the Rudrakoṭi, Gokarna, Rudrakarna, etc. were declared to be equally sacred (MP, 181.25-26). The text further mentioned sects such as the Siddhas and Pāśupatas. One who would stay in Kasi even for a moment would beget the fruits of highest ascetism and those who stay for a month gets the benefit of having observed the Pāśupata vrata (MP, 182.12). Thus one would be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. Surprisingly one could be purified from the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa (MP, 182.17), which was supposedly one of the greatest sins one can commit. Interestingly, the desired reward from this tīrtha was not luxury; rather the stress was on emancipation. The worshippers of Pārvatī, Viśṇu, as well as Śūrya would attain emancipation and go to the realm of Śiva. The tīrtha was the giver of yoga, peace and was a dispeller of all fears and other obstacles (MP, 182.26). By listening about the tīrtha one was liberated from all sins (MP, 183.10). The chapter continued in a philosophical note and mentioned the two kinds of yogas i.e. Sāṇkhya and Yoga. Those who held that Śiva was omnipresent were the Yogis; they were of two kinds, nirgūṇa and sagūṇa (MP, 183.43-48).

Performing sacrifices and giving charity was also an important activity at the tīrtha. Giving cows which had horns covered with gold to a brāhmaṇa who was well versed in the Vedas on the bank of Varanasi would liberate seven generations from bondage. Gifts of gold, silver, clothes, grain etc. to a brāhmaṇa in Kasi would acquire everlasting
benefits. By taking a bath in this tīrtha one would be free from all diseases and would get the benefit of ten aśvamedha sacrifices. Further one who would feed brāhmanas would attain the benefit of the sautrāmani sacrifice. And one who would give ten gold coins in charity would get the benefit of the agnihotra sacrifice. It was not just the benefits were accounted in the form of sacrifices performed but benefits were also calculated in terms of money. The benefit of giving away a broom was equivalent to five hundred gold coins. Similarly the benefit of giving sandal was equal to one thousand gold coins. The gift of flowers and garlands was equal to one hundred thousand gold coins (MP, 183.68-81).

Thus the new money economy was part of the conceptual framework; benefits calculated in terms of gold coins were replacing the equivalence in terms of sacrifices. The importance of the tīrtha was enumerated as the place where even unchaste women, bhogaparāyana strī, dying here attain bliss (MP, 184.25). Men attain yoga and bliss in this tīrtha which they could not attain anywhere else. Thus the stress was on attaining bliss, emancipation, liberation from sins and rebirth. In this māhātmya provisions were made for women to attain bliss, although the details were missing.

From chapter 186-194, the text glorified the Narmada as a tīrtha. Purāṇas such as the Matsya Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa, Padma Purāṇa, and others mentioned the greatness of the Narmada as a tīrtha. It arose from the body of Rudra, i.e. from Amarkaṇṭaka. Amarkaṇṭaka was described as the abode of Mahēśvara and his spouse, Umā. Similar to the description of Prayag māhātmya, the Narmada was described in the conversation between the sage Mārkaṇḍeya and Yudhiṣṭhira. The Narmada was described as the foremost among rivers and the dispeller of all sins (MP, 186.7). The Ganga was sacred in Kankhala, the Sarasvati in Kuruksetra, whereas the Narmada was sacred everywhere (MP, 186.10). The Matsya Purāṇa marked a kind of gradation of the tīrthas. The text mentioned that the water of the Yamuna purified after one bathes for seven days, those of, the Sarasvati in three days, those of the Ganga at once, while the water of the the Narmada purified at the mere sight of it (MP, 186.11). According to Vijay Nath this gradation may have been the result of an attempt to create some kind of structural order among the mass of tīrthas. This was caused by the large scale integration of far-flung

peripheral regions into the core cultural traditions. The Narmada was further described as the most charming and attractive of all, in the country of Kaliṅga, the forest of Amarkaṇṭaka and all the three realms. The gods, demons, gandharvas, ascetics attain emancipation at the Narmada. This sacred place was also associated with the deity Śiva. The text mentioned that after taking a bath in the Narmada and worshipping with flower and incense, one could please Maheśvara (MP, 186.17). The gendered nature of the text again becomes prominent. By giving libations to the manes with sesame and water, the seven generations would go to heaven and the person would enjoy heaven for sixty thousand years with apsarās, gandharvas, and Siddhas. Afterwards he would be born as a wealthy person (MP, 186.20-21). If a person, who has control over his senses and is free from anger and a devotee of Śiva, dies on the banks of the Narmada then he would reside in heaven for a century in the company of the apsarās, gandharvas and Siddhas. He could also stay with the gods and would be reborn as a rājā with a fine palace, jewels, pillars with precious stones and with servants and maids. His gateway would be like that of Indra’s palace and he would stay with many women, stī and enjoy their company without any fear of diseases (MP, 186.23-33). Thus once more, the reward was in terms of worldly luxury and not spiritual ones. Further the text mentioned the various rivers, which were sacred, such as the Kapilā and Viśālyakarana. The benefit of the aśvamedha can be accrued by taking a bath on its bank (MP, 186.57). Those who die on the bank of the rivers would be liberated from all sins and attain Rudraloka. Any one who bathes in any tīrtha on the bank of the Narmada would get the benefit of the aśvamedha sacrifice. Then the text mentioned that by bathing and giving charities near the Ganga, Sarasvati and Narmada one would beget equal benefits (MP, 186.59). Thus, all the rivers were considered to be of equal status in later verses. At the same time, it is declared that by taking a bath in the Narmada and its confluence with the sea one would get ten fold benefits (MP, 186.65). The legends associated with the river included those of the demon, Vānāsura, Tripuri and its capture by Śiva. Next the text mentioned the confluence of the Kaveri and Narmada, where Kuvera practiced ascetism (MP, 189.6). Afterwards he got a boon from Śiva and became the lord of the Yakṣas. The text further enumerated the glory of the confluence as a dispeller of all sins. One gets the benefit of the aśvamedha yajña

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144 Nath, Vijay, Purāṇas and Acculturation, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi: 2001, p. 128.
and goes to the realm of Rudra. There he would enjoy the company of women for many years and would be later born as a king (MP, 189.13-20). One who drinks the water of this confluence gets the benefit of the cāndrāyana and also gets the benefit of taking a bath at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna. He would as a result attain heaven. Again the embedded caste system was enumerated in the result of praying to the river Narmada. If a brāhmaṇa prays at the Narmada, then he would become well versed in the Vedas, if a kṣatriya then he would be victorious in war, a vaiśya would become wealthy, and a śūdra would get bliss (MP, 190.23-24). Many of the tīrthas mentioned, which were associated with the Narmada were based on the names of demons such as the Meghanāda tīrtha, Rāvanaśvara tīrtha besides the Koṭi tīrtha, Vileśvara tīrtha, Bhīmeśvara tīrtha, Soma tīrtha, Nandi tīrtha and other such places. By bathing in the Koṭi tīrtha one would become the ruler of a kingdom. For one who gives charity, the blessings increase many fold. One who would stay and observe fasts in the Parmaśobhana tīrtha on the seventh day of the śuklapakṣa in the month of Māgha would become free from the effects of old age, sufferings and also would never be dumb, blind, and deaf. Besides he would become handsome and would be surrounded by women (MP, 191.78-79). Interestingly, it also mentioned that if woman, nārī, takes a bath in this tīrtha, she would become the wife, patnī of Indra after becoming as beautiful as Gaurī (MP, 191.55-57). Similarly one who takes a bath at the Ahalyā tīrtha would enjoy the company of women (MP, 191.89). The gendered nature of the text becomes evident as according to it one who worships Ahalyā on this tīrtha on the fourteenth day of the śuklapakṣa in the month of Caitra would always be born as a male, nara and would be beloved of women and have a handsome form as Kāma (MP, 191.91-92). Thus, attaining a beautiful form was considered more relevant than spiritual gains.

The Śukla tīrtha on the Narmada was described in detail. This placed was considered to be sacred on all occasions and was the giver of the greatest boons (MP, 192.13-14). The text mentioned that rājaṛsi Cānaka attained Siddhi at this tīrtha. The identification of this person is intriguing. Besides other details on this tīrtha there was also mention of women giving charity at Śukla tīrtha and worshipping Śiva and Kumāra. Those who did so would go to the realm of the lord (MP, 192.33). Thus it was one of the few cases where the benefit for women was not the gain in physical beauty; rather it was
emancipation. Further one who gives charities after taking a bath on the full moon day, the fourth day of the fortnight and on a sankrāntī, according to one's means pleases Hari-Śaṅkara and gets great benefit (MP, 192.35-36). By taking a bath at the confluence of the Kanyā tirtha one goes to the realm of Devī (MP, 193.83). This was only reference to the realm of the goddess in the context of a tirtha. According to the Matsya Purāṇa there were ten crore tirthas between the Narmada and Amarakaṇṭaka and rṣis reside in each of them (MP, 194.43-44). The Narmada was resorted to by the Agnihotris and learned men and was the giver of wishes. Further the text mentioned that even listening to its glory, barren women, vandyā beget sons, unfortunate become fortunate, saubhāgya, a maid, kanyā gets a handsome husband, the brāhmaṇa becomes versed in the Vedas, the ksatriya becomes victorious in war, the vaiśya becomes wealthy, the śūdra attains emancipation from the bondage and the idiot, mūrkha becomes learned and one who hears it never suffers from the pangs of separation and hell (MP, 194.48-50). It was notable that for the same religious acts, benefits were different for men and women. The caste distinction was also noticeable.

The tirthas as could be noticed in the Matsya Purāṇa had gained relevance in the region and there were innumerable sacred places. There was a recommendation to visit these places and the benefit accrued was in terms of sacrifices and sometimes in monetary terms. The sacrifices were losing ground and the Purāṇas were referring to other methods of attaining desires, which ranged from luxury, beautiful women, jewels, kingship besides emancipation, liberation from all sins and deliverance of the ancestors.

As noted earlier, the Vākāṭakas do not adhere to the Purāṇic norms and follow the traditional method of claiming power i.e. mentioning sacrifices. The Vākāṭaka inscriptions do not mention any tirthas. Probably the concept was not much in practice. The Kalacuris, on the other hand, mentioned tirthas in their grants. The concept of going to a tirtha or else creating a tirtha was prevalent during the Kalacuri times. The records mention the death of Gāṅgeyadeva along with his wives under a Banyan tree at Prayag.\(^{145}\)

This was according to the prescribed norm in the Purāṇas, which recognised it as the best way to attain mokṣa. Besides, Prayag was considered as the most sacred place. The

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observance of the śrāddha by Karṇa has been discussed in the earlier section. There was also a reference to Karṇatīrtha, which according to V.V. Mirashi was a ghāṭ built by Karṇa at Allahabad. There were mention of Prabhāsa, Gokarna, Gaya and other tīrthas, where Vimalaśiva, the donee, and spiritual initiator of the king Jayasimha had paid his debt to the gods. The Goharwa Plates of Karṇa also mention Arghatīrtha, where Śiva was worshipped on the full moon day of the month of Kārtika. The Khairha plates of Yaśahkarna mentioned the Godavari and the holy place of Bhīmeśvara. The Narmada was praised in the inscription of Vijayasingha of the Tripuri branch. It mentioned the river as:

‘...The Narmada which flows with sacred and extremely limpid water from the world which is the abode of the best of the sages (like) a maiden born in a noble family, and which is praised by the words of the Siddhas, removes by (mere) sight the weight of the sins due to kali age. On its bank is a city named Tripuri where is a king named the illustrious Vijayadeva....’

It not only mentioned the tīrtha in terms similar to the Purāṇas but also linked the city with the tīrtha. Thus, it was claimed that the capital was sacred. The Purāṇic city Tripurī was associated with demons and Śiva’s victory in the text. The Purāṇic Tripurī was identified with the region around Tewar. The Purāṇic city was associated with the modern Jabalpur region and the Kalacuris. Śaivism was prevalent in this region as was also evident from inscriptions and sculptural evidence. The Sarkho Plates of Ratnadeva II, year 880, mentioned the tīrtha known as Jambavat where the donee Padmanabhā’s great grandfather, Mahasona fasted for fifty days and attained liberation. This place was identified as Jambufīrtha mentioned in the Padma Purāṇa, which was associated with the Śiva liṅga known as Jambavanteśvara. An inscription of the Saryupara branch

mentioned the river Gaṇḍakī, identified as the river Gandak in Uttar Pradesh, from where the grant was made on the occasion of sankrānti.\footnote{Kahla Plates of Sodhadeva, (Vikrama) year 1135, CII, Vol. 4, Pt. II, p. 396.} The grants by men, including both kings and ministers, mentioned tīrthas. However, these were not mentioned by queens. Most of the tīrthas mentioned, except the Narmada and Tripuri, were outside the region of the Kalacuris. The reason for this pattern may have been the popularity of these places. Thus, unlike the Vākāṭakas, the Kalacuris followed Purāṇic traditions, although, the benefit desired from the mention of these tīrtha was not stated in the records. They only refer to emancipation and not to any desire for luxury as was specified in the Matsya Purāṇa.

II (d)

A vrata is a vowed observance, a religious act of devotion and austerity, performed for the fulfilment of a specific desire.\footnote{Chakrabarti, Kunal, Religious Process. The Purāṇas and the Making of the Regional Tradition, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 2001, p. 235.} It was also defined as an ascetic regime i.e. observing a fast, along with the worship of a deity, performing which the devotee would obtain worldly as well as other worldly objectives.\footnote{Lubin, T., ‘Vrata Divine and Human in the Early Vedas’, JAOS, Vol. 121, No. 4, 2001, p. 565.} In the RgVeda, vrata was explained in terms of rules to be observed and was linked with deities such as Varuṇa.\footnote{Cited in T. Lubin, op. cit., p. 566.} The Sūtra literature also emphasised on the importance of vrata and associated it with tapas i.e. hardship. The works on vrata also mentioned the upacāras such as worshipping the deity with flowers and other substances.\footnote{Kane, P.V., HD, Vol 5, Pt. I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona: 1974, (2nd edition), p. 37.}

The Matsya Purāṇa described vrata in terms of rules in the context of kingship. It described the vrata to be observed by the king such as the indravrata, varuṇavrata etc. as discussed earlier. In the Purāṇic period; it was transformed into a religious rite associated with the Purāṇic gods and became a ritual observance. Kunal Chakrabarti holds that the Purāṇic vrata was an artificial device through which the Vedic and Tantric elements were incorporated into non-Brāhmaṇical rites. Thus vratas became a part of the Brāhmaṇical rituals.\footnote{Chakrabarti, Kunal, Religious Process. The Purāṇas and the Making of the Regional Tradition, Oxford University Press, Delhi: 2001, pp. 249-50.} It was held that the vrata was basically a non-Brāhmaṇical ritual practiced
exclusively by women but later adopted by the Purāṇa writers. To provide a popular basis, it was recommended that vrata could be performed by all members of the community irrespective of gender and class. Thus unlike other rituals, vratas could be performed by women and śūdras. Again, celebration of a vrata involved an entire neighborhood, the ritual was conducted by brāhmaṇas, and reading out the Purāṇas to performers were essential aspects of the vrata. Thus, the vratas were not just popular among the masses but also affirmed the position of the brāhmaṇa as the ritual specialist. In most of the vratas, brāhmaṇas had to be fed and presented with gifts.

*Vratas* were to be performed in the honor of the deities, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Pārvatī besides others. The Purāṇas understand vrata as niyama for the purpose of tapas. It included the observance of a fast, sleeping on the ground, bathing, abstaining from sexual intercourse etc. If the performer, male or female, failed to observe all the injunctions due to physical or other inability, there was provision for performing the same through a substitute. Thus, it was a Brāhmaṇical rite which fixed rules of behaviour including restrictions and at the same time prescribed actions to produce desired results. This could be the probable reason for its popularity among the masses. The vratas were performed in order to please the deities.

Unlike other religious rites, which would confer benefits in the other world, the vrata could produce results in this world as well. *Vratas* were also instrumental in reinforcing Brāhmaṇical ideology such as varnāśrama dharma. The patriarchal social order based on gender differentiation was also established through the vratas such as the *patissaubhāgyavardhana vrata*, performed by married women for their husband’s long life. There were vratas specifically for women, who observed vrata with an aspiration to get a desirable husband or a son. Thus, the text laid down rules to be followed by married women by defining their status as dependent on that of their husbands. It also

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asserted that the performance of the *vrata* was a compulsory religious duty for women.\footnote{Chakrabarti, Kunal, ‘Textual Authority and Oral Exposition: The *Vrata* Ritual as a Channel of Communication in Early Medieval Bengal’, *Studies in History*, 10, 2, 1994, p. 221.}

A gendered distinction can be noticed in case of women, as they had to obtain permission from their guardian, father, husband, or son to perform the *vrata*.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* mentioned a huge list of vows to be performed for Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvatī and other deities.\footnote{Refer Appendix 4.} The highest number of *vratas* was recommended for Śiva. In some of the *vratas* performed, Viṣṇu was venerated along with Lakṣmī, Madana, Rati, Rohiṇī, and Candra, while in some, Śiva was worshipped along with Umā and Sūrya. There were some *vratas* exclusively for Pārvatī, to be performed by both men and women. The reward was generally liberation from sins, destruction of evil, good health, fortune, and realm of the deity. Some *vratas* mentioned benefit in terms of the Vedic *yajña*. For instance, the performance of the *akṣayatriṣṭya vrata* gave the benefit of the *rājasūya yajña*. Some *vrata*, such as the *rudra vrata*, gave the benefit of power or kingship in the next birth. Thus *vratas* were performed for *bhukti* and *mukti* which would lead to the attainment of bliss.\footnote{Kumar, Pushpendra, *Sakti Cult in Ancient India*, Bhartiya Publishing House, Varanasi: 1974, p. 213.}

Of the various *vratas* performed in honor of Viṣṇu,\footnote{Appendix 4.1.} the first reference was to the *madana dvādaśi vrata*, which was observed by Diti as a result of which she became the mother of the Marutás and was liberated from grief (*MP*, 7.7). The fast was performed in the month of Caitra and on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight. This vow was performed in honor of Kāma and Rati, along with *mantras* and gifts to *brāhmaṇas*. The *Matsya Purāṇa* mentioned that lord Janārdana in the form of Kāma should be worshipped (*MP*, 7.20). The text mentioned that one who would perform this ordinance would be liberated from all sins, beget worthy children, and die in peace (*MP*, 7.27-28). But in the story that followed, in place of the *vrata*, the *putresṭi* sacrifice was mentioned. This could be the initial period when *vratas* were not very popular and sacrifices had not lost their attraction.

The correlation between *vrata* and women was noticed in the text. Kunal Chakrabarti mentions that the *vrata* was women’s domain which was taken up and made into a

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167 Refer Appendix 4.
169 Appendix 4.1.
communal festival with Brāhmaṇical formulae and the role of the brāhmaṇa.\textsuperscript{170} In this way women could stay in the household and at the same time attain happiness and other assurances.\textsuperscript{171} According to the legend, Nārada asked Śiva regarding the vrata to be performed by married women, nārī or a widow, vidhavā. Besides mentioning the procedure to ensure wealth, health, beauty etc., it specified that vrata was a method of emancipation for women (MP, 54.4-5). The nakṣatrapuruṣa vrata was recommended for widows. The vrata was to be observed in the month of Caitra, with an idol of Viṣṇu properly made according to the rules, and names of Viṣṇu were to be recited (MP, 54.6-7). Gifts were to be given to a brāhmaṇa and his wife. The gifts included an image of the deity, a golden mace studded with jewels, bedstead, garments etc. One who would perform this vrata would attain all his desires and go to the region of Viṣṇu. He would liberate his deceased ancestors as well. Further a married woman or man who reads or hears this story would also be freed from all sins. The observance of this vrata would confer many blessings on the worshipper (MP, 54.29-31). The result of observing the ordinances was similar to other Purāṇic rituals such as śrāddha, visiting a tīrtha etc.; but unlike those, vrata could be performed by women.

There was mention of a vrata especially for śūdras, i.e. rohinīcandraśayana vrata which was performed in honor of Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa along with Rohini and Candra. The vrata was specifically recommended for śūdras along with the use of mantras (MP, 57.6). It was suggested that śūdras should worship Hari with varieties of flowers such as jasmine etc. The brāhmaṇa should be given a bedstead, mirror besides an image of Rohini and Candra made in gold (MP, 57.18-20). A cow should also be given as dāna along with other articles. The vrata was performed with the desire to attain bliss, health, and prosperity. This vrata was very dear to the pitṛ and one would attain the region of Candra. The text also specified that women observing the ordinance would achieve the same result and would be liberated from the cycle of births (MP, 57.27). Similar to other vrata, one who hears or reads the ordinance gets intellect and goes to heaven where he would be venerated by the gods. Thus, the text mentioned rituals specifically for śūdras which reflects a change in the Brāhmaṇical outlook, as the earlier Vedas were not


\textsuperscript{171} Kumar, Pushpendra, Śakti Cult in Ancient India, Bhartiya Publishing House, Varanasi: 1974, p. 214.
accessible to women and śūdras. Thus in order to attract a larger mass the Purāṇas adopted a flexible belief pattern and mentioned vrata specifically for śūdras. By performing the aksaya triitiya -vrata in honor of Janārdana, one would get the benefit of performing the rājasūya yajña and would as a result attain bliss (MP, 65.6-7). Thus the result of the various sacrifices was now attainable by women and śūdras.

Another interesting vrata was the bhīma dvādaśī/ kalyāṇī dvādaśī ordinance. The text specified that this vrata was for those who are unable to suppress their hunger (MP, 69.16). The fast was observed on the tenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Māgha and started with the worship of Viṣṇu but in the later part it mentioned Rudra. The text mentioned that Śiva was in the heart of Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu in Śiva and there was no difference between the two. It also recommended the reading of the Purāṇa while observing the ordinance (MP, 69.55). Most importantly the text mentioned that observing this vrata the sex worker, veśyā would become an apsarā, the daughter of a vaiśya became daughter of Pulomana and a wife of a king and Satyabhāmā became the beloved, priyā of Vāsudeva (MP, 69.56-60). Thus the benefits were specific for women with reference to sex workers as well. Thus the results, as in the present case, were different for men and women. It seems that the ordinance was quite mixed in content; the purpose and benefit do not seem correlated. Further the text mentioned that Sūrya became the thousand rayed Visvasvān and this vrata was also observed by Mahendra and other deities. For one who reads or hears about this ordinance, all desires would be fulfilled and he would be united with Brahmā (MP, 69.64). Earlier this fast was known as kalyāṇī dvādaśī but since it was observed by Bhīma, son of Pāṇḍu, it was later known as bhīma dvādaśī.

Another interesting vrata was anaṅgadāna vrata to be performed by sex workers, panyastrī. It probably signified temple prostitution. The legend mentioned sixteen thousand wives, nārī of Vāsudeva who were taken away by robbers (MP, 70.2-12). They requested the sage Dālbhya to enumerate the duties of the veśyā (MP, 70.19). The legend also tells about the origin of the sex workers. According to the myth, many demons were killed in the war with the gods. Indra thus told the widows to be available to all the kings.

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and gods as a sex worker, vēṣyā. Further they were told that they should take both the king and the śūdra as their master and should be contented with whatever money they receive. To maintain the position of the brāhmaṇa they should give gifts of gold, grain, cows, and land to him and do as they were told. A specific vrata was also recommended for them (MP, 70.26-32). The gods Viṣṇu and Kāma besides other deities should be worshipped. Besides the usual dāna of pillow, bed, shoes, mattress etc. the widow should feed the brāhmaṇa, who should be looked upon as Madana, for the sake of sexual enjoyment. The brāhmaṇa and his wife should be given gold thread, rings, besides clothes, bangles, garland etc. The women devotee should satisfy each and every desire of that brāhmaṇa. She should, with all her heart and soul and with a smile on her face, yield herself up to him. Further any brāhmaṇa who would come for sexual enjoyment on sūryavāra, Sunday should be honored for thirteen months (MP, 70.56-57). It was further mentioned in the text, that if a handsome man asks for favors then with the consent of the brāhmaṇa, she should perform the fifty-eight kinds of observance of love. This vrata when performed saves the women from all sins and was giver of innumerable benefits. One who follows all these procedures goes to the realm of Mādhava and would be honored by devas and would obtain a place in Viṣṇuloka (MP, 70.68).

Another ordinance mentioned was the aśunyaśayana vrata, which would prevent separation between husband and wife; puruṣa-strī (MP, 71.1). The ordinance was observed in honor of Viṣṇu and requests the deity to maintain the householder status of the observer (MP, 71.5). Surprisingly the fast was to prevent the wife leaving her husband. Gifts were given to a brāhmaṇa who had a large family. Then the text recommends the vrata for women, married or widowed, who would reside in heaven as a result of the fast; they would be free from sorrow and would be blessed with sons, cattle and wealth and also accompany their husband till the sun and moon endure (MP, 71.17-18).

The vibhūtidvādaśi vrata, which was to be observed in honor of Viṣṇu, was specifically for the poor. It mentioned the story of a sex worker, who had observed the fast in the past. The details of the vrata along with the rituals to be performed were stated. It specifically mentioned that a poor person who has faith can perform the ordinance with only flowers (MP, 99.18). Thus gift of golden images and other requisites could be
avoided. The text then mentioned the legend of the king, nṛpa Puṣpavāhana and his pāni, Lāvanyavatī. Both of them were beautiful and had ten thousand valiant sons. The queen was compared to Pārvatī in her beauty (MP, 100.6). The king and his wife in their previous birth were born in the house of a hunter and led a sinful life. They once watched the performance of the vibhūti dvādaśī-vrata by a veṣyā Anamgavatī. As a result he became a king and his wife became beautiful; the veṣyā was later known as Pṛiti and was comparable to Kāma’s wife, Rati. She became the giver of happiness to women and was venerated by gods (MP, 100.32). The king was further advised to observe the vrata near the Ganga and achieve nirvāṇa. According to the story the resultant benefits for men and women were different.

There were many ordinances performed in honor of Śiva.173 Of these one was the āditya śayana śaṅkarācana, observed on a Sunday when sankrānti falls on the seventh day of the dark fortnight and the moon was in the hastā asterism (MP, 55.3-4). As usual, the mantras and the proper method of worship were specified. The gift of a golden lotus studded with jewels was to be given to a brāhmaṇa along with clothes, bedstead, pillows, utensils, shoes, a cow along with her calf besides other things. The desired result was prosperity. The vrata could be observed by both men and women and those who perform the ordinance would never be separated from their sons and dear ones. They would be free from diseases, grief and sufferings (MP, 55.31). This ordinance was first observed by Vaśiṣṭha, Arjuna, Kuvera, and Indra. Interestingly, the gods and epic characters were given an equal status in the text. By recitation, one could be free from all sins. Further one who reads or hears the vrata becomes dear to Indra and would liberate his ancestors, who would go to heaven from hell (MP, 55.33).

The Mahēśvara vrata or Śiva caturdaśī was observed from the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Mārgaśirṣā (MP, 95.5-6). The vrata was in honor of Śiva and Umā; it included the usual gift of gold, grain, cow etc. to the brāhmaṇa. The expected result was equivalent to a thousand aśvamedha sacrifices, expiation from the killing of a brāhmaṇa, long life, prosperity and unification with Śiva (MP, 95.32-34). Even by thinking, reading or hearing about the ordinance one would be liberated from all

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173 Appendix 4.2.
sins. The text specifically mentioned that women who observe this fast with the permission of their husband, son, or preceptor would attain bliss by the glory of Pinākī (MP, 95.37). Thus, an implicit patriarchal control over women is evident.

The next vrata which was discussed in detail was the saubhāgya śayana vrata (MP, 60). This vrata was performed in honor of Pārvatī in the form of Lalitā and was the giver of bliss and emancipation. Most of the Devī vratas were performed on the third or the ninth day. The saubhāgya śayana vrata was recommended for both men and women (MP, 60.10-12). This ordinance was to be performed during Vasanta, on the third day of śuklapakṣa. This was the day Śiva and Pārvatī got married, pōnigrahaṇa (MP, 60.15). The vrata was to be performed by worshiping Śiva and Pārvatī with proper mantras, flower, incense, food etc. The ordinance was to be observed for a year with a different diet and dāna for different months. For example, the performer should drink the water after washing the cow’s horn in the month of Caitra, eat cowdung in the month of Valsādi, the flower of the Mandara tree in the month of Jaiṣṭhya etc. Similarly one should invoke the goddess with different names such as Lalitā in Caitra, Vijayā in Vaiśākha and so on. One should offer a variety of flowers each month such as Malīka, Aśoka, Utpala, Mālāti etc. Married women and maids were specifically recommended to give away a bedstead along with other things (MP, 60.41). The brāhmaṇa and his wife should be given grain, clothes, ornaments, cows, cash besides the images of Śiva and Pārvatī. One who would observe this ordinance would achieve everything and attain bliss. The result also varied according to the period of the vrata. If the vrata was observed every month then one becomes fortunate, wealthy, beautiful, and had a long life. One who observes this ordinance for twelve, eight or seven years would enjoy the region of Śiva for three kalpas. Women who perform this vrata would attain the same result through the grace of the goddess. One who hears or advises this vrata would go to heaven and live as a Vidyādhara. This vrata was first performed by Kāma, then Sahaśrabāhu and then by Varuṇa and Nandi. This vrata was considered very pious according to the text (MP, 60.44-49).

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174 Appendix 4.3.
175 Kumar, Pushpendra, Śakti Cult in Ancient India, Bhartiya Publishing House, Varanasi: 1974, p. 214
Another ordinance mentioned in honor of Gauri was the *anantatriiyā vrata*. It was the
giver of good luck, health, prosperity, emancipation and everlasting fruit in the next
world (*MP*, 62.1). The *vrata* could be observed by both men and women. On every third
day, male devotees should wear yellow, while married women should wear red garments.
Maidens should wear white clothes while widows should wear ochre-colored garments.
Then with proper procedure and *mantras*, they should worship the goddess in her various
forms such as Gauri, Rudrāṇi, and Saunyā so on (*MP*, 62.15-19). The worship of the
goddess was to be followed by singing auspicious songs. As in the earlier *vrata*, different
flowers and articles had to be partaken in different months. The *vrata* was basically for
women: this was also evident in the use of sindura as part of worship. Again, as in the
other rituals, the *brāhmaṇa* along with his wife should be fed and given *dāna*. The text
also specified that women who were pregnant or menstruating should get it observed by
others. The poor could also observe this *vrata* and use flowers and could get the same
benefit (*MP*, 62.37). Again the text specified that women, maid, married or a widow gets
the same benefit through the grace of the goddess Gauri. As in the case of other *vratas*,
one who hears or reads the *vrata* would be honored by *devas* and their consorts and also
by the kinnaras (*MP*, 62.39).

Another *vrata* observed in honor of Pārvatī was the *rasakalyāṇī tritīyā vrata*. The text
mentioned a similar procedure of using *mantras* in honor of the goddess, along with the
various names of the deity. It was also called the *lavanavrata* as salt was to be avoided in
the month of Māgha. Further raw sugar should not be taken in Phālguna, oil and mustard
in the month of Caitra and honey and sweets in Vaisākha (*MP*, 63.15). Interestingly, one
who would observe the *vrata* would get the benefit of a thousand *agniśtoma* sacrifices
(*MP*, 63.26-27). The married woman or maid or widow who would observe the ordinance
would derive the same benefit by the grace of Pārvatī as well as good luck and health and
would go to the realm of Pārvatī (*MP*, 63.28). One who would read or hear this *vrata*
would be liberated from the sins of the *Kali yuga* and go to the realm of Pārvatī. Further
one who tells others about this *vrata* would become the lord of *devas* and travel in an
aerial chariot (*MP*, 63.29).

The *ārdrānandakarī tritīyā vrata* observed in honor of Bhavāṇī was the destroyer of all
sins. The text mentioned that by observing the ordinance with proper methods, married
women would go to the realm of Pārvatī along with their husband. In case of a widow, she would be united with her husband there (MP, 64.29).

Of gods and goddesses other than Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Pārvatī, there was mention of vratas in honor of Sarasvatī. Another ordinance was in honor of Bhauma i.e. Mars i.e. aṅgāraka vrata (MP, 72). According to the story, it was performed by a śūdra when Virocana, son of Prahlāda saw it and as a result he became handsome. Thus it was a vrata which was related to the demons and śūdras. The vrata was to be performed in honor of Mars, son of Earth (MP, 72.23). As in the case of other vratas, gifts were to be given to the brāhmaṇas. Śūdras were not to pronounce the mantras and were to pray silently. The company of women was to be avoided on the day of the fast. The devotee would become beautiful and fortunate. One who was devoted to Viṣṇu and Śiva would become the king of seven realms, saptadvipādhipo (MP, 72.42). The vrata was also performed by Yudhiṣṭhira. One who hears about the vrata gets the same benefit by the grace of the lord.

There were many vratas mentioned in honor of Sūrya. These ordinances were recommended for the safety of people who travel the seas of the world (MP, 74.1). Thus these were probably specified for merchants. These vratas were known as Saura dharma and consisted of seven vrata to be performed (MP, 74-80).

The text mentioned sixty vratas to be observed in honor of various deities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvatī, Sūrya besides Indra, Brahmā and others. These vratas were different from the other vratas mentioned above. The text does not mention any mantra to be pronounced or rites to be followed. The vrata mentioned daily functions such as cleaning the floor, giving light which would give benefits to the devotee. The benefits were heaven or the realm of the deity. These set of vratas were simpler and probably meant for ordinary people. The other vratas prescribed rules which were cumbersome and expensive. Probably they were for the elite or rich people. Another aspect emphasized in the context of the vrata was singing during the night such as in the Viṣokadvādaśi vrata in which singing prayers throughout the night was recommended, which would reflect the communal aspect of the vrata, (MP, 81.19-20). The text further

176 Appendix 4.4.
177 Appendix 4.
mentioned that the married woman who would observe this ordinance with music and
dance would obtain the same results as men. One should always have music and songs in
honor of Hari and as a result one would be prosperous (MP, 82.29-30). Emphasis was
laid on the benefit from hearing or reading the vrata; thus emphasis was on reading or
hearing the Purāṇa. Many a times the benefit of hearing or reading the text was
equivalent to performing the vrata. This was probably a method to make the text more
and more popular.

In the context of vratas, the inscriptions were silent. There was no mention of any of
these vratas in the records. There was only a reference to ‘ekādaśī’ performed by
Prabhāvatīguptā.178 The record mentioned the prabodhini-ekādaśī and the breaking of the
fast in the month of Kārtika and Pauṣa and the grant of a gift by Prabhāvatīguptā.179 The
Purāṇas and other texts mentioned the ekādaśī vrata. The Nārada Purāṇa extolled the
māhātmya of the observance of this fast.180 It was said to bestow heaven and liberation as
well as a kingdom, sons, spouse and health.181 Again the correlation between women and
vratas could be highlighted. Unlike other Purāṇic aspects such as śrāddha, which were
emphasized by the Kalacuris, there was no mention of the vratas in their inscriptions. The
Kalacuris mentioned the solar and lunar eclipse as well as sankrānti and grant of land but
vratas were not mentioned.182 It was probable that the vrata were not popular among the
elites, hence they were not mentioned in the inscriptions that represented an elite culture.
The ruling elite resorted to constructing temples, granting villages, wells, and gardens etc,
as pious acts. The vrata were for the masses.

III

In the religious beliefs and practices the concept of expiation of sin was very well
developed. The Purāṇic texts reiterated the need for liberation from all sins and
emancipation. The Purāṇas emphasized on various rituals and religious acts which would
free one from the evils of the Kali yuga. The inscriptions mostly accepted those rituals

179 Appendix 5.1.
181 Kane, P.V., Kane, P.V., HD, Vol 5, Pt. I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona: 1974, (2nd
dition), p. 98.
182 Appendix 5.2.
and belief patterns. This implied that the belief pattern had been well accepted in the region. Thus instead of the Vedic practices the Purānic ideology was established in the early medieval period.

The Purānas and inscriptions represented the acculturation of various sects. They mentioned Brāhmanical gods such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvatī besides non-Brāhmanical deities such as the Buddha. The divine mothers were also mentioned both in the text and the records. As the textual, inscriptions, and sculptural records show, central India reflected a fluid belief pattern.

The Purānas show a stage of acculturation of Brāhmanical and non-Brāhmanical deities. In the Purānic trinity, Viṣṇu and Śiva had a prominent place. It seems that Brahmā was losing his position as his epithets were taken over by Viṣṇu. Very few goddesses were mentioned. The position of the goddesses was defined as that of consort of the gods. Lakṣmi as the consort of Viṣṇu did not hold a prominent position. She was the goddess of wealth and fortune but hardly any legends about her were reiterated in the text. Her only identity was as the wife of Viṣṇu. The position of Pārvatī was different. The texts contained various stories about her birth, marriage, austerities performed by her. She was identified as the daughter of the Himalaya and the wife of Śiva. Her independent status can be noticed in the text where it mentioned the hundred and eight names of the goddess and the places associated with her. Among the goddesses the Mātrakas were another group of deities who were venerated and mentioned in the texts. These were tribal deities as can be deduced from their names and their demonic blood thirsty description. But these deities were Brāhmanized and included into the pantheon. The Purānic description of the deities was detailed and related them to various legends and places. The Purāṇa also included the Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Thus this was a phase when Buddhism was incorporated into the Brāhmanical realm.

The Vākāṭakas followed a fairly simple mode of religious invocations in their inscriptions. They invoked the deity and mentioned the donation in its honor. The kings of the Eastern Branch made several grants in honor of Śiva, while the Vatsagulma Branch did not invoke any deity. The queens gave grants to Viṣṇu; for instance, Prabhāvaṭīguptā proclaimed herself to be bhāgavata bhakta. She probably played an important role in
spreading the religion in the region. This was also supported by the sculptural evidence. Sculptures of Varāha and Nṛṣimha besides others were found. Ramtek was believed to be a Vaiṣṇava centre. Even the fragmentary grant of Atibhāvatī, daughter of Prabhavatīgupta records donations in honor of Viṣṇu. The unnamed queen of Pravarasena II however gave a grant in honor of Śiva, similar to the donations by the kings. The ministers and the feudatories gave donations to Viṣṇu and as well as to the Buddha. The Vākāṭakas do not invoke any goddesses. The Vākāṭakas do not refer to any myth regarding the gods except the mention of the Śiva linga in the context of the Bharaśivas. Thus the inscriptions indicate that men and women used different identity markers in terms of their beliefs and practices. The Vākāṭakas emphasized on sacrifices and marked their identity as follower of Brāhmaṇical traditions.

The Kalacuris marked a change in the trend in the sense that the invocation included not just obeisance to the deity but also described the deity and sometimes mentioned the legends associated with them. In many inscriptions they used the conversational format. Thus the Purānic way of description was well accepted and practiced in the region. They invoked Śiva, Viṣṇu, the Buddha, Mañjughoṣa, Gaṇapati, Durgā and Ambikā. Thus alternative traditions were well accepted in society and even the elites adopted it. The kings and queens gave donations in honor of Śiva and Śaiva ascetics while other men invoked and gave grants in honor of Brāhmaṇical as well as non-Brāhmaṇical deities. The queens of the Kalacuri dynasty did not invoke any deity other than Viṣṇu and Śiva. They gave their grants to Śaiva ascetics. They played a prominent role in promoting the Pāśupata and the Siddha sect. There was only one inscription which referred to a donation by a woman other than the queen in honor of the Buddha. The Kalacuris also referred to the Jaina tīrthaṅkara being worshipped. The inscriptions and sculptures show that a variety of Brāhmaṇical and non-Brāhmaṇical deities were worshipped in central India. The myths were developed length in the Purāṇas and the images were also depicted on panels of temples. All these suggest the popularity of the forms and myths in the region. Overall the evidence points towards a flexible tradition followed in the region. Men and women in the Kalacuri period also used different identity markers in terms of the invocations and patterns of donation.
The Purāṇa in terms of rituals marked a paradigm shift from the earlier texts. It opened emancipation for śūdras and women in general and mentioned rites for the poor as well as for sex workers. In terms of sacrifices, the Purāṇa shows that early rituals such as sacrifices were losing their relevance. These were seen as violent and expensive. Other religious acts leading to the same benefit as the sacrifices were the new trend as seen in the Matsya Purāṇa.

In the inscriptions, the Vākāṭakas adhered to older traditions, mentioning sacrifices. Of the rituals, the Vākāṭakas mentioned various sacrifices such as the aśvamedha, vājapeya, agniśṭoma etc., thus reiterating Vedic traditions. But women do not refer to these sacrifices for themselves. Probably the Vedic rites were not permissible for them. The Vākāṭakas connected these with an ancestor. This may imply that these practices were losing their relevance. By the period of the Kalacuris there was no reference to sacrifices. In the Matsya Purāṇa the sacrifices were not important, as tapas was held to be more relevant. The text mentioned other rituals which would give the same result as the sacrifices. This undermined the power of sacrifice in comparison to other religious activities.

The śrāddha was a religious activity which was recommended for all. The Purāṇa mentioned the importance of giving gifts to the brāhmaṇa. The gift as compared to those recommended in the context of dāna was simpler and less expensive. Thus it was evident that all sections of the society could perform it. This would have made these religious practices more popular. These rituals were thought as giving of health, wealth, and progeny. The emancipation from all sins and the satisfaction of the ancestors could also be achieved. The Purāṇas mention these rituals as compulsory for the householder. Various places were also associated with the performance of the śrāddha. The Vākāṭakas do not mention the śrāddha in their inscriptions while the Kalacuris refer to the performance of the śrāddha in many records. It was not only the king but also in case of other elite men that the ritual was mentioned. Thus the ritual of śrāddha had gained prevalence by this period. None of the inscriptions by women mention the performance of the śrāddha.
Going to a *tīrtha* was also given much importance in the *Matsya Purāṇa* as it would expiate all sins. The *tīrthas* were associated with various deities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and others. The Purāṇas also emphasized on sacred rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, as well as the Narmada. The *Matsya Purāṇa* also mentioned a gradation of the *tīrtha*. It was said to be a great dispeller of sins. The Vākāṭakas were silent about *tīrthas*. The Kalacuris mentioned *tīrthas* in their inscriptions, although most of the *tīrthas* they mentioned were outside their domain, except for a few references to the Narmada and the region linked with it. The kings, with the exception of Karṇa, do not specifically mention going to a *tīrtha* in the context of the performance of the *śrāddha* in their records. *Tīrtha* were mentioned by other elite men in the records. Women do not mention going to *tīrtha*.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* also emphasized on *vratas* as an important religious activity for both men and women. These rituals were not only for the elites but also for the masses. The connection of *vratas* with women is accepted by scholars. It was an easy way for women to achieve emancipation and at the same time perform their duty of wife and mother. Special reference was given to various *vratas* and their benefit for sex workers. The text gave details about *vratas* to please Viṣṇu, Śiva and other deities to get the benefit of liberation from evil and to achieve other gains. It also mentioned rituals for *śūdras* and sex workers. Thus it was open for all sections of the society irrespective of their gender and caste. There was mention of *vratas* which could be performed by the poor. It was important that the grants were made to *bṛāhmaṇas* with a family. Thus the rituals strengthened the position of *bṛāhmaṇas*. The Purāṇas mentioned the giving of gifts to a *bṛāhmaṇa* and his wife or one who had a large family. In the inscriptions only the Vākāṭakas mentioned *vratas* that were performed by Prabhāvaṭīguptā. The Kalacuris do not mention *vratas* in their records.

In a changing society, the Purāṇas integrated as well as accepted divergent traditions. They included women as well as *śūdras* in their fold, at the same time as they established the superior position of the *bṛāhmaṇas*. Overall Śaivism was dominant in the region but it was not the only religious belief system. This was attested by inscriptionsal as well as sculptural evidence. The Kalacuris were more flexible in their beliefs and practices as they patronized a variety of deities and followed the Purāṇic beliefs. They followed the Purāṇic traditions while the Vākāṭakas believed in Vedic practices. It was probable that
by the time of the Kalacuris, Vedic traditions had lost their significance and Purāṇic beliefs and practices were widely accepted. Thus the inscriptions referred to śrāddha and tīrtha. The Kalacuri belief pattern was very similar to the one portrayed in the Purāṇa. The need to incorporate various religious traditions was well documented in both the sources. The Purāṇic concepts such as śrāddha and tīrtha were incorporated in the inscriptions. But these were used in the records of men. Women do not mention the performance of any of these rituals. Even vrata, which were seen as primarily women’s activity, were only mentioned in the record of Prabhāvatīgupta. No other inscription of elite men or women mentions the vratas. Unlike dāna, which was recorded and was regarded as a means of legitimization, vratas, even if performed were not considered worthy of mention.

Another method to expiate sins was to give donations. In the various rituals the Purāṇa mentioned gifts to be given to brāhmaṇas. The inscriptions, especially the Kalacuri records, referred to such grants like the donation with the performance of the śrāddha etc. The donations of land were well documented in the inscriptions. The Purāṇas mentioned a variety of dāna to be given to the brāhmaṇas in most of the cases. The trend was well accepted and practiced as could be seen in the donations recorded during the rule of the Vākāṭakas and the Kalacuris.