In the early period of Indian history modern Orissa was divided into three sub-regional kingdoms namely Odra, Kaliṅga, and South Kosala. Balasore, Cuttack and Puri, the districts of the coastal region of modern Orissa, constituted Odra (Odra Deśa), and the present districts of Ganjam and Koraput the kingdom of Kaliṅga. This also included the Vizagapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. The kingdom of South Kosala consisted of present western Orissa including Raigarh, Raipur and Bilaspur districts of Madhya Pradesh. In those days there were mainly two routes connecting Orissa with North India; the first route connected the Gangetic valley with coastal Orissa through Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts. This route was used even in the Medieval period by invaders like Firuz Tughluq for the Jajnagar expedition in 1360 A.D. Another route mostly frequented by traders and pilgrims from North India was through Raipur, Patnagarh and Sonepur. This was used by King Samudragupta for his South Indian expedition in the 4th century A.D. Visitors could also come to Orissa using the sea-route via the port of Tāmralipti (in Odra) and Pālur (in Kaliṅga). It would be no exaggeration to state that Orissa served as a land bridge between North and South India.
According to the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, Samudragupta led his South Indian expedition circa 350 A.D. during which he subjugated the rulers of Kośala, Mahākāntāra, Kurāla, Piṣṭapura, Koṭṭura, Erranḍapalla, Devarāṣṭhra, Vengi, Kānchi, Palakka, Avamukta, and Kusthalapura. Among these kingdoms conquered by Samudragupta, Kośala, Mahākāntāra, and Kurāla have been located by historians in South Kośala and Piṣṭapura, Koṭṭura, Erranḍapalla and Devarāṣṭhra in Kaliṅga. The conquest of Piṣṭapura, Koṭṭura and Erranḍapalla of Kaliṅga region ushered a new age in political and cultural history of ancient Orissa. Apart from giving rise to independent sub-regional kingdoms in the post-Gupta period under powerful ruling dynasties like the Māṭharas (Kaliṅga), the Nalas (Puṣkari), the Nāgas (Keonjhar region), the Śarabhapuriyas (South Kośala) and the Bhaṅjas (Khiḷjiṅgakoṭṭa) etc; the new age facilitated the growth of Brāhmaṇical culture in various aspects of social life of the people. Not only Sanskrit language and Brāhmaṇical religion could spread in the tribal dominated region of ancient Orissa but one also witnessed the introduction of Gupta system of administration and polity in the newly established subregional kingdoms. The use of Gupta Era and coinage was another important aspect of this new cultural phenomenon. In the sphere of art and architecture the emergence of a new tradition was equally significant. In the subsequent period of Orissan history the Īailodbhavas (of Kangoda Maṇḍala), Bhauma-Karas (of Tośali) and the Śomavaṃśis (of South Kośala) followed the Gupta pattern of
culture faithfully. The kings of Kaliṅga and South Kosala extended liberal patronage for the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in their respective kingdoms. Śaivism, Śaktism and other cults in no time sanskritized the autochthonous tribal deities in order to make Orissa a centre of Brāhmanical culture. Subsequently, religious synthesis became the order of the day and gave birth to new cults like Harihara, Saptamātrikā and other forms of religious syncretism. Vaiṣṇavism received a great impetus under the influence of Gupta culture. In the fourth-fifth centuries of Christian era when the Māṭharas occupied Kaliṅga the cult of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu was popularized there. Under the influence of the Pancharātra school Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva, identified with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, occupied a pivotal position in the religious faith of Kaliṅga. Simultaneously, the Bhāgavata cult developed as a dominant faith in South Kosala with Vāsudeva as the supreme deity.

After the Nala rule towards the last part of the fifth century A.D., South Kosala witnessed a process of transformation from tribalism to Aryanization, and the teachers of the Pancharātra school provided a living faith to the royal house of Śarabhapura. A new cult of Vaiṣṇavism, which the Śarabhapuriyas evolved and patronised, successfully synthesized the Pancharātra school and the Bhāgavata school admitting the non-Aryan tribes into its fold.
Temple as one of the most important art forms was started in Kaliṅga and South Kosala a few years after its origin in the Gupta empire. The process of evolution of the temple architecture in the above region marked its close similarly to the classical trends.

The present dissertation is an attempt to focus light upon the aforesaid aspects of Orissan history and culture with emphasis on the expansion of Gupta cultural traditions after the South Indian campaign of Samudragupta. No work has been published so far on this aspect of Orissan History. Since Gupta influence served as the main source of inspiration during the formative period of sub-regional state formation and evolution of Orissan culture, a thorough study of this aspect can provide a link to understand the regional manifestation of the main sphere of India's cultural heritage. The period under study is considered to be culturally most significant as it marked the transition from tribalism to Aryan culture. The dissertation is based upon epigraphical and archaeological data.

In Chapter-I a brief account of the foreign dominance of Orissa in the Pre-Gupta Age has been provided in the light of information furnished by the discovery of Kushāṇa, and Puri-Kushāṇa coins, and the Asanpāt stone inscription of Śatrubhanja. A discussion of the political instability of Orissa on the eve of Samudragupta's South Indian campaign has been made in Chapter-II. In this chapter discussion has been
made to identify the kingdoms conquered by Samudragupta with reference to ancient Orissa. The special significance attached to Mahendragiri as 'Kulagiri' has also been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter-III provides a review of various theories regarding the prevalence of Gupta rule in Orissa. On the basis of the Kurudh copper plate grant and a number of gold coins of Kramāditya found in the Chhatisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh we have ventured to suggest our own views about the Gupta rule in South Kosala. Chapter-IV, V and VI deal with the political history of the Māṭharas of Kaliṅga, the Nalas of Puṣhkari and the Šarabhapuriyas of South Kosala on the basis of literary and archaeological sources. The study gives an idea about the rise and fall of the sub-regional kingdoms and the sub-regional cultures in the valleys of Vamsadhārā and the Mahānadi.

Chapter-VII brings under focus the religious condition of the people living in Kaliṅga and South Kosala. Chapter-VIII deals with the history of Orissan art and architecture in the early period of their evolution. We have shown how Gupta cultural tradition left an indelible imprint on the regional culture of Orissa.
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