Chapter – IV

Temple Structure: Religious Transformation and Regional Style

Temple as a subject of research has largely remained under the domain of art historians, who have perceived it as an artistic creation, and monument of past glory. While their studies give importance to architectural components, styles, forms, decorative motifs and sculptures, the historical analysis of the temple continues to be under-researched. In the recent past, scholars working on early medieval state and society have tried to incorporate it in their discussion, but their analysis is largely based on data drawn from inscriptional sources. Ironically, much has been written and debated on the role of the temple in state formation, legitimisation and religious transformation, but these studies neither include an analysis of temples nor trace the religious environment in which they developed.

Therefore, this chapter would attempt to bring into focus the historical aspects of South-Kośalan temples and related issues such as hierarchy, religious affiliation and ritual. For a comprehensive analysis this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the physical appearance of the temples of South-Kośalan region. This includes the evolution of a regional art tradition and its historical implications. The second section discusses the hierarchy of temples and sites. The hierarchy of the individual temple can be discussed according to their architectural complexities. Similarly, extant temples, cult objects, and its nature and function have been included in discussion to ascertain the hierarchical position of the site. The third section entails religious affiliation, a complex issue often studied from inscriptional data. Here, the attempt is to juxtapose the sculptural remains with inscriptional data to understand the religious environment of the said period. The use of coins, seals, and sealings will be helpful in this regard. The
The last section would analyse ritual practices, studied often on the basis of inscriptional and scriptural data. Here, sculptural remains would be discussed for a comprehensive analysis.

The bad preservation of temple structures and the lack of an absolute chronology are two major problems that a historian faces while studying temples of the early medieval period. South-Košala has more than hundred temples which are distributed over forty sites. But they are in a bad state of preservation and the majority are completely ruined. What is left today is debris of temple fragments and mutilated loose sculptures. The problem does not end here. A large number of modern shrines have been erected throughout the region by using old materials, which have added to the problem related to the issue of chronology and religious affiliation. Moreover, even the standing temples are not bereft of complications. Over a period of time these standing temples have been restored, renovated and repaired more than once. This has often altered the original plan. The repeated whitewash, occasional plastering and accretion on the outer walls have obliterated the intricate designs and art motifs. Thus it is hard to identify the precise stages in the development of South-Kosalan temples.

Placing the temple structure into a timeframe is equally problematic. Temple inscriptions are very rare in this part of the country. Though a few temples do contain inscriptions, in most cases they are not part of the original structure. However, inscriptions are either of a later date or have been taken away from another temple and affixed in the subsequent period.¹ In comparison to the number of temples found from this region, the epigraphical data related to religious shrines are meagre. The available epigraphic records also are not of much help. Not a single inscription is dated

¹ The Gandhesvara Temple at Sirpur contains six small inscriptions, out of which two or three seem to be a part of the original temple, whereas others were perhaps affixed at a later date. Similarly the Rajivalochana Temple at Rajim bears an inscription, which is dated to c. 7th–8th century A.D., but on architectural ground the temple has been dated to c. 6th century A.D.
in any standard era, rather these bear only the regnal years of the ruling authority. Hence, formulation of an absolute date and placing temples in a chronological sequence is difficult.

(i) Temple Structure: Development of a Regional Style

The temple structure, which emerged in the early medieval period, was not a sudden or unforeseen development. It was rather a manifestation of ever increasing religious practices and growing complexities within these. It is important to notice that different regions achieved this particular development at different point of historical time. The transition from open-air shrines (which was the probable mode of religious worship of the previous period) to elaborate temple structure was a continuous process and passed through various stages of development. Growing religious complexities and new innovation in the field of building techniques provided a further impetus to the emergence of religious structure.

Image worship was introduced at the beginning of the Christian era, but intensified in the Gupta and post-Gupta period. This new religious arrangement brought many changes in ritual practices and delineation of space. In the beginning images were worshipped either in the open air or in the shade of trees and groves, which were considered as sacred. But these sacred spaces could not fulfil all the requirements of the growing popularity of elaborate rituals. It was against this backdrop that the concept of “enclosed sacred space” separated from “secular space” developed. Innovation in building technique might have re-shaped the whole process of the temple-building tradition. The transient shrines were replaced by permanent structures, which became more elaborate and embellished according to the growing religious and social requirements. This process of religious transformation, which contributed to the emergence of religious shrines, has generally been disregarded by scholars. They have instead argued in favour of
the notion of the migration of Brāhmaṇas and superimposition of the temple that developed in core region during Guptā period over other parts of the country. Their whole argument not only ignored the internal development of a region but also the role of artisans, who moved from one region to another in search of work. It was the artisans who were responsible for the construction of the temples and not the Brāhmaṇas. Hence, similarities between temple types of two regions should not be perceived as a superimposition of one over the other, rather this can be interpreted in terms of borrowing or influence arising out of movement of artisans.

**Physical Appearance of Temples**

The South-Kosalan temple broadly comes under the nāgara style of north Indian temple architecture of post-Gupta period.\(^2\) In the vertical axis, the important characteristic features are a jagati, vedibandha, jangha, varāndika and śikhara.\(^3\) Similarly, in the horizontal axis the temples consist of garbhagrha, antarāla, maṇḍapa, and rarely mukhamandapa or nandi-mandapa.

The jagati\(^4\) or platform provides the foundation for the structure, followed by vedibandha which firmly rests on the jagati. In general, the vedibandha consists of khura, kumbha, kalaśa, antarapatta and kapotapati topped by a vedika and maṇcikā. The next component is the jangha, which is placed above the vedibandha. The jangha rising from a maṇcikā is dominated by rucaka pilasters. The jangha is topped by varāndika and acts as the first storey or the bhūmi of the śikhara. The śikhara is surmounted over the varāndika and

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3 See Glossary for the meanings of the above mentioned terminologies

4 The stone platform is an optional component. It formed an integral part of the temples of the upper Mahanadi basin, as evident from its length, breadth and height. Its presence is very nominal in case of the temples of the Tel and middle Mahandi basin.
arranged in storey or bhūmi. The sikhara is surmounted by amlakas which are adorned with dhvajās or flags.

In the horizontal axis, the garbhagrha is the abode of the presiding deity. In plan it may be square, rectangular or star shaped (stellate) and in elevation it is tri-ratha or pancha-ratha and the garbhagrha is, in turn, fronted by an antarāla. The antarāla is fronted by the pillared mandapa. The mukhamandapa and nandi-mandapa are not regular features of the South-Kośalan temple. Due to its sporadic appearance and bad state of preservation, nothing much can be said about its plan and elevation.

In the historical analysis of the temple, the emphasis in the following pages would be to highlight distinctive architectural components, which indicate the origin and evolution of a regional style. Then, the components influenced the prevailing art style of neighbouring regions, and the styles of the three identified sub-regions will be analysed. While discussing the temples a tentative chronology will be taken into account.

The earliest group of South-Kośala temples is located in the upper Mahanadi basin. Among them, the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur is the best preserved one. Architecturally this temple is the benchmark of South-Kośalan style. It is not only important for South-Kośala but also for the development of north Indian architecture in the early medieval period. Dated to early seventh century, it stands as an intermediate example between Gupta period

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5 The sikhara is curvilinear in nature and adorned with vertical projections of the temple wall. In the vertical arrangement, bhūdra, karṇa and pratiratha (depending upon the plan of the temple) are the major components. In the horizontal plane, it is adorned with candraśalas, kirtimukha, grasamukha and carved images of Brahmanical deities.

6 The antarāla is an intermediary arrangement between the sanctum and the pillared hall. The doorjamb and lintel of the antarāla is the most decorated part, carved with patravali, scrolls patraakha and deities of Brahmanical religious order.

7 The mandapa is square, rectangular or oblong in plan. The size of the mandapa varies from temple to temple. It consists of pillars and pilasters which bears excellent sculptural creation of South-Kośalan artists. The pillars are generally square, octagonal, sixteen, and thirty two sided in nature. These pillars and pilasters hold the flat roof of the mandapa.
shrines of central India and early north Indian medieval architecture as a whole.8 These brick-built temples stand on a 7 ft high stone jagati.9 The temple faces east and consists of garbhagriha, antarala, and mandapa in its horizontal axis and vedibandha, jangha and sikhsa in its vertical axis.10

The Lakshmana temple in many respects shows a more mature and developed form as compared to the Gupta shrines of central India. These include pancharatna plan of sikhsa,11 larger corner amalaka,12 the gradual diminishing width of the central projection,13 use of candrasalas as a decorative motif,14 miniature octagonal shrines at sikhsa,15 wide application of pilaster and support cornices,16 and many more. But the most important aspect,
which certainly contributed to the origin and development of a regional style and later on became an integral part of South-Kosalan temple, is the *mandapa*.

In no temple prior to the sixth century does the *mandapa* have such an important role in the overall design of the temple, and therefore, it is difficult to determine the prototypes. The small porches of the Gupta shrine at Tigawa, Sanchi, and Cave XIX at Udayagiri are perhaps the earliest examples of the Gupta period of what can be considered a *mandapa*. There are indications that the Gupta shrines at Bhumara bear a *mandapa*, but its original form cannot be reconstructed. A close look at the dilapidated structure at Tala of South Kośala provides some clue in this regard.

The origin and development of *mandapa* can be traced in the three stages. All these stages of development have taken place in three identified sub-regions of South-Kośala and fall under three different time brackets.

The first stage of development took place in the upper Mahanadi basin where the earliest group of temples were located. Due to the bad state of preservation of the temples, it is very difficult to ferret out the precise stages in the development of the *mandapa* style within this sub-region. But the dilapidated *mandapa* attached to Lakshmana temple at Sirpur and surviving, though much altered *mandapa* attached to the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim sheds some light on the form and arrangement of this particular architectural component.

The *mandapa* attached to the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur is a rectangular structure. It consists of two rows of standing pillars and two rows of pilasters affixed to the side walls, which support a flat roof made of stone (see Fig. No.5). The pillars are generally square at the base, followed by octagonal and sixteen sided in the middle, and topped by either a square or a

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18 Deva, K. (1995), *The Temples of India*, Vol.1, New Delhi., p. 36. Originally, the *mandapa* of Lakshmana temple at Sirpur had five longitudinal rows of stone pillars, of which only four rows of pillar bases have survived showing two pillars in each row flanked on each side by pilasters. Thus, the *mandapa* probably had ten pillars and ten pilasters forming three longitudinal bays and five bays across. K. Deva (1960). *op cit.*, p. 37
circular fluted *lasuna* capital on the top. These pillars and pilasters are highly decorated and bear sculpted images\(^{19}\). The *mandapa* attached to the Rajivalochana temple is similar in plan and elevation to that of Sirpur (see Fig. No.7). But the surviving pillars *in situ* show that they are more decorated, ornately carved and bear more sculpted images\(^{20}\). The extant pillars and pilasters at sites like Senakpat, Turturia, Palari, Aḍabhāra Kharod, Seorinarayana, Dhibini, Malhar, Dhamatari, and many more sites in the upper Mahanadi basin indicates that there once existed *mandapas* of an early style.

The second stage in the development of the *mandapa* can be seen at the sub-region of the Tel basin, dated to c. 9\(^{th}\) century A.D. Here the *mandapa* became more mature and complex with the addition of new architectural components. Although the traces of *mandapa* are found from many sites of this sub-region (i.e., Raniapur-Jharial, Kansil, Belkhandi, Budhikomna Mohangiri), the *mandapa* as a surviving structure is found only at Somesvara temple at Raniapur-Jharial and Sihni.

The square pillared roofed *mandapa* at Sihni is very simple, squat and devoid of decoration.\(^{21}\) But the one which is attached to the Somesvara temple at Raniapur-Jharial is most important. The square *mandapa* is peristylar in nature, and consists of two rows of pillars along the sides with a group of four pillars forming a square pattern at the centre which is the earliest of its kind \(^{22}\) (see Fig. No. 12). But unlike the pillars of the upper Mahanadi basin, the pillars are simple and rough in appearance and devoid of decoration. The

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\(^{19}\) None of the pillars and pilasters has remained *in situ* at Lakshmana temple’s *mandapa*. But, at least one of the pilasters preserved in the site museum seems to be a part of the original *mandapa*. It bears a large image of Kṛṣṇa subduing Kaliya, and it is probable that the missing pilasters were also furnished with images. Stadtner, D.M. (1976) *op cit.*, p. 51.

\(^{20}\) But the existing pillars of the *mandapa* attached to Ramachandra temple are highly ornamented, carved with *salabhahājika, opusara*, lively monkeys, *mithuna* and other decorative motifs. K. Deva (1985), *op cit.*, p. 227.


\(^{22}\) The pilasters have a plain shaft with a base and a bracket capital. The four central pillars have an elongated *khura* base, a shaft rising in the succession on of a square, an octagonal and a square section, and a bracket capital with a vaulted ends.
nature of raw materials used here or the participation of local artisans might have been responsible for such an unusual treatment.\textsuperscript{23} The importance of this mandapa lies in the arrangement of two projected balconies or gavākṣṭa windows along the north and south sides (see Photo No. 19). This unique architectural component was introduced here and became an integral part of the mandapa in the subsequent period. Another new development here is the two-tiered roof.\textsuperscript{24}

The final stage of development in the mandapa took place in the middle Mahanadi basin. Here, unlike the earlier two sub-regions, some of the mandapas are in a good state of preservation, which reveals its stages of evolution. The earliest mandapa can be seen at Narasimhanatha temple. The original mandapa collapsed long back, but the surviving four pillars stand in a square pattern like that of Ranipur-Jharial in a shrine of a later date. The standing pillars are highly decorated and have retained the art convention started in the upper Mahanadi basin,\textsuperscript{25} which helped in assigning the date of c. 9\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. to the temple. The mandapa attached to the Kosalesvara temple at Patnagarh is similar in many respects with that at Ranipur-Jharial (see Fig. No. 17). This witnessed further development in the style, which incorporated many new features\textsuperscript{26}. Stylistically, it has been dated to the last

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} The pillars and pilasters of the upper Mahanadi basin are made of basalt or sandstone where decoration is easy. But, the pillars and pilasters attached to the mandapa at Ranipur-Jharial are made of granite or hard stone where minute decoration is very difficult. It is also evident in the existing temples (fifty in number) at the site which are devoid of any decoration on any part of the county.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Das, D.R. (1982), \textit{Temples of Orissa: The Study of a Sub-style}. Delhi, p. 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} The shaft of the pillars is square and decorated with lotus half-rosetti separated by vertical bands of scroll works as an example from the upper Mahanadi basin. The carving is exquisite and the details are well preserved. Donaldson, T. E. (1985), \textit{Hindu Temple Art of Orissa}, Vol. I, Leiden, p. 221, also see Bhandarkar, D. R. (1904-05), 'The Temple of Narsimhanath', \textit{ASI-AR}, pp. 121-125.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Here, the porches of the south and north sides are more developed than those of Somesvara Temple at Ranipur-Jharial. In case of Kosalesvara temple the porches have been transferred and are no longer open aired but rather resemble miniature shrine or chapels. The floor within the mandapa is lined with two rows of four pillars each rather than four pillars arranged in a square as at Ranipur-Jharial. The pillars have a low square base above a low pedestal which is crowned by standing lions at the corner. Donaldson, T.E. (1985), \textit{Hindu Temple Art of Orissa}, Vol. 1, Leiden., p. 201.
\end{itemize}
half of c. 9th century A.D. The *mandapa* attached to the Kapilesvara temple at Charda is an improvement on Patnangarh. This *mandapa* has undergone numerous renovations, which has altered the original plan. The addition of a square raised dais in the middle supported by four pillars at the four corners was a new innovation (see Fig. No.18 & 19). The interior of the *mandapa* is highly decorated and the pillars and pilasters bear life size images of Ganesha, Karttikeya, Parvati, Natarāja, Ardhanarisvara, and Hari-Hara. The South-Kośalan style of *mandapa* reached to its culmination at Baidyanath. The *mandapa* has a stone frame filled with brick walls. The north and south side has projecting balconies or *gavākṣa* windows. In the interior twelve engaged pillars formed a square pattern. This also has a raised platform in the centre of the floor with a pillar on each corner and an ornately carved doorframe at the west end leading to the sanctum (see Fig. No. 20 & 21).

The interior of the *mandapa* is peristylar in scheme, where twelve engaged pillars go round the hall. In the centre there is a raised square platform measuring fifteen feet in diameter, which is a further development from that of the Charda. The raised dais is supported by four pillars at the four corners. These pillars and pilasters support the roof of the *mandapa* made of stone. The use of iron beams to strengthen the roof is a new feature, introduced for the first time. The interior of the *mandapa* is highly decorated with life size images of various gods and goddesses of Saiva and Vaisnava pantheons. The north and south walls project to form *gavākṣa* windows provided with seats (*kaksasana*), which were fenced by balustered railing (see

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28 Baidyanath is situated on the bank of the river Tel in the Sonepur district of Orissa. At present, the site has a *mandapa*, but in a bad state of preservation. The original shrine (dauh) and vestibule (antarāla) connecting it with the *mandapa* have long since disappeared Das, D.R. (1976), 'Kosalesvara Temple at Baidyanath' Bolangir District Orissa, *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 38, pp. 297-307.

Photo No. 49, 50 & 51). The roof of the window is supported by small pillars and pilasters. The outer surface of the baluster railing and supporting pillars and pilasters are decorated, and carved with various scenes related to Kṛṣṇa, female figures, mithuna, alasakanyā and kirtimukha. The doorway at the west end leading to the sanctum (missing) is highly decorated with dvārapālas, river goddesses, navagrāha panels, Naga bust, and a huge image of Viṣṇu anatasāyana. In many respects it has retained the prevailing art form, which also shows its connection with other mandapas of this region.30

The above discussion reveals the stages in the evolution of the mandapa from the nascent to mature types. The growing importance of the mandapa is not only a manifestation of the art form, but also indicates its growing religious, ritual and social importance. The religious practices of the period would have required more space to accommodate the increasing number of deities. Therefore, the interior walls or supporting pillars and pilasters of the mandapa were appropriate places for such an arrangement. We have also seen that the space of the mandapa increased over time. This provided the space for ensuring more and more deities drawn from the ever expanding diverse religious sects. The mandapa was also an important place for the performance of a wide range of rituals other than pūjā. In the Pāṇḍuvamśi inscription,31 it is

30 The gradually ascending sequence of the floor of the mandapa, antarāla, and garbhagṛha suggest central Indian influence as the sanctum floor is usually lower in Orissan temples. The large size guardian images in the doorframe of the sanctum are similar in style and execution with their counterparts at Kharod, Pali, Dhamtari, and Adabhara and are in contrast with the standard treatment on Orissan temples, where the dvārapāla are small in size and generally housed in niches. It is also rare for the river goddess to be as large as the dvārapala. The architrave above the inner doorframe is decorated with a large image of Viṣṇu Anantasāyana, as on the west gate of the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim, a most unusual motif to dominate the doorframe of a Saiva temple. Ib., also see Das, D.R. (1982), op cit., pp. 15-19. Mitra, D. (1991), 'Kalinga Style, Phase 2, c. 8th- late 9th century A.D. Bhaumakara', in M.W. Meister, et al. (eds.), Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture North India, New Delhi, p. 439.

31 The Lodhia plates of Panduvamśi King Śivagupta Balarjuna record the donation of a village to a Saiva shrine for the offering of bali, utsava, and naivedya. This charter further mentions that nṛtta (dance) and vaditra (instrumental music) was an integral part of Saiva worship (EI, XXXVII, pp. 319-25, Shastri, A.M. op cit., pp. 128-133. Dance and music were parts of temple ritual. This is known to us from a set of nine inscriptions found from Sirpur. These set of plates gives ample evidence of its prevalence during the period under discussion, JESI, XVIII, pp. 15-23, SIE, XXVII, pp. 25-48.
mentioned that, apart from cāru, bāli, and naivedya, nritta (dance) and vaditr (instrumental music) were important components of Śaiva worship. It is evident from the nature of the last two rituals that they were certainly performed in the mandapa. In this regard, we can argue that the raised dais inside the mandapa at Charda and Baidyanath could have been used for this purpose. The mandapa was also an important place for performance of community sacrifices (yajñas).

The mandapa was also the place for religious discourse. Here the bards, story tellers, Brāhmaṇas, Saiva āstāyas, temple priests, etc. recited verses from the epic and Puranic literature and explained them in simple language for the understanding of the common masses. This tradition of recitation of verses from ancient literary texts and story telling is still in practice and was an important mechanism for the spread of our ancient cultural idioms and values among the common masses32. Besides its religious and ritual functions, the mandapa was an important place for social gatherings. The devotees congregated here for daily worship as well as on important festive occasions, or to listen and participate in the religious discourses, which transcended social barriers. People from across the communities participated in some of the important community rituals like the yajña or worship of Indra for rain, to ward off evil eyes upon the villagers, for better harvest, etc. Therefore, the growing importance of the mandapa was not just architectural but also had deep religious, ritual and social implications.

Another important aspect which manifests itself in the regional style of art, is the star-shaped or stellate temple. Such uncommon ground plans were achieved by revolving concentric squares around a fixed central point, each exterior point in an angle of 45° conforms an oblique division on the face of the temple. This variety of temple is widely prevalent in South-Kosala, especially in the sub-region of the upper Mahanadi basin. It contains five

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32 The ethnographical study carried out at some selective temples like Baidyanath, Charda, Gandharadāi reveals that such traditions are followed even today on ceremonial occasions. The verses from the ancient texts are recited and explained in simple languages for the understanding of the common people.
temples of the altogether ten standing temples that exist today. Similar temples were also found from Tel basin (two), and the middle Mahanadi basin (three). Their wide geographical distribution, and evolution over a longer span of time, shows the continuity and relevance of the stellate temple.

Of the five stellate temples of the upper Mahanadi basin, the Rama temple at Sirpur is the earliest of its kind. Though the shrine at present is in a bad state of preservation, the ground plan indicates a new experimentation which is different from the well-preserved Lakshmana temple (see Fig.No. 6; Photo No. 5). Donald M. Stadtner has pointed out that the Rama temple exhibits a hesitant experimentation when compared to the later temples of this variety. Here the oblique divisions are simple, undecorated registers of bricks, whereas the division of the later temples are not only a great deal wider but bear an impressive amount of brick and plaster surface ornamentation which conforms to the wall surfaces. On the basis of its architectural progression this temple has been dated to early 7th century A.D.

The Indal Deul temple at Kharod is a further development from the Rama temple. The ground plan of the Indal Deul is similar in conception to the Rama temple but differs from the latter in at least two significant respects (see Fig. No. 9; Photo No. 11 & 12). Similarly, the Siddhesvara Temple at Palari is also an important temple in the sequence of stellate types. In elevation it has many similarities with Indal Deul but the ground plan differs

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36 At Sirpur, there are two oblique projections on each wall immediately to either sides of the central bhadra division, but at Kharod there is only one oblique division (pratiratha) between the central projections and the corner member. Between each angled projection and each corner division is a narrow section that can be considered as a deeply recessed segment of the central bhadra. All of these divisions are considerable wider and more clearly differentiated from each other than at the Rama temple. Stadtner, D. M. (1981), op cit., p. 140.
on many counts (see Fig. No. 10; photo No. 13) The Sabari temple at Seorinarayan is also built on the principles of the stellate plan. In elevation this shrine is similar to other shrines of the region but the ground plan is the least complex (see Fig. No. 8; Photo No. 9 & 10) A new feature is the angled portion of the pilaster immediately adjacent to the central bhadra division. The temple at Dhobini is related to the temples at Kharod and Palari in details of elevation and must be of same date. But the plan shows clear perfection of the geometry of the square. This has perfect octagon that reinforced the sanctum and back the karna of the temples at Kharod and Palari (see Fig. No.11, Photo No.14). Similarly, the shrine at Aqabhara is also built on the principle of placing two squares at an angle of 45°. The much dilapidated walls of the main sanctum show close resemblance with the structure at Dhobini.

In the sub-region of the Tel basin, two star shaped or stellate temples are located, one at Kansil, and the other one at Budhikomna. The shrine at Kansil is in a ruinous condition, and only survives the ground plan of the sanctum and antarāla. The pillared mandapa is completely lost. The ground plan shows that it was built on the principles of intersecting squares and in elevation could have resembled the one at Budhikomna (see Fig. No. 15). This was also built on the same principle of rotating squares. The stellate

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37 The Indal Deul has only one oblique division, whereas the Siddhesvara temple manifests three oblique vertical sections between the corner and central sections. The surface of the angled projection at the former temple is flat, whereas in case of the latter is pointed. There is a clear separation of temple wall, into two distinct horizontal divisions by a thin horizontal band at Palari which is completely absent at Sirpur, but present in nascent form at Indal Deul at Kharoī. Ibid., pp. 140-143.

38 Here, there is only one division between the under and central projection. This division is oblique and has a flat surface, which relates it to similar divisions at the Indal Deul and the Siddhesvara temple, Ibid., p. 43.


plan is most likely a copy of the temple of diamond shape on account of the oblique indent made into them 42 (see Fig. No.16).

In the sub-region of the middle Mahanadi basin only three stellate temples are found, located in a single complex at Boudh. These three temples are identical in nature, and show maturity in their forms. The stone-built temples stand on a pista (platform) stellate in nature. This feature appears for the first time. In elevation it confirms to the nāgara variety of 10th century A.D temples. Another important feature of the temple is the stellate plan of the yaktipītha enshrined in the garbhagṛha 43 (see Fig. No. 23; Photo No. 58, 59 & 60).

The stellate temples formed an important aspect of South-Kośalan style of architecture. The experimentation which was first made at Rama temple at Sirpur evolved continuously as exhibited by the diversity in the plans of the subsequent period. This temple type has great significance not only in the architecture of South-Kośala, but also in the whole spectrum of the nāgara variety of temples architecture dated between c. 6th–11th centuries A.D. Also this was the first of its kind in the whole of north India 44. In the subsequent period, bhūmija temples in Malwa region 45 and stellate temples in Hoyasala kingdom 46 became very popular. The textual reference to this variety

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44 These varieties of temples are totally absent in coastal Orissa. Of the central Indian temple one at Indore (Guna district M.P) has stellate plan, which has been dated to c. 8th century A.D. which is more than one century later than the first example at Sirpur, Meister, M.W. (1982), ‘Analysis of Temple Plans, Indore’, *Arthas Asiat*, Vol. XLIII, pp. 302-320.
45 Krishna Deva believes that the bhūmija temples of Malwa region were built on the principles of Samarāṅgana Sutradhāra and can be dated to 2nd half of the 10th century A.D. Deva, K. (1975), ‘Bhūmija Temples’, in P. Chandra (ed.), *Studies in Indian Temple Architecture*, New Delhi, p. 95f.
of temples comes from a later date. In fact, the stellate temples of the subsequent period were influenced by the Kośalan variety. Although this influence is disputed by certain scholars, it does not hold ground in the light of the above discussion.

By arguing for the local origin of mandapas or stellate temple types, in no way South-Kośala temples or its architecture is being isolated. A close scrutiny of the earliest extant temples and architectural fragments of South-Kośala shows that they were certainly influenced by developments of the neighbouring regions. Some of the excellent examples of such influence can be seen at Tala, Turturia, Senakpat and Rajim.

The Devarani temple at Tala is perhaps the earliest extant temple of South-Kośala. Its superstructure has totally collapsed, but the existing shrine bears unique art remains, some of which are perhaps local, and others are influenced by the prevailing style of Deccan and South-India (see Photo No. 47).

47 S.K. Saraswati refers to a list of ten types of circular temples (vrita prasadas) enumerated in the Samarangana Sutradhara (Ch. XLX). A few of these, like Valova, Patmaka (kamaladbhava), etc. are said in the later section to have been reached by rotating the square kshetra all around (samanatā) or in different direction (dikṣatavat), Ibid., p. 130.

48 Donald M. Stadtner though agreed that the temples of South Kośala were built on stellate ground plan but argued that these stellate plans were not a product of this region but borrowed from other regions. He proposed this hypothesis by considering the peripheral or provincial nature of this region. Stadtner, D. M. (1981), 'Ancient Kośala and the Stellate Plan', in J. G. Williams (ed.), Kaladarsana, New Delhi, pp 137-145. However, Meister argued that the South Kośalan temples are not built on stellate plans but the extra protection were given in the corner of the temple to protect it from the demons which, in turns, looks like a stellate plan. Meister, M. W. (1984), 'Siva's Forts in Central India: Temples in Daksina Kośala and their "Demonic" Plan', in M. W. Meister (ed.), Discourses on Siva, Bombay, pp. 119-141. However, the present analysis of the stellate temples of this region reveals that they were originated here and gradually influenced the architecture of other regions.

49 Architecturally, the temple is uncommon in plan and elevation, comprising an antarāla almost as large as garbhagṛha and a narrow mukhamandapa. Such an arrangement was not followed in the subsequent period. K. Deva (1985), op. cit., p. 227. In many respect this temple was influenced by Deccan and south-Indian style. The arrangements of vertical niche in the exterior wall have generally been found in South Indian temples. The vertical exterior niches alternating recessed and projecting with or without images are a characteristic feature of early temples of the Deccan and south Indian architecture in general. Certain elements of base (adhisthana) mouldings and a series of simple mouldings above the wide sloping member (kubja, kumbha) at Tala are also widely prevalent in south Indian temple forms. The figural depiction on the wall of the sanctum, doorway and the side walls of its mukhamandapa has a Vākahāka flavour. Stadtner, D.M. (1980), 'A Sixth Century A.D. Temple from Kośala', in Archives of Asian Art, XXXIII pp. 38-48, also see Stadtner, D.M. (1976), op. cit., pp. 23-24, K.Deva (1985), p. 225, (1995), p. 36.
1 & 2). On the other hand, the extant pillars at Turturia show some connection with the Vākāṭaka style. The badly worn jambs at Senakpat are much akin to its counterpart at Tala. A short inscription in so-called sankha-kili of shell character inscribed on the jamb is important. This is the only known use of this script in this region, which was common in the Gupta period in the c. 5th–6th century A.D. The next architectural remains of this period is the door jamb attached to the Ramachandra temple, which is a modern shrine built from old materials. This doorway represents a fusion of elements drawn from largely north Indian and Deccani sources.

Thus, in the early stages of development, the South-Kośalan artists showed tremendous flexibilities in using the architectural motifs both from north and south India. They used these motifs in a systematic manner, which in the process crystallised with the art forms of this region and became standardised. This process was most probably completed by the turn of the seventh century A.D. Further, the South-Kośalan artists did not depend upon

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50 The site has yielded two identical pillars. Each pillar is eight sided and made up of a series of connected ornamented bands. The topmost position of the pillars assumed a tapered shape, fluted and crowned by a squat cushion-shaped member which is also fluted. This tapered design and cushion shape of the capital identical in basic shape to many Vākāṭaka pillars and pilasters in Deccan dated to the last half of c. 5th century A.D. Stadtner, D.M. (1976) op cit., p. 26.

51 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

52 The innermost band of each jamb at Rajim was composed of diamond pattern alternating with elliptical form which was slightly indented on one side in the centre surrounding those motifs with delicate floral work. This basic design is represented at Vakatakasa Ajanta and later Deccani sites with modification. It is used on the doorway of the Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur and is common in Kośala throughout the 7th century. Ibid., p. 27. Between the inner jamb and pilasters is a vertical band which contains foliate merlon patterns, a common late Gupta motif, and a hexagonal moulding which is interspersed in two places by small square floral patterns on either side. Near each square floral pattern is a pointed clasp like member, which is similar to fifth century examples from Udayagiri and Eran in central India. Separating this hexagonal moulding and the pilaster is a small vertical row of lotus petals. This feature is found on the doorways at Ajanta and is generally limited to the Deccan from c. 6th century onwards. The basic tapered shape of the capital of the pillars also relate to a type which is commonly employed at Ajanta and related to Deccani sites. Ibid., p. 28. The tabular acanthus leaves is an important decorative motifs in the doorjams at Rajim. It is also frequently found in association with Gupta doorways in north India. But the manner in which the band forms perpendicular indentations and encloses figure is unknown in north Indian sites. This form is present on the shrine doorway of cave II at Ajanta, Ibid., p. 30.
other regions, and frequently used the standardized form in subsequent temples. This change in the pattern provided artists more time to work out new forms of art. The origin and development of mandapa and stellate type of temples were perhaps a manifestation of such change. It is too early to reach such a conclusion, but these are important aspects, which reveal the mechanism of formation of regional art form in the early medieval period. Another important point emerging from the above discussion is that the external influence was mostly restricted to the features related to decorative motifs.

Although certain common architectural components run through the region, the temples, in general, were not homogenous structures and many differences exist between them. These differences are not only restricted to a sub-region but also prevail across the three sub-regions. These differences may be because of continuous experimentation, wide geographical distribution, availability of new materials and development over time. In the previous pages, while discussing the mandapa and stellate temple types, some of the differences have already been enumerated, which would be further elaborated in this discussion.

**UPPER MAHANADI BASIN**

The upper Mahanadi basin witnessed the construction of the earliest temple structure of South-Kośala, dated to c. 6th century A.D. Among the earliest structures, the remains at Tala, Malhar and Maraguda are most important. All these sites bear temples bu mandapa ilt upon an unusual ground plan\(^{53}\), which was not followed in the subsequent period. Moreover, the temple at Tala and Malhar was built of stone (foundation and sanctum walls upto vedibandha) and

\(^{53}\) The Devarani temple at Tala consists of a square sanctum, an antarśala similar to the sanctum but smaller in size and a mukhamandapa, which is unusual in comparison to the temples of the subsequent period. Similarly, the Deur Mandir temple at Malhar consists of a sanctum and a small porch where as the temple at Maraguda has a rectangular sanctum the only one of its kind in the entire region. Stadtner, D.M. (1981), 'Sixth century Temple at Tala', *op cit.*
probably of brick (superstructure), whereas the extant foundation remains at Maraguda suggests that it was a completely brick structure. The temples dated to c. 7th century A.D. are found at Sirpur, Rajim, Kharod, Seorinarayana and Palari. The architecture of the early temples at Sirpur is important not only for Kosala, but for the development of north-Indian architecture in the early medieval period as well (see Photo No. 3 & 4). Though the subsequent temples of this sub-region were modelled on the style of Lakshmana and Rama temples, certain differences are apparent. One such example is the Indal Deul temple at Kharod. It has many similarities with Rama temple (ground plan) and Lakshmana temple (superstructure), but the difference lies in the components like foundation (jagati), decoration of doorways and outer walls of the sanctum. Next in the architectural progression comes the Siddhesvara temple at Palari. While this structure shares a number of features with the Indal Deul, it differs from the latter in a number of important aspects. The Rajivalochanna temple at Rajim is in many ways different from the prevailing form of c. 7th century A.D. The introduction of open air

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54 I have already discussed the architectural components of Lakshmana and Rama temples in the previous pages.

55 The foundation of the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur is made of clay slate whereas basalt stone were used for the foundation at Indal Deul temple. Similarly, the doorways of the former bear vertical rows of rectangular niches and large mithuna groups, which were replaced by images of Ganga and Yamuna in the later one. At Sirpur bricks were rubbed for smooth surface for body decoration, where as at Kharod plaster was applied over roughly carved bricks and decoration was achieved through incisions on the dying plaster. The outer walls at Sirpur bear small pilasters and heart-shaped motifs, replaced by deities as Indal Deul temples, Stadtner, D.M. (1976), op cit., pp. 98-111, (1981), op cit., pp. 138-148, also see Longhurst. A.H. (1909-10), 'Ancient Brick Temples in the Central Provinces', ASI AR, pp. 11-17.

56 Both temples have a number of differences, which I have discussed in the previous pages. The other differences appear in doorways of the sanctum, outer walls and sikhara. The doorway of the Siddhesvara temple is more elaborate than that of Indal Deul. The single jamb and lintel at Kharod are expanded at Palari into two. At Palari there is a clear separation of temple wall into two distinct horizontal divisions by a thin horizontal band, which is present in a nascent form at Indal Deul. The addition of a vertical row of candrasalas between the bhadra, karna section at Palari is different from Indal Deul. Stadtner, D.M. (1976) Ibid., pp. 112-126, also see Stadtner D.M. (1981), 'The Siddhesvara Temple at Palari and the Art of Kosasla During the Seventh and Eight Centuries', in Ars Orientalis, Vol. XII, pp. 49-56.
pradakṣhiṇāpatis, pyramidal super structure, absence of figural sculpture on the outer walls and a wide horizontal division separating the wall from the śikhara are important ⁵⁷ (see Photo No. 6 & 7). In plan and elevation the Sabari temple at Seorinarayan is similar to Indal Deul at Kharod and the shrine at Palari. But the wide horizontal division which separates the wall from the śikhara (a feature of the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim) distinguishes it from the latter.⑸ Adbhāra and Dhoobini are two important sites which contain standing temples dated to c. 8th century A.D. In plan and elevation they are similar to other temples of this sub-region. Besides the existing components of sanctum, vestibule and pillared hall, two new features i.e., mukhamandapa and nandimandapa, were added (see Photo No. 16). Application of stucco on the outer wall to achieve a smooth surface was a new addition. ⁵⁹ The shrine at Adbhāra is similar to that at Dhoobini. But unlike other shrines of this region, which were either built of brick or brick and stone, only stone was used for the entire structure. ⁶⁰

The above discussion suggests that temples of the upper Mahanadi basin are not a homogenous category. Differences existed in terms of temple plan, elevation, decorative motifs and use of materials. Within the span of two centuries, experimentation began and continued which made the shrines more elaborate and complex.

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⁵⁷ A high wall surrounds the shrine and mandapas formed an open-air circumbulatory passage, entrance to which is provided by the two doors at the western end of the mandapa, Stadtner. D.M. (1976) op cit., p. 179, The śikhara above the varaundika is a straight-edged pyramid. It has four bhūmis marked on the karnas by kutas of four pillars supporting a heavy octagonal dome topped by an amalaka and flanked by small corner sikharikas crowned by amalaka and sijapuraka, Deva, K. (1985) op cit., p. 230.


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TEL BASIN

The Tel basin has a large number of temples dated between c. 9th–10th centuries A.D. Despite this large number, their ruinous condition does not allow for a systematic study in the stages of development within this region as well as for a comparison with other regions. However, it appears from the surviving temples that differences existed within regions as well as with other regions.

Like the temples of the upper Mahanadi basin, except the Chausathi Yogini, all other temples are of the nāgara variety. In the vertical axis we can identify two groups of temples (a) undecorated stone temples, and (b) decorated temples, the undecorated stone temples being in the majority. They neither bear mouldings nor decorative motifs on any part of their body (see Photo No. 27 to 31, 34 & 35, 37 & 38). The second group are fewer in number, but differ from each other in many respects. Most of the undecorated temples consist of a garbhagrha and a small frontal porch, but in two cases mandapas are found. However, the decorated temples bear three principal components i.e., sanctum, vestibule and mandapa. In the decoration of the shrines, the outer wall of the Indralatha temple is exquisitely carved, a

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61 The Chausathi Yogini is a circular open air shrine, located at Ranipur-Jharial. This is the only one of its kind in the entire South-Kośala region and a rare phenomenon all over India. This hypaethral temple is carved with 64 niches in its interior wall which housed yoginis. A small four-pillared mandapa exists in the centre of the circumbulatory, which enshrines an image of eight-armed, and three-headed Natarāja. Donaldson, T.E. (1985), op cit., pp. 263-64, Das, D.R. (1990), Temple at Ranipur Jharia/, Calcutta.

62 Indralatha temple is the most decorated temple of this sub-region. The brick temple stands on a high platform (jagati), whereas other temple like Patalesvara temples at Budhikomna variety bears only a low plinth. In the pabhaga the former one has four mouldings whereas latter one bears only three. The ground plan of the former one is square, whereas later one has a stellate plan in the vertical division the gandi of the former temple consists of nine bhūmis whereas the latter one consists of six bhūmis.

63 The Somesvara Temple at Ranipur-Jharial bears a peristylar mandapa discussed in the previous pages. Similarly, the temple at Silhi also bears a mandapa different than the former one. At Somesvara temple, an antarāla also exists, Donaldson, T.E. (1985), op cit., P. Das, D.R. (1982), op cit., pp. 26-29.
feature absent at Patalesvara temples at Budhikomna (see Photo No. 22, 23 & 24). On the other hand, the doorjambs of the former are devoid of any decoration, whereas the later is carved and decorated with life-size images of river goddesses (see Photo No. 25). Besides this, the temple fragments found from Belkhandi, Saintala, and Mohangiri indicate that there once existed highly decorated temples. In terms of materials, there was a preference towards the use of stone. Barring one brick temple all others are built of stone.

**Comparison of Upper Mahanadi Basin and Tel Basin**

A comparative analysis of the temples of the Tel basin and upper Mahanadi basin shows their differences and similarities. The Indralatha temple at Ranipur Jharial is the only temple complex, which retains the characteristic features of the upper Mahanadi basin. The other common features between them are: star-shaped temple, a pillar fragment at Belkhandi and the doorframe decoration at Patalesvara temple at Budhikomna. But there are a number of differences that exist between the temples of these two sub-regions. Some of them are as follows; limited use of plinth, greater number of square temple plans, Chausathi Yogini temple, peristylar *mandapa*, limited

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65 The fragmented doorframe attached to a modern shrine is important. The first jambs are decorated with scroll motif of a meandering vine throwing off broad leaves alternately to either side; the bottom niches are filled with female figures. The jamb above the niche is divided into three panels filled with figure motifs including *lingapuja*, bestowing alms, two panels of three standing females. The second set of jambs are carved with river goddesses, numerous figural scenes including many episodes of the child Krsna such as stealing curds and defeating horse demon Kesi, as well as dancers, *mithunas*, and wrestlers. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265.

66 The foundation (*jagat*) formed an important component of the temples of the upper Mahanadi basin, whereas in case of the Tel basin its use is very limited.

67 Stellate or star-shaped ground plan was widely used in the temples of the former. In case of the latter, square plan outnumbered the stellate plan.
use of decorative motifs, plain pillars and pilasters, plain doorways and doorjams and for extensive use of stone, etc. The above analysis reveals that a different kind of architectural tradition flourished in the basin of Tel. In principle, they are categorised under the Nāgarā style, but in practice they do not follow all the standard architectural components.

**MIDDLE MAHANADI BASIN**

The temples of the middle Mahanadi basin sub-region are a further development of the South-Kośalan style of architecture. Barring a few minor differences, they follow a general pattern in broad principles. Like the other two sub-regions, continuous experimentation led to innovation and inclusion of new architectural components. The fifth mouldings of pā-bhāga, ornate platform, gavāksa window, raised dais in the centre of the mandapa and dvajā, etc.

The phenomena of temple building started at the beginning of c. 6th century A. D. and continued up to the turn of c. 11th century A.D. Within this long span of time, various experimentations were made. In the initial stages of development, South-Kośalan artisans showed utmost flexibility in using the prevailing art motifs of neighbouring regions. In the process, all the borrowed features were assimilated and crystallised within the art form of this region.

68 The doorways of former temples are exquisitely carved with scroll work, patramati, patrasakha, stambhasakha, acanthans, rosette, etc. and adorned with deities, Naga, Vidyadharas, mithunas and river goddesses, whereas the doorways of the later temples are plain and devoid of any decoration except the examples at Palalesvara temple at Budhikomna and doorjams at Saimtala.

69 Brick and stone was the common materials used in the former temples, whereas in case of later temples stone was used in large number.

70 The pabhaga of the stellate temple at Boudh consists of five moulding, the first such examples on an Orissan temple, Donaldson T.E. (1985), op cit., p.224.

71 The platform consists of a number of mouldings at Gandharadi, whereas the platform at Boudh replicates the design of the ground plan of the temple.

72 For mandapa see the discussion of previous pages.

73 Cakra as the finial of Nilamadhava (Viṣṇu) temple, and trident as the final of the Siddhesvara (Śiva) temples at Gandharadi is for the first of its kind.
which became standardized by c. 7th century A.D. Therefore, in the process of continuous experimentation and assimilation a standard Kośalan style of art developed, which was manifested in the form of mandapa and stellate temple plan of the subsequent period.

Moreover, the temple building process was not a linear one and many differences existed within and among the temples of sub-regions. Such differences were outcome of many factors like, continuous experimentation, geographical distribution, availability of raw materials, temporal gap. The participation of local communities and temple built by unskilled artisans might have provided another dimension to these differences. The issue of community participation and local artisans in the temple building activities seems to be hypothetical at the present state of our knowledge. Further, the more comprehensive analysis of temple structures, corroborated with other authentic sources will shed new light into the long-drawn debate of the temple building processes.

(ii) Hierarchy

There was a horizontal and vertical expansion of temples and sites in the South-Kośala region dated between c. 6th-11th centuries A.D. So far more than forty temple sites have been identified. These sites contain around seventy standing temples and vestiges of many more. However, all the temples and sites are not of the same dimension, and importance. There are some obvious but inexplicable differences between them. Most of the temples differ from each other in terms of dimension, addition, elaboration and survival. Similarly, the sites differ from each other in terms of dimensions, number of temples, religious affiliations, and their functional associations. Moreover, all the above-discussed criteria helped to identify the visible differences which existed between them, but it is difficult to explain the factors which caused these differences. Thus, the cause of the differences needs to be studied in depth. Some of the factors can be identified, such as (a)
internal dynamics and vibrant nature of the site, (b) multiple functional aspects, (c) sacred geography and emergence of tirtha, (d) diversified patronage, (e) distribution of settlements and density of population, (f) community participation, (g) availability of suitable raw materials, and (h) communication networks and linkages.

Due to the bad preservation of the temples and lack of corroborative source materials, it is nearly impossible to analyse all the factors mentioned above. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to include some of them in this discussion.

**UPPER MAHANADI BASIN**

So far fifteen temple sites have been discovered from this sub-region. At present only twelve standing temples along with three dilapidated ones are in situ, whereas many more have collapsed and their vestiges are scattered in the vicinity (See Table No. XI).

In broad principles, all the standing temples of this sub-region share a number of common architectural components. In terms of dimension and elaboration not much difference existed. All the temples are of similar size, between 20 to 30 feet in height. The extant temple remains show that additional shrines were only attached to the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim, which is *pança-yātana*\(^{74}\) in nature and to the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur.\(^{75}\) However it is not yet certain whether these additional shrines were attached due to the growing religious requirements of an individual temple or the site as a whole. There was a temporal gap of at least three to four hundred years

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\(^{74}\) When the main shrine is surrounded by four subsidiaries shrines at the four cardinal directions, the whole complex is termed as *pança-yātana*. The Rajivalochana temple at Rajim is the only of its kind in the whole of sub-region.

\(^{75}\) Beglar has reported that the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur was surrounded by eight small temples one opposite each of the four faces, and one opposite each of the four corner; the two in front and the back were the largest the side ones comes next, the corner ones were the smallest; every one of these has long ago subsided into mound of brickbats; they were like the main shrine, on cell foundation, Beglar, J.D. (2000), *op cit.*, Vol. VII, pp. 191-192.
between the earliest and the latest shrines of the sub-region.\textsuperscript{76} The dating of the temples are not absolute and are confirmed by the architectural progression and palaeography of temple inscriptions.

Unlike the temples, the sites were more diversified in nature. These are clearly identifiable in terms of the number of temples at the site and their functional aspects. The number of temples varied from site to site. Some of them bear a single temple, whereas others bear more than one and developed as complexes. However, the religious significance of a site does not depend upon the number of temples it possessed, rather how much respect it has commanded over the local folk, and across the regions.\textsuperscript{77} Therefore, the rise and growth of a religious centre is a complex process. It does not automatically come through with the creation of a shrine or the shrines. It was, instead, highly dependent on sacred geography, elaborate ritual arrangement, creation of legends and most importantly, how much space it offered to the local community.

On the basis of their functional utility, the sites of the upper Mahanadi basin can be classified as: (a) centres of pilgrimage, (b) political centres (c) commercial centres, (d) art production centres and (e) simple religious centres.

\textbf{CENTRES OF PILGRIMAGE}

Rajim, Seorinarayan, and Turturia are three important pilgrimage centres of this sub-region. People from far-flung areas visited these sites. Among them especially Rajim is the most sacred one. Thus, its religious importance is transcended over a wider geographical zone. The data regarding pilgrimage is

\textsuperscript{76} The earliest shrine of this sub-region has been found from the excavation at the Trisul mound at Maraguda valley. The excavated Sākta shrine has been dated to c. 5\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. \textit{IAR,} Patel, C.B. (1991), \textit{op cit.} pp. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{77} In this regard we may cite the example of Puri and Bhubaneswar, two most important religious centres of coastal Orissa. In terms of structures Bhubaneswar has the maximum number of temples and is far ahead of Puri. But in terms of religious significance Puri outshines Bhubaneswar and developed as one of the most sacred religious centres of the whole of India.
more ethnographical than historical. On one hand not a single full-length inscription related to pilgrimage has yet been found, though some personal names dated to c. 6th-7th century A.D. are engraved on the pillars at Rajivalochana temple. However, it is yet to be confirmed whether these are personal pilgrimage records or names of the artisans who had constructed the shrine. The ethnographical data and local tradition traces the origin of pilgrimage and also the temples to a remote past and sometime even beyond the historical period.

Rajim is located at the confluence of the Mahanadi and Pairi. The confluence or sangama of rivers is considered sacred in Hindu tradition and has ritual importance. People take holy bath here and offer ādiśadana after the immersion of bones of deceased persons perform and other important rites related to death. The temple mainly performed two kinds of rituals, daily and annual. The daily worship was managed by the priests, whereas the annual worship was celebrated in a grand way, which required considerable resources and manpower. On ceremonial occasions, the participation of the local community was maximum and it is they who rendered different kinds of services for the celebration of the annual festivals. The creation of legends also played a crucial role in the popularisation of the sites. The legend at the Rajim temple shows the close bond between an ordinary oil-presser women and lord Viṣṇu. The legend associated with the Seorinarayan temple talks of Sabari, the old woman, who offered fruits to Rama during his vanavāsa (exile). This story is narrated in the Rāmāyana and the shrine is also named after her as Sabari temple.

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78 Beglar has reported that “Rajim is named after a Telin (oil Presser) named Rajha. She used to worship Narayana regularly, and she did so far 12 years Narayana came to her daily all the time. At the end of twelve year Narayana, being pleased, desired her to ask a boon she replied— “My Lord Stay here always and let my name precede your’s”. Hence Rajha Telin’s name is first uttered is pronouncing the name Rajivalochana”. Beglar, J.D. (2000) op cit., Vol. VIII, p. 154.
RELIGIOUS-CUM-POLITICAL CENTRES

Sirpur, Malhar, and Maraguda are three excellent examples of this category. Sirpur was one of the prominent religious centres of South-Kośāla. Of all the sites it has the maximum number of temples. However, along with its religious function, it was also the hub of South-Kośālan politics between c. 6th-8th centuries A.D. It served as the political headquarter during the rule of the Sarabhāpurīyas and Pāṇḍuvamśīs.

The previous chapter (No.II) shows the beginning of habitation at the site by beginning of the Christian era which continued up to the turn of c. 11th century A.D. The Lakshmana temple, dated to c. 600 A.D, is the earliest religious shrine at this site, and is associated with the rule of the Pāṇḍuvamśīs. The most interesting aspect of the site is that the temple-building tradition did not die with the collapse of the Pāṇḍuvamśīs in c. 8th century A.D. Rather, it continued until the end of c. 11th century A.D. when the site was finally abandoned. Malhar was another religious centre that also served as the political headquarter. But unlike Sirpur, the situation was entirely different at Malhar. It was a fortified urban settlement dated to c. 4th century B.C. and continued up to c. 13th century A.D. (see discussion on Malhar in the Chapter II and III). In the initial centuries it was perhaps under the rule of local chieftains. Later on the Magha dynasty established their authority and ruled between c. 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. After the end of Māgha rule nothing is known about political history of Malhar. The records of the subsequent ruling dynasties of South-Kośāla region are silent about it.

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79 This hypothesis is substantiated by the discovery of a large number of local coins which bears the specific mint mark ascribed to Malhar. See Majumbdar S.B. (2000), Local coins of Ancient India, A New Series, coins of Malhar. Nasik, Bhargava, R.R. (1995), 'Numismatic History of Malhar,' Numismatic Digest, Vol. 19, pp. 13-35, also see author's unpublished project report (2003),"Numismatic and History: Findings from South-Kośāla" Submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.

80 Ibid.
Malhar had a long sculptural tradition, which had preceded temple construction. Images of Viṣṇu (c. 2nd century B.C.), Śiva-Pārvati and Ardhanarishwara (c. 3rd century A.D.) and Śiva (c. 4th century A.D.) are some of the earliest examples. The earliest temple at the site (Deur Mandir) is dated to c. 6th century A.D. In the subsequent centuries many more temples were constructed, which have now collapsed and whose vestiges are found scattered around. The site is famous for its art tradition. A sizeable number of sculptures have been found, most of them dated to c. 5th and 10th century A.D.

Maraguda was one of the largest and sophisticated habitational complexes of early medieval India. Though scholars have tried to identify it with Sarabhapura, the unidentified political headquarter of the Sarabhapuriya, nothing definitely is known about its political affiliation. On the basis of its systematic planning and layout like division of citadel and outer town, double fortification around the citadel and another around the entire township with watch towers and gateways at four cardinal points, arrangement for places of worship, tanks and well, etc. it can be assumed that it was under some authority which supervised the total layout of the metropolis.

The excavation and exploration of various mounds of the site yielded a large number of temples dated to the period under discussion (See Table No. XI). The most important is the Śākta temple and Śaiva monastery dated to c. 5th century A.D. The later is the only one of its kind in the whole of India.

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82 Bajpai and Pandey (1978), Malhar 1975-77, Sagar, Ibid.
83 Photo archives American Institute of Indian Studies Gurgaon.
84 Tiwari, S.P. (1986), Comprehensive History of Orissa (Dakshina Kosalal under Sarabhapuriya), New Delhi, p. 68.
The number of temples and sculptures found from the site indicates that it had more religious ramification than political.

**Religious-cum-Commercial Centres**

All the religious-cum-political centres along with Rajim were also important commercial centres located at strategic points. Malhar was an important trading centre in the early historic period. It was connected with both the sites of northern India and coastal Orissa through Chhattisgarh and western Orissa. A large number of trade routes passed through Malhar. The trading activities of Malhar continued even in the early medieval period (see chapter II). In the inscriptions of the later period (Kalachuri) Malhar has been referred to as Mallala *Pattana.*

Sirpur, located on the bank of the Mahanadi, developed as an important urban centre of the early medieval period. The strategic location might have helped it to control the riverine trade on the Mahanadi. A large number of trade routes passed through this region, which connected north India with south India on the one hand and central India with the coast through western Orissa on the other. The commercial activities of Sirpur are attested through the discovery of coins, ceramics, iron implements, beads of precious and semi-precious stone and polychrome and monochrome glass bangles. The Gandhesvara temple slab inscription at Sirpur refers to Navahaṭṭa or a new market place, which was perhaps located at the site itself.

Similarly the strategic location of Maraguda also made it the focal point of trade and commerce. The site is located on the upper reaches of the Jonk, a tributary of the Mahanadi. It is positioned in the centre of the valley, which is surrounded by plateau and low-lying hills. Most importantly the site was not an isolated one but connected with the sites of western Orissa and the upper Mahanadi basin through regular trade and feeder routes. From the location of

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the site one may assume that it was famous for the transaction of forest products, which can be confirmed by the discovery of punch-marked coins and coins of Mahendraditya.91 The site also yielded a wide range of pottery such as red ware, grey ware, buffware, black and red ware glazed ware etc. A type of glazed ware resembling Arretine Ware has been found at the lowest level of Daniraja temple mound assignable to early Christian era. The other important discoveries are stone beads and iron implements.92

Rajim is an early historic site. Though the site is famous for its early medieval temples, the habitational area of the same period has not yet been traced. The strategic location might have promoted its participation in riverine trade on the Mahanadi. Beglar,93 who visited the site in 1873-74, reported about the trading activities at the site.

**ART PRODUCTION CENTRE**
Sirpur and Malhar fall in this category. Besides their temple remains, both the sites have yielded several pieces of art objects. These included images and sculptures, both meant for decoration and embellishment of the religious shrines and for independent worship. However, their extensive production indicates that they were not only produced for the respective sites, but to fulfil the requirement of other sites too. There might have been some kind of trade in religious objects. The excavation at Sirpur has unearthed a large number of iron implements used for specialised crafts i.e., production of bronze and stone images.94

**SIMPLE RELIGIOUS SHRINE**
A majority of the temples belong to this category. They emerged in important geographical locations, which were probably considered sacred in the preceding period. The simple religious shrines possibly had ramifications for

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93 Beglar J.D. (2000), *op cit.*, Vol. VII.
the daily life of the local folk who inhabited in the vicinity of the temple sites. The physical existence and ritual functioning of the temples depended on local patronage. Though these simple religious shrines might not have developed as centres of tirtha, but for those local folk who could not afford a long distance tirtha, these shrines were not less than that.

**Tel Basin**
The Tel basin sub-region has the maximum number of sites (24) which contains sixty-two standing temples and many more dilapidated ones. The earliest shrine is dated to c. 5th century A.D. (excavated) whereas a majority were built between the last parts of c. 8th century A.D. to early eleventh century A.D. (See Table No. II).

Among the individual temples the Indralatha at Ranipur-Jharial is the most prominent one. The brick-built Vaishnava shrine is the tallest (70 feet) structure of South-Kosāla. It is also one of the few decorated shrines of this sub-region. The broken architectural fragments at Belkhandi, Mohangiri, and Saintala indicate that the sites had elaborately decorated huge temples in the past. Barring these few examples a majority of temples of this sub-region are squat (5 to 20 feet in height), simple, single cell, undecorated in nature (see table no. 2). Since none of these shrines bear any images of deities, their religious affiliations are unknown.

On the basis of available data at least seven temple complexes can be identified. Among these Ranipur-Jharial, Ghodar, Kumda and Belkhandi are famous for their multiple temple structure whereas Surda, Balpadar and Mohangiri bear *pancaśātana* shrines.

Ranipur-Jharial was one of the sacred pilgrimage centres of South-Kosāla. At present the site has fifty standing temples. But on the basis of

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95 The Shrines at Mohangiri has completely broken down. Huge debris of temple fragment including a number of amalakas is lying at the site. The *pajari* reveals that the site had a *pachāyatana* shrine which seems possible on the basis of temples ruins.
architectural fragments, past survey reports,96 and local tradition97, it appears that the site had more than hundred temples in the past. Despite being one of the largest single temple complexes of India, Ranipur Jharial has yet not received adequate attention. Art historians have not shown much interest because these temples do not offer any scope for architectural study. Similarly scholars working on religious history, especially Śaiva-Sākta tradition gave some reference to the Chausathi-Yogini temple as one of the rarest shrines of India, but nobody has ever tried to situate Ranipur-Jharial in the broader context of South-Kośala’s regional tradition on the one hand and the growing religious complexities and the emergence of temples on the other.

It is very difficult to produce any concrete evidence regarding the mechanism and purpose for the construction of such a large number of temples at a single site.

Most of the temples at the site stand on two parallel rocky outcrops, which in turn are located in a fertile plain in east-west orientation. A tank is attached to the southern side of the first outcrop. It is perennial in nature and does not dry up even in the worst summer months as claimed by local folk. The tank has both social and religious importance. On the one hand, it is the only source of drinking water for the people living in and around the area while, on the other, it has been used for ritual purposes for a large number of standing temples at the site. This tank and the site have wider religious meaning for the people of the region. In the Somesvara temple inscription it is mentioned that “This holy place delivers (one) of all sins if one bathes here (in the tank)”98. People from far flung areas come here for the purpose of

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96 Beglar has enumerated 57 standing temples and many more broken one in his visit to the site in 1873-74. Beglar, J.D. (2000), op cit., Vol. XIII, pp. 128-137.
97 The local tradition says that the sites had 120 temples and equal number of ponds.
98 EI, Vol. XXIV (1937-38), pp. 239-244.
or the immersion of bones of the deceased person. The inscription further states that the temple was built by a Śaivacārya named Ganganasiva.99

Here it is important to mention that some of the temples at the site might have been associated with death rites of important sādhus or individuals. Memorial temples were not new to South-Kośala. Some of the important shrines of the upper Mahanadi valley are of this nature.100 In the case of Ranipur-Jharial, the nature and dimension of temples is such that they could have been financed by an individual and built by local artisans. Furthermore there is no dearth of raw material as the rocky outcrops were used for quarrying. This needs a comprehensive analysis to strengthen this hypothesis.

Ranipur-Jharial is famous for its composite religious affiliation. Vaishnava, Śaiva and Sākta traditions are amply represented in the forms of temples and panels depicted on the loose stones. This religious synthesis might have attracted devotees across the religious sect. This aspect is dealt with in detail in the next section.

Belkhandi might have been another important pilgrimage centre of this landscape. Its sacred geography, fertile plain, heavy concentration of settlements and riverine trade in the Tel could have helped in the emergence of the site. Till date the site is famous for the Śaiva-Sākta tradition. The local people refer to it as Aṣṭaśambhu-Sapta Mātrākā Pīthā. Ghodar and Kumda are two other major temple complexes of this sub-region. The number of ruined temples found at both sites indicates that they were also important religious centres in the past. Besides these, three more sites of this sub-region bear


100 The great Lakshmana temple at Sirpur was a memorial monument. It was built by queen Vasata on the memory of her deceased husband Harshagupta, (Shastri, A.M. Op. cit. pp. 141-147.) The Rajim stone inscription states that king Vilasatunga built a shrine of Viṣṇu in memory of his deceased son (EI, XXVI, pp. 49-58). Similarly the Arang stone inscription mentioned that king Śūryaghosa built abode for Sugata (Buddha) in memory of his son (EI, XXVII, pp. 116-117).
pancayatana shrines. The shrines at Balpadar and Mohangiri are completely dilapidated. Besides these seven complexes the remaining sites fall under the category of simple religious centres. They might have been important religious centres in their own right in the past. They also could have played an important role in their respective religious environment.

Unlike the upper Mahanadi basin the functional aspects of sites (other than religion) is a complicated issue in the case of the Tel basin. This sub-region had five political centres i.e., Parvatadvāra and Tarabhramaka under Tustikara101 (c. 5th century A.D.), Udayapura under Rāṣṭrakūta chief102 (c. 8th century A.D.), Kisarkela, and Murasimha under the Somavamsīs103 (c. 9th–10th century A.D.). Parvatadvāraka has not yet been identified. Tarabhramaraka has been identified with Talabhamaras village located about two miles south of Belkhandi. The site has yielded a lot of archaeological remains dated to the early historical period, but no temples of that period have yet been found from the site. Udayapura has been identified with Udaypur near Titlagarh. The site has a dilapidated temple and remains of stone fragments and amalaka dated c. 10th century A.D. Most importantly the neighbouring sites of Udaypur like Ghodar, Kumda, Sihni, Balpadar and Sirekela contain a large number of standing temples and remains dated to c. 10th century A.D. Kesarakela has been identified with present day Kesarkela, and Murasimha with Mursim. However, no temple has yet been found from these sites.

102 Recently two set of copper plates charters have been found from the village Terasingha from where the charter of Tustikara was found. These charters claimed the rule of Rāṣṭrakūta chiefs over upper and middle Tel basin dated to c. 8th century A.D. Agarwal, S (2001), ‘Two Copper-Plate Grants from Western Orissa. Mendo’, pp. 15-24, also see Mishra, B and Acharya, D. (2003), ‘A Note on the Terasingha Copper Plate of Bhanudeva Alias Dakkarisvara Deva’, in Kala Jharan, a Souvenir of Kalabandi Utsah, pp. 73-75.
103 The Patna plates (R.V., 6) and the Satalama plate (R.V. 8) of Janamejaya of the Somavamsi dynasty were issued from Murasiman which referred Vijayakataka, Samavatita Srimat Vijayakatava and Pattanavana Murasimna respectively, Shastri, A.M. (1995), op. cit., pp. 173-193.
The above discussion shows that there was no direct relation between religious centres and political centres of this sub-region. Religious sites continued for a longer period. The political centres of this sub-region were transient in nature, and nothing is known about them after the collapse of the respective ruling dynasties. Again due to the scarcity of any written records it is very difficult to associate the religious centres with the activities of trade and commerce. But the locational analysis of the temple sites suggests that some of them might have been part of riverine trade.

**Middle Mahanadi Basin**

The middle Mahanadi sub-region has eleven temple sites. At present only eight temples and a mandapa are standing, distributed over six sites. The remaining five sites only bear the vestige of old temples (see table no. 3). In terms of dimension and elaboration, the standing temples have close resemblance. Some of the sites of this region can be associated with functions other than religious.

Baidyanath, Gandharadi and Narasimhanath are three important pilgrimage centres of present-day western Orissa, and could have served the same function in the period under discussion as well. The first two sites are most venerable for Śaiva devotees. Besides the temple remains, they are also famous for Śiva Lingas. Gandharadi is called as chari-sambhu pitha. Similar attributes have also been given to Baidyanath. Other factors that might have contributed include strategic location (on the banks of major river valley and on river crossing) and cluster of settlements in the vicinity. Narasimhanath is a Vaiṣṇava tīrtha located on the source of the papanasini (of sins washer) river at the foot of the Gandhamardana hill, identified with Gandhamardana hill mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa. The site has also been associated with the story of the Mahābhārata. In fact some of the bathing ghāts of the Papanasini river are named after them and where people take holy dips. According to tradition, the Pandavas had taken shelter here during their exile.
Sonepur and Gandharadi are two important temple sites, which were political centres as well. Sonepur or ancient Suvarnpura was the political headquarter of the Somavamsis, and dated to c. 9th-10th century A.D. A number of land grants were issued from here (see Chapter III). The Sonepur charter of Janamejaya, (RY. 6) record land donation to the shrines of Kesava (Viṣṇu) and Āditya (Sūrya) by a merchant association named Kamalāvana. The Gopalpur inscription of the same king states that the shrine of Narayana Bhaṭṭāraka was built by Sadharana, a Brahmān minister under Janmejaya. Further the Jatesingha Dungri plates refers that the presiding deity of Suvarnapura was Panchambari Bhadrambka. However, neither the shrines nor any other temple of that period as mentioned in the inscription has been found yet. The earliest shrine at the site is dated to c. 11th century A.D. Moreover, in the subsequent centuries it emerged as one of the major temple sites in the whole of western Orissa and was known as Mandira Nagari (Temple City). Near Gandharadi is the site of Jagati, which has been identified with Yayātinagara a major political centre under the Somavamsis (see Chapter III). The standing temples at the sites are dated to mid-10th century A.D.

Some of the temple sites can also be associated with commercial functions. Sonepur was a leading commercial centre of the period under review. In the Somavāṁśi charters the sites have been mentioned with the suffix pura (Suvarnapura) and pāṭana. The terminology signifies that it was an urban centre located on the confluence on the Mahanadi and Tel. This was a convergence point of all trade routes connecting central India through western Orissa with coastal Orissa. So its strategic location might have helped

104 Ibid., pp. 194-199, EI, XXIII, pp. 248-53.
it to control riverine trade on the Mahanadi and the Tel. Gandharadi and Boudh are located on the bank of the Mahanadi whereas Selebhata is on the Ang and Menda is on the Suktel. Their location might have helped them to serve as centres of trade and commerce or halting stations in riverine trade. The remaining sites can simply be categorised as religious centres.

The above discussion has brought out some important issues pertaining to temple sites and their functional aspects. The period between c. 6th and 11th century A.D. witnessed a multiplicity of temples sites. However, they were not a homogenous group and many differences existed between them. Similarly these sites cannot be placed in a linear hierarchy. Each and every temple was the product of the local religious and social milieu and had great religious importance within that locality. They were also not solely religious in nature but dispel other function as well. But the religious importance of some of the sites transcended from local to supra-local and regional levels. However, the process was a gradual one and was influenced by many historical factors as discussed in the chapter.

(III) Religious Affiliation

The religious transformation of the early medieval period has been studied either through inscriptionsal sources or on the basis of the Puranic literature. Scholars\textsuperscript{108} who have used inscriptionsal data believe that religious transformation of the said period was only brought through land donation to the Brāhmaṇas. Similarly scholars\textsuperscript{109} who have used Puranic literature perceived it as the mechanism for the same purpose. But none of these studies have included temples and sculptures, which were the manifestation of the early medieval religious transformation. Therefore, a comprehensive

\textsuperscript{108} Herman Kulke and B.D. Chattopadhyaya are the main proponents of this hypothesis. See the historiographical section of the Chapter I.

\textsuperscript{109} Vijay Nath and Kunal Chakrabarty have put forward this argument. See the same section for the detail. Nath, V. (2001), \textit{Purana and Acculturation, A Historical-Anthropological Perspective}, New Delhi.
analysis of the temple and sculpture is imperative to understand the same in case of South-Kośala. In this section, an attempt is made to analyse the religious content of the inscriptions, seals, sealing, and coins on one hand and temples and sculptures on the other. A comparative study will also be made to see how far the inscriptive data matches the objects situated on the ground.

The earliest epigraphic records of South-Kośala belong to the Nala dynasty. Out of the four inscriptions, two refer to Vaisnavism\(^{110}\) and another two to Saivism.\(^{111}\) However, their coins only bear the symbols of Saivism.\(^{112}\) Though the Nala inscriptions claim that they were involved in the construction of a Viṣṇu temple (Padamula), no shrine has yet been identified with the site.\(^{113}\) It may be recalled that the Nalas ruled over one of the densely forested parts of India.

In the 6th century A.D., the Sarabhapuriyas had established their rule over the upper Mahanadi basin and perhaps succeeded the Nalas. So far eighteen copper plate charters of the dynasty have been found. These charters indicate that they were devout Vaiṣṇavas and bear the epithet paramabhāgavata. This is also corroborated by the art motifs depicted on the seals of their...

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\(^{111}\) The Kesaribeda plates of Arthapati described him as 'Mahesvara-Mahasena Atisrstra Rajya-Vibhavah (one upon whom the glory of royalty has been bestowed by Mahesvara (Śiva) and Mahasena (Skanda-Karttikeya). *EI*, Tripathy, S. (1997), *op. cit.*, pp.

\(^{112}\) So far gold coins of the five rulers (i.e., Varaharāja, Arthapati, Bhavadatta, Nandanarāja and Stambha) have been found. All the Nala coins bear symbols of couchant bull facing left and at times to right, with the crescent in front. *JNSI*, Vol. XLIII (1981), pp. 49-53, Vol. XL (1978), pp. 108-110, also see Sahoo, A.C. (1980), ‘Saivism as Reflected on the Gold Coins of the Nalas’, *JNSI*, XLII, pp. 110-112.

\(^{113}\) Although the Rajim stone inscription of Vilastunga at present attached to the Rajivalochana temple, it seems that it was not an original part of the shrine. Architecturally the shrine has been dated to c. 6th century A.D. where as palaeographically the inscription is dated to c. 7th–8th century A.D. Deva, K. (1985), *Op. cit.*
charters. These consist of an Abhiseka Lakṣmi and associated devices like conch shell, cakra, sun, moon and crescent, purṇa-kumbha. Similarly their coins also bear Vaiṣṇava motifs. Despite their Vaiṣṇava religious affiliation, the only shrine mentioned in their inscription, dedicated to the Śaiva sect.

Contrary to the epigraphic data, the extant temples and loose sculptures indicate a much more complex system of religious beliefs and practices in c. 5th–6th century A.D. The excavation at Maraguda has unearthed a Sākta temple and a Śaiva monastery complex. Malhar has yielded temple fragments and important images like those of Kṛṣṇa (standing in samabhāṅga posture), Kubera, Lakulisa, (seated), Sūrya (standing), dated to c. 6th century A.D. The sixth century A.D. sculptures from Sirpur are Cakrapurāsa (standing) Viṣṇu, Nṛsimha (seated/standing), lower part of Sūrya images, Lakulisa, Ganas (standing), dvārapālas (standing) and a Buddhist vihāra (Anandaprabha) along with the images of Buddha (headless) seated in bhūmisparśamudra and Ambika (standing).

Tala is an important site of the same period. The site has two broken temples, dated to c.550 A.D. and c.570 A.D. and the dilapidated one is known as Devarani temple. The garbhagṛha of the Devarani temple is empty, but the

114 The Goddess is standing on a full blown lotus, and flanked by an elephant on each side. The elephants standing on the water lilies are pouring water from the pot held by the uplifted trunk on the head of the goddesses. Nayak, P.K. (1998-99), ‘Seals, on Orissian Inscriptions: A Study of Art Forms’, Kala, Vol. V, pp. 67-75.


118 Photo Archives AIIS, Gurgaon

119 Ibid.

images carved on the door jambs and lintels indicate that it was a Śaiva shrine. However, the Śaiva tradition of this site seems to be different from that of other sites of South-Kośala. The lower most section of the door lintel contains a four-armed standing kankalamurti (a form of Śiva) flanked by two standing bhutas. The most interesting image found from the site is a giant eight-headed deity measuring 2.70 meters in height. This enigmatic image has not yet been identified properly.  

A seated Kubera (south jamb), Abhiseka

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121 It is perhaps the earliest representation of Śiva in kankalamurti form in India. Its attributes like the holding of drum and staff adorned with bones (kankalamanda) in his right hand, while one of his left hand holds a baton (yaṣṭi) to strike the drum. All of these attributes are recognized in a number of late north and south Indian texts. This form of Śiva became popular in medieval South India, Nigam, L.S. (ed.), (1999), Riddle of Indian Iconography (Zetetic on Rare Icon from Tala), Jaipur, p. 48.

122 This two armed image is standing in samapāda posture. It has unusual iconographic features depicting various animals along with hUman and lion heads as body ornaments. A turban is made of a pair of snake, a pair of serpent-head figures on either side of the head above the shoulder. A snake is also shown entwining the left leg. A peacock is depicted ornamenting ears. Eyebrows and nose are made of a descending lizard. Two figures of fish form moustaches of the image along with upper lip, while the lower lip and the chin are shaped like a crab. Both the shoulders have the depiction of makaras (crocodile). Seven hUman heads are engraved in various part of the body. The legs of the icon are formed in the shape of elephant’s legs. This image attracted the attention of a numbers of scholars, who have proposed divergent identification. Joanna Williams is of the view that the depiction of this Yakṣa should be a visual conundrum, like the navagunjara form of Viṣṇu depicted in the Oriya Mahabharata. She has also compared the image with cosmic Viṣṇu, visvamṛta and the Buddhist vairocana. Williams, J.G. (1999), 'Thoughts About A remarkable Sculpture from Tala' in L.S. Nigam, (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 69-72. K.K. Dasgupta accepts the image as pasmpati and visvamṛta aspects of Śiva and compares it with the navabharata. Dasguta, K.K. (1999), 'An Enigmatic Image of Śiva', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 73-82. Micheal Meister opines that this icon is proportioned by a system of Śiva and it can be related with various lokas. He also correlates the images with Śiva- Yakṣa and visvamṛta of Śiva. Meister, M.W. (1999), 'Too Late of Tala', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 83-88. Doris Srinivasan identifies the image as Rupa- Yakṣa among the two Mahā- Yakṣa referred to in the Brahmanical texts. Srinivasan, D.M. (1999), 'Rupa Yakṣa; Unique Icon/Unique Identification', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 89-96. Hans Bakker considered the image as composite Śiva-gana figure that may have had an apotropaic function, protecting Devarani temple. He also observes tribal influence on the statue. Bakker, H. (1999), 'An Enigmatic Giant from Tala', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 101-106. R.C. Agarwala elucidates on the traditions of Śiva and Yakṣa in the art-form and refers to the Śiva-Linga of Gamṛi in which in Yakṣa figure is carved. Thus he suggests that in the transitional phase people had started carving Śiva-Lingas on the pattern of Yakṣa but not forgetting the older tradition of Yakṣa worship. Agarwal, P.K. (1999), 'Śaivite Gana Statue from Tala', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 107-110. P.K. Agarwal described the image as an icon of personified figure of Śiva-weapon called Agbarastra on the basic of Agamic literature. Agarwal, P.K. (1999), 'Śaivite Gana Statue from Tala', in L.S. Nigam (ed.), Riddle of Indian Iconography, Jaipur, pp. 111-116.
Lakṣmi (upper door lintel), Śiva-Pārvati (north jamb) and Umā-Mahesvara are important. The other images found are Karttikeya, Ganesha, Varuna, Sūrya, Viṣṇu (plaque), Mahisasuramardini Durga, Gauri (plaque), and a Mesamukha gana or Naigamesa (ram headed).

The Sarabhapurūyas were succeeded by the Pāṇḍuvaṁśī who ruled between first parts of c. 7th century A.D. to the last part of c. 8th century A.D. So far 32 inscriptions have been found. The distribution pattern of their charters reveals that they had established their sway over the upper Mahanadi basin. The early Pāṇḍuvaṁśī rulers bear the epithet paramavai[ṇava whereas, the last and the most important ruler styled himself as paramamahesvara. The important development of this period was that now kings started comparing themselves with a deity or deities and important personalities of the epic or of Puranic origins. The seals attached to Tivaradeva’s charters bear the motifs

123 Nigam, L.S. Ibid., p. 47,49.
124 Such types of gati has also been found the Vākṣaka site Mandhal, Ibid., p. 52.
125 In the Bamhani plates of Udinnavira, Maharaja Bharata is said to have been born of the queen Indrabhaṭṭārika, as Kumāra was born to Pārvati. His prowess is equalled with that of Indra, the Lord of gods. He is compared with the river Ganga in his virtues. (Shastri A.M. (1995), op cit., pp. 73-79, EI, XXVII, pp. 132-145). In the Adabhāra plates of his son Mahannarāja, it is referred that Tivaradeva is said to be have been born in the lunar family (saut-vansu) and to have excelled the lustre of the first lord of the earth (i.e., Prthu) by the perfection of the qualities like statesmanship, humility, truthfulness, liberality, bravery, and the like which were acquired by grace of Narayana pleased with the adoration in several births. (Shastri, A.M (1995), op cit., pp. 116-118, EI, XXXI, pp. 219-22). In the royal grant of MahaŚivagupta Balarajuna, he is compared with Karttikeya. The Senakpat inscription of Durgarakṣita of time of Śivagupta Balarajuna begins with the auspicious invocations (mangala) 'namah Śivya' and invokes Śiva as Bhava in the first verse and his consort Pārvati in the second. Durgarakṣitas overlord is described in verse 3 as a devotee of Śiva, in verse 4 he is referred to as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Durgasakṣita himself described as devotee of oṇāmamahesvara as Sambhu (i.e., Śiva). The Sirpur Gandhesvara temple inscription contains an invocation to Hara (Śiva), the god who bore the Ganga on his matted locks. (EI, XXXI, pp.31-36). The Sirpur stone inscription of the time of Śivagupta (which record a private, not a royal donation) commence with the mangala 'namab Śivya' and invokes Sambhu (i.e., Śiva) the Pāṇḍuvaṁśī king Indrabala, the son of Udayana, is described in this inscription as equal to the destroyer of Vāla i.e., Indra; his son Nannarāja is said to have filled the earth with the temples (alesat) of Lord Śiva. The Sirpur stone inscription of Balarajuna begins with an invocation to Viṣṇu as purushottama and goes on to eulogise Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. The same pravasti is replete with comparison of the Somavamsī king with epic heroes. A brother of Candragupta rīja is said to have followed him in battle just as the one whose weapon is the plough i.e., Balarama, followed the killer of Kamsa i.e., Kṛṣṇa; MahāŚivagupta is described as an incarnation of dharma (dharma-avatara) and said to have conquered the earth with the help of his younger brother Ranakesarin even as Prtha’s first son (Yudhisthira) did with his younger brother Bhima. MahāŚivagupta is compared with Kṛṣṇa and Kalkī. Vasata is compared with Pārvati, the mother of Karttikeya. She is also compared with the goddess Śri. The queen and her husband were worshippers of Ṣaṁ.
of the therio-anthropomorphic form of Garucā, the mount of Viṣṇu. The figure of Garucā is flanked by cakra and sankha, whereas seals attached to the charters of MahaŚivagupta Balarjuna display Śaiva motifs i.e., couchant bull, a trident, purṇa-kambha (vase of plenty) and a full blown lotus.

Out of the 32 charters 21 are related to religious donation to temples, mathas, Śaivācārya and Buddhist monastery. Moreover the maximum numbers (15) of donations were made to Śaiva shrines and Śaivācāryas, the other religious sects mentioned in the inscriptions are Buddhism (twice), Vaisnavism and Sūrya worship (once each). Among the Śaiva shrines, one religious establishment is prominently mentioned. There are eight inscriptions which refer to the establishment of the shrines of Balesvara Bhaṭṭāraka, the mathas attached to it and the additional shrines which were built in the complex. This religious complex was said to be located in the low lying area of Sirpur the political headquarter.

Nevertheless, the religious milieu as evident from the extant temples and loose sculptures is more complex and diversified. The temples of the period under discussion are distributed over 15 sites (see table no. 1). Though there was a preponderance of Śaiva shrines, other shrines affiliated to Vaisnavism, Jainism, Buddhism and Indra also flourished. Moreover, the Śaiva temples were not an exclusive category. The images of deities depicted and carved on the temples shows that they had provided enough space for other sects as well. The depiction of Vaiṣṇava deities on the door lintel of

126 Nayak, P.K. *op cit.*, p. 71.
Śaiva shrines is an indication of the religious synthesis and co-existence of different sects at one place.

The sculptures also formed a major part of the religious practices of the period. It not only manifests itself in the rich art tradition of the region but also the religious milieu of the period as a whole. They were not always meant for the decoration of the temples, but were also worshipped as personal deity. If an image of Nṛśimha or for that matter any of the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina deities have been found from any site, it signifies that the inhabitants of the site might have been well aware with the story or legends around the deity or deities and required rituals, otherwise there is no point in carving images adhering to strict rules and regulations. Some of the important sites like Sirpur, Malhar, Marguda, Rajim have yielded a large number of sculptures belonging to Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina religious orders.129

Politically, nothing more is known about the Tel basin sub-region. So far only five copper plate charters and a stone inscription have been found, the earliest of which is dated to c. 5th century A.D. and belongs to Maharājā Tustikara.130 Here, the king assume the epithet Stambhesvari padabhakṣa or devout to the feet of Goddess Stambhesvari. The Rāṣṭrakūṭa chiefs who ruled over the upper Tel basin were Śaivite in faith.131 They assumed the sectarian epithet paramamahesvari, but the seals attached to their charters bear the

129 The important Brahmanical deities found from the Sirpur are cakrapurusa, Visnu in large number, Nṛśimha in large number, caurumukha linga, Śiva Natarāja, Kubera, Varaha, Śiva, Andhakasuramurti, Umā Mahesvara, Sūrya, Kṛṣṇa killing Kesi, Brahma Rama (?) etc. Photo Archives, AIIŚ (Gurgaon). The Buddhist images consist of Buddha (inscribed), Bodhisattava, Ambika (standing), Manjusri, Buddha with snake Mūlinda over head, Buddha seated in bhūmiśparśamudra (headless), Buddha (seated) Avalokitesvara Padmapani (standing), Buddha seated in bhūmiśparśamudra (Bronze), Buddha seated in saradamudra (Bronze), seated Buddha in dharmaakra pravastaanamudra, Padmapani (seated), Vajrapani (seated). All these sculptures are dated between c. 6th and 8th century A.D. Photo Archives AIIŚ (Gurgaon) Sirpur has also yielded sculptures of mother goddess and Jaina Tirthanuara. Malhar has also unearthed a large number of sculpture affiliated to Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism.


Vaiṣṇava emblem Garuḍa. The only inscription which refers to the construction of a shrine is the Somesvara temple inscription at Ranipur-Jharial, which attributed its construction to a Śaiva ācārya named Gaganasiva.

But architecturally this sub-region was very rich in the period under discussion. So far twenty four temples have been discovered which contain sixty two standing temples, and vestiges of several more. Saivism, Saktism and Vaisnavism were the main religious sects. Ranipur-Jharial is an excellent example of the peaceful co-existence of these sects. The example from Belkhandi and Saintala also endorse the same view.

In their eastward expansion from the upper Mahanadi basin (i.e., Raipur, Bilaspur, Raigarh areas) to coastal Orissa, the Somavamśi had ruled over the middle Mahanadi basin for a considerable period of time. A majority of their charters were either issued from the political headquarters located here or meant for this sub-region.

The Somavamśi kings assumed the sectarian epithet like paramamahesvara, which shows their Śaiva leaning. The seals attached to their charters usually depict Gaja- Lākṣmi seated in lalitasana, but in some case standing humped bull along with crescent moon are also depicted.

The Somavamśi inscriptions do not usually begins with an invocation to a deity, but aberrations do occur. The Mahākosala Historical Society Plate begins with the auspicious invocation ‘Om Namah Śivaya’. The Sonepur plates of Kumāra Somesvara state that the grant was made after

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134 Ibid., pp. 296-300.
135 Ibid., pp. 194-199, EI, XXIII, pp. 248-55.

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invoking the name of the lord Mahesvara (Bhagavanam Mahesvara Bhattārakam Uddiyā). The Brahmesvara temple inscription\textsuperscript{136} invokes the full moon.

Similar to the Pāṇḍuvamśī, the Somavaṃśī charters are also replete with various deities of the Brahmanical pantheon. The kings compare themselves with a deity or deities and an important personality of epic and Puranic origin.\textsuperscript{137} The reference to religious shrines is very rare in Somavaṃśī charters. The Sonepur charter\textsuperscript{138} of Janamejaya refers to the shrine of Kesava (Viṣṇu) and Āditya (Sūrya). The Gopalpur plates\textsuperscript{139} of the same king refer to the shrine of Narayana Bhagaraka. The Jatesinga Dungri Plates\textsuperscript{140} of Mahasiva-gupta Yayāti states that Bhagavati Pancāmbari Bhadrāmbikā was the goddesses of Paṭṭana-Suvarnapura (Sonepur).

\textsuperscript{136} Here it is also mentioned that Moon was born with Sri from the midst of the ocean of milk when it was churned along with the Mandara mountain by Brahma, Upendra, Mahesvara, Indra, Bali with the king of serpent as the churning rope. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 303-308.

\textsuperscript{137} The Orissa state Museum plates of Mahasivagupta Yayāti compared Jamayeya's accession to the throne with that of Yudhisthira's accession to the throne. There is a reference to Janamejaya's intelligence being adorned and purified by his understanding of the essence of the Agamas. The king's qualities are compared with that of Somarāja, the moon. (Shastry, A. M. (1995), \textit{op cit.}, pp.219-225) The Jatesingha Dungri plates of Mahasivagupta Yayāti compare the king with legendary kings such as Nala, Nahusa, Mandhata, Dilipa, Bharata, and Bhagiratha. (\textit{Ibid.}, pp.276-284) In the Brahmesvara temple inscription of the time of Udyotakesari, Bhimaratha is said to be the tree of plenty (Kalpa-vrksa) of the kali age; his son Dhamaratha is said to be the second Parasurama; Udyotakesari is said to be a conqueror of the earth like Mandhata, Prthu, and Bharata. Udyota Kesari's mother Kolavati is compared with goddesses Durga and Laksmi. (\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 305-308). In the Narasinghpur plate, Yayāti, the father of Udyotakeshari is referred to as the representative of Madhusudana (i.e., Kṛṣṇa). (\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 358-361).The Gopalpur plates of Janamajeya (first regnal year) opened with a stanza invoking the favour of god Śiva, who is described as adorned with the divine river (Ganga), Snakes and human skull, here Svabhabatunga is compared with god Visnu (Hari) in the form of a bore (Varaha incarnation) supporting the earth on his arms. This inscription refers to the Indradhvaja festival. The reference to the Indradhvaja festival as the occasion for the grant is also very important. Although such festival is referred to in a number of literary texts of the ancient India, inscriptive references are very rare and the present one is one of them. Shastry, A. M. and Tripathy, S. (1994), \textit{OHRJ}, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 92-118


\textsuperscript{139} \textit{OHRJ}, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 119-132.

The picture that emerges from the temple remains and loose sculptures is more diverse in nature. So far eleven temple sites have been identified, containing eight standing temples, a mandapa and ruins of another at least 12 structures. Though Saivism dominates the religious environment, Vaisnavism and Saktism were also present here. The unique features of the temples of this region are the presence of a huge anantasayana Viṣṇu on the door lintel of the Śaiva shrines. The presence of the mother goddess cult is mostly comes from loose sculptures.

To sum up, we can say that great divergence existed between the inscriptive data and temples and sculptures situated on the ground. The inscriptive data neither matches the number of temples and sculptures nor their diversified religious affiliation. Saivism and Vaisnavism are the main concern of the inscriptions whereas Saktism plays an important role in the religious tradition of the period, even though it is not represented in a major way in inscriptions.

(iv) Ritual

Ritual is a generic term used to describe the diverse and complex forms of worship. However like religious affiliation this aspect has also been studied largely from the literary sources. Despite of its diverse forms and means, it can be broadly categorised into domestic and temple rituals. Though domestic rituals are an important aspect of human life, it is outside the purview of present research. The aim of this section is to highlight some important facets of temple rituals of the period under discussion. These can be analysed through inscriptive data, narrative panels, and ethnographical data.

The inscriptions provide some valuable information regarding the nature of ritual practices. Certain terms like bali, cāru, and naivedya are often mentioned in the records. The Rawan plates of Sarabhapuriya king

Narendra is the earliest record of South-Kosala, which states that land was donated to the temple of God Sridharasvāmin at Vatapadra. It was meant for meeting of the expenditure for its repair, the bali, cāru offering and the free feeding house attached to the temple. The Malhar\textsuperscript{142} plates of Pāṇḍuvamśi king Śivagupta Balarjuna mentions that the king donated land for repairs and the arrangement of bali and cāru offering for the temples of Kapilesvara (Śiva) and Bhaṭṭāraka (probably Sūrya). The Sirpur Lakshmana temple stone inscription\textsuperscript{143} of the same king reveals that a separate village was donated for bali, cāru naivedya and the almshouse attached to the god. The Sonepur plates\textsuperscript{144} of Somavamśi king Janamejaya I record the land donation to the temples of God Kesava (Visnu) and Āditya Bhaṭṭāraka (Sūrya) for meeting the cost of bali, cāru, and naivedya. The Gopalpur charter\textsuperscript{145} of the same king (R.Y. 10) states that the donated village was divided into eight parts, three of which were made over to the temple, located at Suvarnapura to meet the cost of offering of bali, cāru, naivedya, services, repairs and for worship. A set of nine inscriptions found from Sirpur\textsuperscript{146} also refer that bali, cāru, and naivedya were important items of temple ritual.

Some of the records registered the provision of flowers and garlands for daily worship of the deity. The Sirpur stone inscription\textsuperscript{147} of Śivagupta Balarjuna records that permanent provision was made for the supply of four-garlands of the measure of man’s height, daily to the trident bearer (i.e., Śiva). The Sirpur Gandhesvara temple inscription\textsuperscript{148} of the same king record that a person named Jorjjaraka installed the offering of a flower garland measuring a

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 122-123.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 148-149, \textit{EI}, XXXI, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 152-153.
purusa in height for the worship of God Gandharvesvara. Flowers for this purpose were to be supplied as long as the moon and the sun last.

Besides the usual caru, bali, and naivedya, dance (nṛtta) and instrumental music (vādītra) also constituted integral part of Śaiva worship, mentioned in the Lodhia plates. A set of nine copper plate charters found from Sirpur also mention about the music and dance as a part of temple rituals. The Senakpat inscription of the same king states that arrangement of a sacrificial rite yōga and the ceremony of initiation (dikṣā) are the main obligation of the Śaiva ascetics for securing the final beatitude (nirvāna) and for the exposition of the Śaiva doctrine (samaya). The Gopalpur charter of Janamejaya I (R.Y.1) is the only inscription which refers to a festival. Here, it is mentioned that the grant was made with the pouring of water for the augmentation of the religious merit and fame of his parents and his own self on the occasion of the great festivals of the raising of (the banner) of Śakra, i.e., Indradhvaja festival, in the first year of his accession prathamarajyabhiseka-sakr-ottbana-mahaobhavam samaye. This is one of the rarest epigraphic references to the Indradhvaja festival.

The sattra or free feeding house was an important part of the temple rituals. Inscriptions refer to two types of sattras, one which was attached to the temple and the other was independent. The sattra mentioned in the Rawan plates Lodhia plates were attached to the temples. The Sirpur Lakshmana temple stone inscription shows that, king had donated an addition village

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149 Ibid., pp. 128-13, EI, XXVII, 319-25.
150 Ibid., pp. 154-159, EI, XXXI, 31-36.
151 Ibid., pp. 154-159, EI, XXXI, 31-36.
152 Ibid., pp. 154-159, EI, XXXI, 31-36.
153 This is an important piece of information regarding the Indradhvaja festival. While it is referred to in a number of ancient texts like the Kauśika-Sūtra, Yajnavalkya-Smṛti, Mahabharata, Harivamsha, Natyāṅga etc, and described at length in a full chapter in Varahamihira’s Brhat-Sāhitya (Ch-42), inscrpational references are very rare and the present is one of them. Shastri A.M. and Tripathy. S. (1994), OHRJ, XXXIX, pp. 101, and 110.
154 Same as no. 1
155 Same as no. 7
156 Same as no. 3

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for worship and maintenance of a sattva. The Sirpur stone slab inscription\(^{157}\) of Śivagupta Balarjuna states that Anandaprabha a Buddhist monk established a free feeding house for the monks of the local monastery.

Narrative panels depicted on the temple walls and doorjambs of the garbhagrha and antarāla shed light on ritual practices. The kalyāṇa sundara murti or Śiva Pārvati paripāya (the marriage ceremony of Śiva and Pārvati) is an important narrative panel of the temples of this region. The Abhiṣeka Lakṣmi was also an important element of the door lintel or narrative panel. Linga-puja or worship of linga by devotees is depicted on the broken doorjamb at Saintala,\(^{158}\) outer wall of the stellate temples of Boudh\(^ {159}\) and on the outer walls of Deur Mandir temple at Malhar.\(^ {160}\) Śiva being worshipped by hermits is depicted on the inner face of the doorjamb at the same site, and a panel bearing seated worshippers is sculpted on a temple fragment kept in the Malhar museum.\(^ {161}\)

The ethnographical data gathered during the field work at some of the Śaiva and Sākta shrines indicate a more elaborate form of ritual. The rituals at Śaiva shrines are mainly of two types i.e., daily worship and ceremonial worship. The ābāhana or invocation of god is the mainstay of daily worship, which is done through the offerings of caura, bali and nauvedya and through the recitation of mantras. The main objects constitute of daily offerings are phula (flower), dipa (lamp) dhupa (incense), chandana (paste of sandalwood), belapatra, milk and annabhoga (plain meal). The annabhoga is prepared by the priest. At some temples annabhoga was offered thrice a day i.e., morning, noon and evening whereas at other places only once at noon. Besides these daily rituals, certain ceremonial worship is performed on various festival occasions, yajña


\(^{160}\) Scholar own field work at the site.

\(^{161}\) Photo archives AIIS, Gurgaon, Delhi.
(sacrificial fire) and jalăbhiśeśa (ceremonial bathing of Linga enshrined in the garbhagṛha).

Apart from this daily and ceremonial worship, temples celebrated certain important annual festivals. This depends upon the religious affiliation of the temple. The whole month of Sravana, Kartika, and Magha are considered as sacred for Śaiva worship. The important ceremonial occasions are Śivaratri, Sheetal Sashṭi, Māgha Saptami, Makara Sankṛānti, etc. Moreover, for Sākta temple the month of Chaitra is sacred, and Duṣṭehra festival is celebrated in full gaiety.

Temples were also closely associated with the three great moments of human life i.e., birth, marriage, and death. After the birth of a son parents performed the ceremonial ritual or jalăbhiśeśa in a Śaiva temple. If a child remained sick for a long period parents sold him to the god. However, parents again bought him from the god at time of the marriage by performing a jalăbhiśeśa ceremony. The god is the first invitee at the marriage ceremony called devaganasa or the invitation of god through the offering of a sacred kūmbha filled with water and balāti (turmeric). The family of a dead person took ritual water from the temple for purification. But the rituals performed at Sākta shrines are different from a Śaiva shrines. Annabhoga is not a part of their daily worship. Similarly animal sacrifice is an important aspect of the ceremonial worship.

The above discussion reveals that the inscriptive data do not match with the diverse nature of the sculptures found from this region, and the ethnographical data collected from some of the selective shrine. While inscriptions mentioned to some of the generic terms like cāru, bāli, naivedya, these are seems to be associated with daily worship of a Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava shrine. However, the ethnographical study reveals that apart from the daily worship, these shrines celebrate some annual festival in a grand manner whose rituals are different from the daily worship. Moreover, the Śaiva and
Vaiṣṇava sects are not homogeneous in nature. The rituals related to invocation of Nṛsimha, Vṛāha, Bhairava must be different from the conventional rituals of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Secondly, the inscriptions do not provide any information regarding the mother worship whose temples and sculptures are found in plenty.

The extensive analysis of temple structures and other associated issues presents an altogether different picture of religious shrines and centres. The previous study, based on insessional data, perceived the temple as a homogeneous category and the similarities in style was a manifestation of cultural diffusion from the north Indian core to peripheral regions. However, the present study is a departure from this view. The South Kosalan temples in broad principles have similarities with the nāgara variety of north Indian temple architecture, but in many respect they are different from them and demonstrate a regional style of structure. Further, the temple of this region was not a homogeneous category. The temples of three delineated sub-regions are different from each other in many counts. The specific and limited nature of epigraphic records fails to encapsulate entire gamut of religious process and practices of early medieval South Kośala. The diversity in the temple style and religious affiliation indicates towards a diverse nature of patronage, which is discussed in the next chapter.