Chapter- VI

CONCLUSION

The present study seeks to understand the cultural processes of South-Kośala in the early medieval period. Here the main emphasis was to trace the various factors, which provided an impetus to the emergence of religious architecture. Since I have undertaken this study with a larger perspective of early medieval historical debates, the issues raised and discussed have wider implications not just for the region under discussion but the early medieval period as a whole.

South-Kośala has some of the earliest extant temples of India dated to c 6th century A.D. It is these temples which have remained neglected in the early medieval debates. Scholars attribute their emergence to the mechanism of state formation, land donation, migration of Brāhmaṇas, settlement expansion, cult appropriation, acculturation, and so on. According to them the nāgara style of temple architecture was a phenomenon of the so-called core region (i.e., the Gupta Empire) and their appearance in the so-called peripheral region (in this case South-Kośala) is a classic example of cultural diffusion.

However, my present research is a departure from the existing notion. This study reveals that South-Kośala was neither a peripheral zone nor its history began only after Gupta invasion. The recent archaeological investigation in this region unearthed a large number of early historic sites dated between c. 5th century B.C. to c. 5th century A.D. Moreover, some of the sites were surrounded with elaborate fortifications, which indicate site hierarchy and their dominant position in the landscape. The locational analysis and spatial distribution of sites reveal that they expanded to diverse ecological
zones. Site clustering can also be seen at some localities which emerged as the centre of activities in the subsequent period.

Moreover, South-Kośala was not a homogenous whole, and on the basis of site distribution I have delineated three sub-regions, which supplement the notion of multiple cores and multiple peripheries within a historical region. Nonetheless, the division of sub-regions are not a mere geographical creation. These divisions bear certain historical meanings in terms of their settlement pattern, temple style, religious affiliation and overall trajectory of historical development. The early historic period was also marked by a rich material culture. This involved mobilisation of resources locally and regionally as well as participation in a wider trade and exchange network system. This extended trade and exchange network facilitated the movement of men and materials and led to cultural interaction with neighbouring regions.

Diverse religious practices and belief system were other important aspects of early historic period. These consisted of image worship as evident from the discovery of a Viṣṇu image (c. 2nd century B.C) and Śiva-Pārvati image (c. 3rd century A.D) from Malhar. The symbols depicted on South-Kośala Jainapada type of punch-marked coins corroborated this view. Similarly, the terracottas, ring stone, rock paintings and burial practices were other facets of early historic religious tradition. Moreover, their continuation even after the appearance of religious shrines reveals their deep underlying meanings.

The religious shrines of the early medieval period did not appear in isolation or in an altogether new area. Their distribution pattern reveals that they were mainly concentrated in the three delineated sub-regions.

The earliest temple of South-Kośala perhaps appeared in the upper Mahanadi basin dated to c. 550 A.D. So far fifteen temple sites have been found from this sub-region dated between c. 6th–9th centuries A.D.
Interestingly some of the important temple sites like Sirpur, Rajim, Arang, Kharod and Maraguda show continuity of settlement from the early historic period. Furthermore, Sirpur and Maraguda which accounted for the maximum number of religious structures flourished in the early medieval period as well. Sirpur which contains the maximum number of temples served as a political headquarter and trade centre for a period of three hundred years (c. 6th–9th century A.D.) under the rule of the Sarabhapuriyas and the Pāṇḍuvamśis. Similarly, Maraguda was an important metropolis and trade centre of the early medieval period.

The locational analysis of temple sites and settlement distribution indicate their coterminity. In other words shrines emerged in those areas which were dotted with settlements. A majority of temple sites are located along the banks of the Mahanadi or in adjoining localities, albeit some sites are distributed away from it. A systematic analysis of settlements mentioned in the inscriptions indicates that they were widely distributed. The emergence of temple sites on the flood plain areas is an indication of the consolidation of earlier inhabited areas. However, the distribution of temple sites over inland and upland areas should not be considered as an outcome of settlement expansion through land donations. Recent archaeological findings from Kalahandi district show that even in the early historic period the inland and upland areas were under occupation. Furthermore, the inscriptions of South-Kośala themselves negate the hypothesis of settlement expansion through land donation. It is known from the inscriptions that all the villages mentioned in them were settled and were tax paying centres inhabited by different social groups. Since, not a single charter talks about the donation of \textit{khila-bhūmi} (uncultivated land) or \textit{aranya} (forested area). I am sceptical about the notion of land donation to Brāhmaṇa as a mechanism of settlement expansion. One important aspect that needs to be stressed in the context of early medieval settlement is that inscriptions do not represent the total picture of a given historical period. These record only those settlements which were
associated with donation. So, many villages do not appear in the inscriptions as they never formed a part of any donations.

The Tel basin accounted for the maximum number of temple sites (Twenty four). Although, the earliest of these can be dated to c. 5th–6th century A.D., a majority of them belong to c. 8th–10th century A.D. On the basis of their location they can be categorised as riverbank sites, inland sites and upland sites. However, the relationship between shrines and settlements is uncertain in nature. This is partly because of poor archaeological investigation and a dearth of epigraphic records.

The symbiotic relationship between shrines and settlements is also evident from the middle Mahanadi basin. This sub-region has yielded eleven temple sites dated between c. 9th–11th century A.D. Out of these eight sites are located on the banks of the Mahanadi and its tributaries like the Tel, Ang and Suktel which were under early historic and early medieval occupation.

Temples of this region, which are the main focus of the present study, represent the origin and growth of a regional style of architecture. Though in broad principles the temples of this region may be categorised under the nāgarā style of north-Indian temple architecture, but in practice, the Lakshmana temple at Sirpur, which is the benchmark of South-Kośalan style is more mature and in many respects, different from its counterparts in Central India. The regional idiom is more apparent in the stellate or star shaped temple and mandapa or frontal pillared hall. The temple with a stellate or star-shaped ground plan is a unique feature of Indian temple architecture. Such temples are mostly attributed to the Hoyasala kingdom dated to c. 10th–11th century A.D. However, their earliest formation can be traced to South-Kośala. The Rama temple at Sirpur is the earliest of this category dated to c. 7th century A.D. South-Kośala bears stellate temples from the nascent to mature types dated between 7th–11th centuries A.D. So using architectural features to define regional styles within a core-periphery model seems rather
inadequate. Similarly, the *mandapa* or frontal pillared hall is an exclusive architectural feature of South Kośalan temples. In no other temples of c. 7th century A.D. the *mandapa* is so elaborate as in the case of Lakshmana temple at Sirpur and Rajivalochana temple at Rajim. From there onwards it developed into a more mature and complex structure and culminated at Kosalesvara temple at Baidyanath (c. 10th century A.D.). The *gavākṣha* windows, *kaksasana*, and raised square dais in the centre surrounded by four pillars in four cardinal directions are unique features of the *mandapas* of this region.

Besides their structural diversity, in the religious domain also all the temples and sites were not of equal importance. There were certain differences that existed among them. While some religious shrines or centres had supra-local and regional importance some others were restricted to within a locality. Moreover, the rise and growth of religious centres and shrines was not linear in nature. It was a very complex process and in their gradual development many factors provided an impetus and these varied from one site to the other.

The religious tradition of South-Kośala was not homogenous in nature as reflected by the inscriptions and numerous temples and loose sculptures. However, there is discrepancy between the data gleaned from these two sources. Inscriptions reveal data pertaining mainly to Saivism and Vaisnavism, though occasionally referring to Saktism and Buddhism. Contrary to this, a systematic analysis of the temples and loose sculptures demonstrates a more diverse religious tradition, with a prominent presence of Saktism, and Jainism as well. Interestingly, the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava tradition does not mean the worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu only but consisted of a plethora of other deities belonging to these pantheons. The worship of the mother goddess and Tantricism, which flourished in the early medieval period, can only be ascertained through the study of extant temples and loose sculptures.
The inscriptional records are also inadequate for the study of ritual practices. The terms mentioned in them like bali, cāru, and naivedya are vague and their actual meaning and nature are not known to us. However, the ethnographical studies reveal the complex nature of ritual. It consisted of both daily worship and ceremonial worship. The rituals of all the deities were not the same. Animal sacrifice was an integral part of the mother cult which cannot be ascertained from inscriptions.

In the present work, I have also discussed the issue of patronage at length. A thorough analysis of epigraphic records and extant temple structures provide a new dimension to it. The study reveals that patronage to religious institutions was not an exclusive prerogative of royalty and nobility as has been perceived by scholars. However, many other individual, social groups and local bodies also participated in their construction, management and maintenance. All the donations were not for the construction of religious shrines as some of them were made in favour of existing shrines.

The inadequate nature of epigraphic records is also apparent in the case of patronage. Their total number is much less than the number of religious institutions situated in the region. Moreover, they are not uniformly distributed in the region, either in terms of dynasty or sub-regions. Most of the inscriptions belong to the rule of the Pāṇṇuvaṁśī dynasty of the upper Mahanadi basin and to the reign of Mahasivagupta Balarjuna. In contrast, Somavāṁśī being first regional kingdom, their participation in temple building activities was meagre as reflected from the inscriptions. Also, the Tel basin contains maximum number of temple sites whereas they are not represented in the inscriptions.

While dealing with patronage I have also focused on the issue of the Brāhmaṇa as their role has generally been highlighted in debates on the early medieval period. The epigraphic records of South-Kośala show that the Brāhmaṇas were hardly associated with religious institutions. The Sirpur
Lakshmana temple inscription is the only available record which ascribes them the role of temple priest. However, detailed provisions were made for their ritual specialisations, inheritance and appointment of new priest in place of a deceased one. Here it is clearly mentioned that the new priest must be a relative of the existing one, advanced in age, well versed in required limbs of Veda, and their appointments were the prerogative of the priests’ family and not of the king. Moreover, the Brāhmaṇa varṇa was not a monolithic group during the period under discussion. There were many differences that existed between them, which were determined by their sākha, cārana, pravara, anupravara, professional association, political connection, unequal land possession and so on. There are indications of growing complexities in Brāhmaṇa identify from one period to another.

In contrast to the Brāhmaṇas, the Śaiva ācārya played a prominent role in the construction, installation, consecration and maintenance of religious institutions, several inscriptions record land donation to Śaiva ācārya and refer to their role in the organisation of sacrificial rites (yaga) and initiation ceremonies (dikṣa).

The present research has wider historical implication especially in the study of regional history and culture. Theoretically, it has demonstrated that there is no universal application of models and frameworks proposed by scholars in the context of the early medieval period. Every region has its own personality, cultural dynamics and trajectory of historical development. Hence, there should not be any blanket generalisation rather regional variation should always be taken into consideration. Practically, the research design, the methodology like quantification of data, their representation in tables and division of South Kośala macro region into sub-regions can be used in the study of any of the historical regions of the early medieval period. The issues raised and discussed here can also contribute to an understanding of the early
No region should be considered as isolated or peripheral zone without adequate archaeological investigation for that matter; no historical region even that of the Ganga valley was a homogenous whole or core area in its entirety, rather it consisted of multiple cores and multiple peripheries. They were also not static in nature but changed over time. So the present work is against the blanket use of the notion of core and periphery.

The present work may also contribute towards an understanding of culture phases and their continuation. Here I have tried to show that cultural phases continued transcending the historical time span constructed by historians. However, the cultural attributes and pace of growth might have differed from one time bracket to another. This research is also against the notion of disjunction between early historical and early medieval cultural phases, as the early historical development continued to influence and mould early medieval development.

The study of religious shrines in their social context is another contribution of the present research. Religious shrines did not appear in isolation as they were constructed by and meant for the communities. Thus, there is little data to support the notion of settlement expansion by Brāhmaṇas through state initiative as the mechanism behind the emergence of shrines. Here I have argued that emergence and decline of settlements was a historical process and many factors were responsible for it and can by no means categorised simply as political.

Inclusion of extant temples and loose sculptures in the study of the early medieval religious process is important. The religious process of the early medieval period has long been studied from the perspective of inscriptions or the Purāṇas which could not depict a holistic picture. Moreover, it was wrongly perceived that there was a superimposition of Gupta style of temple architecture in peripheral regions through diffusion. The present study, however, is in contrast to this hypothesis. In broad
principles, the temples of South-Kośala may have come under the nāgara style of north-Indian temple architecture. But in reality, all the temples are not a homogeneous category. There are many differences that existed between them. Within this diversity, they retained a strong regional character manifested in the origin and evolution of stellate ground plan and mandapa. Establishing a hierarchy of the temple is also a complicated issue. It does not solely depend upon size, dimension, elaboration and decoration of shrines. A whole range of other factors were responsible for it which has been elaborately discussed in the present study. The religious affiliation and ritual practices were much more complex than generally depicted in inscriptions.

In spite of my hard work and best of efforts, due to time and resource constraints, certain issues could not be taken up for discussion whose proper investigation would have contributed to our understanding of the role of temple in religious transformation.

The early medieval period has always been studied through the prism of inscriptions and literary records. But a thorough archaeological investigation will certainly reflect the nature and extent of settlement distribution. Systematic indexing of ceramics, which has not yet been achieved, will reveal the relationship between sites and their inter-linkages. Intensive site-surface survey would be useful in evaluating a link between temple and their social milieu.

In the present research the study of temple remains within the time-frame of c. 6th-11th centuries A.D. However, the temple did not cease to exist afterwards. Thus, it is imperative to study religious shrines within a longer time span to understand their survival strategies and the interest groups involved in their maintenance and preservation.

The ethnographical survey and contextual analysis of legends associated with the temple can be of great help in ascertaining the interaction between the shrines and communities and the latter perceptions about the
former in the past. My ethnographical study on selective temples reveals the close association of present communities living in the vicinities of shrines. Temple forms an integral part of their day-to-day life. On each and every occasion they visit the temple and participate in the daily and annual festivals. God or deities presiding in nearby temples are the first to be invited in a marriage ceremony which is called devāgaṇāsana. Similarly, first crop and fruits are offered to gods. The padukā-pani or oblation water of the deity has been used for the purification of sins like birth or death in a family. Therefore, a thorough collection of ethnographical data and their contextual use will be of great help to understand the role of temple in a given social milieu.

Another important aspect that could not be taken up for discussion is a comparative study with neighbouring regions especially costal Orissa. As I have mentioned that the present day Orissa is divided into a number of independent Politico-cultural units in the past. Similar kind of exercise, as done in the case of South-Kośala, would be of great help to establish their relation on one hand and the early medieval debate on the other.

I hope that my modest attempt will initiate further research on the social and cultural milieu of the temples of the different regions of the subcontinent.