CHAPTER - VII

THE GUPTA PERIOD

(C.320 to 550 A.D.)
I. SOURCES:

Moving out of the marshy and miry ground of misgivings and meagre information compelling us to qualify our expressions with 'must have been' and 'may have been', we now start walking on solid ground and follow a sure path, the Gupta rule having begun. No longer we have to remain content with literary references only; no longer our march is hampered owing to the lack of epigraphical and numismatic data; no longer are we obliged to enter in surmises and conjectures. Thanks, indeed, to the Gupta emperors who have left a wealth of epigraphical and numismatic evidence throwing a flood of light on the spiritual life of the contemporary of India. A part of this wealth belongs to Bundelkhand.

To the Gupta emperors goes the credit of establishing a strong and stable administration after the Mauryas for more than two centuries and thereby ushering India in an era of peace and prosperity which proved a fertile ground for the growth of fine arts like sculpture, architecture and painting. Consequently the cultural map of Bundelkhand comes alive with numerous shrines and stupas supplying us unmistakable and unimpeachable evidence to continue our narrative. Surviving to the present day and testifying to the deep spiritual consciousness of the people are a number of inimitable and immortal sculptural remains assignable to this age.

On epigraphical plane we possess inscriptions of the Saka king Sridharavarman, Samudragupta and Budhagupta from Kran. At Deogarh the ruins of the Gupta temple yielded a brief record of a brother of emperor Kumāragupta I. Another Gupta record is incised
on a rock there in Shāṭī with Siddha Kī Guphā. No less important are Nāgma Kī Talāi inscriptions of Ucañalpa Mahārāja Vyāgradeva. The same monarch has left one more record at Canj (Dist. Panna). Khon Copper Plates of Pārivrājśa and Ucañalpa Mahārājas are also valuable for us as these kings must have held some territory of our area. Khon is located quite close to the boundaries of Aundhelkhand. Identical is the case of Śāni and Udayagiri records of the Gupta period, as they belong to a region adjoining to our area. As a matter of fact all records of the Gupta emperors reflect their religious policy and so a reference will be made to them in course of our narrative as Aundhelkhand was a part and parcel of their empire. Towards the end of the period Kālaṇjar was occupied by the kings of the Somavarmś dynasty. Udayana a king of this dynasty has left his record there.

As regards numismatic data much of it was discovered outside Aundhelkhand but the legends and deities on Gupta coins tell us a lot about royal religion and so we should not hesitate in making their use in our narrative.

On literary plane we do not possess a single book of this period written in our region. But we can make use of the Brhatasamhīta of Varāhamihira who certainly flourished during the period under review. He is known to have toured extensively throughout the country. Presumably he travelled through our region also. His book contains valuable information on the religious life of the period.

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2. ibid., p. 21.
Bundelkhand is particularly rich as far as sculptural and architectural remains of this period are concerned. At Eran and Deogarh, we possess remains of numerous Gupta temples and art-relics. Prominent among these are the Visṇu temple, and the Garuda Pillar of Eran and the Gupta temple and the Varāṇa temple at Deogarh. A temple dedicated to Śiva stands at Sakor (Dist.Damoh) (Plate No.VII.Fig.No.2) and another dedicated to Pārvatī is located at Nachnā (Dist.Panna). Thus for the first time, in course of our narrative, we possess sufficient archaeological material bearing upon the religious history of our region.

II - RELIGIOUS POLICY OF THE GUPTA EMPERORS

The Gupta period witnessed the progress of Brahmanism to peaks of glory, which ruled supreme in the realms of religion ever after. The Gupta emperors were particularly devoted to Visṇu and styled themselves Parama-bnāgavata in their inscriptions. Īśvaragupta has assumed this title in his Gaya Copper Plate. Īśānagupta II has used this title in his Gāḍhāvā stone inscription. Kumāragupta I has also styled himself with this title in his Gāḍhāvā stone inscription. The Bhātari stone inscription of Ikṣvaku aims at recording the installation of an image of Visṇu. Identical was the object of his Gāḍhāvā stone inscription. Visṇu has been invoked in the Junagarh rock inscription of this emperor.

2. Ibid. No.7.
3. Ibid. No.8.
4. Ibid. No.13.
5. Ibid. No. 86.
The coinage of the Gupta emperors, no less than their inscriptive records, speaks of their devotion to Viṣṇu. Containing representations of Garuḍa and goddess Lākṣmī, their coins reveal that Viṣṇavism enjoyed the status of a royal religion.

Far more important and significant than the progress of Viṣṇavism is the revival and renaissance of Brahmanism of which Viṣṇavism was one of the chief cults. In other words, the Gupta emperors not only patronised Viṣṇavism but also actively aided and effected a renaissance in Brahmanism. Of utmost importance in this regard, is their performance of Aśvamedha sacrifice which had long been in abeyance. In the Gaya Copper Plate, Samudragupta has been held a restorer of Aśvamedha sacrifice. Shitari stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta makes an identical observation. Kumāragupta I also performed Aśvamedha sacrifice, and like his grandfather he issued special coins to mark the occasion. From Aran stone pillar inscription of Audhagupta we note that Indra Viṣṇu celebrated sacrifices and practised private study of the scriptures. In Ganganara stone inscription Naravarman is said to have pleased the gods with sacrifices.

Notable again is the tendency of the Gupta emperors and other royal personalities to compare themselves to Brahmanic gods, as is evident from their inscriptions. Allahabad Praśasti of Samudragupta regards him equal to the gods Brahmā, Varuṇa, Indra and Sūtaka. Identical claim can be seen in his Gaya Copper Plate and Aran stone inscription. His Allahabad Praśasti says that he rut to shame Kasyapa, Pumouru and Nārada by his sharp

1. altkar, m.s. : The Coinage of the Gupta Empire, Pl.2.
3. Ibid. No.1.
4. Ibid. No.2.
and polished intellect. In Caṇḍagupta stone inscription,¹ Viśāvavarmans is said to be equal to Āraṇāspati, Vīśnu in strength and the Lord of gods in prowess. The Mādāśor stone inscription of Kumaṇaragupta and Caṇḍavārman² says that Viśāvavarmans was equal in intellect to Śūkra and Āraṇāspati, and his deeds in war made him equal to Pārtha. An An Posthumous Pillar inscription of Goparāja³ says that Śāhānugupta was equal to Pārtha. This frequent mention of Brahmanic gods also reveals that Brahmanism had reasserted itself.

One should not conclude from what has been said above that the Gupta emperors were intolerant of other cults and sects than that of Vīśnu. Plenty of evidence we possess attesting to their broad out-looking and catholicity of temperament. Their liberal policy in matters pertaining to religion is reflected in a number of contemporary records.

The Sānci stone inscription of Śāndragupta II⁴ is Buddhist in character and records a grant by Śrīnakārīhava who was an officer of the emperor. Kānāwar stone image inscription of Kumaṇaragupta I is also Buddhist and records the installation of an image. From the Kusumā stone pillar inscription of Śrīnagupta⁵ we learn that five Jain images were set up. Udaygiri cave inscription⁶ of C.E. 106 (A.H. 820) is Jainia in character and records the installation of an image of the Tirthankara Pārśva at the mouth of the cave. Among other Buddhist inscriptions of the time, Sānci stone inscription of C.E. 131 (A.H. 450-51)⁷, Mathura

2. Ibid. No. 18.
3. Ibid. No. 20.
4. Ibid. No. 5.
5. Ibid. No. 13.
6. Ibid. No. 61.
7. Ibid. No. 62.
stone image inscriptions of C. B. 135 (A.D. 454-55)\(^1\) and G. E. 230 (A.D. 549-550)\(^2\) and Deoriya\(^3\) and Kasra\(^4\) stone image inscriptions are also noteworthy. The evidence cited above shows that the heterodox sects of the Jainas and Buddhists enjoyed great prestige and popularity during the Gupta period and the Gupta emperors never looked with disfavour at them.

Alike was their attitude to other cults affiliated to Brahmanic faith. Virasena Sāda, a Śaiva, was the Minister of Peace and war of Čandragupta II. He caused the excavation of a cave temple dedicated to Śiva at Udayagiri. Bilsad stone pillar inscription of Kumāragupta I records the erection of a temple of Svāmī Mahāsena.\(^6\) Binae stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta mentions temples dedicated to Skanda and the Divine Mothers.\(^7\) Gaṅgadhara stone inscription of Nīśavarman purports to record the erection of a temple of Divine-Mothers.\(^8\) Mandasar stone inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman records a temple dedicated to Śun.\(^9\) Thus if the Gupta emperors patronised and encouraged Vaiśṇavism on the one hand, they offered ample opportunities and accorded full freedom to other cults and sects for continuing and increasing their activities.

Another notable feature of the religious policy of the Gupta was their practice of establishing and endowing the alms-houses. Gaṅnā stone inscription\(^10\) of Čandragupta II records the establishment of such an alms-house. His son and successor

\(^{2.}\) Ibid. No. 70.
\(^{3.}\) Ibid. No. 66.
\(^{4.}\) Ibid. No. 69.
\(^{5.}\) Ibid. No. 6.
\(^{6.}\) Ibid. No. 10.
\(^{7.}\) Ibid. No. 12.
\(^{8.}\) Ibid. No. 17.
\(^{9.}\) Ibid. No. 18.
\(^{10.}\) Ibid. No. 7.
Kumāragupta I is also known to have contributed to the perpetual maintenance of an alms-house. 1

III - BUDDHISM

The little evidence, attesting to the existence of Buddhism in our area, that we possess consists of fast-vanishing traces of stupas that stood at Chhoti Jadoni (Dist. Datia) during the Gupta period. The evidence indicates that the stupas had a radius of about 15 m. and were constructed of the Gupta bricks which are still scattered at the place. Local traditions of Datia district speak of Mahāyāna Buddhism having been associated with the nillocas of Copesvara in the vicinity of Chhoti Jadoni from the early centuries of the Christian era getting, later on, a strong hold over the region. 2 Our assumptions are confirmed by the find of baked clay seatings, containing the miniature representation a stūpa and a Buddhist formula which were collected as a result of the survey undertaken by a team of the deptt. of A.I.E.C.A. Archaeology, University of Bhopal. The characters of the legend are assignable to 6th century A.D.

Bundelkhand Unnatrasal Museum (shanda) houses a sculptural representation of a stūpa possessing a square base crowned by a cylindrical dome. Carved fully in round, it measures 15 cms. in height and 10 cms. side at bottom on each of its faces, the stūpa contains representation of a miniature shrine within which a seated Buddha can be seen. In two of these representations, Buddha has been depicted in dhyāna-mudra whereas in other two he sits in dharma-cakra-mudra and bhūmisparśa-mudra respectively. On

2. किसी किसी के नाम से उनके पुत्र कुमारागुप्त के समय में वैसे ज्ञात नहीं है।
three sides the well-known Buddhist formula is inscribed below these Buddha figures in Gupta Brāhmi.

Exactly similar sculptural representation of a miniature stūpa is included in the collection of Manatma Gandhi Hindi Museum, Kalpi. Both the stūpas are carved out of slate coloured stone, but their find-places could not be ascertained.

IV - JAÑINISM

No positive evidence we possess testifying to the existence of Jainism in Aundelkhand during the Gupta period. Dr. B.C. Jain, who has thoroughly studied the Jaina remains of Deogarh, however, believes that at least temple No.15 and the maññamandapa of temple No.12 there can be assigned to the Gupta period. From the Jina images lying at the place, he has dated one in the Gupta period.

Finding some resemblance between the Gupta temple of Deogarh and temple No. 15 of the Jain group there, Dr. Jain regards that either of them must have inspired the conception of the other, implying thereby that temple No. 15 could be earlier than the Gupta temple or at least not far removed in date from it.2

With regard to temple No.12 he believes that it assumed its present form in course of four centuries with maññamandapa the earliest component part to be placed in the 4th century A.D. Developing further his theory, Dr. Jain says that this maññamandapa was originally planned as those sections of the samavasarana of a Tīrthāṅkara, that occupy the central situation.

1. तां लेन, माहते : हेमण्ड्र की लेन तो लांकनिक अभ्यस्त (सौंप प्रसाद-प्रतिष्ठित) बागर विश्वविद्यालय.
2. विशेष - पृ. २७२.
These central compartments are 12 in number, and here also we get the same number, being 3 in every direction, leaving the space for passages. Gandhakuti occupies the center most position in a samavasarana with a square form and contains the seat of the Tirthankara on three circular platforms. Though this Vedi is lost now, but an inscription found on its place is now studded in the south-east corner of the mahāmandapa. This inscription is known as Jñānasīla record, containing lines of letters from different alphabetical orders starting with Brāhmi. It symbolises that the sermon of a Jina is delivered in 18 chief languages and (700 dialects) and so, it was placed in the center of this mahāmandapa.\(^1\)

We have some difficulty in accepting the views of Dr. Jain as regards the date of temple No. 15 and the mahāmandapa of temple No. 12. Of course, there is some resemblance between the former and the Gupta temple of Deogarh. Since both have an arrangement of panelled niches in outer facades, but the latter has one cella whereas the former has three. The Gupta temple certainly had a śikhara whereas temple No. 15 is crowned by a pavilion. The Gupta temple was provided with a deep and flat continuous canopy to protect the panelled niches whereas no such arrangement can be made out in case of temple No. 15. Moreover, inscriptional evidence found within the temple is not assignable to the period before 9th century A.D. So the resemblance noticed by Dr. Jain is not so great as to warrant us in dating this temple to the times of the Gupta temple.

As regards temple No. 12, it is true that its construction was spread over some centuries and its component parts came gradually into existence. But Dr. Jain has not given any

\(^1\) Jain, B.C.: Ibid., P. 120.
ground for placing its manāmandapa in the 4th century A.D. The earliest dated inscription of Deogarh, which belongs to this temple is of the time of Anoja Pratināra. Dr. Klaus Brunn, who has also made a thorough study of the Jaina remains of Deogarh, believes that among the component parts of temple No. 12, vimāna with porch was the earliest to appear and the hall belongs to the late-medieval period. As a matter of fact, he categorically, remarks, "There is no evidence which would lead us to suppose that important Jaina temples and sculptures were in existence before the middle of the 9th century A.D." Hence the existence of Jainism at Deogarh during the period under review is ruled out. We do not mean that Jainism was non-existent in Bundelkhand during the Gupta period, but in the absence of evidence we can only say that its followers must have been few and destitute of resources to raise shrines in honour of their Jinas.

V - VAISHNAVISM

(A) Names of Viṣṇu:

The epigraphical records of the period contain following names of Viṣṇu -

1. Viḍnātri
2. Janārdana
3. Nārāyaṇa
4. Keśavapurasvamin

It may be noted here that the names mentioned above are available from the inscriptions found in Bundelkhand.

1. C.I.I., Vol.IV, No.44.
2. Brunn, Klaus : Ibid., pp. 52, 53.
3. Ibid., P.I. (Introduction).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., No.36.- śṛṅg stone boar inscription of Tormana.
(3) **Visṇu Temples**

The well-known Gupta temple of Deogarh was dedicated to **Visṇu** who is called as 'Keśavapurasvaṁin' in a brief pillar inscription which was discovered by Daya Ram Sanani on excavating the ruins near the temple.² Perhaps **Visṇu** was the presiding deity of Deogarh in Gupta period which may have been known as Keśavapura. The **Vaisṇava** dedication is further confirmed by the figure of **Visṇu** who occupies the lalāṭabimba on the **uttaranga** of the door-way and who has been represented in a variety of forms in the panelled niches of the outer facades.

The temple has been hailed as a gem of Gupta art and architecture by the scholars and is regarded as one of the earliest śikhara temples of North India.

Standing on a **jaṭāṭā** accessible by a flight of steps on all sides, it consists of a sanctum only surmounted by a fragmentary śikhara. Facing west the temple has three panelled niches in its outer facades, which are highly artistic and extremely beautiful. Very little of the śikhara remains in situ that crowned the monument.

A lively controversy rages round the question whether there were four small porches or a covered gallery around the shrine. **Cunningham**² held the former view and **Percy Brown**³ held the latter. Rejecting their opinion, **N.Ś. Vats**⁴ says that a deep and continuous flat canopy, effectively shading the reliefs below, had been provided all round the temple. **Dr. P.K. Agrawal**⁵ who made special study of the Gupta temple architecture remarks, "It is

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3. *Indian Architecture*, P.60.
apparent that there was presumably an architectural expedient to protect the sculptures; whether it was in the form of porticos or simple continuous projecting canopy, it is difficult to ascertain now. The five śākḥā door-way to the sanctum is exquisitely carved, and is certainly one of the absorbing features of this temple. In lalāṭabimba on the door-lintel, a figure of Viśnu sits on the serpent-coil. The four-armed god holds čakra and śāṅkha in back hands; the front right hand is abhaya-hasta, while the front left is placed on the folded leg. Lakaśmi is seen massaging his suspended right foot. To the right of Viśnu, stands four-armed figure of Nṛśimha.

With respect to the date of the temple, there is, again, a controversy among the scholars. Cunningham¹ was not inclined to place it earlier than 600 A.D. and Daya Ram Sahani² dated it in the early Gupta period on the basis of short Brāhmaṇ record that he found in the precinots of the temple. Percy Brown³ placed it around 500 A.D. and Shri M.S.Vaṭā⁴ opined that it was built in the beginning of the 6th century A.D. Dr. F.K. Agrawala⁵ first identified Śāṅgavata Govinda of the pillar-inscription (found by Shri Daya Ram Sahani) as the son of Čandra-gupta II with the help of Bāsarh seal begotten of his wife Mañadevī Daruvadevī. and then he assigned the temple to the period a.d. 400 to 430.

The Viṣṇu temple of Ċran is in ruins and no longer its original self. According to Cunningham, the temple as we now see it, is later by at least two or three centuries than the Nṛśimha temple at the same site. He further observed that its early

3. Indian Architecture, P. 61.
portico as well as the body of the building was left unfinished; it is not improbable that it may have fallen down and afterwards rebuilt as we now see it. Its flat roof is only early feature. "However .... how far the was justified in attaching Samudragupta's epigraph to 'the old temple of colossal Viṣṇu' with its massive capitals and mouldings which were discarded at a later date for pillars of a more ornamental style", wonders Dr. P.K. Agarwala.1

Except a few adniṣṭhāna mouldings of the sanctum nothing survives of it. The portico pillars are 16-sided with a height of about 2 mrs. 61 cms. They are carved with ghaṭapallava and lotus designs. The sanctum door is 2 mrs. 73 cms. high and 1 mtr. 33 cms. wide. Its a four-ākāṃ doorway. A colossal but fine icon of Viṣṇu is ensnared within the sanctum.

(C) Temples dedicated to Viṣṇu Incarnations :-

A notable feature of Vaiṣṇavism of this period is that the 'para' aspect of Viṣṇu was as popular as some of his vibhava forms which he is supposed to have assumed for the benefit of mankind. Of his incarnatōry forms, Varāha and Nṛṣimha were so popular during the period under review that in Bundelkhand some temples were dedicated to them.

Earliest among these is the Nṛṣimha temple at Bāna of which nothing survives now. It consisted of a single cell with a portico in front supported on four pillars. The pillars themselves no longer stand now but their positions can be clearly defined by chisel marks on the surface of the plinth. The ensnared figure of Nṛṣimha has an elemental strength and vigour. Save for its head and neck, the rest of his body has broken now. Prof. K.D. Daspsi has

assigned the temple to the reign of Chandragupta II.

A Varāha temple was built at Eran during the time of Toramāṇa, the Hūṇa king. The boar still stands in situ. Measuring 5 mrs. 30 cms. from snout to tail and nearly 3 mrs 75 cms. in height, the body of the boar is carved all over with tiny human and divine figures. The earth-goddess has been shown as hanging from its right tusk. Over its shoulder is carved a four-sided shrine with a sitting figure in each face. The neck is encircled by a garland of small human figures. The inscription dated in the first regnal year of Toramāṇa and incised on the neck of the boar praises the Varāhāvatāra of Viṣṇu in the opening lines in the following manner—"Victorious is the god Viṣṇu who has the form of a boar; who in the act of lifting up the earth out of the waters caused the mountains to tremble with the blows of his hard snout and who is the pillar for the support of the great house which is the three worlds..."2

The inscription further informs us that this 'divine temple of Nārāyana' was erected by Dhanyakṛṣṇa to honour the wishes of his deceased brother Matṛviṣṇu and it was a joint deed of religious merit.

According to Dr. P.K. Agrawal the Varāha temple of Deogarh, situated towards the west of the hill is also datable to the Gupta period. He is of the view that "Several sculptures and architectural fragments represent relics of an early Gupta temple at the site. The image of the Varāha ensnirmed in the sanctum is to be regarded beyond doubt as the surviving from the initial establishment."

1. Bajpai, K.D.: Sagar through the Ages, P.5.
   "अति घर्ष्युदिर्घि घर्ष्युदिर्घि घर्ष्युदिर्घि पशुसिद्धि
   देवै वराहर्वशिष्टक्या पहाण्व हस्तम्य: 11"
But we have some difficulty in agreeing with the views of Dr. Agrawal. The Varāha panel now lying in the sanctum does not bear any trace of Gupta style and art. The figure of Nṛ-varāha has been crudely executed and lacks in that realistic form which is the hall-mark of Gupta art.

It is interesting to note here that the three panels lying around the Varāha temple contain the same subjects as those of the Gupta temple of the same place. Of course, the art and execution here is decidedly inferior.

(D) Garuḍa Pillar of Eran :-

The practice of raising dedicatory pillars in honour of Viṣṇu was prevalent during the period. At Eran stands a flag-staff which was raised during the time of Budhagupta in honour of the god 'Janārdana'. (Plate No.VI.Fig.No.2) Possessing a height of about 16 mrs. and placed on a pedestal 4 mrs. 30 cms. square, this flag-staff was placed facing the temple of Viṣṇu described above. The shaft is 1 mr. square upto a height of 6 mrs. 70 cms. and then octagonal. The lower portion of the capital is in the form of a reeded bell, above which is an abacus surmounted by a square block. The lower half of this is plain, but the upper half is carved with two lions sitting addorsed to each other. Crowning the pillar is a two-armed male figure representing Garuḍa, about 1mr. 50 cms. high, facing both ways and has a radiated halo round the head. The inscription of Budhagupta is carved a few mrs. above the plinth on the side facing the temple and dated in the year A.D. 484-85. The opening lines of the record invoke Viṣṇu in the following words—

"Victorious is the lord, the four-armed god Viṣṇu whose couch is the broad waters of the four oceans; and who is the cause of the
continuance, the production and destruction of the universe; and whose ensign is Garuḍa. The flag-staff was raised by Mātravīṣṇu and Gaṅgavīṣṇu for the purpose of increasing the religious merit of their parents.

(5) Vaiṣṇava Sculpture:—

The Viṣṇu temple at Ērāṇa enshrines a colossal figure of Viṣṇu. According to Brhatasamhitā, "The worshipful god Viṣṇu may be represented either as eight-armed, four-armed and two-armed; his breast should be marked with Kaustubha gem. He should be yellowish green in colour like the līn blossom, be clad in a yellow garment and should have a serene expression; he should wear earrings, and a topped-crown (kiriṭa) and his neck should be thick (full and fleshy). The right hand of the two-armed god should be in the abhāṅga pose, the left one holding conch-shell; in this manner the image of Viṣṇu should be made by those who desire prosperity. 2 Viṣṇudharmottara enjoins that Vāsudeva should be four-armed, possessing a charming appearance and beautiful body, ornamented with kundala, aṅgada, keśūre, vanamāla, and kaustubha, kiriṭa. His loin-cloth and vanamāla should go upto knees and yajñapavita should hang upto navel. A fine lotus should be carved as his śirāṅgakara and he should have long arms. Below, between his legs should be shown the earth-goddess. Flanking him should be shown Gaḍādevi and Čakrapuruṣa. 3

The Viṣṇu icon from Ērāṇa, referred to above, is of massive built with full and fleshy body as enjoined by Brhatasamhitā. Standing samapādaṣṭānaka, the god is ornamented with a kiriṭa, flat torque, a fine vaijayantimāla and armlets, in accordance with the direction of Viṣṇudharmottara. The left arm of

   कर्म विपुल विचार जैसे निरंकुर्म विदु प्रक्तिल परंतु। 
   कक्ष: विक्षुप्रसन्नकारदि सु गीत उक्तह।।
2. नैसर्थ, 37, 31-32, 35.
the deity seems to be Kaṭyayalamśita contrary to the injunctions of Brñatsamhitā which directs that it should hold a saṅkha.

Another image of Viṣṇu is also lying at the site. Standing in samabhaṅga pose the god is flanked by saṅkha-puruṣa and ēakra-puruṣa whereas Viṣṇu-dharmottara enjoins that on one side should stand Gādā devi. Thus iconographic injunctions have not been fully carried out in these icons.

The myth of Karivarāđanas found fine representation in a panel, studded in the northern niche of the Gupta temple at Deogarh. The elephant stands helplessly in a lotus pond, being firmly bound by the coiled-tails of a nāga-pair. He is rescued from this desperate situation by the intercession of God Viṣṇu who appears riding his mount Garuḍa. The elephant is shown proffering lotus flower to the deity held in his uplifted trunk.

The Nāga pair is in namaskāra-mūdra.

The eastern niche of the same temple contains a new theme from Viṣṇava mythology choosing the penances of Nara and Nārāyana as its subject matter. (Plate No.III.Fig.No.1) Sitting on rock under trees their hermitage is unique in possessing lions and deers living together. Seated laḷitākṣepa four-armed Nārāyana is on proper right. With an aksāmālā in upper right hand, his lower right is shown in vitarka-mūdra, near chest. The object of upper left hand is not clear whereas in lower left he holds a long-necked flask. Sitting to his left in a similar posture is the figure of Nara with a rosary in right hand and his left hand is suspended with palm towards the onlooker. Both are shown with matted hair tied into different chignons over their heads. Each wears a deer skin thrown across his left shoulder and arm, while their loin-cloth is secured by a waist-band. A bearded anchorite is seen behind them.
Further, garland-bearing celestial couples above their heads may also be noticed flying in the air. At top, Brahmā is carved sitting on lotus.

The south facade of the Gupta temple at Deoghar contains a beautiful representation of Śeṣaśāyi-Viṣṇu. We have already noted that Eran stone pillar inscription of Budhagupta describes four oceans as the couch of Viṣṇu. So popular was his Śeṣaśāyi form that numerous names came into being associated with it. From Varāhamihira we learn that Viṣṇu was known as Kamalānāba, Abjanābha, Padmanābha, and Padmadhana, which relate to the myth of lotus, issuing from his novel and giving birth to Brahmā.

According to Viṣṇudharmottara, "Padmanābha should lie on the Śeṣa which floats on the primeval waters. The eye of the onlooker should be dazzled by his face, which is brightened by the precious stones on the hoods of the Śeṣa. One of his hands should rest on thigh, second on navel, third below head, fourth with sāntāna-maṇjari; Brahmā be shown sitting on the lotus issuing out of his navel near which should stand demons Madhu and Kaitabha. The ayudha-purusas of Viṣṇu should be shown near Śeṣa. In the Śeṣaśāyi-Viṣṇu representation, available from the Gupta temple of Deoghar (Plate No.VI.Fig.No.4) Viṣṇu has been depicted four-armed. Lakṣmī is seen massaging his legs. Brahmā is carved sitting on a lotus, the stalk of which issues from the navel of Nārāyaṇa. Flanking Brahmā are figures of Śiva-Pārvatī, Indra and Skanda riding their respective mounts. All these figures are seen hovering in the sky. The reclining body of Viṣṇu is somewhat raised in its upper-half.

According to Shri T.A. Copinath Rao, the whole body has the outline of a bow which is described in the āgamas as appropriate to the reclining images of Viṣṇu.¹ One of the left hands supports the head while the other is seen resting upon the bed; one of the right hands is held in the Kaṭaka pose and the other is stretched out parallel to the body so as to rest upon the thigh. Adorned with kiriṭa-mukuta, kundala, hāra, keyūra, kaṅkaṇa, and vanamālā, the icon has a rare charm. The demons Madhu and Kaitabha have been shown in the lowermost section along with āyudha-puruṣas.

(P) Icons of Incarnations:

Varāhamihira has mentioned the following incarnations of Viṣṇu: Varāha, Vāsudeva, Vāmana-Trivikrama and Rāma, the son of Daśaratha. It must, however, be remembered that Varāhamihira nowhere describes them as avatāras. Of note, again, is the fact that he uses the word Rāma in the sense of three, indicating his awareness of the three Rāmas viz., Parāśurāma, Daśarathī Rāma, and Balarāma.²

Note may be taken that Shri P.C. Mukharji found ten incarnations of Viṣṇu in the Gupta temple at Deogarh, and so he named it as Daśāvatāra temple.³ In course of excavation, a large number of panels were found representing Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Nṛśimha, and Vāmana from the ruins. Of importance, again, are panels depicting scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa-līlā that once adorned the temple-jagati. Deserving of mention among them are Abhayā-Uddāra; vanagamanā of Rāma with Sītā and Laksmanā; visit of Rāma, Laksmanā and Sītā to the hermitage of the sage Atri; Rāma and Laksmanā learning the art of archery; Laksmanā deforming Sūrpaṇakhā; Laksmanā garlanding Sugrīva; Sugrīva under intoxication; Rāvana threatening Sītā; Hanumāna carrying hill

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³ M.A.S.I., No. 70, P. 2.
with Sañjīvāmi, from the Rāmāyaṇa. Scenes from Kṛṣṇa's life include representations of Devakī handing over the child Kṛṣṇa to Vasudeva; Kṛṣṇa hurling a butter-cart; Nanda and Yaśodā fondling Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva; Kṛṣṇa receiving his friend Sudāma; Dnenukāsura-vadha; Kamsa-vadha and Vasudeva fondling Kṛṣṇa.1 As a matter of fact, the entire life of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa comes alive in these lithic representations.

Among other representations of Viṣṇu incarnations, an image of Nṛ-varāha now housed in Sir H.S. Gaur Archaeological museum, Sagar, is worth describing here. The inscription on its pedestal speaks of its dedication by Śrī Manesvaradatta and Varāhādatta. Full of vitality and vigour, the deity is appropriately ornamented with a hāra, vanamālā, and bracelets. His waist-band is finely knotted in front. His left leg is raised and placed on a pedestal. With head turned to left, the earth-goddess is seen hanging from his snout. A lotus flower is depicted on his head in order to show that the deity is just emerging out of the bottom of the sea. Measuring 1 mr. 70 cms. in height and made of red sand-stone, the image is a fine work of art.

A massive icon of Nṛsimha discovered also from Bāṇa, is now in the collection of the museum at Sagar. (Plate No. III, Fig. No. 4) Both the hands of the deity are mutilated and only the upper half of the body survive. The manes have been forcefully depicted. From the Gupta temple of Deogarh, we possess a panel showing the visit of Vāmana to king Bāli.2

(G) Gajalakṣāmi i-

A few representations of Gajalakṣāmi are available to us. Viṣnudharmottara 3 enjoins that a pair of elephants should be

1. M.A.S.I., No. 70, Plates XV to XXI.
2. Ibid., Plate XIX(b).
3. III, 82, 7.
made behind her head upturning (the contents) of two jars. The text further informs that the two elephants are to be known as the two nīdhis-sāṅkha and pādma.

An icon of Gajalakṣmī is accommodated within a semi-circular panel in a pilaster of the southern niche of the Gupta temple at Deogarh. The collection of Sir H.S. Gaur Archaeological Museum, Sagar, includes a representation of the goddess datable to A.D. 400. Measuring 35 cms. high and 32 cms. broad, the image shows her seated lalitākṣepa. Ornamented with kuṇḍalas and hāra and flanked by one elephant on each side, pouring contents of their upturned jars over her, the goddess is clad in a garment going up to her ankles. From Nachnā, an uttarāṅga with the figure of Gajalakṣmī in the lalāṭabimba was recovered some time ago. It belongs to the period under review.

VI - ŚAIVISM

Testifying to the existence of Śaivism in the area of our study, is a solitary Śiva temple located at Sakor (Dist. Damoh). A partly preserved sanctum containing a linga and possessing a richly sculptured door-way is all that has survived of this shrine. (Plate No. VII. Fig. No. 2) Standing on a high jagati about 79 cms. high, it is a nirandhāra-prāśada, facing west. The tri-sāṅkhā door-way to the sanctum measures 1 mr. 71 cms. in height and 85 cms. broad, and bears unmistakable marks of the Gupta art.

The linga inside the sanctum is 151 cms. in diameter and 81 cms. above the earth. According to Dr. J. N. Bannerjea, 1 "The Manuṣa or man-made lingas are made up of three parts, known as Brahma-bhāga, Visnu-bhāga, and Rudra-bhāga. The first is the square lowest section; the second is octagonal middle one, while the third

or the topmost is cylindrical Ṛudra-bhāga. It is also known as Pūjā-bhāga, for it receives the offerings of water and flowers. The linga of Śiva temple at Sakor has been made perfectly in accordance with the injunctions, quoted above. Its square Brahmā-bhāga is inserted in the pītha whereas the octagonal Viṣṇu-bhāga and cylindrical Ṛudra-bhāga are clearly visible above. A few fluted lines can be noticed on the Pūjā-bhāga.

The ceiling of the temple consisted of one slab only. The temple belongs to the pre-Śikhara group of the Gupta temples, as no trace of a Śikhara can be made out here.

The Nīlkantha temple of Kalanjari must also be assigned to the period under review, for the figures of Gaṅgā-Yamunā and Śiva-Parvati on the door-way appear to be work of the Gupta artist.

With regard to the mode of consecration in Śaivism, Varāhamihira says, 'the image of Śambhu must be consecrated by the ash-besmearing Brahmānas. Besmearing the body with ashes thrice a day and sleeping on ashes was an important practice of the Pasupatas. About Kāpālikas he says that they were so called because they used human skulls as receptacles of food and wore garlands of skulls.'

Among the minor deities of Śaivism, Gaṇeśa was yet to emerge as an important god, but Skanda commanded some following. Particularly notable, in this regard, is the fact that Śaka king Śrīdhvaravarman was devoted to 'Śvāmi Mahāśena' as is evident from his Kanakhera stone inscription.

VII - ŚĀKTISM

The Mother-Goddess cult of the pre-historic times ultimately adopted Gaurī as the Supreme Śakti. A temple dedicated to

Fārvati was erected at Nachnā during the period under review. The
temple is dated in the period 470-490 A.D. on the basis of an
inscription of Maharāja Vyāgrayadeva, a feudatory of the Vākātakas.
But Dr. P.K. Agrawala is of the view that it is wrong to connect the
inscription with the temple. It possibly marks the rebuilding of the
monument with a cloister and a mandapa.

The garbha-grha is enclosed by a larger chamber
serving the purpose of a pradakṣinā-patha thus rendering the temple
a sandhāra-prāśāda. A mandapa is also provided in front. The
notable feature of this temple is that it is double-storeyed.

The gloom of the sanctum is relieved by door-way
in the west and stout trellises in other three sides. Similar
trellises had been arranged in the corresponding part of the cloister
wall. The ceiling of the sanctum consists of flat monolithic slabs.
The pañca-sākha door-way to sanctum consists of a meandering creeper,
a super-imposed row of sunken panels, containing couples; a
geometrical pattern consisting of diamond-shaped ornaments; a pilaster
and a super-imposed row of half-opened rosettes. Two of the sākhās
have been carried over the lintel. Noteworthy here is the fact that
the difference between the height and breadth of the temple (2 mrs.
height and 1 mr. breadth) corresponds to the one prescribed in the
text.

The Divine-Mothers have been referred to by
Varāhamihira as Mātrgaṇa and described as universal mothers. At
Deogarh we possess rock-cut sculptures of Saptā-mātrikas inside a
niche in Nāharagnāṭī. Preceded by Śiva in his Vīra-madra form,
their depiction includes the figures of Gaṇeṣa at the end. According

3. B.S., LXI, 12.
4. Ibid., LVII, 56.
to Brhatasmhita, "The Mothers should be made with the forms and
cognisances of the individual gods whom they are named after."
In
the niche of Nahraghati, the figure of Brahmānī follows that of
Virabhadra. She holds an akṣamāla in her right hand. Next figure
is that of Pārvatī riding her mount lion and holding Ganeśa on her
lap. Then follow Vaiṣṇavī riding garuḍa and Kaumārī riding man.
Varāhī and Andrī riding tortoise and elephant respectively are shown
next to them. Last figure is that of Ėamunḍā. An inscription in
Gupta Brahmi characters is incised above the representation recording
that Svāmibhāṭṭa, the son of Keśava caused to be constructed
Avaṇīśvara temple in honour of the Saptā-mātrkās.

For the cult of Sūrya we do not possess any positive
evidence assignable to this period. But the existence of Sauras
in Bundelkhand can be presumed on the basis that Sun-worship was
prevalent in our area from very early times and evidence attesting
to it has been already discussed. Worth-noting here is the fact that
the Nächne kī Talāi inscription of Mahārāja Vyāghradeva contains the
carving of a wheel. We have seen that the wheel symbol stands for
Sūrya. Varāhamihira appears to be conscious of the concept of
orthodox Brahmanical triad as is evident from the mention of Brahma
Viṣṇu and Rudra in their fixed order.

The Gupta temple of Deogarh had four subsidiary
shrines attached to it. We shall never know, perhaps, to whom these
were dedicated. But their existence renders it a real paṇḍāyatana.
Ordinarily they are dedicated to the four principal deities of
Brahmanism other than the god of the main temple. If so, the Gupta
temple is the earliest example of a paṇḍāyatana shrine in our area.

1. B.S., 57, 56.
4. B.S., XLVII, 55.