CONCLUSION:

From the present study, it is clear that Saivism was prominent and widespread in Gujarat at least from the beginning of Christian era. And if the linga like terracottas from the Harappan site of Surkotāda considered valid then the earliest relics of Śaiva worship in Gujarat could be traced back to the Chalcolithic period i.e. about 2350 B.C.

The extensive explorations carried out through all the districts of Gujarat revealed numerous Śaiva images and some new centres of Śaiva faith. Besides this the images preserved in the Museums and private collections showed a variety of known as well as unknown Śaiva forms. Of these images, some are either Upāsyamūrtis whereas others seem to be decorative elements of the temples.

The study has revealed a variety of linga forms like saumya, ugra, saṁhāra and composite images of Śiva as well as deified saints like Lakulīśa and Nātha Yogīs along with minor deities like Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Nandī and Gaṇas.

The study of these images revealed that except slight changes and deviations, these images followed the iconographic tradition preserved in Rūpamandana, Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Samarāṅganasūtradhāra, Aparājitapṛcchā, and such other texts.
The iconographic study of these Śaiva images showed that images of some of the Śaiva deities have parallels in other regions of the country. Some of them seem to be characteristic of this region whereas some are unique in the whole country as they do not seem to have been reported so far from other parts of the country. Several Śaiva forms noted by T.A.G. Rao and others are not so far available from this region. These observations indicate regional differences in the broad framework of Śaivism.

Śiva's aniconic representation the linga, seems to be the earliest, more popular and widely spread form than any other Śaiva icons. The study of the lingas showed the worship of varieties of lingas such as Jyotirlinga, Svayambhūlinga, Bānalingas, Mahisa in the form linga and numerous cala and cala lingas.

Of the mythical group, the Jyotirlingas the Svayambhūlingas and the Bānalingas were well known in other parts of the country. The tradition preserves the worship of dvādaśa Jyotirlingas. One of such Jyotirlingas is being worshipped at Prabhuśa Patan. The tradition of worshipping Bānalingas was wide-spread all over the country. But the Svayambulingas are not so far reported but it might be well prevalent in other regions also. The noteworthy form in this group is the installation of mahisa as linga in the pithika. This form does not seem to be reported from other parts of the country. Similarly, the custom of carving miniature lingas on the square or rectangular slab, and in pithika also seems to be a feature of this region.
The miniature (cala) liṅga and the mānuṣa liṅgas are available in all the provinces of the country. The representation of ekamukha and caturmukha liṅgas also seem to be widely known in most of the regions since early centuries of Christian era.

The representation of Sahasra-liṅga seems to be more popular in South India. Only a few specimens are reported from Northern India. The region of Gujarat also preserves a solitary image of this kind. This indicates that the worship of Sahasra-liṅga although known to this region, was not widely prevalent. The literary references speak of the existence of Sahasra-liṅga at Pāṭan (North Gujarat).

Among the Saumya forms of Śiva, the images of Kevalamūrti (Śiva alone) are known all over the country. The earliest representation of Śiva so far known belongs to the Śauṅga period, while in Gujarat it appears rather late during the Kṣatrapa period.

The Kevalamūrties of South India hold parasu, mṛga (deer) etc., whereas the images found from Gujarat, Rajasthan, M.P., U.P., etc., usually carry trisūla, sarpa, bijoru, kamandalu etc. The seated as well as standing images of Śiva endowed with two, four, six or eight arms are also known from Rājasthān, M.P., U.P., and other parts.

A colossal head of Gaṅgādhara Śiva - a form usually available in the South India was also known in Gujarat.

The representation of Daksināmūrti in North India seems to
be different than that of the Southern images. The two specimens found from Gujarat also do not confirm the iconographic inductions. But their attributes and absence of Apasmāra, which is usually found in the images of South India, would show that they follow the Northern tradition. Moreover the scanty specimens also indicates that although the form was known to this region it was not very popular.

The Sadāśivamūrtiṣ are represented in two ways: (i) as bust or full figure with three faces and (ii) pāñcakvatra (five faced). Both the types are found from Rājasthān, U.P., Bengal, Deccan, Southīdīa etc. It may be noted that the mediaeval three faced figures do not specifically show features like the Saumya, ugra, delicate etc.

Some interesting images of Nāṭēśa dancing in different modes such as Lalita, Catura, Kaṭisama, Īrdhvajānu and Lalāṭatilaka establish a fact that the tradition of the classical Indian dances in the images of the Śiva was well—known to the artists of Gujarat. Most of these nrtya poses were well—known in most of the region of the country.

Further, it may be pointed out that in several Nāṭēśa images from Gujarat Śiva's normal arms are posed in front of the chest probably in teaching pose. The image of Nāṭēśa dancing in Lalāṭatilaka is generally confined to South India and it is rare in the northern provinces. The region of Gujarat which remained
under Cañukyas and Rāstrakūtas might have received such forms from the Deccan and Southern India.

A very interesting image of Śiva, blowing Śingī (horn-pipe) which is referred to in the Mahābhārata is noted from the Prabhāsa-Patam Museum. There is a reference to its parallel in Bengal.

The image of Markandeyānugraha also seems to be rare in Northern provinces. A broken image of Markandeyānugrahamūrti, the only specimen of its kind from this region shows nearness to the similar images found from Ellora and Elephanta and thus it seems to follow the tradition of the Deccan.

The Rāvaṇanugrahamūrti - a form well known in most of the regions, is carved in the northern tradition and show iconographic similarity with the similar images found from Osian (Jodhpur), temple No. 2 and the One preserved in the Engine Fuller Memorial Collection, Seattle Art Museum.

The representations of Śiva-Śakti forms include Kalyāṇasundaramūrti and the images of Uma-Maheśvara or Śiva-Pārvatī.

Of these, the images of Kalyāṇasundara aspect from Gujarat (only two specimens) do not seem to be elaborately depicted as found in the images of Ellora, Etāh, Ratanpur etc. But here they show Śiva-Pārvatī standing facing each other in the act of Pāṅgṛahaṇa and a small figure of three-faced Brahma as a priest, as usual, seated on the ground in front of the āgnivedika.
The form of Uma-Mahesvara appears in Gujarat during the Ksatrapa period. Its images are widely known in the country since Kusana period to present day. The images of Uma-Mahesvara do not show any iconographic evolution and except slight changes in the attributes all of them are identical. It may be noted that the images of Siva-Parvatī seated on standing bull seem to be popular in eastern Gujarat and its adjacent regions of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The earliest representation of Bhairava known so far from the region belongs to c. 5th-6th cent. A.D. Here it may be noted that the Vakataka ruler Rudrasena II, who also had short rule over Gujarat, worshipped Mahābhairava. A good number of Bhairava images depicting him in seated, standing, dancing, skeletal form, ālingana-mūrti etc. show that the worship of Bhairava was well known in Gujarat since this period. Evidently the worship of Bhairavas, Kaulas, Kāpālikas and the Nātha Yogis also developed. Of this several forms, the Bātuka and the Atiriktāṅga forms appear to be widely popular. Outside this province, Bātuka Bhairava seems to be a form confined to Northern tradition whereas his Atiriktāṅga aspect (skeletal) seems to be widely known all over the country. The representation Kānkāla-Bhikṣaṅtana a combined form from Lādol (North-Gujarat) seems to be rare in other parts of the country. Such composite depiction is found from Brhadēśvara temple, Tānjore. Perhaps, the region of Gujarat also had a tradition to represent the exploits of Siva into one image.
Besides, his usual dire aspect, Bhairava in several specimens is shown in placid form with smiling countenance. On several temples, he is shown as dikpāla in place of Nirṛti. This is also seen in the temples of Rājasthān and Madhya Pradesh.

The āliṅganāmūrti of Bhairava-Bhairavī from Gujarat, although known from Ellora also, seems to be rare in other parts of the country.

The Jains also worshipped along with other Hindu deities, various forms of Bhairava as a minor deity, and various forms of Bhairava as a minor deity as well. The Jaina temples display Bhairava as one of the dikpālas. Besides this, although the image of Ghaṇṭākārnavaṇīra from Mahuḍī (North Gujarat) and other places belong to recent years, the tradition of his worship preserved in the Jaina religion indicate the worship of Ghaṇṭākārnavaṇīra in Gujarat during mediaeval period.

The Vīrabhadra images, except the one from Śamalājī, invariably carry vīṇā in their frontal arms. Like the Śamalājī figure, several Gupta images of Vīrabhadra from Rājasthān and Orissa, (e.g. Vaitāl temple, c. 8th cent. A.D.) does not hold vīṇā.

Perhaps, this shows a different tradition.

The Andhaka-Gajāntakamūrti is also a composite form. This form seems to be more popular in Ellora, Gujarat, Rājasthān, M.P., U.P., Orissa (Bhubanesvāra). The depiction of Andhakāsura-vandhamūrti alone is available in most of the provinces where slight deviations are noted.
The images of nṛtya Tripurāntaka (victory dance), as proclaiming his victory over Tripura, seem to be the characteristic form of this region. This form seems to follow the tradition given in the Aparājītaprācha.

The image of Kālāntakamūrti can also be called as Nārkanaṇḍeyā-nugrahamūrti. A solitary specimen found from Gujarat seems to follow the tradition of Ellora and Elephanta. It may be noted that, this form has not yet been reported so far from Northern India.

The tradition and the recent excavations at Kārvaṇa has revealed that Kāyāvaroḥaṇa or Kārvaṇ was the centre of Lakulīśa-worship since early centuries of Christian era. But his early images found from Rājasthān and Mathurā indicate that though Kārvaṇ was the birth-place of Lakulīśa, his Karmabhūmi was Rajasthan and Mathurā region.

The earliest image of Lakulīśa so far known from Gujarat belongs to the post-Gupta period (c. 7th cent. A.D.). A variety of Lakulīśa images such as seated, standing, two and four-armed have been found from Gujarat. Similar types are also available in Rājasthān, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and other places. Some images of Lakulīśa show Śrīvatsa lāṃchana on their chest. It is also seen in the images of Rājasthān.

The sculptures of Nātha yogīs found from Dabhoī are the first of their kind in the country. Besides this, several images of the Nātha yogīs found, From Gujarat show that the Nātha cult had become
quite influential in this region since medieval period. Among all the Nathāyogīs only Matsyandranātha (with fish as his symbol) and Gorakṣanātha (with cow as his cognizance) bear definite symbols. This also indicates that among all the Nathāyogīs, these two teachers remained as the chief objects of worship.

The earliest depiction of Ardhanārīśvara in the country goes back to the Kuśāna period and it is available from almost all parts of the country. In this province, the schist image of Ardhanārīśvarā seems to be the earliest and the only Upāsyamūrti so far known. This sublime theme also continues to appear on the Jaṅghā of the mediaeval temples. Here, it may be noted that poet Mīthu who lived during c. 15th cent. A.D. was a famous Tantric and great worshipper of Ardhanārīśvara.

The recent excavations at Malhār (M.P.) has revealed perhaps the earliest image of Harihara (c. 2nd cent. B.C.) in India. It is available in most of the regions of the country but Harihar seems to have been favoured more in Uttar Pradesh and Eastern India. The descriptions of several images show that image except slight changes did not undergo much evolution from iconographic point of view.

It is doubtful whether there was a cult of Harihara. Only a few Upāsyamūrtis of this form have been found. Besides this, excepting the Harihara temple at Osian, there is hardly any reference to any shrine installed in his name. Probably a Harihara
temple existed at Rods: also. Still, the existence of Harihara images in most of the regions suggests that there were some groups of people who continued to worship this composite form upto mediaeval period, in a spirit of tolerance and syncretism.

The images of Hariharapitamaha and Hariharapitamahaarka are generally carved on the niches and jaṅghā of the temples. No shrine exclusively devoted to the God is known so far, but at the same time, it is certain that the form was more popular in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Evidently Gāṇeśa had already acquired an important place among the people of Hindu deities, upto c. 2nd or 1st cent. B.C. However, the full iconographic representation of the god Gāṇeśa appears during 3rd-4th cent. A.D.

Several varieties of Gāṇeśa such as seated, standing, dancing, Sakti-Gāṇeśa, Buddhi-Siddhi Vināyaka etc. are known from different parts of the country.

The earliest representation of Gāṇeśa in Gujarat appears during the Kṣatrapa period. Here too all the above-mentioned forms are popular. But of all these, his caturbhujā aspect holding gajadanta, paraśu, padma and modāka seems to be more popular and known. Besides this, some interesting forms of Gāṇeśa are found from this province. Of these, the representation of standing Gāṇeśa from Pādāṇa with a broad pāṭṭa worn like an upavīta across
the chest and another standing figure of the God with a serpent shown near his leg as his cognizance are noteworthy. The depiction of Gaṇeśa as Yogisvara is also noteworthy. Among all the interesting icons of Gaṇeśa, the representation of dvimukha Gaṇeśa also referred to in the Yāmala tantra, seems to be rare in the country and it is a significant addition in the realm of Saiva iconography.

Besides this, it may be noted that, Gaṇeśa is not included as Pradhan deva. Excepting at Hangal (Karnāta), the prasāda of Gaṇeśa seems to be rare. In Gujarat also only small shrines of Gaṇeśa viz. perhaps Pāṭan, Ainthor (Dist. Mehsāna) have been found.

The images of Karttikeya also seem to be well-known in the country. His earliest depiction appears during Kuṣāṇa period but in Gujarat it becomes available from Kṣatrapa period onward; though no shrine dedicated to Karttikeya has come to light so far. Still it is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. Of his several forms, Subrahmanyaṃ Karttikeya-Devasena, Valli-Kalypa-sundara and others seem to be confined to Southern provinces; whereas his famous commander-in-chief aspect endowed with two-four, six, eight, ten twelve arms and one, three or six faces seem to be well known in northern provinces.

Of his several forms, the Karttikeya-Devasena depiction, an ālinganamurti usually confined to South India is found from Gujarat also.
The Nandi images of South India differ from those of the North India only in their gigantic size and elaborate decorations. The Nandi-images from Gujarat except some nearness to Gujarat, except some nearness to ornaments with Karnataka bulls, follow the tradition of northern Nandi images.

The depiction of Gaṇa figures on the Śaiva temples are almost identical and does not show any evolution. The early Gaṇa figures found from Gopa temple (Saurāstra) and Śamalājī (North Gujarat) show some affinity with the Gaṇa figures of Bhumarā Śiva temple. Of all these figures, the scythian style headdress of Śamalājī Gaṇas are typical and noteworthy.

Thus, the iconographic study of the numerous known as well as little known Śaiva icons from Gujarat has provided evidence that Śaivism patronised and encouraged by several royal families of Gujarat was widely prevalent in this province since the early centuries of Christian era. Further, it has disclosed that the existence and vast distribution of a variety of Śaiva icons in Gujarat.

The iconography indicates that Gujarat reflects most of the icons known in other parts of India but the icons of Mahiṣa as liṅga, nṛtya-Tripurāntaka, Lakulīśa shown in front of the liṅga, and Nātha Yogīs carved in this part of the country, with the peculiarities which could be recognised as regional variations of pan-Indic phenomenon of the religious life.