

**VAIṢṆAVA CENTRES AND FORMS OF VIṢṆU
IN MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH
(C.A.D. 300-1000)**

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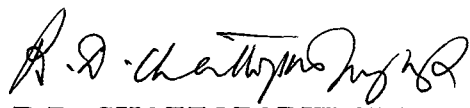



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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "**VAISNAVA CENTRES AND FORMS OF VISNU IN MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH (c. A.D. 300-1000)**" submitted by **SIMA MALLICK** is in partial fulfilment of the **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** degree of the University. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree to this or any other University to the best of our knowledge.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


PROF. B.D. CHATTOPADHYAYA
(Supervisor) *22/7/2002*


PROF. MAJID H. SIDDIQI
(Chairperson)

Dedicated

to

Mummy & Papa

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Sima Mallick

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CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Religion has remained an integral part of life since ancient times. History of religion, hence, attracts the attention of the researchers. In the course of their evolutions, these religions affected the social, economic and political life of the people and in turn got affected by them. This makes their history all the more interesting. Despite different approaches to the study of religion, the historical approaches with its focus on how religion evolved through different stages, remains a fascinating way of looking at any religion.

All the ancient Indian religions, like religions in other countries, have different backgrounds and have gone through changes, which would offer an understanding about them quite different from the common perception. Of all the Ancient Indian religions, Vaiṣṇavism, for various reasons, appears extremely fascinating. Different incarnations of Viṣṇu with different stories attached to them present a curious picture before a researcher. All the incarnations were regarded as manifestations of Viṣṇu at different stages of time. There must have been one or more factors that stimulated this type of syncretism. Besides, all the forms/incarnations of Viṣṇu did not receive equal representation in the religious monuments or archaeological remains of particular period in a particular region. Regional variations seem to emerge in the form of deity worshipped even in different segments of a region.

Vaiṣṇava religion was patronized by different rulers from time to time, most vigorously from the Gupta period onwards. Even among the Vaiṣṇava deities, rulers used to give preference to some in respect of others. Once again, the question arises whether the rulers patronized

them randomly or there were other compelling factors. How far cultural geography makes more intelligible the limited spread or the growth of Vaiṣṇavism in different regions (here Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) in early India is one aspect of this study of religion, which needs probing.

Keeping in view all these points, this research tries to understand the reasons (social, political or geographical, if any) for the growth and spread of Vaiṣṇava centres and forms of Viṣṇu worshipped in Madhya Pradesh, right from Gupta period to early medieval period.

I

There is no dearth of research publications on Vaiṣṇavism and the incarnations of Viṣṇu. Early works deal mainly with the evolution of Vaiṣṇavism.

R.G. Bhandarkar¹, one of the pioneer writers on Vaiṣṇava religion, gives a comprehensive analysis of its origin based on both textual and epigraphical evidences. He traces the origin of the religion from the 4th century B.C. to the 8th century A.D., giving emphasis on the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and the identification of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa with the cowherd deity (Gopāla Kṛṣṇa). He also turned his attention to different followers to Vaiṣṇavism right from Rāmānuja down to Caitanya.

Monier Williams² considered Vaiṣṇavism as a result of “abolition of triune equality of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu in favour of Viṣṇu”, especially as manifested in his two human incarnations – Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. He found the accommodative power of Vaiṣṇavism as the reason behind its spread in India.

¹ Bhandarkar, R.G., *Viṣṇuism, Śaivism and Minor Religious systems*, Strassburg, 1913.

² Monier Williams, M., ‘The Vaiṣṇava Religion’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series XIV, (1882), pp. 289-316.

H.C. Raychaudhuri³ found Vaiṣṇavism not a plagiarism from Christianity, but indigenous and owing its origin to Vāsudeva. He tried to reconstruct the true history of life of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa from historical data. According to him, alliance of Vāsudeva with brāhmaṇic gods Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu was to counter the Buddhist propaganda of the Mauryas. He traced the fortunes of *Bhāgavata* religion from the 1st century A.D. to the time of the Tamil Ācāryas (Alvars).

J. Gonda⁴ dealt with almost the same theme based, however, on textual sources only. He traced the evolution of Viṣṇu from a subordinate position in the *Ṛgveda* to a dominant god of the Purāṇas. Besides, he throws special light on Viṣṇu's relation with kingship. The protector aspect of Viṣṇu presents him as a *Cakravartin* god, often seated on a royal throne. He connected the ruler's function with the furtherance of vegetation. An essential part of the king's duty is to make rain and to cause the crops to be good. As such, Gonda found association of Viṣṇu with the concept of generation and fertility.

K.G. Goswami⁵ in his book, *Study of Vaiṣṇavism* took the help of epigraphic, numismatic and other archaeological materials to trace the growth of Vaiṣṇava religion from the time of the Śuṅgas to the fall of the Guptas. Rising from a tribal cult, Vaiṣṇavism transgressed the geographical boundaries to carve out a wider field for itself. The Gupta period was the high water-mark in the history of Vaiṣṇavism in India.

³ Raychaudhuri, H.C., *Materials for the study of Early History of Vaiṣṇava Sect*, New Delhi, 1975 (2nd ed.).

⁴ Gonda, J., *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Delhi, 1969 (2nd ed.)

⁵ Goswami, K.G., *Study of Vaiṣṇavism, from the Advent of The Śuṅgas to fall of the Guptas in The Light of Epigraphic, Numismatic and other Archaeological Materials*, Calcutta, 1956.

Suvira Jaiswal⁶ in her book *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* used both literary and archaeological sources including some Jaina and Buddhist works. She studied the development and progress of Vaiṣṇavism from 200 B.C. to 500 A.D. in the context of its social basis. She also pays attention to Vaiṣṇavite rites and practices. She differentiates between Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa. Giving a comprehensive analysis of the process how different gods merged into one, she throws interesting light on the extent of influence, the religion enjoyed in the period.

Urmila Bhagowalia⁷ in her work *Vaiṣṇavism and Society in North India* analysis certain phases of Vaiṣṇavism and society within the limits of North India during c.A.D. 700-1200. She studied the evolution of Vaiṣṇavism as a cult movement upto 1200 A.D., in the context of social and economic changes.

Vaiṣṇava incarnations remained a favourite topic among the scholars. As early as 1914, Herman Jacobi⁸ found the tenet of incarnations as fundamental in medieval and modern Hindu religions, especially with the Viṣṇuites. Greater number of Viṣṇuites worship either Rāma or Kṛṣṇa, not Viṣṇu in his proper form. According to him, early incarnations (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, etc.) were the result of theological speculations, while Rāma and Kṛṣṇa formed the great principle pervading and upholding the popular religion. Once again, his emphasis is on the two incarnations Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

⁶ Jaiswal, Suvira, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism (200 B.C. – 500 A.D.)*, Delhi, 1967.

⁷ Bhagowalia, Urmila, *Vaiṣṇavism and Society in North India, c.A.D. 700-1200*, Delhi, 1980.

⁸ Jacobi, Herman, 'Incarnation Indian', *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VII, Edinburgh, 1914, pp. 193-197.

Scholars have made attempts to enquire into the reason behind the *avatāra* concept. D.D. Kosambi⁹ ascribed the increasing popularity of *avatāra* syncretism to the coexistence of several different historical or mythological elements which could not be denied or forgotten. According to him, an element in Indian tradition was hostile to Āryan or Kṣatriya superiority. Several different historical or mythological legends co-existed. These had necessarily to be combined to prevent conflict. He ascribed Semitic origin to fish incarnation. The flood incarnations were a form of Prajāpati. Nṛsimha incarnation goes back to a legend of Indra. And thus according to him, all these were later submerged into one.

R.S. Tripathi¹⁰ expressed similar views about Vaiṣṇavism. According to him, the religion of the royalty (Vaiṣṇavism) showed a wonderful elasticity and powers of assimilation and recuperation. The reason given by him is that votaries of different creeds, princes, priests and peasants alike owe an obligation towards one another to live in peace and concord.

The specialized study of different forms of Viṣṇu got attention of the scholars with the publication of *Elements of Hindu Iconography* of T.A.G. Rao.¹¹ However, he studied icons only on the basis of the textual references.

J.N. Banerjea¹² in his *Development of Hindu Iconography* took the help of varieties of archaeological evidences, besides textual references, to study the growth of different emblems of gods and goddesses. In this

⁹ Kosambi, D.D., 'The Avatāra Syncretism and Possible Sources of the Bhagavad Gītā', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 24, 25 (1948-49), pp. 121-134.

¹⁰ Tripathi, R.S., 'Religious Syncretism under the Imperial Guptas', *Indian Historical Quarterly* (hereafter *IHQ*), Vol. 15 (1939), pp. 1-13.

¹¹ Rao, T.A.G., *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I & II, Delhi, 1968.

¹² Banerjea, J.N., *Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1936.

book, he analysed the forms of all the prominent gods of Hindu mythology.

In the papers on 'Hindu Iconography'¹³, J.N. Banerjea dealt particularly with Viṣṇu and his different forms. Starting from Besnagar Inscription of Heliodorus, he showed that the rise in importance of Viṣṇu as a sectarian deity is due to his identification with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, who was at the root of Bhakti cult that came to be designated afterwards as Vaiṣṇavism. He says that the tendency to supernaturalise the cult object led to the addition to multiple hands to the god. In case of other man-gods like Buddha and Mahāvira, there was no conscious attempt ever made to endow their figures with more than two hands. In the iconographic presentation of Kṛṣṇa, as an incarnatory form of Viṣṇu, it is seldom endowed with more than two hands. In a similar way, J.N. Banerjea analysed the beginning and spread of different forms of Viṣṇu (*Caturbhuja*, *Stnānaka murti*, *Āsana murti*, *Varāha* etc.).

Kalpana Desai in her work *Iconography of Viṣṇu*¹⁴ studied the similar kind of iconographic evolution. Her book concentrates on different forms of Viṣṇu and his incarnations based on the available archaeological materials and religious monuments. Her study is confined to the Vaiṣṇava sculptures from early times to the early medieval period.

Similar kinds of the study of the sculptures are done by different scholars on different regions at different periods. Some of them are J.C.

¹³ Banerjea, J.N., 'Hindu Iconography', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. 13 (1945), pp. 55-129, Vol. 4 (1946), pp. 1-75.

¹⁴ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, New Delhi, 1973.

Harle's *Gupta Sculpture*¹⁵, Krishna Deva's *Temples of Khajuraho*¹⁶, Devangana Desai's *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*¹⁷, S.N. Mishra's *Gupta Art and Architecture*¹⁸, etc.

The work edited by B.L. Smith and titled: *Essays on Gupta Culture*¹⁹ came forward with a new idea of the crucial link between legitimacy and religion in the Gupta period and onwards. This book is a collection of essays showing how this link was projected through art, architecture and literature. F.M. Asher in his essay 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art'²⁰ discussed how religious symbolism served as a visual metaphor conveying the analogous relationship between the ideal monarch and divine power and authority. W.O. Flaherty in her essay 'Images of Heretic in Gupta Culture'²¹ in the same work gave emphasis on Gupta *Parāṇic* literature which arose out of a period of reactions against heterodoxy which adds a note of realism alongside the ideal Gupta image.

Devangana Desai in her essay, 'Patronage of Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho'²² did a similar kind of work in relation to the early medieval period. She showed in it the efforts of the Candella kings to glorify the origin of their dynasty in their inscriptions. The Candella kings carefully recorded in their inscriptions marriage of Candella prince Harṣa with the princess of Cāhamāna family. This matrimonial

¹⁵ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture, Indian Sculpture of the Fourth to Sixth Centuries A.D.*, New Delhi, 1996 (new ed.).

¹⁶ Krishna Dēva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, New Delhi, 1990.

¹⁷ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, Mumbai, 1946.

¹⁸ Mishra, S.N., *Gupta Art and Architecture with special reference to Madhya Pradesh*, Delhi, 1992.

¹⁹ Smith, B.L. (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi, 1983.

²⁰ Asher, F.M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art' in Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 53-66.

²¹ Flaherty, W.O., 'Images of Heretic in Gupta Culture' in Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 107-127.

²² Desai, Devangana, 'Patronage of Lakshmana Temple at Khajuraho' in B.S. Miller (ed.), *Powers of Art*, New York, 1992.

alliance elevated the social status of the newly rising Candella family. In this essay, she showed how the sculptures of Lakṣmaṇa temple cleverly put forward the supremacy of orthodox brāhmaṇic religion over the non vedic heretical forces.

Although available publications on Vaiṣṇavism cover a wide range of subjects, there is still space for research on it by attempting synthesis of different types of material from different regions. The present work attempts a fresh survey of Vaiṣṇava material from Madhya Pradesh including the newly created state of Chhattisgarh. The only work, I came across for this region (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) is S.N. Mishra's book, *Gupta Art and Architecture with special reference to Madhya Pradesh*²³, that too limited to Madhya Pradesh of Gupta period. It deals with sculptural representations and religious monuments of the period.

However, detailed regional studies are necessary; the main justification for such studies is that a great deal of disparities existed in India in all periods of history. In other works, even when studying the same religion or same cultural phenomenon of an all India level, it is necessary to remember that the phenomenon may have its appearance in different regions in different points of time.

Keeping in view, these points emerging out of available studies, this research attempts to study the forms of Viṣṇu and the nature of Vaiṣṇava worship in Madhya Pradesh from c. A.D. 300-1000. It will try to understand the geographical spatial pattern of the evolution of these aspects of Vaiṣṇavism.

²³ Mishra, S.N., *Gupta Art and Architecture with special reference to Madhya Pradesh*, Delhi, 1992.

distinction of being the first place in India yielding the epigraphic evidence of Vāsudeva worship. Heliodorus Pillar in Besnagar²⁴, in Vidiśā district gives the evidence of Vāsudeva worship in this part of India even in 2nd century B.C.

Besides, this region presents a clear link between the Imperial Guptas and Vaiṣṇava centers. In this connection, reference to the famous Boar incarnation image of Viṣṇu in Udaigiri Caves (Vidiśā district) is important, where, according to F.M. Asher²⁵, the boar Viṣṇu is the allegory for the Gupta sovereign.

II

Sources of this study are mainly archaeological remains and inscriptions. Testimony of these sources is far more reliable than that of literary texts which invariably suffer from textual corruptions and late interpolations. It is also impossible to ascertain where individual texts were written and thereafter to relate their evidence to particular regions. Archaeological evidence on the other hand is region specific and can thus be used for analyzing regional patterns over time. The inscriptions are also an excellent sources indicating the extent of royal patronage enjoyed by Vaiṣṇavism. Often the rulers professing to show their Vaiṣṇava faith used the epithet *Paramabhāgavata* or *Parama Vaiṣṇava* before their names. These inscriptions are in fact records of donation of land to a Vaiṣṇavite deity or to a person/s of Vaiṣṇava affiliation or serving Vaiṣṇava centers. The localities, in which such donations were made, show the extent of influence enjoyed by the presiding deity of the temple.

Inscriptions also contain the names of donor and the donees, which may throw some light on the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the persons

²⁴ *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report* (hereafter *ASIAR*) 1908-9, pp. 126-129.

²⁵ Asher, F.M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art' in Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 53-66.

concerned. For example the Ēraṇ Stone Inscription of Budhagupta²⁶ refers to persons named Mātrviṣṇu, Dhanyaviṣṇu, Hariviṣṇu etc. The names of these persons clearly show the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of them. Sometimes, common people, including traders, were named after Viṣṇu, which may show the reach of Vaiṣṇavism among the different social groups.

Archaeological remains, another source material show the iconographic evolution of the deity. They reveal the particular forms of Viṣṇu worshipped in different parts of Madhya Pradesh. Sometimes a particular form of Viṣṇu may have been common in an area. For example, Ēraṇ in Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh has a series of Varāha sculptures (boar incarnation), right from the Gupta period down to the 8th century A.D. An image of goddess Vārāhī, the female counterpart, of god Varāha is found from this place, belonging to the 8th century A.D.²⁷

Religious monuments and sculptures often contain the royal inscriptions indicating the patronage enjoyed by the deity of the temple. Sometimes inscriptions are inscribed on the sculpture itself. Ēraṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāṇa²⁸ is inscribed on the chest of a powerfully modelled Vārāha sculpture. In this inscription, the Hūṇa ruler boastfully claimed his authority. Side by side, he praises the boar incarnation. Perhaps, he was trying to compare his power to that of the deity. In this connection, Udaigiri Varāha cave is also noticeable, which, as mentioned, present allegorically, Candragupta II as the mighty emperor.

²⁶ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Eran Stone Pillar Inscription of Budhagupta, yr. 165', *Inscriptions of Early Gupta Kings, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (hereafter *CII*), Vol. III (Revised), Delhi, 1981, pp. 339-341.

²⁷ Bajpai, K.D., *Sagar through the Ages*, Sagar, 1964, Plate XI.

²⁸ Fleet, J.F., Ēraṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāṇa, *Inscriptions of Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors, CII*, Vol. III, Varanasi, 1970 (3rd ed.) pp. 158-161.

Some of the forms of deity are represented with boldness and power (as in the case of Varāha) and large images of these deities are often connected with a ruler.

Thus, the sculptures are not mere representations of deities. They had much more to do with its patrons. An attempt has been made in this work to explore the meaning of this relationship between the patron and the deity. This relationship varied with time and the space.

Besides, the distribution pattern of inscriptions and archaeological remains in Madhya Pradesh (which was not uniform throughout the period) shows the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in different parts of this state.

III

This research work is divided into six chapters. Besides the Introduction and the Conclusion, it consists of four intervening chapters. Its time span has been broken up into three phases corresponding to three chapters, while the fourth chapter deals with the forms/incarnations of Viṣṇu, as they were found in different parts of Madhya Pradesh over the period (c. A.D. 300-1000).

The second chapter deals with the period c.A.D. 300-550. This was the period of Gupta dominance over Madhya Pradesh. In this period, we have abundance of Vaiṣṇava inscriptions and archaeological remains of Vaiṣṇava centers in northern and western part of Madhya Pradesh, while the other parts do not yield much evidence. In this period, Gupta emperors and their feudatories donated lands or constructed temples of different gods (mostly Vaiṣṇavite deities).

The second sub period, c. A.D. 550-800, corresponds to the third chapter. In this period, the erstwhile feudatories of the Guptas grew independent and supported the Vaiṣṇava religion with varying degree of adherence. This period is marked by the availability of Vaiṣṇava inscriptions in Chhattisgarh region of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh. In

the previous period, this region did not yield such evidence. One reason may be that earlier this area was forested. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta calls this region as that of forest kingdom – *aṭavika rājya*.²⁹ While moving towards statehood, how this region adopts Vaiṣṇava religion and how limited resources of the newly formed state prevented it from large scale construction of temples, forms the subject matter of this chapter. In these circumstances, the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of this region was different from the previous one. All these things have been dealt with in this chapter.

The fourth chapter corresponds with c.A.D. 800-1000. A large number of dynasties emerged in different parts of Madhya Pradesh. Competing with each other for superior claims of legitimacy, these dynasties resorted to large scale construction of temples. The Vaiṣṇava inscriptions of this period are replete with names of Vaiṣṇavite deities and incarnations. All the parts of Madhya Pradesh yield, in this period, substantial evidence of Vaiṣṇava inscriptions and monuments.

The fifth chapter deals with forms of Viṣṇu and his incarnations. Different incarnations and forms of Viṣṇu remained dominant in different periods. With the passage of time, the forms of Viṣṇu changed in some new ways and new types appeared. This aspect of change forms the theme of this chapter.

The last chapter, conclusion, attempts an overview, trying to underline geographical variations, trends of patronage, continuity and change in Vaiṣṇava centers and other aspects of Viṣṇu worship in Madhya Pradesh.

IV

The chronological span of the present work starts with the coming of the Imperial Guptas. But any work regarding the spread or evolution of Vaiṣṇava sites in M.P. has to begin with Heliodorus Pillar

²⁹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, p. 213, line 21.

Inscription, the earliest evidence of Vāsudeva in inscription. This pillar is situated in Besnagar, 2 miles north-west of Vidiśā district in Madhya Pradesh.

D.R. Bhandarkar³⁰ in his excavation report of Besnagar gives a detail description of the site and archaeological findings. The pillar records the erection of this pillar as a *Garuḍadhvajain* honour of the god Vāsudeva by Heliodorus, son of Dion, a Greek ambassador from the Indo-Bactrian king Antialkidas of Taxila to the court of local prince Bhāgabhadra. Heliodorus in this inscription calls himself *Bhāgavata-Hēliōdōrēna Bhāgavatena*. He refers to Vāsudeva as the god of gods and uses the term *Garuḍa* standard

Dēvadēvasa Vāsudēvasa Garuḍadhvajēayam Kāritē.....

Both these terms are significant, keeping in view the two facts: *first*, supremacy of Vāsudeva over other gods and *second*, *Garuḍa* standard as being the symbol of the same.

This epigraph thus points to the existence in the immediate neighbourhood of the column, of a temple of Vāsudeva which was as old as at least the middle of middle of 2nd century B.C. The Heliodorus pillar is locally called Khām Bābā. Close beside this pillar are found three retaining walls of an old platform on which the old shrine of Vāsudeva may have been erected. Not only the one shrine, but this place may well have been a complex of Vāsudeva temples. In this connection, Bhandarkar refers to still another stamp of a column which was lying uncared for in one of the narrow streets of Vidiśā.³¹ It contains a small inscription which says:

“Bhāgavata, son of Gotamī, caused a Garuḍa standard to be made in connection with the best temple of Bhāgavat (Bhāgavato prāsādotamasa Garuḍa-dhvaja kāritē...), when Mahārāja Bhāgavata had been crowned twelve years”.

³⁰ Bhandarkar, *ASIAR*, 1914-15, pp. 66-81.

³¹ Bhandarkar, *ASIAR*, 1913-14, p. 190.

The word '*Prāsādotama*' perhaps suggests that of many temples, this Vāsudeva temple is the best of which column forms a part. The stamp in question was a part of a pillar, which stood on this site (Besanagar). Also, Bhandarkar says that Heliodorus, coming from Taxila, would have erected a *Garuḍa-dhvaja* at the most famous temple. Next he refers to an image, originally with four hands, found from this site by Mr. Lake. The features, the crown and head dress behind it, the peculiar earrings, the necklace, the breast ornament and lower dress of this image are exactly like that of the figure of Viṣṇu carved in the *veraṇḍāh* of the Udaigiri cave, containing the inscription of Candragupta II. But the figure in question is round. Therefore, Bhandarkar assumes that this is the image of Garuḍa, which crowned the Khām Bābā column. Chandragupta II may have crowned the column with this image of Garuḍa. However, he does not provide any evidence for the same. In any case, it is clear, that Garuḍa frequently appeared as symbol of Vāsudeva more than any other symbol like *śaṅkha*, *cakra* etc.

Towards the south of the Khām Bābā column is found the foundation of an old dwelling with fragments of tiles, pottery, nails, tanks and a domestic mortar. This may be the house occupied by the family of worshippers, who were in charge of Vāsudeva temple. This site also yielded remnants of an irrigation canal of Maurya or Pre Maurya period.

Another site³² excavated is lying in close vicinity of the pathway leading from Udayagiri to Khām Bābā. Here Bhandarkar found an old stūpa and two *kuṇḍas* of which one bore close resemblance of a *yoni kuṇḍa*. Brāhmaṇas offer daily sacrifice in these *kuṇḍas*. Two drains and one large hall are also found in excavation. Fragments of potteries of diverse nature are found from the site, besides 26 clay pieces

³² Bhandarkar, *ASIR*, 1914-15, pp. 12-18.

bearing impressions of seals. Bhandarkar³³ calls the structure the spacious halls constructed for accommodating large gathering of people who must have come for the sacrifice for which the *kuṇḍas* were laid on the ground. Six Nāgā coins found from the place of the *kuṇḍas* indicate the age of the sacrificial pit to the beginning of 4th century A.D. or middle of 3rd century A.D. Further down he found a flat stone with 'bhikhuniyā' (by the nun) incised on it in characters of the Maurya or Śuṅga age. Near it, two antiquities of the same period—the relic casket and a vase—are found. He says that the *stūpa* of Maurya or Śuṅga period was originally standing here, which was later on occupied for dwelling purpose.

With such an ancient record of habitation, the site was bound to become a big religious centre, which is evident from the seals and sealings. All the seals were affixed to documents which came from outside to the *yajñasālā* or sacrificial halls. A sealing contains the legend *Timitra-dātrisya(sa)-ho (tā)-p(0) tā-mamtrasajana*, meaning 'of the donor Timitra accompanied by Hotā Potā, by Kinsmen and.....'³⁴ Timitra or Demetrius was the *dātā* or *yajamāna*, who instituted the sacrifice. A mould of Indo-Bactrian type of steatite stone and another bearing the effigy of dragon and name *Huvilāsyā* shows the involvement of these foreign people in brāhmaṇic sacrifices.

Thus the site of Besnagar developed into a Vaiṣṇava centre in 2nd B.C. Not only Besnagar but neighbouring sites were also moving towards brāhmaṇic religion. Active participation of foreigners in these sacrifices is also noted. But for further development of Vaiṣṇava centers, the region had to wait for the age of the Imperial Guptas.

In the area adjoining the Khām bābā pillar to its south west, remains of one of the earliest temples have been exposed by M.D.

³³ Bhandarkar, *ASIAR*, 1914-15, pp. 12-18.

³⁴ *ASIAR*, 1914-15, p. 77.

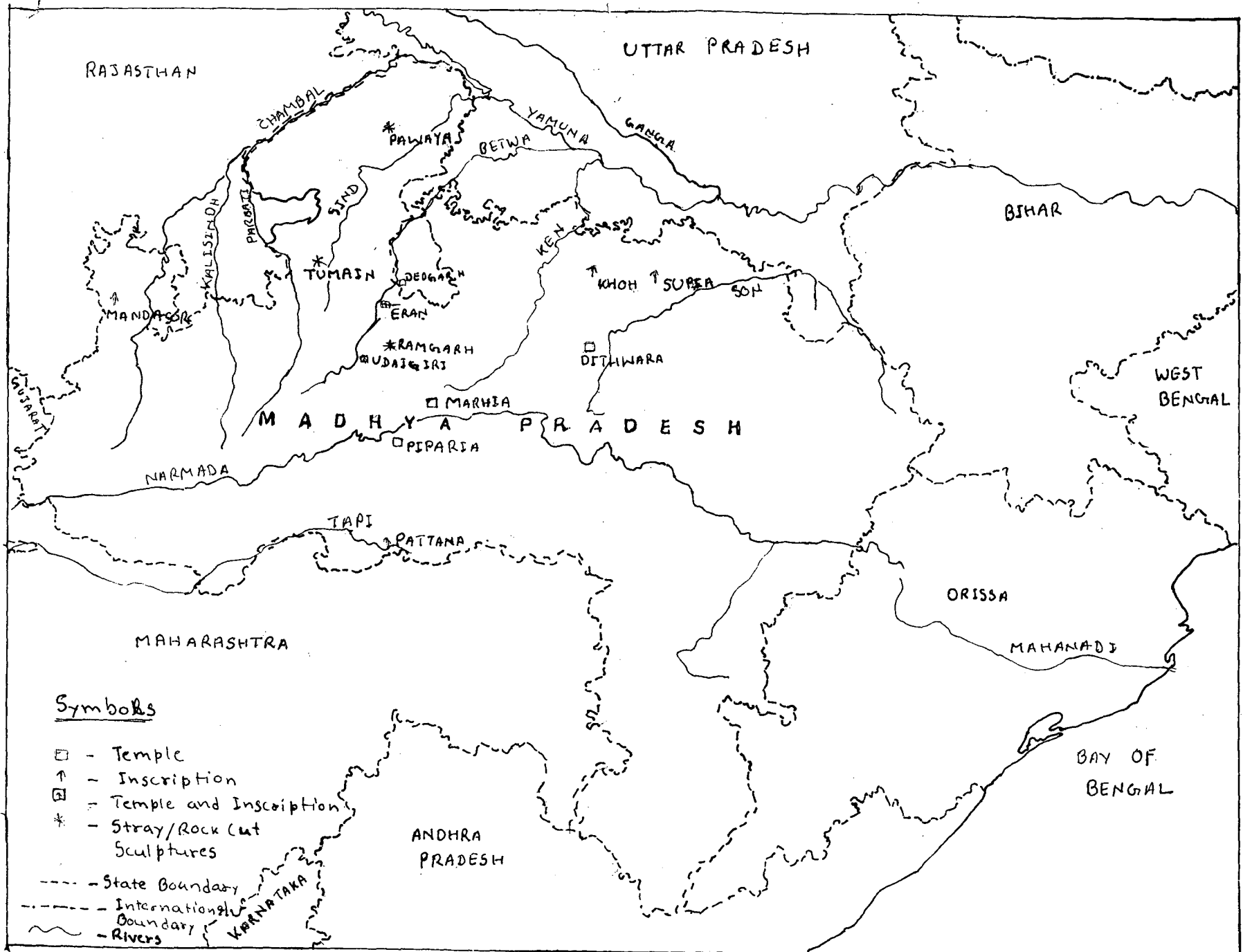
Khare.³⁵ In the recent excavations done by him, a huge retaining wall made of rubble stones have been found. Khare calls it the enclosure of Vāsudeva temple. The superstructure of the temple was of perishable material probably timber was used in the plinth. How early it was constructed, cannot be said. The excavations have only shown that it was finally destroyed due to heavy floods of the river Betwa. After the first damage to the site, the site was raised artificially by making an embankment on earth. According to Khare, a desire to give eminence to the temple as also to secure it from floods, seems to have dictated the building of the temple on a high platform. It was during this period that the Greek ambassador Heliiodorus from Taxila visited Vidiśā. That more than one pillar may have been erected in one alignment (north-south) outside the eastern rubble wall is indicated by traces of several pits at uniform distances with similar filling as that of the Heliiodorus pillar, as confirmed by a explored section cut into a pit. At least three more pillars are excavated on the plan in the trenches on the eastern side of the mound.

Occurance of two northern black polished ware sherds and six square copper punch marked coins from the deposit of period I indicates that the temple is dated to the end of the 3rd century B.C.³⁶ Evidence of the first flood may also probably be of the 3rd century B.c.

Thus, we may have here traces of Vaiṣṇava temple of as early as the 3rd century B.C. With such a background of Vaiṣṇava affiliation, Madhya Pradesh turned towards the spread of Vaiṣṇavism from the Gupta period onwards, which has been dealt with in subsequent chapters.

³⁵ Khare, M.D., 'Discovery of a Visnu Temple near the Heliiodorus Pillar, Besnagar, District Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh)', *Lalit Kala No. 13*, (1967), pp. 21-27.

³⁶ Khare, M.D., 'Discovery of a Visnu Temple near the Heliiodorus Pillar', *Lalit Kala*, No. 13, (1967), p. 27.



MAP I: VAISNAVA CENTRES IN MADHYA PRADESH [C. A. D. 300-550]

CHAPTER – 2

VAISNAVA CENTRES IN MADHYA PRADESH

[c.A.D. 300-550]

Growth of Vaiṣṇava centres in the time span of the present chapter corresponds to the rise and establishment of the Gupta rule in Northern India, Madhya Pradesh being a part of it. The great rulers of the Gupta dynasty, Candragupta I, Samudragupta, Candragupta II, Kumāragupta and Skandagupta dominate the history of India of the fourth and fifth centuries. 'For the first time since the Mauryas in 3rd century B.C., all of India north of Vindhya acknowledged the sovereignty of a single ruler', says Harle.¹

All the Gupta rulers are too well known to require an introduction. They came into power after the rule of the Kuṣānas over Northern India. They adopted full imperial titles on their inscriptions and coins.

Unlike the Mauryas, Gupta rulers showed a leaning towards the orthodox brāhmaṇic religion. R.G. Bhandarkar characterized this as a period of 'vigorous brāhmaṇic revival and renovation'.² Accordingly Vaiṣṇavism drew the attention of scholars in this period. How far this 'Brāhmaṇic Revival' materialized into emergence of Vaiṣṇava complexes/sites, forms the subject matter of this chapter.

Besides, the focus is also on to identify such areas and the geographical pattern of the spread of Vaiṣṇavism by locating the find spots of relevant inscriptions and religious monuments. An attempt is

¹ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 1.

² Bhandarkar, R.G., 'A Peep into Early History of India', *Journal of The Bombay Branch of The Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XX, (1944), p. 356.

also being made to study the link between Vaiṣṇava sculptures and the Gupta rulers, if any such link can be shown to have existed.

The study of the primary material for this chapter is not limited only to Gupta inscriptions and sculptures, but also takes into account of other local rulers and feudatories too, if they fall within the time span (c.A.D. 300-550) in Madhya Pradesh.

II

Several Vaiṣṇava centres sprang up in the present day region of Madhya Pradesh in the Gupta period. Caves of Udaigiri³ are one of the several groups of ancient monuments that are situated within the radius of a dozen miles around the modern town of Vidiśā. These caves have a unique distinction of being the only site, which can be personally associated with a Gupta monarch.⁴ The three Gupta inscriptions [Udayagiri Cave inscription of Candragupta II, year 82⁵, Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Candragupta II in cave 7⁶ and Kumāragupta inscription of cave 20⁷] speak of dedicating cave or a particular sculpture at Udaigiri. All these inscriptions are dealt with in this chapter.

Vidiśā city is situated at the junction of ancient trade routes running to Kośāmbī and Kāśī, to Andhra Capital and to other cities in Kośala and Pañcāla⁸. Udaigiri caves situated in Vidiśā district are twenty in number. According to J.C. Harle, the images in these caves are fairly evenly divided between the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava pantheons⁹. However, this is not the case. Quantitatively as well as qualitatively

³ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, Gwalior, 1948.

⁴ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 9.

⁵ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II, The year 82', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 242-244.

⁶ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 255-257.

⁷ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, p. 41.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 1-24.

⁹ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 9.

(size and structural evolution), Vaiṣṇava sculptures are in a dominant position, as is evident from the given table.

Sculptures	Caves dedicated	Remarks
Standing Viṣṇu	9, 11, 12	Vaiṣṇava images
Varāha	5	Varāha incarnation scene. Largest panel 7m x 4m ¹⁰ .
Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu	13	Vaiṣṇava image
<i>Amṛtamanthana</i> Scene	19	Vaiṣṇava image
<i>Ekamukhaliṅga</i>	4	Śaiva cave
12 armed goddess	6, 17	Frequently shown with Vaiṣṇava images
Gaṇeśa	6, 17	Crudely carved
Jina images	20	Jaina cave
Standing deity	1	Not identified
Śiva-Pārvatī	Outside cave 19	Śaiva image

Table I. Sculptures in Udaigiri caves

Most of the sculptures of Udaigiri caves belong to the time of Candragupta II. Cave 6 contains an inscription of the time of Candragupta II.¹¹ This inscription records the excavation of the cave as a religious benefaction (dēya-dharmaḥ) to that (Viṣṇu) god by

¹⁰ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 11.

¹¹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Candragupta II, year 82', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 242-244.

Sanakānika, son of Viṣṇudāsa and son's son of Mahārāja Chagalaga. The name of Sanakānika appears in Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.¹² 'Chagalaga' is not a familiar Indian name. The person concerned may be of the foreign origin, whose son Viṣṇudāsa (slave of Viṣṇu) converted to Vaiṣṇava faith, as it appears from his name. Though this inscription doesn't name the god, the figure of four armed Viṣṇu just below the inscription attests to the fact that the cave was dedicated to Viṣṇu. Four armed Viṣṇu with his cylindrical crown (*kṛita-mukuta*) seems most wide-spread type in the Gupta period.¹³ Viṣṇu is shown as standing in *samapāda* (stiff legged) posture, with his lower hands placed on *Gadādevī* and *Cakrapuruṣa* (the personified images of Viṣṇu's weapons – *gadā* and *cakra*). The body of the Viṣṇu figure (specially the chest) is massive; he has a gentle smile on his lips. Other sculptures of this cave include a figure of twelve armed goddess and a crudely carved figure of Gaṇeśa.¹⁴ The goddess is represented as holding the buffalo demon by the heels and treading upon his head, which are sculptured on the face of the rock outside the cave. Cunningham calls this image as *Mahiṣāsūramardini*.¹⁵ About the figure of Gaṇeśa, D.R. Patil opines that it is struggling for prominence out of his primitive obscurity.¹⁶ Another figure of Gaṇeśa more advanced in iconography is found outside the cave 3.

Cave 5 contains the famous Varāha incarnation scene.¹⁷ It is one of the most favourite and elaborate scenes where the Varāha is shown rescuing the goddess Pṛthvī (earth) from the depths of the ocean. This sculpture is most widely known among the Udaigiri sculptures, partly

¹² Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, p. 213, line 22.

¹³ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 33-37.

¹⁵ Cunningham, A., 'Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa', *Archaeological Survey of India, Reports*, (hereafter *CASIR*), Vol. X, pp. 49-50.

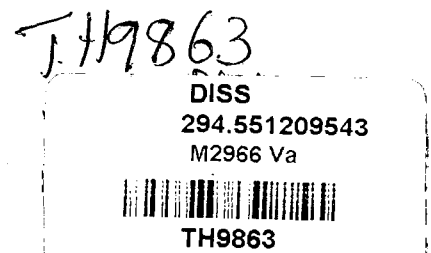
¹⁶ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 33-37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-33.

due to its size and partly due to the allegorical meaning it is supposed to convey. No other bas-relief panel in India is as large as this figure, roughly measuring 7m x 4m.¹⁸ The boar is sculpted in human form with an animal head, holding the human figure of Prthvī (earth) in his right hand. The boar is shown stepping up on to a rock with its left foot raised and left knee bent to a right angle. Its left hand is on its hip. A very small Bhūdevī perches on a lotus wreath. Another small feminine figure stands on the Boar's proper right, holding the stem of a large lotus. Śeṣa with a canopy of thirteen hoods in two layers is in worshipful attitude. The god of ocean is represented by bottom figures of the side walls where he, with a turban like headdress, is seen receiving the combined streams of Ganga and Yamuna. Both the rivers are in human form riding on crocodile and tortoise respectively. In effective contrast with the dynamic personality of Varāha are the rows of small figures of amazed spectators, almost static and carved in low relief, which cover the entire wall above the scene. These represent sages and demigods. On the top left row are represented Śiva, Brahmā and Agni. Two large figures on proper right are shown worshipping the Boar. The first is a serpent king. Behind him, holding a lotus bud on a large stalk in his right hand is a large kneeling figure of a man. The large human figure may well be the donor, one of local *Mahārājas* mentioned in the inscriptions at the caves. According to Harle, since this panel far outranks in size all the other sculptures, this figure can be Candragupta himself.¹⁹ All these descriptions of *Purāṇa* accounts of Varāha's lifting of the earth from beneath the ocean as depicted in the figure is more than a simple sculpture depicting the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu. The image seems to serve as a remarkable allegory for the unification of the empire under Candragupta II,

¹⁸ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 35.



according to F.M. Asher.²⁰ Saving earth from the dismal state of affairs at the end of a cosmic age offers a comparison between the cosmic feats of an incarnation of Viṣṇu and the human achievements of Candragupta II.

The allegory gets credence from the fact that large part of Western India including Mālwā (area in which Udaigiri is located) remained under the authority of Western *Kṣatrapas* before Candragupta II's victory over them. The political allegory of the Varāha panel lies in the projection of the Gupta ruler as a mighty conqueror. In consonance with this fact, the sages standing in a worshipful posture, may recall local kings like the patron of the relief who paid homage to the paramount Gupta sovereign. Asher found resemblance between the costume of the sages and that of the Kuṣāna rulers, the same retained in Gupta Age.²¹ Further the merging of the streams, Ganga and Yamuna, into a single mighty river and of the great rivers into a an enormous ocean may symbolize Samudragupta unifying disparate states of India into a central authority.

Royal connection of this Varāha image is strengthened by another Udaigiri Cave Inscription of Candragupta II.²² It records the construction of cave 7 and its dedication to god Śambhu by Sāba Virasena, a resident of Pāṭaliputra. Though the inscription is undated, it is of the time of Candragupta II (on palaeographic grounds). The emperor was present there with his minister of war and peace.

*Sacivyōvyā-----ndhivigrahe ----- Kritisna-prithvījāyārthena rājñ-
aivenasah-āgataḥ.*

²⁰ Asher, F.M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art', in B.L. Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 53-66.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta II', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 255-257.

Other notable Vaiṣṇava images of these caves include a colossal statue of Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu in cave no. 13.²³ This twelve ft. long scene contains the god sleeping on the coils of primeval snake. Other figures of this scene are Brahmā, Lakṣmī and Gaṇeś'a. This is one of the earliest images of Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu. Cave 19 contains the *Amṛtamanthana* scene with the panel of *Navagrahas*.²⁴ It is an earlier version of the story than that related in the Purāṇas according to D.R. Patil. Cave 2 contains a standing deity with *daṇḍa* in his hand. In all probability it is the image of *Skanda Kārttikeya*.

Among other sculptares those of cave 20 are of significance.²⁵ In this cave, four sculptures are shown seated on the pedestal below which is carved the symbol of wheel. Each of them has a halo round the head. An inscription, ascribed to the reign of Kumāragupta [c.A.D. 425-26], further attests the dedication of the cave to a Jaina *Tīrthaṅkara*. It records the construction of the image of Pārśvanātha by a devoted ascetic Śaṅkara.

It seems probable that the site of Udaigiri caves was earlier occupied by Buddhists. A bell shaped lion capital is found from the with its abacus containing twelve *Ādityas*, twelve *Rāśis* and twenty seven *Nakṣatras*.²⁶ The site was occupied by a *stūpa* and some dwelling houses according to Bhandarkar.²⁷ Above them is the wall of the platform of the Gupta period, constructed to stand upon the two stone courses of the *stūpa*.

A study of the Udaigiri site, thus, reveals not only a transformation of its character from a minor Buddhist site, a little distance away from Sanchi but also its remarkable position in the

²³ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 38-39.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 40-41.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 43-46.

²⁷ Bhandarkar, D.R., *ASIAR*, 1914-15 p. 79.

symbolic projection of Gupta imperial aspirations through Vaiṣṇavism. It may or may not have been a regular centre of Vaiṣṇava worship, but it was the most impressive site in comparison with other images sculpted there, in the period of early Guptas.

Of the caves at Udaigiri, some of them are excavated by king or their feudatories. Others may have been the efforts of citizens of Vidiśā, according to Patil.²⁸

II

Turning away from the site of Udaigiri near Vidiśā, we may now take up another site which emerged as an important centre of Vaiṣṇavism in the period of the Guptas. Ēraṇ or ancient Arikina is a village on the left bank of Bīnā in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh. It has yielded the earliest known Vaiṣṇava inscription of the Gupta period in Madhya Pradesh. A Stone Inscription of Samudragupta is found to the west of a ruined temple of Varāha.²⁹ The date of the inscription cannot be read, but the inscription mentions the name of Samudragupta. It refers to something that was erected at Arikina (Ēraṇ). According to Cunningham³⁰, this most probably would be the old temple of colossal Viṣṇu with its massive capitals and mouldings. The enshrined statue has four arms with two of the left hands resting on the hip.³¹ The lintel of this temple contains the figure of Viṣṇu on Garuḍa which shows that the temple was constructed for Viṣṇu. With a view to showing his devotion to the feet of Acyuta (*Acyuta-pāda-pithe*), the king set up the temple of Janārdana here –*dēv=ālayasca kritin=*

²⁸ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, p. 50.

²⁹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Ēraṇ Stone Inscription of Samudragupta' *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 220-224.

³⁰ *CASIR*, Vol. X, pp. 85-87.

³¹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Ēraṇ Stone Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 220-224.

atra Janārdanasya.³² The temple is thus called *devālaya* of Janārdana according to Bhandarkar.

Another stone pillar, of the time of Budhagupta, (dated C.A.D. 485-86)³³ is found engraved on a red sandstone column further north of the above mentioned Viṣṇu temple. The column stands about half a mile to the west of the village Ēraṇ. This column seems to be specially connected with a small double temple. According to Conningham³⁴, this is the Lakṣmī temple separated by the intervening Viṣṇu temple from the Varāha temple. The inscription refers to the erection of a *dhvaja-stambha* (flag-staff) of *bhagvāna* Janārdana by Mahārāja Mātṛviṣṇu and his younger brother Dhanyaviṣṇu for the religious merit of his parents. The inscription starts with invocation to the four armed Viṣṇu (Caturbhuja), whose ensign is Garuḍa. Mātṛviṣṇu is said to be excessively devoted to *bhagvāna* Viṣṇu. His ancestors mentioned in the inscription are Indraviṣṇu, Varuṇaviṣṇu and Hariviṣṇu. Thus, the family had a continuous tradition of Viṣṇu worship for four generations. Vaiṣṇava religion seems to have penetrated deep down in the religious faith of this local chieftain.

The capital of the pillar of the time of Budhagupta is surmounted by a huge square abacus with a pair of lions on each side, those on adjacent sides sharing the same head.³⁵ Above the abacus a large *cakra* is surmounting a stand. Against this stand is a pair of two armed figures standing back to back. They bear none of the attributes of Viṣṇu. They are surmounted by a top knot and hold a serpent. It is, in all probability, Viṣṇu's vehicle, the Garuḍa. The stump like projections of *cakra*'s stand are probably meant to be wings.

³² Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Ēraṇ Stone Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 220-224.

³³ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Ēraṇ Stone Pillar Inscription of Budhagupta, yr. 165', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 339-341.

³⁴ *CASIR*, Vol. X, p. 87.

³⁵ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 12.

Another such wheel is found from Pawaya [Gwalior], as a crowning figure of a monumental pillar.³⁶ It consists of an addorsed pair of figures with a *cakra* rising between their heads. Viṣṇu is also represented here. His right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*, turned slightly inward and backed by a cushion like support.

F.M. Asher found the significance of this wheel beyond the customary personification of the god's weapon.³⁷ He recalls the notions attached to the *Cakravartin*, the age old ideal king whose very name means wheel-turner and who in concept, followed the path of an ever turning wheel, extending his righteous rule to the four quarters. Since, in the case of Ēraṇ, the wheel serves as an emblem to stand before the temple of Viṣṇu, it is the dedicator of the temple, the reigning monarch who is to be seen as the righteous universal monarch.

An anthropomorphic Boar Incarnation image of Viṣṇu is brought from the ruins near the pillar of Budhagupta.³⁸ Here, Varāha is lifting Pṛthvī (earth) from the ocean by the left arm. Its left leg is raised and the left hand rests on the knee, while the right hand is placed on the hip. On the flat surface beneath the left foot, a short inscription in two lines in Gupta Characters is found:

Śrī Maheśvara-dattasya Varāhadattasya.

i.e. the joint gift of Maheśvaradatta and Varāhadatta. The second person mentioned in this inscription may have been considered by his family members as a gift from god Varāha and hence named so.

The Varāha image is remarkable for its splendid condition as well as for the sense of excellent power which it conveys. The extraordinary realism which shows the Boar as a powerful man is in direct contrast

³⁶ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 13.

³⁷ Asher, F.M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art', in Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 60-61.

³⁸ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 35.

to the bold schematization of legs and particularly hands and feet. Harle calls it not only as one of the finest of all Indian sculptures but also one of most original.³⁹

Another remarkable piece of evidence discovered from the same place (Ēraṇ) is the Ēraṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāna.⁴⁰ The inscription is inscribed on the chest of a colossal red stone statue of a boar. The statue stands facing east in the portico of a ruined temple at the southern end of a well known group of temples. It records the building of the temple in which the boar stands. The inscription is recorded by Dhanyaviṣṇu, younger brother of deceased *Mahārājā* Mātrviṣṇu, known from Budhagupta's inscription. It extols the image of Varāha (*Varāha-murti*) and calls him as the protector of the world, the god Nārāyaṇa [*jagat parāyanasya Nārāyaṇasya.....*]. Toramāṇa, the Hūṇa chieftain, who came from Punjab, overthrew the Guptas, establishing himself as the ruler of Malwa in Central India. Mātrvisnu and others who were feudatories of the Guptas accepted the supremacy of the Hūṇas. The statue of Varāha containing the inscription is noted for the elaborate sculptures of ṛṣis and saints clinging to its mane and bristles. These may suppose local rulers and feudatories who were now paying homage to the Hūṇa ruler. It suggests continuity of patronage to Vaiṣṇavism by the family of local rulers of the Arikina region, who now acknowledge the authority of the Hūṇas.

The inscription starts with description of the valorous deeds of Varāha, and immediately after that follows a description of the strength of Toramāṇa and his family. Perhaps, Hūṇas were conscious of their foreign origin and felt a need to assert their sovereignty through this image. Thus, according to F.M. Asher, this Varāha image serves as a

³⁹ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Fleet, J.F., 'Ēraṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāna', *CI*, Vol. III, pp. 158-161.

visual metaphor and Varāha's act as allegory for Toramāna's usurpation of authority in Ēraṇ.⁴¹

Another nearby inscription dated A.D. 510 is engraved on a small stone pillar which was afterwards converted into a *liṅgam*.⁴² It is located half a mile away to south-east on the bank of Bīnā. It is a posthumous record of a chieftain Goparāja who came to Ēraṇ with the powerful king Bhānugupta in A.D. 510. It is a non sectarian inscription. The object of the inscription is to record that in the company of Bhānugupta, his chieftain named Goparāja came to Ēraṇ and fought a battle with the Maitras. Goparāja was killed and his wife accompanied him by cremating herself on his funeral pyre. Goparāja is the son of Mādhava and Śarabharāja's grandson (maternal) – Śarabharāje dauhitraḥ. Name of the chieftain Goparāja and his father's name indicates some Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the same.

Ēraṇ has a complex of temples. It has four dilapidated east facing temples⁴³ assignable to 5th-6th century A.D. as well as the already mentioned monolithic Garuḍa standard of the reign of Budhagupta. The northern most Nṛsimha temple is the earliest shrine at the site. Images of *Gajalakṣmī* and Vaiṣṇava Pratihāras are also found here. The temple enshrining the Nṛsimha image has a striking affinity to the Nṛsimha image at Udaigiri (Cave 12). Immediately to the south of Nṛsimha temple is a shrine with two cells. To the south of this shrine is the Viṣṇu temple. This is a great piece of sculpture to whom the collection of shrines and relics are dedicated.⁴⁴ The image wears a

⁴¹ Asher, F.M., 'Historical and Political Allegory in Gupta Art', in Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, pp. 57-58.

⁴² Fleet, J.F., 'Ēraṇ Posthumous Stone Pillar Inscription of Goparaja', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 91-93.

⁴³ Meister, W. Michael and Dhaky, M.A., *Encyclopedia of India Temple Architecture, North India: Foundation of The North Indian Style*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 18-56.

⁴⁴ *ASIAR*, 1923-24, pp. 29-30.

dhotī and sacrificial thread and holds a sword and a goad. This statue is among the oldest known *brāhmaṇical* image in this part of India.⁴⁵

III

One of the major centres in Western Malwa, from which evidence relating to Vaiṣṇavism in the Gupta period is available, is Mandasor. Located in the north-west corner of Madhya Pradesh, Mandasor has a number of inscriptions of Gupta and post-Gupta period, invoking one or other forms of Viṣṇu. The earliest Gupta period inscription from this area is that of Naravarman, a feudatory prince of Candragupta II.⁴⁶ Haraprasad Shastri calls it a Vaiṣṇava record, since a shrine of Kṛṣṇa adjoining an orchard is situated, from where the inscription is found. Mandasor is the chief town of Mandasor district of former Gwalior state, is Madhya Pradesh. Dated in A.D. 405-06, the inscription starts with obeisance to thousand headed *Puruṣaḥ* (*sahasra-sirasē tasmai Puruṣāya*) whose soul is boundless and who is sleepy on the waters of bed like four oceans. The grant has been given on the festival of Indra approved by Kṛṣṇa. At another place, it refers to Vāsudeva [*Vāsudevam jagad-vāsam*] whose abode is the world, who is inscrutable, unborn and all pervading. The upkeep of the orchard is entrusted to a brāhmaṇa of Gāṅgeyagotra. Here, the emphasis is on the assimilative form of Viṣṇu, who is *nidrālu* (sleepy)⁴⁷ and at the same time protective. It alludes to the Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu. The god is omnipresent and everlasting (unborn) in Vāsudeva form and yet sleeping on the bed of four oceans. Reference to the festival of Indra approved by Kṛṣṇa clearly shows the subordination of Vedic deity Indra to Kṛṣṇa.

⁴⁵ ASIAR, 1923-24, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Mandasor Inscription of Naravarman, The Krita year 461', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 261-266.

⁴⁷ Bhandarkar, D.R., *CII*, Vol. III, p. 126.

Another Mandasor Inscription is of the feudatory chief Bandhuvarman of the same line to which Naravarman belonged.⁴⁸ Bandhuvarman along with Viśvavarman were the feudatories of Kumāragupta I. The above inscription refers to the construction and rebuilding of a sun temple at the request of the guild of silk cloth weavers who migrated from Lāṭa. It refers to two dates-first, 437-38 A.D. of the original construction of the temple and second, 473-74 A.D. of its repair. Though it refers to sun temple, it at the same time refers to Śāraṅgin form of Viṣṇu (one who holds bow and arrows). Towards the end, the engraver hails that the temple lasts as long as a garland of full bloom, lotus flowers clings to the shoulders of Śāraṅgin – *Vikāṭa, kamala-mālām=aṁsa-saktām ca Śāraṅgī bhāvanam*⁴⁹.

Elsewhere, it is also compared to the *Kaustubha* jewel of Śāraṅgin – the top of the temple is like the moon in the sky or like the *Kaustubha* jewel on the chest of god Śāraṅgin –

*Śaśin-ēva nabha vimalam Kaustubha-maṇin-ēva Śāraṅginō Vakṣaḥ*⁵⁰

Thus the sun temple is close to the chest of Śāraṅgin (or quite dear to the god). It may be an attempt to link the sun worship of the migrated silk weavers to the faith to which they (Guptas) adhered to. This inscription is engraved on a sand stone slab which was originally built into a wall of the flight of steps leading to a shrine of Mahādeva. Simultaneous presentation of the three gods Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya may be a reflection of “religious syncretism”⁵¹ in the words of Bhandarkar.

⁴⁸ Bhandarkar, D.R., ‘Mandasor Inscription of Kumāragupta I and Bandhuvarman, Krita years 493 and 529’, *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 322-332.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* verse 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* Verse 42.

⁵¹ Bhandarkar, D.R., *CII*, Vol. III, p. 123.

Mandasor remained under the occupation of Varman family of which Naravarman and Bandhuvarman were members. After the extinction of the Varman family, a king Prabhākara may have been appointed by the Gupta emperors, as appears from the Mandasor Inscription of Mālvā samvat 524 [467-68 A.D].⁵² The inscription records the construction of a *stūpa*, *kūpa* (well), *prāpa* and an *ārāna* (garden or monastery) by Dattabhaṭṭa. The inscription refers to Dattabhaṭṭa as the commander of the forces of king Prabhākara and the father of Dattabhaṭṭa as the general of the armies of Govindagupta, son of Candragupta II. The inscription starts with obeisance to *Sugata* (Buddha). However, it calls Candragupta as famous as Govinda [*Govindavata = Khyātaguptaḥ*]. Sculptures and inscriptions [5th and 6th centuries A.D.] found at Mandasor (Daśapura) are so far all Brāhmaṇical. This is the first Buddhist record of the Gupta period hailing from Mandasor.

Govindagupta mentioned in the inscription was the eldest son of Candragupta from Dhruvasvāminī as mentioned in a clay seal of his mother found in excavation at Basarh (Vaiśālī in North Bihar)⁵³

Another inscription of Mandasor of a slightly later date begins with the creed formula of the *Bhāgavatas* [*jītam bhāgavata*] and praising Viṣṇu who is said to move about in a chariot of Garuḍa [*Garuta=madrathayāyin*]⁵⁴. The inscription records the excavation of a tank by *Mahārāja* Gauri. It also refers to the event as happening during the reign of king Ādityavardhana. It is probable that Mahārāja Gauri (another name Ādityavardhana) was ruling over Daśapura (Mandasor) after the invasion of the Hūṇas. Mānavāyanis, as the new dynasty was

⁵² Grade, M.B., 'Mandasor Inscription of Malwa Samvat 524', *Epigraphia Indica* (hereafter *EI*), Vol. 27, pp. 12-18.

⁵³ *ASIAR*, 1903-04, pp. 102-107.

⁵⁴ Sircar, D.C., 'Mandasor Fragmentary Inscription' *EI*, Vol. 30, pp. 127-132.

called, probably established themselves here as result of extirpation of the Gupta dynasty after Hūṇa invasion.

Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuwardhan [dated 533-36 A.D.]⁵⁵ records the construction of a large well by a person named Dakṣa younger brother of Dharmadōśa, who was a minister of Viṣṇuwardhana. The well was constructed in memory of their deceased uncle Abhayadatta, who had formerly held the same office for the tract of country bounded by the Vindhya and the Pāriyātra mountain and the western ocean. The inscription refers to Yaśodharmana as a tribal ruler, '*janendraḥ*', while Viṣṇuwardhan is called *Narādhipati* with the title *Rājadhira* and *Parameśvara*. Viṣṇuwardhana seems to have acknowledged a certain amount of supremacy. The inscription refers to the genealogy of the family of the ministers. One of their antecedents is named Varāhadāsa (slave of Viṣṇu) and is described as incarnation of Hari (*Harer-iv-anśam*). Another Bhagavaddośa is compared with Uddhava, the well known cousin of Kṛṣṇa. And the inscription is engraved by a person named Govinda. This inscription invokes Śiva (Pināki) at the beginning.

IV

One of the notable monuments of the Gupta period is the Daśāvatāra temple at Deograh.⁵⁶ Although located in the Jhansi district of present day Uttar Pradesh, the site of Deogarh is brought under the purview of the present discussion because of its geographical proximity to the sites in Madhya Pradesh and because of its significant position in the history of temple based Vaiṣṇavism.

⁵⁵ Fleet, J.F., 'Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuwardhana', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 150-158.

⁵⁶ Vats M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deograh', *Memoirs Archaeological Survey of India*, [hereafter *MASI*], No. 70.

Now a days, Deogarh is a complex of Hindu and Jaina temples. Besides the Daśāvatāra temple, the Gupta period inscriptions with *sapta-mātrika* relief on the flight of steps leading down to the river Betwā and Siddh kī Gufā on the southern relief of the hill. Deograh Daśāvatāra temple is the earliest known temple of *Pañcāyatana* type.

The temple is dedicated to Viṣṇu, this is clear from the fact that the *lalāṭabimba* of the doorway contains a four-armed image of Viṣṇu as the central figure.⁵⁷ The god is sitting on Ananta, holding *śaṅkha*, *cakra* and his foot being pressed by Lakṣmī. Other figures of the doorway include those of Nṛsiṃha, Gangā-yamuna along with Vaiṣṇava Pratihāras.

The story of *Gajendramokṣa*⁵⁸ appears for the first time in a niche at Deogarh. Here, the four armed Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa in his liberator image, is helping the elephant standing in the lotus pond.

Another figure shows the penance of Nara-Nārāyaṇa and *Gajalakṣmī*⁵⁹ scenes. The southern niche contains the famous Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu⁶⁰ with all its paraphernalia and subordinate gods and goddesses. Nārāyaṇa is sleeping on seven hooded cosmic serpent. Lakṣmī is sitting at the feet of Viṣṇu with Bhūdevī holding a *camara* behind him. Garuḍa is standing next to the god. The upper part of the panel represents Brahmā seated on a full blown lotus. He is not connected with the navel of the Viṣṇu, presumably emerging from behind the coils of the cosmic serpent. Flanking him to right are the figures of Indra on Airāvata holding Vajra in his right hand, Kārttikeya on peacock and towards left Hara-Gauri on the Nandi bull. The four figures to proper left represent the *āyudhapuruṣas* i.e. *Kaumodakī*,

⁵⁷ Vats, M.S., "Gupta Temple at Deogarh", *MASI*, No. 70, p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

Sudarśana, *Śāraṅga* (bow) and *Nandaka*. A separate piece also depicts the fighting demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.

Besides there, the panels on the plinth consists of well known Rāmāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇalīlā scenes.⁶¹ While Rāma is everywhere depicted as an adult, Kṛṣṇa is depicted as child. Rāma redeeming Ahalya in his liberator form, Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa fighting with *rākṣasas* in Daṇḍaka forest, Rāvaṇa stealing Sītā are some of the Rāmāyaṇa scenes. Kṛṣṇa's story starts with his birth and revolves round in Vraja along with Nanda, Yaśodā, gopi's (cowhered women) and killing of Kaṁsa (in mathura).

Among the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Vāmana and Nṛsimha are present.⁶² A projection on the plinth contains the story of Sunda and Upasunda.⁶³

Some later Gupta panels contain images of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and the scenes of Daṇḍaka forest fight of Bālī and Sugriva, monkeys etc.⁶⁴

This temple also contains a Gupta period inscription in two lines-

*Śrī Govinda, Keśavapuraśvāmī pādiya bhagavata
Govindasya edam nāma.*⁶⁵

It refers to a *Bhāgavata* Govinda, a votary of Lord Keśavapura. Lord Keśavapura may refer to the image of Viṣṇu installed in the temple under the name of Keśavapuraśvāmī. It may have been the presiding deity of Deogarh, then called Keśavapura. The Vaiṣṇava leaning of the region is well reflected in the name of the place itself, Keśavapura (Keśava being a name of Kṛṣṇa). Among the incarnations of Visnu, Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are the more

⁶¹ Vats, M.S., Gupta Temple at Deogarh, *MASI*, No. 7, pp. 16-20.

⁶² Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, No. 70, pp. 20-21.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 25-27.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

worshipped gods. This temple, though it is called Daśavatāra temple, no where shows the Matsya, Kūrma, Buddha or Kalki avatāra. In fact, no Gupta period sculptures or inscriptions are of the above four incarnations of Viṣṇu. Judging by the presenc of Anantaśayana form and Nṛsimha on the *lalāṭabimba*, N.R. Banerjee⁶⁶ opines that the temple may be of either of them. However, Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu has rarely a temple dedicated to it, it is more likely to have been a temple of Nṛsimha according to him.

A Varāha temple in ruined condition is situated in the midst of a thick jungle to the south west of the fort Kīrti Dugra.⁶⁷ The sanctum contains the anthropomorphic image of Varāha as the deity on a pedestal in the centre. The group shows Viṣṇu as emerging from the ocean where the Nāga and Nāginī are reclining below in object supplication after the discomfiture of *Hirṇayākṣa*. Bhūdevī reclaimed from the clutches of the demon is poised gracefully on the left shoulder of the god. Varāha has a plain circular halo at his back, suggestive of its early date. He wears a *vanamāla* and is attended by Śrīdevī standing to his right. Ganga and Yamunā are shown at the base of the jambs but without their *vāhanas*.

On the south a panel of *Gajendramokṣa* shows Viṣṇu sitting on winged Garuḍa and dealing with the elephant below.

Resting against the western wall is the panel of Nara-Nārāyaṇa with fewer details. The crowning panel as in the case of *Gajendramokṣa* is again missing.

The third panel is that of Viṣṇu as Anantaśāyī with Lakṣmī at the feet. Brahmā is shown seated on a lotus at the centre over the reclining

⁶⁶ Banerjee, N.R., 'New Light on Gupta Temples at Deogarh', *Journal of The Asiatic Society*, (hereafter *JAS*), Vol. V, No. 1, 2, (1963), pp. 37-49.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

figure, with Śiva and Pārvatī seated on Nandi on the left of Brahmā and Indra on his Airāvata and Kārttikeya on Mayūra to the right of Brahmā. The two panels of Varāha and Daśāvatāra temple are exactly identical, only difference is in stiffness of the disposition, which is a common characteristic of the Varāha temple.

The demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha disturbing Viṣṇu's *yoga nidrā* and their fight with the weapons of Viṣṇu in anthropomorphic form including the female form of Gadādevī are portrayed as a separate panel.

Against the structural support for the main deity is seen a large figure of Viṣṇu standing in *samabhaṅga* pose with an upraised hand. It has lost its emblem. Lower left hand holds *śaṅkha*, other hands are missing. A halo can be seen behind the headgear.

Other loose sculptures of the site include a seated image of Pārvatī holding an *akṣamāla* and lotus. This sculpture is finely executed and structurally more evolved than the Varāha image, according to N.R. Banerjee. A headless figure with a the right leg raised up and folded is shown, as though, it is trampling upon a fallen foe. On the grounds of *Śrivatsa* and particularly the indication of the *vanamāla*, it is inferably Viṣṇu. A late two handed figure of Vārāha is also found. Banerjee gives a date of early Gupta period to the temple, earlier than the Daśāvatāra temple.

The site of Deogarh remained well occupied by other groups.⁶⁸

V

Another Vaiṣṇava complex, which may be called the expansion of Besnagar – Udaigiri complex is in Ramgarh Hill. Ramgarh hill close to a small village is situated about 4-5 miles west of Pathari district in

⁶⁸ Images of Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras and Medieval Period Inscription of Mihir-Bhoja are found here. Vats, M.S. 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, No. 70, pp. 1-2.

Vidišā. An early Gupta date has been assigned to the rockcarvings of Viṣṇu and his incarnations found here.⁶⁹ They are in all likelihood contemporary with or prior to those at Udaigiri. Carvings represent a series of Vaiṣṇava themes among which are Varāha, Nṛsimha and Trivikrama. An image of Mahiṣāsūramardini has also been found. The sculptor used the natural rock to make the images at the site. There does not seem to have been any attempt to shape the rock to prepare appropriate placement of particular images. Images are divided into two parts, lower rock face and upper rock face.

A seated Gaṇeśa of lower rock face is one of its earliest forms and had its later counterpart with variation at Bhumrā⁷⁰ and Deogarh⁷¹. The Varāha relief is once again a vigorous one. Holding in his left hand a *vanamāla* and left arm extending rigidly down to his upraised knees. The figure has similarity with those of Udaigiri panel, Badoh and Ēraṇ.

Six standing figures of Viṣṇu are found at various places along this rock face. In one of the most well preserved images, the left upper hand holds a *cakra*. Other hands hold a water vessel and a mace. One hand is in *abhaya mudrā*.

The Nṛsimha image strikingly resembles the figure from Besnagar and the Ēraṇ Nṛsimha. Harle suggests an early or mid 5th century date for Ēraṇ Nṛsimha. This Nṛsimha may have been an earlier one. Three figures of Trivikrama is on the lower rock face. The god is standing on his right foot with the left taking the stride. This eight armed god holds all the symbols of Viṣṇu-mace, conch shell, bow, *cakra* and a small shield. This may be the earliest known carving of Trivikrama on a rock.

⁶⁹ Berkson Carmel 'Some New finds at Ramgarh Hill, Vidisha District', *Artibus Asiae*, (hereafter *AA*), Vol. 40, (1978), pp. 215-232.

⁷⁰ Banerji, R.D., 'Temple of Śiva at Bhumrā', *MASI*, No. 16.

⁷¹ Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI* No. 20.

Mahiṣāsūramardini (twelve armed goddess killing the buffalo demon) also figures in lower rock face.

Upper rock face consists of images of Mahiṣāsūramardini and two Viṣṇu figures. Some distance away to the east is another Gupta shrine of Mahiṣāsūramardini. Besides the area is strewn with a number of stray *liṅgas*.

With less surface ornamentation and less definition of details, these carvings share “the elemental vitality and the simple direct power which distinguishes the best art of the period”, says Carmel.

VI

Some other sites in Northern Madhya Pradesh which has yielded sculptures and inscription showing Vaiṣṇava influence have been found around Gwalior.

A fragmentary inscription is found from a large village Tumain in Guna district of Madhya Pradesh.⁷² The stone on which it is inscribed was found stuck up in a wall of a small dilapidated mosque at Tumain. Dated in A.D. 435, this inscription mentions Ghaṭotkacagupta as a member of the Gupta royal family and Kumāragupta who was occupying throne at the time of the inscription. It may be that Ghatotkacagupta was then holding the office of the governor of the province of Arikina (Ēraṇ) which included Tumbavana (Tumain), the provenance of the inscription. The object of the inscription is to record the construction of a temple of a god [*Devaniketanam*] whose name is lost, by five brothers residing at Tumbavana. The five brothers are Śrīdeva, Harideva, Dhanyadeva, Bhadradeva and Saṅghadeva. Although the identity of the god is not known, the names of two first mentioned brothers betray Vaiṣṇavite influence.

⁷² Garde, M.B., ‘Tumain Inscription of Kumāragupta and Ghatotkacagupta, Gupta Era 116’, *EI*, Vol. 26, pp. 115-118.

A brick temple of the Gupta period dedicated to brāhmaṇical worship has been excavated at the ancient town of Pawaya (Padmāvati), situated to the south of Gopagiri (present Gwalior)⁷³. Some stone sculptures of Viṣṇu as well as a *torana* depicting Vāmana and Trivikrama are found at the site indicating Vaiṣṇava affiliation for the monument. On the basis of architectural features, the date assigned to the temple is first quarter of 5th century A.D.

VII

Turning towards central Madhya Pradesh, we find several sites showing Vaiṣṇava temple and sculptures.

Devri is a Gupta period site situated on the south bank of the river Ken in Jabalpur district. The Vāmana stone temple locally known as Marhia is located here.⁷⁴ The temple architecture is intermediate between Sāncī hill and Deogarh temple. In central panels of the temple are portrayed Vaiṣṇava deities with animal human form – Nṛsimha and Haryagrīva (horse faced Viṣṇu) along with *āydhapuruṣas*. In the centre of the doorway lintel is shown Garuḍa bearing aloft Viṣṇu on his shoulders. Square sanctum is empty inside. However, it is most probable that the solitary image lying outside the temple must have been the main object of worship. Judging from the stunted and bow shaped legs, the deity can only be Vāmana. God is shown wearing a short stripped *dhotī* secured by a simple girdle. On the basis of the style of the sculpture, Pramod Chandra assigns a date towards the end of 5th Century A.D. to this temple. Cult worship of Hayagrīva may have been popular here, which is later incorporated under Vaiṣṇava pantheon.

⁷³ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, pp. 18-56.

⁷⁴ Chandra Pramod, 'A Vāmana Temple at Marhia and Some Reflections on Gupta Architecture', *AA*, Vol. 32, (1970), pp. 125-145.

Another small temple site depicting Viṣṇu worship in the form of Hayagrīva is found in Pipariya in Jabalpur district.⁷⁵ It had a Gupta temple of which only few things survive. It contains figures of Bhūvarāha and armed Hayagrīva. Scenes of Kṛṣṇa killing the bull demon are depicted here. A large standing image of Viṣṇu wearing a broad *kiriṭamukūṭa* found at the site was the *mūlanāyaka* of the temple.

In the region of ancient Tripuri in the Narmada valley in Jabalpur district is located the site of Sindursi. It is a site located about one kilometer west from the Bahari Band, perched on the Kaimur hills of the Vindhyan ranges. This region was on the main original route between Kausāmbī and Tripuri in 3^d century B.C.⁷⁶ Minor rock edict of Aśoka is found in this area at Rupnath. Succeeding centuries saw a great deal of artistic activity which resulted in the building of brāhmanical temples of Tigowa and Kunda, lying within the radius of five kilometres. This area was probably a part of the Kharaparika country mentioned in Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.⁷⁷ Gupta period rock cut sculptures (dated 5th century A.D.) are found here locally known as Jogini Māi. Sculptures included Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu. The four handed god is gracefully recumbent on the coils of Ādi Śeṣa of seven hoods, also serving as a canopy. The god wears elongated and festooned *kiriṭamukūṭa*, *kuṇḍalas*, *hāra (ekāvalī)* and *yajñopavita*. The god has half closed eye with upper right hand resting on the chest, while the lower one is in *varada-mudrā*. The image of Bhūdevī, the head of which is missing, is seen seated at the feet of Viṣṇu massaging his right foot. From the navel of the god emanates, the *padmanābha* with double petalled lotus. The four handed Brahmā,

⁷⁵ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Bajpai, K.D., 'Rock cut Sculpture at Sindursi, Dist. Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh', *Prachya Pratibha, Journal of Prachya Niketana*, (hereafter *PP*), Vol. IV, pt I (1976), pp. 42-46.

⁷⁷ Bhandarkar D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, p. 213, line 22.

holding the *kamaṇḍalu* is seated in *padmāsana* on it. To the left, the two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha armed with clubs, are seen in a fighting posture. In short, it is a replica of Deogarh relief of the same god with the exception of *āyudhapuruṣas* and other celestial beings. The magnificent form of Viṣṇu is recumbent in graceful dreamy attitude.

A four handed *sthānakamurti* of Viṣṇu wears trapezoidal *kiriṭamukūṭa*, *kuṇḍala*, beaded *grāiveyaka* and *vanamālā* of śaṅkha. *Gadā* and *cakra* are depicted as *āyudhapuruṣas*. Hands of the god are placed on the upper part of the *gadā* and on the oval *cakra* simultaneously to the right and left. Viṣṇu with half closed eyes has close parallelism with Viṣṇu carved on the cave no. 6 at Udaigiri near Vidiśā.

Two handed Nṛsiṃha⁷⁸ is seated in *sukhāsana*. The god wears a beaded *grāiveyaka*, *keṃaras*, *angada* and *yajñopavita*. The manes are weaving like flame on either side, eyes protruding and the face of the god is terrific. The god is in meditation. It is one of the rare sculptures of the Gupta period with close resemblance to that of Deogarh with the difference that in this image, the *āyudhas* are conspicuous by their absence. The form of the god symbolizes peace, tranquility and yogic meditation.

A four handed Mahiṣāsūramardin⁷⁹ engaged in subduing the demon is also depicted here. The upper right hand is placed on the top of tapering three pronged spear. The lower right hand holds *khadga*. The right foot of *devī* is planted on the head of the prostrate buffalo. These sculptures according to K.D. Bajpai⁸⁰ present a balanced

⁷⁸ Bajpai, K.D., 'Rock Cut Sculptures at Sindursi' *PP*, Vol. IV, pt I, p. 45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

synthesis of the sensuality of the earlier period and the hardness of the later period.

Two sculptures along with the remains of a brick temple are discovered by C.B. Trivedi at Dithwara, which lies about 5 km North east of Katni in District Jabalpur.⁸¹ These sculptures lay on a brick platform locally known as Jogia bābā to the east of the village in a mango grove. The first image is of four armed Viṣṇu standing in *samapāda* posture with half closed eyes and wearing *keyūras* and sacred thread. However, the god does not wear *vaijayantimāla*. Another figure is of two armed Garuḍa. From the orientation of the arms of the Garuḍa though damaged, it appears that these might have been held in the *Namaskāra-mudrā*. The figure has half closed eyes with restricted ornaments. To the right are remnants of wings. Because of severe damage to the sculpture, it is difficult to say whether the image adorned a *garuḍa-dhvaja* as at Ēraṇ or was an independent image fixed in front of the main deity Viṣṇu. This discovery adds to the available information relating to the distribution of Gupta brick temples of Viṣṇu in Madhya Pradesh.

VIII

Baghelkhand area in Madhya Pradesh shows another example of Vaiṣṇava affiliated sites in Madhya Pradesh.

The earliest known inscription is found from Supia, of the time of Skandagupta.⁸² Supia is a village in former Rewa state now in Madhya Pradesh. It refers to the reign of Skandagupta of the Imperial Gupta dynasty. Dated in Gupta era yr. 141 (460-61 A.D.), it records the construction of the *bala-yaṣṭi* (memorial pillar) which was a *gotra*

⁸¹ Trivedi, C.B., 'Newly Discovered Gupta Sculptures from Madhya Pradesh', *Puratattva*, No. 11, (1979-80), pp. 150-51.

⁸² Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Supia Pillar Inscription of The Time of Skandagupta', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 317-319.

śailika (family stone) by *Varga-grāmika* for increase of his own merit, glory and fame. Skandagupta in the inscription is described as Rāma in righteous conduct – *Rāma tulyo dharmā*.

Towards the end of this period (A.D. 300-550) a number of inscriptions have been found from Baghelkhand area, specially from Khoh, Nagaudh state (former). This area was ruled by Parivrājaka Mahārājas. Name of Parivrājaka-Mahārāja appear in Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta.⁸³ The earliest known inscription of this dynasty showing Vaiṣṇava influence is Khoh Plate Inscription of Mahārāja Hastin.⁸⁴ This inscription is found in the valley near the village Khoh, about 3 miles southeast of Uchaharā in the former state of Nagaudh in Baghelkhand. Mahārāja Hastin was a feudatory of the Guptas as it appears from the expression-*sat pañcāśottare=bdāśatē Gupta nṛpa-rājya-bhuktau....*—meaning in the enjoyment of sovereignty by the Gupta kings in the yr. 156 [A.D. 475-76]. The inscription is a non sectarian one except for the opening invocation of god Śiva. The object of the inscription is to record the grant by Mahārāja Hastin of village Vasantaraṣaṇḍika to Gopasvāmin and other brāhmaṇas. The name of the brāhmiṇ Gopasvāmī indicates his Vaiṣṇava affiliation.

Another inscription of the same dynasty is of Mahārāja Janynātha from the city of hill called Uchakalpa, dated A.D. 496-97.⁸⁵ It records the grant to some brāhmaṇas of a village Dhavaṣaṇḍikā for the purpose of a temple of god Viṣṇu under the name of the Bhāgavat or the divine one established by them:

bhagavat pādēvyah devagrāhāro tistrṣṭah ebhiscattra pratiṣṭhah

⁸³ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 203-220.

⁸⁴ Fleet, J.F., 'Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of Mahārāja Hastin', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 93-100.

⁸⁵ Fleet, J.F., 'Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of Mahārāja Jananātha', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 121-125.

Though literally meaning feet of the god (*Bhagavat pādebhyah*). Fleet does not accept this meaning, but he sticks to the temple of god Viṣṇu under the name Bhāgavatā. The inscription mentions the boundary of the village with reference to boundary trench, bridge, cattle path, well etc.

The Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of Mahārāja Sarvanātha (dated A.D. 512-13)⁸⁶ is once again issued from Uchakalpa. It records the grant of village Aśramaka (north bank of river Tamaśa) for the purpose of a shrine of Viṣṇu under the title of Bhāgavata or the divine one and a shrine of Āditya:

Bhagavat pādānām āditya-bhattāraka-pādānaḥ ca

Tamaśa is the modern tons river which flowing through northern part of Rewa flows into the Ganges. Mahārāja Sarvanātha was the son of Jayanātha. The plate on which inscription is inscribed contains a relief on a counter mark surface at the top, Garuḍa, the vehicle of Viṣṇu. Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the record is once again reflected in the name of the share holder Viṣṇunandin.

In his another inscription from the same place, Sarvanātha records the grant of half of the village Dhavaṣaṇḍikā⁸⁷, on the agreement between him and the grantees that it should be applied to amongst other things the purpose of a temple of goddess Piṣṭapurikādevī [*bhagavatyāḥ Piṣṭapurikādevyāḥ*]. The date of the inscription is lost. Fleet calls the goddess as a form of Lakṣmī, although the real identity of the deity is disputed.

⁸⁶ Fleet J.F., "Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of The Mahārāja Sarvanatha", *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 125-129.

⁸⁷ Fleet, J.F., 'Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of The Mahārāja Sarvanatha, year 193', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 129-132.

From the same place, Privrājaka Mahārāja Saṁksobha issued an inscription dated A.D. 528-29.⁸⁸ It records the grant at the request of a certain person named Choḍugomin of the village Ōpāni to a temple of Piṣṭapurikādevī. The inscription starts with the adoration to Vāsudeva [*Om Namō bhagavate Vāsudevāya*]. The ruler Saṁksobha accepts the sovereignty of the Gupta kings. He is said to have occupied his kingdom (Dāhala) in heredity from Hastin. Dāhala is included in forest kingdom in Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta [*aṭvika rājaya*]⁸⁹.

All these inscriptions of Parivrājaka Mahārājas seem to show the horizontal as well as vertical spread of Vaiṣṇava religion. As Gupta rule penetrated into the region of these kingdoms, the religion of the conquerors spread into the area and penetrated vertically downwards too, as is evident from reference to Bhāgavat and from the adoption of Vaiṣṇava personal names.

IX

Besides all these Gupta period inscriptions and monuments, a Vākāṭaka inscription is also found in Madhya Pradesh. The Vākāṭakas were perhaps rulers of the southern origin.⁹⁰ The earliest known king of the Vākāṭakas was Vindhyaśakti I, who carved out an independent kingdom for himself in ancient Vidarbha.⁹¹ They were the contemporaries of the Guptas and maintained friendly relationship with them. One of its rulers, Rudrasena II was married to Prabhāvatīguptā, the daughter of Gupta emperor Candragupta II.⁹²

⁸⁸ Fleet, J.F., 'Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of The Mahārāja Samkshobha, year 209', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 112-116.

⁸⁹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, p. 213, line 21.

⁹⁰ Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, *CII*, Vol. V, Otacamund, (1963), pp. XI-XXIV.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

The only inscription of the Vākātakas found in Madhya Pradesh is of Pravarasena II, the son of Rudrasena II and Prabhāvatīguptā. Pattana, a village in Multai tahsil of Betul district has yielded five copper plates of Pravarasena II.⁹³ All the grants were issued from Pravarapura, the capital and at the victorious office of justice (*Vaijayikē dharmasthāne*). The grant is made for the maintenance of a *sattra* or charitable hall in honour of the foot prints (*pādāmūla*) of Mahāpuruṣah. The village of Asvatthakhetaka is situated on the road to Varadakhetaka (Warud), 5 miles southwest of Warud. The grant was made at the request of Nārāyaṇarāja.

X

The period between c.A.D. 300-550 in Madhya Pradesh thus saw fashioning of images of Viṣṇu and of his various incarnations in a number of distant centres which all became nuclei of Vaiṣṇava worship. Among the incarnations Varāha, Nṛsimha and Vāmana were the major deities among the Gupta rulers and their feudatories. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa stories, too, were familiar to the rulers and the sculptors. However, unlike the above three incarnations, no separate temple or monumental site was dedicated to these two incarnations. Among the forms of Viṣṇu being worshipped, *Caturbhuja* form of Viṣṇu, Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu on Garuḍa remained favourite to the sculptors of this period. The twelve armed goddess or Mahiṣāsurasamardini was often portrayed with different forms of Viṣṇu.

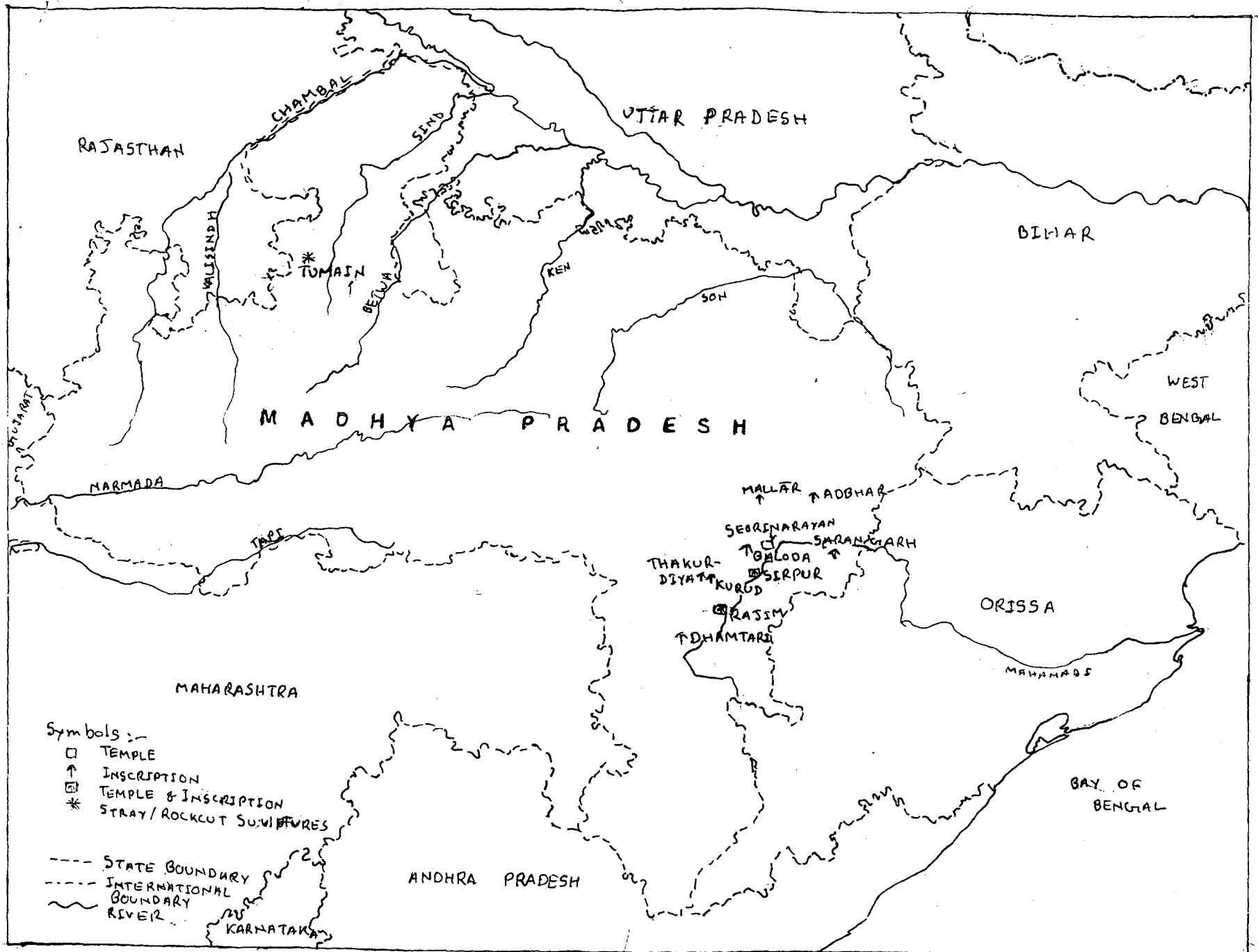
The Varāha incarnation remained especially notable for the allegorical meaning it was supposed to convey. Large images of Varāha remained always associated with royalty. The image of Viṣṇu as liberator (or protector) which was also a part of Varāha incarnation,

⁹³ Mirashi V.V., 'Pattana Plates of Pravarasena II', *EI*, Vol. 23, pp. 81-88.

was well reflected in *Gajendramokṣa*, Rāma killing *rākṣasas* and *Kaṁsavadha* scenes.

A clear cut geographical pattern emerges out of the availability of epigraphical evidences and monuments. While the Northern, North Western and Central parts of Madhya Pradesh abound in Vaiṣṇava inscriptions and sites under the aegis of Gupta rulers and their feudatories, southern Madhya Pradesh remained totally bereft of them. Baghelkhand area came under the influence of this religion only towards the end of this period.

Attempts were made on the part of the rulers to associate other local deities to the main line Vaiṣṇava religion. Goddess Piṣṭapurikādevī's association with Vaiṣṇavism may have been an example of this type.



MAP-II: VAISHNAVA CENTRES IN CHHATTISGARH [C.A.D. 550-800]

CHAPTER – 3

VAISNAVA CENTRES IN CHHATTISGARH

[c.A.D. 550-800]

Passing on to second phase from the first phase of Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism, there is a shift in the areas as regarding the availability of archaeological and epigraphical materials. The second sub-period [c. A.D. 550-800], with which this chapter is concerned, saw new dimensions of Vaiṣṇavism emerging in new corners of Madhya Pradesh. Now, Chhattisgarh region of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh abounds in inscriptions invoking Viṣṇu in different ways. Strikingly enough in this period, we do not find any inscription or new monuments relating to Viṣṇu and his *avatāras* in northern Madhya Pradesh. Dāhala or South Kosala, which has been described as the region of forest kingdom [*aṭavika rājya*] in Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta¹, now embraced Vaiṣṇavism.

This period is noticeable for the rise of local dynasties in Chhattisgarh region. The mighty Gupta empire had vanished and the role of the Imperial Pratihāras was still to come. Now, minor powers were trying to establish independent state system in this area. Keeping in view the small territory and limited resources of these dynasties, it is quite possible that they would not resort to large scale making of big temples or monuments. This seems to have been the case here, for big temple complexes came to be built only towards the end of this period.

¹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *C II*, vol. III, p. 213, line 21.

I

The political history of this region is in darkness before the rise of the Śarabhapuriyas about the close of the 5th century A.D. A.M. Shastri² opines that this region formed a part of the empire of the Mauryas and the Sātavāhanas. After the fall of the Sātavāhanas, its history again fell into oblivion. About the middle of the 4th century A.D., this area was under Mahendra, who according to Allahabad Pillar Inscription³ was defeated and reinstalled on the throne by the Gupta emperor. Shastri finds enough evidence of the growing Gupta influence in the use of the Gupta era [Arang Plates of Mahārāja Bhimasena II]⁴ and the coins of Mahendrāditya and Kramāditya⁵ During this period, the area was also raided by the Vākāṭaka king Narendra Sena, whose commands were obeyed by the lords of Kosala, Mekāla and Mālvā:

Dapa hrtaṅgaśa śriyaḥ kosalamekalamālvādhipatiḥ

Śarabhapuriyas rose about the close of the 5th century A.D. or early 6th century A.D. The dynasty got its name from the name of the town Śarbhapura, which has been named after its founder Śarabha. In all probability, the Śarabhapuriya initially accepted the suzerainty of the Guptas. Kosala region earlier called *aṭavika rājya* slowly started moving towards statehood under the rule of the Śarabhapuriyas.

² Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapuriyas, Pāṇḍuvamśins and Somavamśins*, Part I, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 98-99.

³ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta', *CII*, Vol. III, p. 213, line 19.

⁴ Hiralal, 'Arang Copper Plate of Bhimasena II, Gupta Samvat 282', *EI*, Vol. 9, pp. 342-345. The inscription also mentions grant of a village Vaṭapallikā (not identified) in Kuśali (district) Dondā (30 miles east of Arang) to two brāhmins Harisvāmin and Bappasvāmin, Name of Harisvāmin indicates Vaiṣṇavite influence.

⁵ Jain, B.C., 'Hitherto Unknown Repousse Coins of Kramāditya', *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* [hereafter *JNSI*] (1960), Vol. 22, pp. 18-187.

⁶ Mirashi, V.V., 'Bālāghāt Plates of Prithivīshena II', *CII*, Vol. V, pp. 79-88.

The first ruler of the family, Śarabha did not issue any grant. However, his son Narendra issued a number of grants.

Śarabha in all probability ruled as a feudatory of the Guptas, specially Gupta ruler Budhagupta.⁷ This is strengthened by the fact that Śarabha's daughter's son, Goparāja acknowledged the authority of the Guptas and ruled over this principality as their feudatory. Ēran Posthumous Stone Pillar Inscription of Goparāja⁸, who speaks that Goparāja (a feudatory of Bhānugupta) was killed in the battle, mentioned Goparāja as the *dauhitra* of Śarabha. Thus the maternal grandfather of this Goparāja may have been ruling as a feudatory of the Guptas over South Kosala, sometimes around close of the 5th century A.D. or the beginning of the 6th century.

The earliest known grant of this dynasty is the Pipardulā Plates of Narendra of year 3.⁹ Pipardulā is in Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh. The grant is issued from Śarabhapura. Śarabhapura may have been the capital of Śarabhapurīya rulers. Dated in first half of 6th century A.D., this grant was addressed to villagers of Śarkarāpadraka to inform them that this village situated in Nandapura *bhoga* (district) was granted by Rāhudeva (described as *Nandapura bhogiya* – bhogapati of Nandapura). The grant was issued for the increase of religious merit of the king. The king is described as *Paramabhāgavata* (a great devotee of Viṣṇu). It also mentions Śarabha as father of Narendra. Vaiṣṇava affiliation of this copper plate and dynasty is reflected in the seal found on the plate. It depicts *Abhiṣeka Lakṣmī* as the royal emblem. The figure shows Lakṣmī standing on a lotus, with

⁷ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, Pt. I, pp. 109-110.

⁸ Flect, J.F., 'Ēran Posthumous Stone Pillar Inscription of Goparāja', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 91-93.

⁹ Shastri, A.M., 'Pipardulā Plates of Narendra, year 3', *Inscriptions of The Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 5-7.

two elephants pouring water over her from pitchers held in their upraised trunks. Perhaps Narendra took advantage of the prevailing political uncertainty in the region and ruled as an almost independent ruler.¹⁰ However, he did not formally denounce Gupta suzerainty. The Gupta influence is visible in the adoption of Vaiṣṇava symbol (*Abhiṣeka Lakṣmī*) on his inscription and also in the name of the district (*bhoga*) Nandapura (Nanda being the foster father of Kṛṣṇa). The *Abhiṣeka Lakṣmī* symbol was retained by all Śārabhapurīya grants.

Another inscription of this dynasty is the Kurud Plates of Narendra of year 24.¹¹ Kurud is about 27 miles northeast of Raipur in the tahsil and district of Raipur in Madhya Pradesh. The charter was issued by king Narendra from his camp of victory (*Vijayaskandhavārāt*) at Tilakeśvara. Dated in 24th year of his reign, the charter was issued in confirmation of an earlier grant made by the deceased father of the king. The charter was addressed to the residents of the village *Keśavaka*, situated in the *Cullādasīmābhoga* (modern Charada village, 7 miles due east of Keśava). Keśavaka is probably the small village Keśava on the bank of a nullah bearing the same name about 5.5 miles to southeast of Mahasamund tahsil. This village was originally given by *Paramabhaṭṭāraka* (Gupta king) for the religious merit of his own. It appears that earlier the charter was issued on some perishable material (*tālapatra i.e. palm leaf*). Owing to burning of it (*tālapatrasāsanam grhadāhe dagdham eti*), it was redonated by Narendra for the religious merit of *Paramabhaṭṭārapāda* (Gupta ruler). It clearly shows Gupta sovereignty over this region. Tilakeśvara where the king stayed, can not be identified. Probably it was a temple of Śiva, judging by its name.¹² The king is once again called as

¹⁰ Shastri A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śārabhapurīyas*, pt. I, pp. 110-111.

¹¹ Dikshit, M.G., 'Kurud Plates of Narendra, yr. 24', *El*, Vol. 31, pp. 263-266.

¹² Shastri, A.M., 'Kurud Plates of Narendra, yr. 24', *Inscriptions of the Śārabhapurīyas*, pt. II, p. 10.

Paramabhāgavata and the plate contains the *Gajalakṣmī* seal. The name of the village Keśavaka has obvious Vaiṣṇava affiliation.

The last known copper plate charter of this ruler is the Rawan Plate.¹³ Dated in the beginning of the 6th century A.D., the grant was issued from Śarabhapura. With a proper *Gajalakṣmī* seal, the grant also describes the king as *Paramabhāgavata*. The object of this inscription is to record the grant of village Torāmaka situated in Mantārāja *bhukti* to a temple of the god Śrīdharasvāmin at Vaṭapadra for meeting the expenditure on its repairs. Expenses for *bali* and *caru* offerings and a free feeding house (*sattra*) evidently attached to the temple are mentioned. It seems to have been a Vaiṣṇava temple of some importance from the description of the feeding house attached to the temple. The merit of this donation was to accrue to the family of *Matṛrāja*. This inscription is found from Raipur district in Madhya Pradesh.

Prasanna or Prasannamātra next in succession probably founded a town named Prasannapura.¹⁴ However, we do not find any of his inscriptions from Madhya Pradesh. Jayarāja next in succession, was the first member of the dynasty to prefix the word 'Mahat' to his name.¹⁵

The Mallār Plates of Mahājayarāja of year 5¹⁶, were issued from the Śarabhapura. Dated in mid of 6th century A.D, the king is described as a *Paramabhāgavata* King with the usual *Gajalakṣmī* seal attached to the plate. The plate was found in Bilaspur district in

¹³ Ibid, 'Rawan Plate of Narendra', yr. , pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, pp. 111-112.

¹⁵ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, pp. 112-113.

¹⁶ Shastri, A.M., 'Mallār Plates of Mahā Jayarāja, yr. 5', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 18-19.

Madhya Pradesh. The object of the plate is to record the grant of village Kadambadrupallaka (not identified) for the religious merit of his own parents and of his own self. Mahājayarāja is described as one whose pair of feet are washed by the waters in the form of flowing forth of the radiance of the crest jewels of feudatory chiefs, bowing down before him, subdued by his prowess –

*Dvīkramopantasāmāntāt Cuḍāmaṇiprabhāsekāmbubhirdhau
tapādayugalo...¹⁷*

It seems that he formally renounced Gupta suzerainty and declared his independence some time between his 3rd and 5th regnal year.¹⁸

Another plates of Jayarāja¹⁹, from the same place, record the grant of village Mokkepika situated in *Nagarottarāpaṭṭa* (situated in the north of the capital city, about 10 miles from Bilaspur). Dated in the middle of 6th century A.D., the inscription contains the same *Gajalakṣmī* seal and the epithet *Paramabhāgavata* to the ruler. The village was given to Maheśvarasvāmin and Rudrasvāmin. The two donees may have been Śaiva devotees. The grant was given by Vatsa, who held the office of *Haḍappagrāha* (in charge of tracing stolen goods).²⁰

Arang Plates of Mahajayarāja of year 5²¹ are found from Raipur district in Madhya Pradesh. Dated in the 5th year of the king's reign (mid of 6th century A.D.), the charter is addressed to the agriculturists

¹⁷ Shastri, A.M., 'Mallār Plates of Mahā Jayarāja, yr. 5', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, p. 15, lines 1 and 2.

¹⁸ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, pp. 112-113.

¹⁹ Shastri, A.M., 'Mallār Plates of Jayarāja', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 24-27.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 26, fn. 30. Haḍappagrāha may have been the Sanskrit equivalent of *Hrtapragrāhāmātya*.

²¹ Shastri, A.M., 'Arang Plates of Mahājayarāja, yr. 5', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 20-23.

and house holders residing at Pamvā (modern Pamgarh about 32 km east of Bilaspur) situated in *Purvarāṣṭra* (region around Bilaspur, it being the eastern part of Śarabhapurīya Kingdom). He had given away this village to Brahmadevasvāmin for the religious merit of his parents and his own. Vaiṣṇava affiliation is once again restricted to one of *Paramabhāgavata* epithet and the *Gajalakṣmī* seal. Here, the *Gajalakṣmī* seal mentions Jayarāja as son of Prasanna.

Sudevrāja, who may be placed after Mahājayarāja issued a number of grants. The Dhamatātri Plate of Sudevarāja of year 322 is found from Mahasamund tahsil of Raipur district. The grant is issued from Śrīpura in the later half of the 6th century A.D. He is described as the son of Durgarāja. Durgarāja may have been the brother of Jayarāja. It seems that Sudevarāja founded the town of Śrīpura and made it his second capital.²³ The purpose of the charter is to record the royal grant of the village Khalapadraka (modern Khalāri in Raipur district) to a *caturvedin* Brāhmaṇa Mādhavasvāmin for the religious merit of his parents and himself. It is for the first time that Vaiṣṇava affiliation of a particular brāhmin is depicted in the Śarabhapurīya grants. The seal of the inscription is also different from the previous inscriptions. It contains *cakra* and *śaṅkha* to the left and right of the seal along with the *Gajalakṣmī*

Sirpur Plates of the same ruler²⁴ was issued from Śarabhapura belonging to later half of 6th century A.D. It records the grant of a village formerly made by one Nanna in favour of Karaṇika brāhmaṇa Kansippasvāmin. The grant was confirmed by *Paramabhāgavata* king

²² Jain, B.C., "Mahasamund Plates of Sudevarāja", *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, (hereafter *JESI*), Vol. 10 (1978), pp. 93-97.

²³ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Sarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, pp. 114-115.

²⁴ Shastri, A.M., 'Sirpur Plates of Mahāsudevarāja, yr. 7', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 35-38.

Sudevarāja by issuing a copper plate charter. The royal order was issued after duly informing the chief queen and the members of the royal household (*rāja kula*). The name of the village is broken, it was probably vaka or Keśavaka.

Sudevarāja's Arang Plates of year 7²⁵ are found Raipur district and dated in later half of the 6th century A.D. record the grant of village Śivaliṅgaka situated in Tasadda bhukti (Tusḍa near Dumarpalli about 30 miles to southeast of Arang) to a number of brāhmaṇas by the king. The name of the village Śivaliṅgaka appears to have been derived from its Śaiva affiliation. All the inscriptions of Sudevarāja contains the *Paramabhāgavata* epithet and Gaja Lakṣmī symbol. Kāvatal Plate²⁶ and Raipur Plates²⁷ are two in this series from Raigarh and Raipur districts respectively.

Still another plate of the same ruler is the Sarangarh Plates from Raigarh district²⁸ and dated in the second half of the 6th century A.D. They were issued from Śarabhapura. The grant records the donation of a village Culaṅḍaraka (close to Tundra) in Tuṅḍaraka bhukti (6 miles south of Sheorinarayana on Mahānadi and 35 miles west of Sarangarh). The grant is made by the chief queen (*rājya – mahādevī*) and other members of the royal family (*rājakula*) to a number of brāhmaṇas. Among the brāhmaṇas, two are named Viṣṇusvāmin and Śaṅkarasvāmin attesting to their Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva affiliations respectively.

²⁵ Shastri, A.M., 'Arang Plates of Sudevarāja, yr. 7', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 39-42.

²⁶ Ibid, 'Kāvatal Plates of Sudevarāja, yr. 7', pp. 43-45.

²⁷ Ibid, 'Raipur Plates of Sudevarāja, yr. 10', pp. 46-49.

²⁸ Ibid, 'Sarangarh Plates of Sudevarāja', pp. 50-52.

A stray Śurabhapura plate²⁹ is found in possession of a person in Rajim in Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh. The name of the ruler, donor and the engraver and details of the date on the first and third plates respectively are missing. Shastri³⁰ assumes that the record cannot be placed earlier than the Mallār Plates of Jayarāja in the 5th year of his region. However, Dixit³¹ on the basis of the contents of the inscription, suggested that the plate in question belonged to Sudevarāja, son of Mānamātra³² Durgarāja. The plate records that a certain Daṇḍacakra gave away a village to Dikṣita Anantasvāmin. The grant was approved by the king by means of a copper plate charter. The name of the brāhmiṇ may have been derived from the name of well known Anantaśāyī image of Viṣṇu, thereby suggesting the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the brāhmiṇ.

Pravararāja, the last ruler of this dynasty continued the trend of adherence to Vaiṣṇava religion and making land grants. He continues with the *Gajalakṣmī* symbol on his plates and calling himself *Paramabhāgavata*. In all probability, he is connected with the shift of the capital.³³ Only two charters of Pravararāja are known and both are issued from Śrīpura. It may be said that during his reign the capital was finally shifted to Śrīpura.

Thakurdiya Plates of Pravararāja of year 3³⁴ were issued from Śrīpura. They were found in Raigarh district. The grant record the donation made by him of the village of Āṣāḍhana (Modern village

²⁹ Shastri, A.M., 'A Stray Śarabhapurīya Plate', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 59-61.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dixit, 'A New Copper Plate Grant from Chhattisgarh', *IHQ*, Vol. 33, pp. 84-85.

³² Jayarāja is succeeded by his brother Mānamātra in some seals. In Dhāmatari and Kauvatal plates (earlier mentioned) Sudevārāja is also called as son of Mānamātra Durgarāja. Mānamātra was also known as Durgarāja. Shastri, *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, p. 113.

³³ Shastri, A.M. *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, p. 115.

³⁴ Shastri, A.M., 'Thakurdiya Plates of Pravararāja, yr. 3', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 53-55.

Asond, two miles to north of Mahanadi) included in the Tuṅḍarāṣṭra village near Sheorinarayana, 25 to 30 miles from Thakurdiya in favour of bhaṭṭaka Purandarāsvāmin.

The Mallār plates of Pravararāja of year 3³⁵ are found from Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Dated in the last part of 6th century A.D., the grant was issued from Śrīpura. It records the grant of the village Mitragrāmaka situated in *Śaṅkhacakra bhoga* to brāhmaṇa Subhacandrasvāmin. The name of the bhoga reflects the Vaiṣṇavite affiliation of the same.

After Pravararāja, the Śarabhapuriya dynasty was probably replaced by some other powers, for now onwards, no Śarabhapuriya record was found from the Chhattisgarh region. It is clear from the type of evidence used above that for the Chattisgarh region, in the post Gupta period, information about the spread of Vaiṣṇavism is rather heavily dependent on stray and incidental epigraphical references.

The Śarabhapuriya rulers did not resort to large scale making of temples. However, some pre-Kalacuri temples of Dakṣina Kosala³⁶ are found roughly corresponding to the period of Śarabhapuriya rule. The temple of Andala (Indra) Deva at Kharod is entirely brick made with the exception of its doorway which is made of sand stone. It contains the images of *lalitāsana* Viṣṇu, Nṛsimha, Gaṇeśa and an elephant rider on niches. Gangā and Yamunā are depicted on the doorframe. The lintel piece shows Umā-Maheśvara flanked by Brahmā and Viṣṇu.

At Adbhar, there is a complex of temples which are either ruined or whose images alone are to be seen around the village of Adbhar. A

³⁵ Shastri, A.M., 'Mallār Plates of Pravararāja, yr. 3', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapuriyas*, pt. II, pp. 56-58.

³⁶ Manwani, S.N., 'Some Pre Kalachuri Temples of Dakshina Kosala', *Journal of The Madhya Pradesh Itihas Parishad*, (hereafter *JMPIP*), No. 11 (1980), pp. 63-66.

large temple dated to the Gupta period was constructed³⁷ here. The only preserved part of it is the door frame with the images of Gangā and Yamunā. The lintel piece has Garuḍa in lower facet and Uma Maheśvara above. A small one line inscription on the plinth reveals the names – Śrī Keśari and *Vyavahārādhyakṣa*, perhaps the donor of the temple who was an official of the Śarabhaurīya rulers. The recently discovered temple of Deorānī-Jethānī³⁸ are situated near the village Tala on Maniyari river, a few kilometers away from Sargaon, a block headquarter on Bilaspur –Raipur road. The door lintel of Jethānī temple contains a unique representation of *Gajalakṣmī*. The two elephants anointing the goddess Lakṣmī are seen assisted in their auspicious mission by two other elephants, who in turn are assisted by sporting Yakṣas and water carrier *apsara*. As mentioned earlier, the seals of the Śarabhaurīya rulers contain the *Gajalakṣmī* motif. Ruins of the Deorānī temple³⁹ include remarkable images including a fragmentary Viṣṇu, Buddha (perhaps installed on outer wall of Jethānī temple), Kicaka etc.

II

The new dynasty which followed the Śarabhaurīyas in Chhattisgarh region seems to have belonged to Amarārya Kula.⁴⁰ Its rulers Jayabhaṭṭāraka, Pravarabhaṭṭāraka and Vyāghrarāja appear to have flourished about the end of the 6th century A.D. or the beginning of the following century.

³⁷ Manwani, S.N., 'Some Pre Kalachuri Temples of Dakshina Kosala', *JMPIP*, No. 11 (1980), pp. 63-66.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 64-65.

³⁹ Manwani, S.N. 'Some pre-Kalachuri Temples in Dakshina Kosala', *JMPIP*, no. 11 (1980), p. 66.

⁴⁰ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhaurīyas*, pt. I, p. 116.

The Mallār Plates of Vyāghrarāja⁴¹ of *Amarārya-Kula* point to a change not only in the dynasty, but in the adoption of Vaiṣṇava symbols also. The charter is found from Mallar, about 16 miles from Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh, issued by Vyāghrarāja, brother of the ruling king Pravarabhaṭṭāraka (not identified) situated in *Purva rāṣṭra* (in the east of the capital) in favour of Brāhmaṇa Dikṣita. The charter was issued from Prasannapura (somewhere near Sirpur) on the bank of the river Nidilā. This inscription is conspicuous for having a seal with three symbols *cakra*, animal (lion) and *śaṅkha* (conch shell) in place of Gaja Lakṣmī. Probably the new dynasty found this seal more convenient to show their separate identify from that of the Śarabhapurīyas. However, they maintained the trend of adoption of Vaiṣṇava symbols.

There are other clear cut differences from the Śarabhapurīya grants. There is no mention of the suffix bhaṭṭāraka in Śarabhapurīya grants, which is found in this grant.⁴² The grant portion including the notification, found in this epigraph, bears no resemblance whatsoever to that of the known Śarabhapurīya records. The earlier records contain no reference to worshipping the present and future brāhmaṇas as mentioned in this charter. However, the present charter is silent about the privileges and exemptions attached to the grant, which found unmistakable reference in Śarabhapura grants.

The *Amarārya Kula* seems to have been short lived and was soon replaced by the time of Pāṇḍuvarṣin rulers.

⁴¹ Sircar, D.C. and Bhattacharya, 'Mallār Plates of Vyāghrarāja', *EI*, Vol. 34, pp. 45-50.

⁴² Shastri, A.M., 'Mallār Plates of Vyāghrarāja', *Inscriptions of the Sarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 66-67.

III

The Pāṇḍuvaṃśins of Kosala were the next, major ruling family of Chhattisgarh region.⁴³ Pāṇḍuvaṃśins of South Kosala belonged to a lunar family, according to V.V. Mirashi.⁴⁴

The Adbhar Plates of Nannarāja⁴⁵ (discussed later) refer to Tivāradeva (a member of this dynasty) born in śaśivamśa (family of moon-text line 5) and Śivagupta Balārajuna as born in somavamśa (text line 4). Udayana, the first member of Pāṇḍuvaṃśin rulers, ruled over a principality including Kālanjara and the adjoining area.⁴⁶ He had two sons-Indrabala and the one whose name is lost. Indrabala succeeded his father Udayana. He is generally identified with Mahāsāmanta Indrabalarāja, who according to Dhamatari⁴⁷ and Kauvatal⁴⁸ plates occupied the office of *Sarvādhi kārādhikṛta* under the Śarabhapurīya ruler Sudevarāja.

Nanna I succeeded his father Indrabala.⁴⁹ Mahāśiva Tivara whose inscription is the first to be found from this area attesting his Vaiṣṇava affiliation was the son of Nanna.⁵⁰

The Pāṇḍuvaṃśin rulers too, adopted Vaiṣṇavite symbols on their seals, however, with a difference. They were probably more powerful than their predecessors. The first inscription of this dynasty invoking Viṣṇu came from Bōnda issued by Mahāśiva Tivara.⁵¹ Bonda

⁴³ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, p. 132.

⁴⁴ Mirashi, V.V., 'Lakheśvara Temple Inscription of Indrabala', *Studies in Indology*, I, p. 258, fn. 1.

⁴⁵ Jain, B.C., 'Adbhar Plates of Mahānannarāja', *EI*, Vol. 31, pp. 219-222.

⁴⁶ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Sain, B.C., 'Mahasamund Plates of Sudevarāja', *JESI*, Vol. 10, (1978), pp. 93-97.

⁴⁸ Shastri, A.M., 'Kauvatal Plates of Sudevarāja, yr. 7', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 43-45.

⁴⁹ Shastri, A.M., *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. I, P. 160.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 165.

⁵¹ Sircar, D.C., 'Bonda Plates of Mahashiva Tivara', yr. 5', *EI*, Vol. 34, pp. 111-116.

is a village in Sarangarh tahsil of Raigarh district in Chhattisgarh. It lies 20 miles to the south of Raigarh near Balpur on the left bank of the Mahānadī. A circular bronze seal was affixed to the inscription which contains a figure of seated Garuḍa, with outstretched wings and holding nāgas, *cakra* and *śaṅkha*. King Tivara is stated to have been a *Paramavaiṣṇava* in stead of *Paramabhāgavata*. Dated in the fifth regnal year of the king, this inscription probably belongs to the last quarter of the 7th century A.D. The grant was addressed to the inhabitants of Bondaka (Bonda) together with another locality called Avaḍika (a locality adjoining Bondaka) both situated in the Piharāja bhukti (Piharā lying about a mile to the south east of Bōnda). The charter was issued from Śrīpura for the religious merit of the king himself and his parents. The gift land was granted in favour of 25 brāhmaṇas. Among the names of the brāhmiṇs those of Avanti-Vikrama-Opādhyāya and Lāṭa Phalihasvāmin suggest that the families of these two brāhmaṇas originally belonged to the Avanti (territory around Ujjain) and Lāṭa (Nausāri-Broach area of Gujurat) countries respectively.

Apart from these brāhmaṇas, some of them may have had Vaiṣṇava affiliation as it appears from their names – Madhusūdan Opādhyāya, Visnughoṣa Opādhyāya, Śrīdharabhutasvāmin, Yoranga-Viṣṇubhavasvāmin, Vāmanasvāmin, Gopendrasvāmin etc. One brāhmaṇa of tribal background is also found named as Nāgaśramanasvāmin. This inscription also mentions the ancestors of Tivāradeva as Indrabala and Nannadeva. Indrabala is said to have obtained the lordship of the entire Kosala country.

The Rajim Plates of Tivāradeva of year 7⁵² are found from Raipur district. Dated in the second half of the 7th century A.D., this

⁵² Shastri, A.M., 'Rajim, Plates of Tivāradeva, yr. 7', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 107-111.

inscription describes the king as a *Paramavaiṣṇava*. However, there is no reference to his obtaining lordship of the entire Kosala country, the omission being possibly due to oversight. The king informed the inhabitants of village Pimparipadraka (probably modern village Piparaud, 3 miles north west of Rajim) situated in the Penthāma *bhukti* (probably modern Pāṇḍukā near Rajim), that he had given away the village in favour of the brāhmaṇas Bhaṭṭa Bhāvadatta and Bhaṭṭa Haradatta, sons of Gauridatta for the increase of religious merit of his parents and his own self.

The Baloda Plates of Tivaradeva of year 9⁵³ found from Raipur district belong to the second half of the 7th century A.D. The king is as usual described as *Paramavaiṣṇava*. However, the seal of the plates is changed. It now contains *śaṅkha* (conch shell), *akra* (discus) and *garuḍa* symbol. The grant was addressed to the inhabitants of Meṅkiḍḍaka (not identified) situated in the Sundarikāmārga (not identified) that he had granted the village at the request of his dear son-in-law, the illustrious Nannarāja, who had acquired the five *Mahāśabdās*. The grant was made in order to feed daily thirty brāhmaṇas or other persons who happen to come over to the free feeding house (*sattra*) established at the village of Bilvapadraka (not identified). It was to be maintained by the local body (*adhiṣṭhāna*). The grant was made for the religious merit of the king and his parents.

The next known inscription of this dynasty invoking different forms of Viṣṇu is the Adbhar Plates of Mahānannarāja.⁵⁴ Adbhar is about 40 miles from Bilaspur in Sakti tahsil of Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. This inscription records grant of a village Kōṭiṇika (village Kāthākonī or Kotami, about 12 miles from Adbhar) to a

⁵³ Shastri, A.M., 'Baloda Plates of Tivaradeva, yr. 9', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 112-115.

⁵⁴ Jain, B.C., 'Adhabhara Plates of Maha Nannaraja', *EI*, Vol. 31, pp. 219-222.

bhāgavata brāhmaṇa named Nārāyaṇa Opādhyāya. Nannarāja, the son of Tivarrarāja, is described as *Paramavaiṣṇavaṇ* ardent worshipper of Viṣṇu. There is also a reference to Mahāśiva Tivarrarāja as being exalted and graced by the god Nārāyaṇa. Here is a clear reference to seeking legitimization by a local power by invoking Viṣṇu. The granted village is situated in Visaya or district of Aṣṭadvāra.

One major landmark in the development and spread of Vaiṣṇavism in this part of Chhattisgarh is the site of Sirpur which has also yielded the Sirpur Stone Inscription of the time of Mahāśiva Gupta.⁵⁵ The area, from where the inscription has been found, is a complex of temple sites, of which the only standing temple is the Lakṣmaṇa temple according to Rai Bahadur Hiralal.⁵⁶ The ruins in and around the village indicate that it was one major centre. There are many temples, the identification of which is now rendered impossible due to the removal of the idols they contained. These idols are carried to a place near a brick temple, which is now the only standing temple as it was originally built.

Sirpur is a small village on the right bank of Mahānadī in the Mahasamund tahsil of Raipur district. Sirpur Stone Inscription (undated 8th or 9th century A.D.) records the construction of the temple of Hari by Vāsaṭā, mother of Mahāśivagupta. It was constructed as the abode of Viṣṇu, where the deceased husband of Vāsaṭā lived worshipping the deity who was imperishable (Acyuta) –

*Tayā-nijaḥ Pretya Patiryathāvidhe
Vasatyasā nityamupāsītā cyutaḥ*

⁵⁵ Hiralal, Rai Bahadur, 'Sirpur Stone Inscription of the Time of Mahāśivagupta', *EI*, Vol. 11, pp. 184-197.

⁵⁶ Hiralal, Rai Bahadur, 'Sirpur Stone Inscription of the Time of Mahāśivagupta', *EI*, Vol. 11, p. 184.

Prakāśitam Tādrśam=eva-kāritam

*Vibhoridam dhām Hṛēḥ sanātanam.*⁵⁷

For the maintenance of the temple, five villages were granted – Karapadraka (Kulapadar, 15 miles southeast of Sirpur), Vargullaka (Gullu, 10 miles southwest of Sirpur), Tonḍankaṇa (Turenga near Kulapadar), Madhuvēdha (Madhuban, 4 miles from Turenga), Vānapadra (near Sirpur) and Nalipadra. An alms house (*sattra*) was also attached to the temple. The villages were divided into four shares, three of which were to be reserved for the maintenance of the alms house (*sattra*) and for the support of the servants attached to the sanctuary. The fourth share was divided into fifteen parts, of which twelve were to be enjoyed by a corresponding number of brāhmaṇas fully conversant with the vedas. The remaining three parts were to be enjoyed by a sacrificial priest (*Viprahḥ puṇyāḥ vācakaḥ*) and two *bhāgavata* brāhmaṇas, Vāmana and Śrīdhara.

The inscription begins with an invocation to Puruṣottama (Viṣṇu). The first three verses are devoted to the praise of Nṛsimha incarnation. There is also reference to kaṁsaniṣūdana (Killer of Kaṁsa i.e. Kṛṣṇa).⁵⁸ For the first time, we got a reference to the Kalki *avatāra* of Viṣṇu-

*...yasya kalkamaterna-cāpi-bhāvita – Kalki bhaviṣyāhpunah.*⁵⁹

Mahāśiva Gupta was a Śaiva⁶⁰, although his mother Vāsātā was a Vaiṣṇava devotee and so was his father, who was described as *upāsītācyutaḥ* (by whom Viṣṇu was worshipped).

⁵⁷ Hiralal, Rai Bahadur, 'Sirpur Stone Inscription of the Time of Mahāśivagupta', *EI*, Vol. 11, pp. 184-197, V. 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, V. 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, V. 14.

⁶⁰ Dikshit, M. N. and Sircar, D. C., 'Senkapet Inscription of the Time of Śivagupta Balārjuna', *EI*, Vol - 31, pp. 31-36. It describes him as devout Śaiva - Pāramahansa. At the same time, he represents

Despite the king being Śaiva, Vaiṣṇavism was increasingly gaining ground among the common people as is evident from the large temple complex (Lakṣmaṇa temple) and the people associated with it.

The Lakṣmaṇa Temple⁶¹ found at this site is the most well preserved temple. It is a brick temple standing on a large well built stone platform. Carved on the lintel is a large figure of Viṣṇu reclining on the folds of serpent Śeṣa, the whole scene representing the birth of Brahmā.

The Vaiṣṇava dedication of the temple is proved by the carvings on the sanctum doorway of the Vaiṣṇava incarnations and Kṛṣṇa-līlā scenes as well as the representation of Śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu as the *lalātabimba* and is corroborated by epigraphical evidence (Sirpur Stone inscription)⁶², coupled by its traditional name of Lakṣmaṇa temple.

The doorway of the sanctum represents Vaiṣṇava incarnations and Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes and other mythological scenes in the panels.⁶³ Matsya *avatāra*, Bhū-varāha, Nṛsimha and Rāma *avatāra* are represented among the Vaiṣṇava incarnations, while scenes of Kāliya damana, defeat of Kāmsa's wrestlers, Kāmsavadha, Keśivadha etc. are depicted among the episodes from Kṛṣṇa's life. The doorway introduces a large composition in relief depicting incarnations and other scenes which exhibit developed iconography, but lack simple vigour and charm of the Gupta sculptural art. The absence of Gangā and Yamunā figures from the Kṛṣṇa līlā and other scenes on its place points to the fact that the temple is later than the Gupta temples.

incarnation of Viṣṇu – *Viṣṇor=Vvā (r = Bbā) lārjunatvam*. Thus, an incarnation of Viṣṇu is worshipping Śiva. Here, the Śaiva nation of Viṣṇu's subservience to Śiva has been cleverly put forward.

⁶¹ Krishna Deva, 'Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur', *JMPIP*, No. 2 (1960), pp. 35-42.

⁶² Hiralal, 'Sirpur Stone Inscription of the time of Mahāśivagupta', *EI*, Vol. 11, pp. 184-197.

⁶³ Krishna Deva, 'Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur', *JMPIP*, No. 2, (1960), pp. 35-42.

The Varāha panel on doorway resembles the classical Varāha of Udaigiri in pose and general treatment and in depicting Varuṇa on one side paying homage to him. However, some differences are there. Here, the Varāha is eight armed in stead of two armed as in Udaigiri. Bhūdevī is seated in the air with her right foot on a lotus stalk held in the hand of a nāgī on the proper left. The right hand of Bhūdevī is against the left arm of the god. In stead of Gangā and Yamunā, a nāgī on each side is paying homage to Varāha. Śeṣanāga is represented in full human form. The Lakṣmaṇa temple is architecturally important, in representing a transition from the Gupta temples to the early medieval temples of North India.

Shortly after the rule of Mahāśiva Gupta, the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin dynasty came to an end. However, Mahāśivagupta enjoyed a fairly long reign of 57 years.⁶⁴ This may be the reason that he resorted to making of such a big temple. Besides, he found himself confident enough to revert to any other religion (Śaiva). Mahāyāna Buddhism also flourished in his reign. Excavations at Sirpur have brought to light two brick temples, both dedicated to Buddha⁶⁵ (roughly belonging to the period of Mahāśivagupta, 7th century A.D.). However, these Buddhist monasteries soon disappeared. Not long after the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin dynasty, the Buddhist monasteries at Sirpur were occupied by a people of Śaiva faith. By that time, many Buddhist images were beheaded. No satisfactory explanation has come about it. Sirpur has a Rāma temple also.⁶⁶ It is a brick temple, situated about two furlongs from the Lakṣmaṇa temple. It has lost its superstructure, doorframe and most of north and east wall. Ornamentation of this temple bears clear

⁶⁴ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, p. 224.

⁶⁵ Dikshit, M.G. and Barrett Douglas, *Temples at Mukhalīngam, Sirpur and Rajim*, Bombay, 1960, pp. 16-23.

⁶⁶ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, p. 236.

resemblance to the Lakṣ maṇa temple. (architecturally belonging to the same period, 7th-8th century A.D.).

IV

Next dynasty which falls within this period (c. A.D. 550-800) is the Nala dynasty. Nala kings seem to have established themselves in Raipur district sometime after Mahāśiva Gupta. Bhavadattavarman was the first Nala ruler.⁶⁷ They seem to have had their base in the area of Bastar-Koraput during the 6th and early 7th century.⁶⁸ But they seem to have filled in the vacuum created by the decline of the Pāṇḍuvaṃsins towards the close of the 7th century A.D.

The only known inscription of this dynasty is found from Rajim of the king Vilāsatunga attached to the temple of Rājīvalocana.⁶⁹ Rajim is a well known Vaiṣṇava centre, which flourished in the Chhattisgarh region. It is a holy place situated 28 miles south by east of Raipur. This inscription of the Nala king Vilāstunga is undated, but on palaeographic grounds is considered to belong to about the middle of the 8th century A.D. The Nalas who hailed from the eastern border of Bastar with their capital at Pushkari, extended their power to Vidarbha. This inscription mentions three members of the ruling Nala family – Pṛthvirāja, Virupākṣa and Vilāsatunga.

The object of the inscription is to record the construction of the Viṣṇu temple by the king. It is incised on a slab of stone which is built into the left wall of the temple of Rājīvalocana (the lotus eyed god, probably Rāma). As is evident from the name, the temple is dedicated to god Viṣṇu under the name of Rājīvalocana. The inscription may have

⁶⁷ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, pp. 224-225.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Mirashi, V.V., 'Rajim Stone Inscription of the Nalaking Vilāsatunga', *EI*, Vol. 26, pp. 49-58.

opened with obeisance to Viṣṇu, the upper portion being broken.⁷⁰ Another verse invokes Varāha *avatāra*, while the 4th verse is in the form of dialogue between Hari and Lakṣmī. The next verse (V. 5) invokes the Vāmana *avatāra* as *Bali-śrī-nihantā*

As already mentioned, Rājim is a pilgrim centre. Consisting of a group of several temples, it still attracts thousands of pilgrims every year and is held in great veneration by the local people.

Rājivalocana temple, found here, is of *Pañcāyatana* type, in which the main temple is surrounded by four subsidiary shrines namely Badrinātha (Viṣṇu), Vāmana Varāha and Nṛsimha.⁷¹ The main temple of Rājīva-locana contains a black stone image of Viṣṇu with usual symbols of mace (*gādā*), disc (*çakra*), conch shell (*śaṅkha*) and the lotus (*kamala*). The temple has undergone three to four successive changes. The first one is roughly corresponding to the Śarabhapuriya period. Large number of records in shell characters are found here. In the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin period, the top of the lintel of the doorway was devoted to a sculpture of Garuḍa, the vāhana of Viṣṇu with attendant *gaṇas* and musicians. The third time, it was renovated by a Kalacuri king Jayasimha.⁷² During the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin period, the Anantaśayana image of Viṣṇu with a Garuḍa at the base was added to the shrine. The figure of Trivikrama is an unusual treatment of a familiar subject. In this figure, Ādiśeṣa is in the act of making obeisance to the standing figure of Viṣṇu Trivikrama whose right leg is lifted high, shown crushing the ugly face of brahmāṇḍa.

⁷⁰ Mirashi, V.V., 'Rajim Stone Inscription of the Nalaking Vilasatunga', *EI*, Vol. 26, p. 55, fn. 4.

⁷¹ Dikshit, M.G., *Sirpur and Rajim Temples*, pp. 27-32.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 32.

Near the Rājivalocana temple, the Rāmacandra temple⁷³ is situated. Like the former, it has undergone several structural changes. The first one was constructed during the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin period, then repaired by a certain Jayasimha during the rule of the Kalacuris of Ratanpur.

V

Some other Vaiṣṇava temple sites, other than those mentioned above are also found in the Chhattisgarh region. Kharod (Śabarinārāyaṇa) is one such site. It is a small village about 3 miles to the northeast of the town of Seorinarayana on the bank of the Mahānadī river in Bilaspur district. These are two very old ruined brick temples⁷⁴ apparently of the same age and similar in style to the Lakṣmaṇa temple at Sirpur. It, too, is a Vaiṣṇava temple, but is now dedicated to a goddess called Śabarī or Savarī. To the north of this village is another temple containing a little image of Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa, occupying the place of honour in the centre.

Tumain in District Guna in the Gwalior region⁷⁵ has yielded a rare *sarvatobhadra* figure showing standing Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and a goddess in *abhaya mudrā* belonging to c. 700 A.D. From the same place was found a Naṭarāja in *tribhaṅga* pose and a hooded image of the same period.

VI

Thus, this period (c. A.D. 550-800) saw the extension of the tenet of Vaiṣṇavism to the south eastern extremity of Middle India

⁷³ Dikshit, M.G., *Sirpur and Rajim Temples*, pp. 27-32.

⁷⁴ Longhurst, A.H., 'Ancient Brick Temples in Central Provinces, *ASIAR*, 1909-10, pp. 11-17.

⁷⁵ Deshpande, M.N. (ed.), *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, (hereafter *IAR*), 1972-73, p. 59.

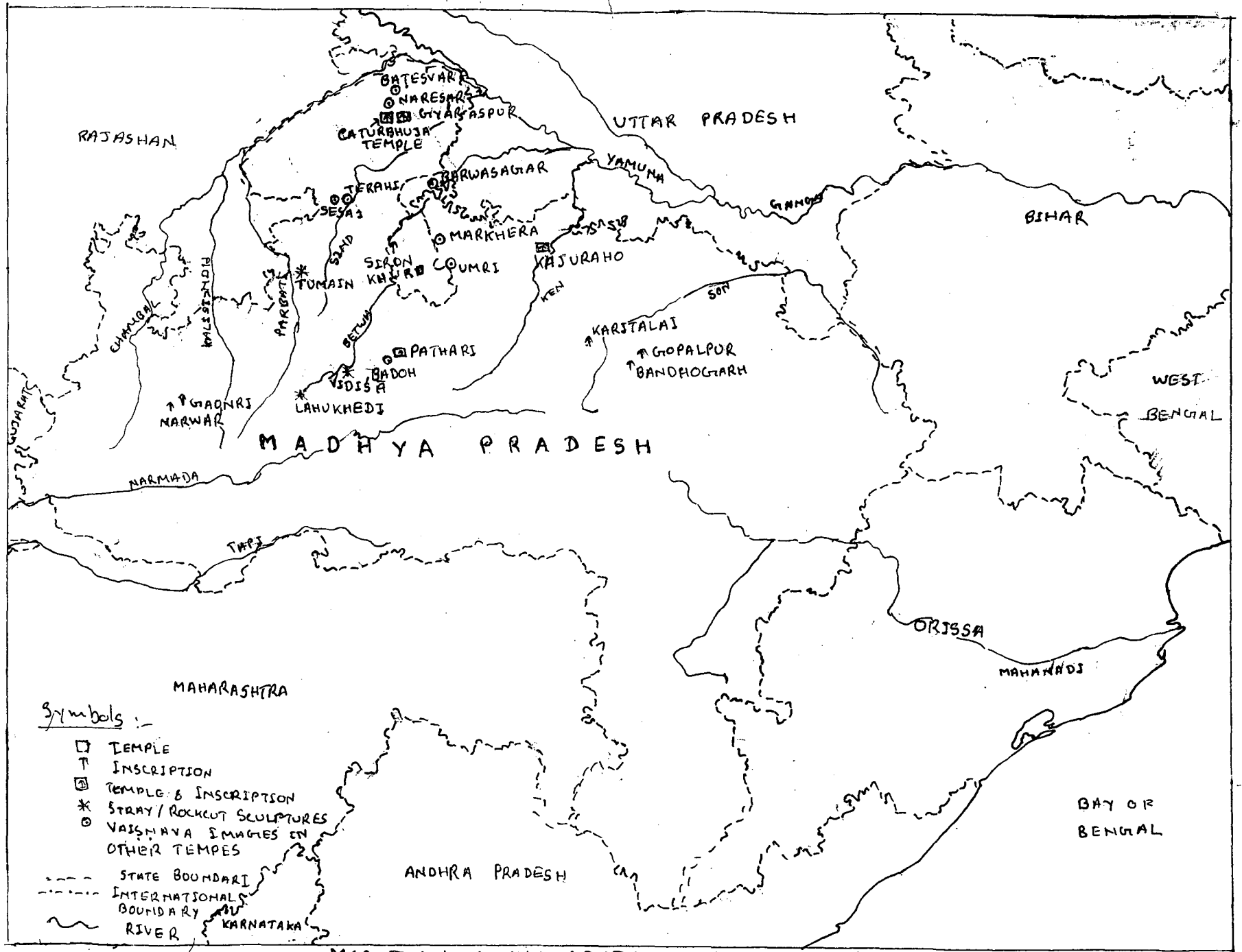
corresponding roughly to the Chhattisgarh region. This forested area became the nucleus of several new royal families in the late Gupta and post Gupta period. It is, in fact the, records, relating to them (their inscriptions and temples), which give us a glimpse of the spread and nature of Vaiṣṇavism in this region.

Initially evidence of affinity to Vaiṣṇava religion was limited to Vaiṣṇava epithets, to Vaiṣṇava symbols on seals and sometimes reflected in the names of villages or districts (Keśvaka⁷⁶ or Nandapura⁷⁷). However, most of the early grants are non-sectarian. Only towards the end of this period, full fledged grants to Vaiṣṇava temples are found.

Among the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Kalki *avatāra* made its first appearance in Sirpur Stone Inscription. For the first time, Matsya *avatāra* made its appearance in Lakṣmaṇa temple. However, Varāha *avatāra* somewhat declined in importance. If the Gupta period evidence does indeed establish Varāha as symbolising the display of imperial power, then its relative unimportance in later periods may indicate that the local rulers did not aspire to project themselves as wielding such power.

⁷⁶ Dikshit, M.G., 'Kurud Plates of Narendra, yr. 24', *EI*, Vol. 31, pp. 263-266.

⁷⁷ Shastri, A.M., 'Pipardulā Plates of Narendra, yr. 3', *Inscriptions of the Śarabhapurīyas*, pt. II, pp. 5-7.



Symbols :

- TEMPLE
- △ INSCRIPTION
- ◻ TEMPLE & INSCRIPTION
- * STRAY / ROCKCUT SCULPTURES
- VAISNAVA IMAGES IN OTHER TEMPLES
- STATE BOUNDARY
- - - - INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
- ~ RIVER

MAP-III: VAISNAVA CENTRES IN MADHYA PRADESH [C.A.D. 800-1000]

CHAPTER - 4

VAIṢṆAVA CENTRES IN MADHYA PRADESH

[c.A.D. 800-1000]

The period extending approximately from A.D. 800 to A.D. 1000 witnessed the emergence of a number of Kingdoms in Madhya Pradesh. While in the first two periods, the number of kings contesting for power in the region was not so many, in this period multiple kingdoms with different nuclei of authority grew quite close to each other. In such a scenario, it was not unusual for them to seek support of religion to have a greater say in claims to supremacy.

Unlike the first two sub periods, Viṣṇu worship in this period was not concentrated in one part or the other of the region. Almost all the parts of Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh region) yield evidence of Vaiṣṇava inscriptions and temples in this period. However, different parts show different patterns in worshipping different forms of Viṣṇu.

This chapter, thus, seeks to analyse the way Vaiṣṇavism took further shape in the region during this particular chronological span and to examine whether there were variations in the pattern of the various nuclei of the region. In this connection, it is to be kept in mind that by this time, all the parts of Madhya Pradesh had experienced statehood and perhaps the resource bases of the kingdom had considerably expanded. It seems probable that vying for superior claims of legitimacy on the part of the rulers and other social groups was the guiding factor behind the construction of temples in this period.

Besides all this, an attempt has also been made to locate the temple complexes and sites dwelling upon the particular forms of Viṣṇu worshipped at these sites.

I

The time span of this sub period (c. A.D. 800-1000) coincides with the mature and late phase of the rule of the Imperial Pratihāras and their adherence (or non-adherence, as the case may be) to Vaiṣṇava religion.

Imperial Pratihāras were gaining strength in early years of 8th century A.D.¹ Nāgabhaṭṭa was the founder of the royal line. Avanti was the home territory of the dynasty. The Pratihāras traced their genealogy from the mythical Lakṣmaṇa. Just as Lakṣmaṇa was the door keeper of Rāma, the Pratihāras, too, were the door-keeper of the world.

*Saumitristivara daṇḍaḥ Pratihāraṇa-vidheryaḥ Pratihāra āsīt.
Tad vaṁśe Pratihāra ketana-bhṛti ttrailokya-rakṣ-ā spadē dēvō
Nāgabhaṭṭaḥ purātana-muner mūttir-vva (bba) bhīv – abhutam.²*

Also Nāgabhaṭṭa is described as the destroyer of the army of the Arabs (*Mlecchādhip akṣauhiniḥ*)³. This may be one of the reasons for adopting the name Pratihāra. Of course, it should be clear, from comparing their designation with others of the same period that they, too, were trying to legitimise their rule by the device of affiliating themselves with the name of the mythical hero Lakṣmaṇa.

Pratihāra period is marked by the construction of a number of temples. A large number of temples in and around Gwalior has been

¹ Majumdar, R.C., 'Gwalior Prasasti of Gurjara Pratihara King Bhoja', *EI*, Vol. 18, pp. 99-114.

² *Ibid*, v. 3-4.

³ *Ibid*, v. 4.

assigned to the Pratihāra period. R.D. Trivedi⁴ divides these temples chronologically into three sub-periods – (i) c. A.D. 725-800, (ii) c. A.D. 800-850, and (iii) c. A.D. 850-950.

In the first sub group, the temples constructed were dedicated to Śiva. However, some of them contain the figures of incarnations of Viṣṇu. The Naresar group of temples⁵ is situated about 25 km north east of Gwalior into a valley known as Naresar, in district Morena, Madhya Pradesh. In this complex, temple no. 20 contains a four armed standing Viṣṇu⁶ on north eastern niche along with two *āyudhapuruṣas* – *Cakrapuruṣa* and *Gadādevī*, on whom the two lower hands of the god rest. This mutilated figure of Viṣṇu is decorated with *kiriṭamukūṭa*, *ekāvalī*, *mekhalā*, *vanamālā* and is flanked by Daṇḍa and Piṅgala. A Śiva temple at Dang⁷ lies about 4 km east of Gohad Chaurah, in district Bhind of Madhya Pradesh. It is basically a Śiva temple, but the smaller niches of this temple contain two episodes of Kṛṣṇa-līlā scenes⁸- Dadhi manthana and Kāliyadamana. The date assigned to the temple is late 8th century A.D.

The Batesara group of temples⁹ lies 3 km south west of village Padhaoli in district Morena of Madhya Pradesh. Bhuteśvara Mahādeva is the most important temple. The northern niches of the main temple contain the four armed Viṣṇu seated in *lalitāsana*¹⁰, on the figure of Garuḍa. The god is wearing *hāra*, *yajñopavita* and *vanamāla*. His lower right hand is in *varada mudrā*, while the upper right, upper left and

⁴ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, New Delhi, 1990, p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 78.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 79-81.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

lower left hold *gadā*, *cakra* and *śaṅkha* respectively. The temple is dated to late 8th century A.D.

Another temple to south east of the Bhuteśvara temple contains the Kṛṣṇalīlā scenes-Vṛṣāsuravadha and Keśivadha.

A temple to the north-east of Bhuteśvara temple has one shrine whose doorway has the figure of Garuḍa holding two nāgas.¹¹ It serves the dual purpose, as the controller of the nāgas, as well as the mount of Viṣṇu to whom the shrine is dedicated. The *lalāṭabimba* Garuḍa is flanked by ten incarnations of Viṣṇu-Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Rāghava Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Kalki. Buddha and Kalki are found in perhaps one of their early appearances as incarnations of Viṣṇu in this shrine. The temple is dated last quarter of the 8th century to the beginning of 9th century A.D.

The second sub period of the Imperial Pratihāras has not many temples assigned to Viṣṇu or individual Vaiṣṇavite sculptures. The only known example is of Sun temple at Umri.¹² The village Umri lies about 40 kms. south-east-south of Tikamgarh in the same district of Madhya Pradesh. It has the sun temple located to the west of the village. The niches on central offsets of this temple represent the three incarnations of Viṣṇu-Varāha, Kṛṣṇa and Nṛsimha. The four armed Varāha incarnation is shown raising up valiantly the goddess pṛthvī (earth) in female form. Nṛsimha is carved tearing out the belly of the demon Hirṇyakaśipu. In Kṛṣṇāvatāra, Kṛṣṇa is shown in Ariṣṭāsurasavadha. Kṛṣṇa caught the demon by his horns and twisted him like a wet cloth. One niche represents Rāma holding bow and arrows. On the basis of

¹¹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, p. 85.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 115.

architectural features, the temple is assigned a date of early 9th century A.D.

The third sub period of Pratihāra group of temples (c. A.D. 850-950) saw many temples constructed in northern and central Madhya Pradesh. The Cāmuṇḍā temple at Mahua¹³ situated at about 12 kms south east of Ranod in district Shivpuri of Madhya Pradesh contains a standing four armed image of Nṛsimha.

Śiva temple at Terahi¹⁴ (10 km southeast of Ranod) is dedicated to Śiva as is evident from the *Śaiva* and *Śākta* images, but the *lalāṭabimba* of the doorway has the garuḍāsina Viṣṇu carved on it. It represents a four-armed image of Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa, holding *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *padma* and *gadā*.

Similar is the case with the Śiva temple at Pathārī in Vidiśā district, Madhya Pradesh. The *lalāṭabimba* of the doorway represents an image of four armed Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa, wearing *kirita-mukuṭa*, holding his usual attributes. Against the back wall, there are remains of a pedestal which originally appears to have supported an image of Viṣṇu, but it is at present occupied by number of *śivaliṅgas* in various sizes under worship. Trivedi emphasizes that in case of a Śiva temple, *śivaliṅga* occupies the central position and not the backside against the wall. In this connection, the inscription engraved on the pillar known as Bhīmgaja located in front of this temple needs reference. This is the Pathārī Pillar Inscription of Prabala¹⁵, the only one hitherto discovered of a Rāṣṭrakuṭa king named Prabala, dated 861 A.D. This inscription records that king Prabala founded temple of Śauri (Hari, Viṣṇu) before

¹³ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, p. 121-125.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 129-132.

¹⁵ Kielhorn, F., 'Pathari Pillar Inscription of Prabala', *EI*, Vol. 9, pp. 248-250.

which he carved a pillar on which the inscription is engraved. It opens with an invocation to Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. The first four verses applauds the protection of earth by him and glorifies the god Viṣṇu under the names of Murārī, Kṛṣṇa and Hari. It consists of two parts. The second part appears to be a separate inscription added by way of a post script which may record the installation of an image of Viṣṇu, but the exact purpose of it is not legible. Reference to Viṣṇu's foot (*Viṣṇoh kim caraṇas trivikramas*) and Śeṣa are found in the inscription. Sometimes kings are compared to Mahābhārata heroes Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīmasena, etc. This inscription also yields a proof for the Vaiṣṇava affiliation of the temple.

At Badoh (near Pathari), Gadarmal temple¹⁶, although it is a Śaiva temple, contains the figures of some incarnations of Viṣṇu-Vāmana, Nṛsiṃha, four armed Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa etc.

The village Sesai situated 12 km south of Shivpuri in the same district of Madhya Pradesh, has remains of ancient temples of which the sun temple is a major monument. It contains the Daśāvatāra of Visnu-Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Rāma, Paraśurāma, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Kalki. One of the lintels contains in the centre Viṣṇu seated in *padmāsana*, holding *śaṅkha* and *padmain* upper two hands and lower hand in the lap with the upturned palm in *dhyānamudrā*. On the left and right of Viṣṇu are carved Śiva and Brahmā. All the three gods are with their wives, representing the trinity.¹⁷

¹⁶ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 161-168.

The village Markhera, situated about 8 kms north of Tikamgarh in the same district of Madhya Pradesh has a sun temple.¹⁸ The temple, assigned to late 9th century A.D., has the figures of incarnations of Viṣṇu – Varāha, Kṛṣṇa, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Balarāma, Praśurāma etc.

Jarai Math temple at Barwasagar¹⁹ is situated 22 kms east of Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh. The temple is dedicated to a goddess or a group of goddesses. Just above the *lalāṭabimba* Viṣṇu is represented seated on Garuḍa flanked by four armed Brahmā on his mount Haṁsa and Śiva seated on Nandī bull. Other images include Nṛsimha incarnation and Viṣṇu with his consort Lakṣmī. The date assigned to the temple is middle of 9th century A.D.

The most outstanding temple of Pratihāra period assigned to Viṣṇu is the Caturbhuja temple at Gwalior.²⁰ It contains two subjoined inscriptions of Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin temple, situated at Gwalior.²¹ These two inscriptions have been found from a small monolithic temple situated on a turn of road leading to the Gwalior fort. It records that the Viṣṇu temple containing the inscription is built by certain Alla, the son of Vaillabhaṭṭa and grandson of Nāgarabhaṭṭa. The purpose is to increase the spiritual merit of Vavvā (wife of Alla) and of Alla. Vaillabhaṭṭa had been the *maryādā-dhurya* (chief of the boudnaries) in the service of the king Rāmadeva. Alla succeeded his father and was appointed to the guardianship of Gopādri (*Gopādrīpālāne*) i.e. of Gwalior fort by the king Śrīmad-Ādivarāha. The first inscription starts with adoration to Viṣṇu in the form of killer of Madhu (*Madhujihantu*).

¹⁸ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, pp. 143-148.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 168.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 135-143.

²¹ Hultsch, E., 'Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 154-162.

At several places, there are references of Lakṣmī, Murārī, Madhuripu, Śambhu, Śacī etc.

The second inscription starts with invocation of Viṣṇu as *Om Namō Viṣṇave*. It mentions four donations made to the temples Navadurga of Rudra, Rudrāni and Purnāśa and Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin temple. The first grant was made for the Navadurga temple situated beyond the Vṛścikāla river (Suvarnarekhā). The remaining three donations were given combinedly to Navadurga and Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin temple. A flower garden, two grain fields (one of Dallaka in village Jayapuraka and another of Memmāka), perpetual endowment of one *pālīka* of oil per mill (by 3 mills) and a daily endowment of 50 garlands by the chief guild of gardeners (dwelling on the top of the Gwalior fort) were given to the temples. The two inscriptions are dated A.D. 875 and A.D. 876 respectively.

The *Caturbhujā* temple²² containing this inscription, is a wholly rock cut temple. To begin with the niches contain the images of Viṣṇu along with figures of Gaṇeśa, two armed standing Kārttikeya holding daṇḍa and four armed standing Pārvatī. An image of the four armed Nṛvarāha with his lower right hand resting on the thigh and the upper left raising up the goddess Pṛthvī (earth) in human form is on a separate niche. Here, the goddess is shown as resting her feet on the lower left hand of the god which is supported by the left knee of the god. The god is forcefully exerting in the act of saving earth from deluge. The deity wears a *vanamālā*, *hāra* and *mekhalā* with loop. Vaillabhaṭṭa-svāmin temple inscription (mentioned earlier) is engraved on the lintel over the doorway of this temple. It mentions king Bhoja as

²² Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, pp. 135-143.

Śrīmad-Ādivarāha. The forceful image of Varāha is intended to remind one of the king's role as the saviour of his vast empire.

Another image, is that of a four armed standing Viṣṇu with *śaṅkha* and *cakra* and his two other attributes in human form near his feet as *Padma-puruṣa* and *Gadādevī*. The *hāra*, *yajñopavita* and *vanamālā* of the image are clearly marked.

It also contains the image of Trivikrama wearing *kiriṭa-mukūṭa* and a long *vanamālā*. The god is shown with his right leg firmly placed on the ground, touching the grinning face of Rāhu below which the donor Bali and his guru Śukrācārya are represented. Other incarnations include Nṛsimha, Rāma, Kalki and Buddha, but not Matsya and Kūrma. The lintel presents Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes. This theme has a wider appeal in the Pratīhāra period irrespective of any sectarian consideration, according to R.D. Trivedi.

The temple was an extremely important building in its day. The Pratīhāra king valued the fortress of Gwalior because it guarded the territory between Kālinjara and Cittaūr and was integral to their campaigns against the Rāṣṭrakuṭas²³. The warden of the Gwalior fort was therefore a key officer, and a temple built by such a person was the product of a respected and powerful individual. Subsequent members of Alla's family apparently continued in the imperial service at Gwalior for one of them died facing a Rāṣṭrakuṭa raid. This is evidently a hero stone from Terahi (Shivpuri district) which records the death of one Allajiyapa, son of Allabhaṭṭa.²⁴

²³ Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopakṣetra*, British Museum Press, 1996, pp. 184-190.

²⁴ Willis, Michael D., *The Inscriptions of Gopakṣetra*, British Museum Press, 1996, pp. 1-4.

Apart from the importance of the temple and the inscription, another thing to be noted is that we have an example of the god being named after the father Vaillabhaṭṭa of the donor Alla (the temple is named Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin). Another important feature of the inscription is the donations given by oil millers and gardeners to the temple. Perhaps, the professional groups associated with the trade and commerce were coming forward to extend their patronage and services to the temple.

The Gwalior Praśasti of Bhoja²⁵ is the another Pratihāra inscription, which attests to their adherence to Vaiṣṇava religion. It is the same inscription in which Bhoja traced his genealogy from Lakṣmaṇa, the latter being the door keeper or Pratihāra of Rāma. The object of this inscription is to record the erection of a house within the seraglio (*antah pura-puram*) of his compound. It begins with an invocation to Viṣṇu and repeatedly refers to Viṣṇu and his incarnations. It refers to Rāma-Rāvaṇa fight. Bhoja is said as more glorious than Agastya and as being embraced by Lakṣmī (sovereign power). It refers to Viṣṇu as Narakadviṣaḥ (enemy of Naraka). Nāgabhaṭṭa, the founder of the dynasty is compared to Nārāyaṇa in this inscription. The inscription is undated, but Bhoja seems to have engraved this inscription around 933 A.D. (according to his period).

An inscription is found from Gyaraspur near Gwalior²⁶, of about 10th century A.D. Apparently, it records the construction of a temple which is now in ruins. It opens with a salutation to Jaga (nnātha) or the lord of the universe, specifically referring to Viṣṇu and contains the genealogy and eulogy of a dynasty of Kings of whom only three names occur in the surviving portion of the record. The three names are –

²⁵ Majumdar, R.C., 'Gwalior Prasasti of Gurjara Pratihara King', *EI*, Vol. 18, pp. 99-104.

²⁶ Garde, M.B., *Annual Report Archaeological Department Gwalior*, (hereafter *ARG*), 1932-32, pp. 6-7.

Śivagana, Cāmuṇḍarāja and Mahendrapāladeva. It was by a scion of this dynasty or some one of their dependents that the temple seems to have been built. The inscription is assigned a date of 10th century A.D. on palaeographic grounds, which is also probably the date of the temple, as suggested on the basis of the style of the carvings. This is a huge temple. The five pieces of sculptures and carvings found here comprised among others a bust of Trimurti – Viṣṇu flanked by Brahmā and Śiva. The ten incarnations of Viṣṇu are carved on the pillars of the Hindola gateway. The fragment of a figure of Viṣṇu may perhaps have been the idol of worship in the temple.

Apart from the kings of this dynasties taking shelter of religion to legitimize themselves, other classes were also involved in propogating or at least adopting the Vaiṣṇava religion. Siyadoni Stone Inscription²⁷ is a land mark in describing the involvement of traders and guild owners in development of particular religion (here Vaiṣṇavism). In Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh, there is a large inscription in Siron-Khurd (Siyādoni) about 10 miles west-northwest of the town of Lalitpur. It covers a long period from 903 A.D. to 968 A.D. The inscription consists of two parts. The first part records a large number of donations made at different times by various brāhmaṇical deities. Most of the donations recorded here were made in favour of god Viṣṇu under the names of Viṣṇu-bhaṭṭāraka, Nārāyaṇa-bhaṭṭāraka, Tribhuvana-svāmīdeva, Vāmanasvāmīdeva. Umā-Mahēśvara (Śiva) and Bhailasvāmīdeva (Sun) are also mentioned. The Siyadoni town was under the nobles and the affairs of the town seem to have been managed by an assembly of five called *Pañcakulas* and by a committee of two appointed by town from time to time. Thus, we find a totally independent merchant community looking after the town and

²⁷ Kielhorn, F., 'Siyadoni Stone Inscription', *EI*, Vol. II, pp. 162-179.

patronising Vaiṣṇavism in its various forms. This inscriptions mentions Bhojadeva and Mahendrapāladeva. Probably this town, was under the administration of some governer of Gurjara Pratihāras.

Most of the temples in this inscription were set up by the merchant Chāṇḍuka. Names of other merchants also correspond to their Vaiṣṇava affiliation like Keśava, Govinda, Mādhava etc. Cakrasvāmīdeva also appears to be a popular epithet of Viṣṇu in this area. The second apart of this inscription starts with an adoration to Gaṇapati. Two verses invoke the blessings of Gaṇanātha and Trivikrama (Viṣṇu) respectively. Then it refers to a certain prince of Mahodayā. The town is compared with Indra's town Amarāvati. This prince of Mahodaya once gave the town Rāyakas, who after the name of the town were called Rāyakabhaṭṭas. One of their descendants named Vaśiṣṭha happened to come on matters of business here, to Siyadoni, where he dwelt near the Rāja of the place, whose name apparently was Harirāja. Vaśiṣṭha's son Dāmodara founded here a temple of Murārī (Viṣṇu). He then furnished it with an image of the god, provided it with a garden and probably endowed it with funds for the worship of the deity. This temple of Viṣṇu has been identified with a large ruined shrine of the neighbouring village of Satgatto to the northeast of Siron. Near the ruined temple is a large *bāoli* or well still in good preservation and the village has a number of fine statues of Viṣṇu.

This independent involvement of traders and brāhmaṇas in the construction of and donation to the temple is called by Michael Willis²⁸ as the thrid stage of patronage enjoyed by the temple, the first two stages being donation by the king and the feudatories respectively.

²⁸ Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopaksetra*, pp. 82-87.

Several other stray sculptures or small temple sites are found in Madhya Pradesh belonging to the Pratihāra period. Tumain in District Guna in Gwalior has yielded a Viśvarūpa form of Viṣṇu.²⁹ Lotkhedi in Mandasor has yielded stone sculptures of Mahiṣāsūramardini, Nṛsimha, Agnī, Hanumāna and Gaṇeśa belonging to 8th-9th century A.D.³⁰ The same place has remains of a 9th century Viṣṇu temple.

The village Behta and Lahukhedi on the bank of Bhopal lake in district Bhopal has a group of sculptures belonging to the Pratihāra period, including Umā-Mahēśvara, Brahmā, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Bhairava etc.³¹

A Viṣṇu image³² of late 10th-11th century is found at Sheopur district Mandasor. C.B. Trivedi has discovered an image of Harihara near Heliodorus Pillar (Besnagar) of the early Medieval India.³³

The Maurya feudatories of the Gurjara Pratihāras were ruling in Mālvā. The Dharmanātha temple in Dhamnār³⁴ (Mandasor district of Madhya Pradesh) of their reign is found here. It contains the figures of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu and Daśāvatārs.

With all the temples and sculptures assigned to Gurjara Pratihāra period, it seems probable that they were involved in at least some of these constructions. However, Michael D. Willis opines that Pratihāra monarchs were not involved in commissioning temples or images.³⁵ They sought to avoid the localisation of power and

²⁹ Deshpande, M.N. (ed.), *IAR*, 1972-73, p. 59.

³⁰ Joshi, M.C., *IAR*, 1988-89, p. 105.

³¹ Nagarajarao, *IAR*, 1982-83, p. 134.

³² Ghosh, A., *IAR*, 1954-55, p. 62.

³³ Ghosh A., *IAR*, 1963-64, p. 89.

³⁴ Meister, Michael W. and Dhaky, M.A., *Encyclopedia of The Indian Temple Architecture, North India: Period of Early Maturity (A.D. 700-900)*, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 299-317.

³⁵ Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopaksetra*, p. 290.

particularization of identity. Willis also seems to find it significant that no account of temple destruction is found in Rāṣṭrakuṭa records when such records deal with the defeats of the Pratihāras.

All these arguments may be true but the Pratihāras did involve themselves in construction of temples, one example being the construction of the seraglio for the god Narakadviṣa (Viṣṇu)³⁶. Also, there is evidence of refurbishing of the Gupta temple at Ēraṇ during late 8th century with a new door way and Mukhalingam³⁷. They may have been involved in the protection and maintenance of the Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior, too. Importance of rituals may have declined, but that of religion may have not. And Pratihāras, used religion to give strength to their call for legitimacy, as being the door keeper of the world (like Lakṣmaṇa)³⁸.

II

The earliest known inscription invoking Vaiṣṇava deities of this sub period (c. A.D. 800-1000) is of Kalacuris of Tripuri. The Kalacuris were emerging as new local rulers in early years of the 8th century in and around Jabalpur. Its founder Vāmarāja³⁹ overran Bundelkhand and established himself at Kālanjara, the impregnable fort in Bāndā. He transferred his capital from Mahiṣmatī to Tripuri. He assumed imperial titles like *Paramabhāṭṭāraka*, *Mahārājadhirāja* and *Parameśvara*.

³⁶ Majumdar, R.C., Gwalior Prasasti of Gurjara Pratihara King Bhoja', *EI*, Vol. 18, pp. 99-104.

³⁷ Meister & Dhaky, *North India, Period of Early Maturity*, pp. 27-60.

³⁸ Hultsch, E., 'Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhāṭṭasvamin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp.154-162.

³⁹ Mirashi, V.V., *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*, *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, Ootacamund, 1955, pp. 1 x vii - 1 XXXV.

Lakṣmaṇarāja I was fourth in succession as the Kalacuri ruler, whose inscription at Kāritalai⁴⁰ is the first to invoke Viṣṇu in its various forms. Kāritalai is a small village, 27 miles north by east from Murawāra tahsil in Jabalpur district in Madhya Pradesh. The inscription is affixed to the temple of Devī Madhiā (may be a local deity). It starts with an obeisance to Druhiṇa (Brahmā), Upendra (Viṣṇu) and Rudra (Śiva). It is dated in Kalacuri-Cedi era, corresponding to 840 A.D. There is reference of Amoghavarṣa, who bowed to the feet of some saintly person. Amonghvarṣa is the famous Rāṣṭrakuṭa ruler. He might have gone to Cedi country to pay his respect to the holy person, who put this inscription.

Next Kalacuri inscription invoking Visnu is three inscriptions of Yuvarājadeva I⁴¹ from Bandhogarh. He was one of the most powerful rulers of later Kalacuri dynasty. These three inscriptions of his reign are incised on the inside of the western wall of fish temple⁴² in Bandhogarh. Bandhogarh is 6 miles south by west of Rewa in the same district of Madhya Pradesh. The object of the first inscription is to record that the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar and others were caused by illustrious Gollakā. Also known as Gauḍa. Gollakā was the son of illustrious Bhāku who was the minister of Yuvarājadeva I.

Another inscription is incised on a pillar with a figure of Garuḍa to the west of a colossal rock cut figure of Ādivarāha. Ādivarāha is placing the left foot on a Nāga figure. The object is to record that the figures of Fish, the Tortoise, the Ādivarāha and Paraśurāma were caused by the illustrious Gollaka, the son of illustrious Bhāku.

⁴⁰ Mirashi, V.V., 'Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakshmanarāja I', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, p. 182.

⁴¹ Mirashi, V.V., 'Bandhogarh Rock Inscriptions of Yavarājadeva I', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, pp. 182-185.

⁴² This may have been an image of Matsya or Fish, whom Mirashi is referring as Fish temple.

The third inscription is incised on a rock facing south west near the rock cut image of a tortoise at Bandhogarh. The object of the inscription is to dedicate the image of Tortoise or Kacchapa, near which it is incised.

Not very far from Bandhogarh, we find another inscription of Yuvarājadeva I from Gopalpur.⁴³ Gopalpur is a village one mile to the north of Bandhogarh. The object of the inscription is to record that an image of Haladhara (Balarāma) is caused to be carved by the same Gollaka. This inscription is incised on a rock at the back of the Śeṣaśāyī image. While the early Kalacuri rulers are seen worshiping trinity, flood incarnations (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha) were particularly worshipped in Bandhavagarh region. Paraśurāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu is for the first time mentioned in this inscription. Kūrma avatāra also made its first appearance.

The Varāha incarnation figures also in the Kāritalai inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II⁴⁴. Kāritalai has the distinction of being a place of antiquity. This inscription opens with a benedictory line assigned to Vāmana incarnation of Viṣṇu. It gives the description of a very high temple (*prāsādayam*) erected by Someśvara. The image installed therein was probably the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, which is referred to in verse 27 and 35 of the inscription. The god (Viṣṇu) is referred to as enemy of demons at two places – *Daiyadruhaḥ*⁴⁵ and *Dānavareresopyayā*⁴⁶ (enemy of *dānavas*). Different donations were given to the god under the name of Varāha (*Varāhanāya dvādaśokhan dikam*)⁴⁷ and Somasvāmin (Somasvāmīdevāya).⁴⁸ Judging by these two

⁴³ Mirashi, V.V., 'Gopalpur Rock Inscription of Yuvarājadeva I', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, pp. 185-186.

⁴⁴ Mirashi, V.V., 'Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, pp. 186-195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 190, V. 18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 190, V. 20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 191, V. 35.

⁴⁸ Mirashi, V.V., 'Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, p. 191, v. 27.

references, it may be that the deity enshrined in the temple was boar incarnation of Viṣṇu.

Various donations were made to the temple by the king, queen and the prince. In the town (*pura*) near the temple, eight brāhmaṇas were caused to settle. To them, king Lakṣmaṇarāja II donated village Dirghaśākhika (Dighi, 6 miles southwest of Kāritalai). He also gave another village to the god on the occasion of a solar eclipse. His queen Rāhadā gave with his consent village Cakrahradi (7 miles south of Karilalai). His son Śaṅkaragaṇa gave the god another village on the occasion of lunar eclipse. Śaṅkaragaṇa is called as *Parama Vaiṣṇava*.⁴⁹ Two other villages Challipāṭaka and Antarapāṭa (Amaturra, 7 miles east of Kāritalai) were donated to the god at solar eclipse. Further donation of two fields were made to the god. A potentete named Valli gave the village Vaṭagartika (Barhati, 10 miles west by south of Kāritalali) in his own territory. Still another who had come to the place donated a field of feed corn. Besides this, income from several trees and tolls were ascribed to the temple. The various donations given to the temple show the influence exercised by the god enshrined there. The inscription also refers to Bali giving three footsteps to Trivikrama.

Another inscription of Someśvara found from Kāritalai⁵⁰ refers to construction of a kūpa (well) in the heart of the city Somasvāmīpura (Kāritalai) by him. The first verse of the inscription praises Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (...*ksmalakṣmībhyām*). The name of the god Somasvāmin was given to the city too, Somasvāmīpura. This is the second example in Madhya Pradesh that Vaiṣṇava incarnation is called after the name of the builder of the temple (Somasvāmin after Someśvara).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Mirashi, V.V., 'Karitalai Stone Inscription of Lakshmanaraja II', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, p. 191, V. 33.

⁵⁰ Jain, B.C., 'Kalacuri Inscription from Karitalai', *EI*, Vol. 33, pp. 186-188.

⁵¹ Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin temple is the first example earlier described in this chapter.

III

Towards the close of this period (c. A.D. 800-1000) the Candellas emerged as a new dominant power in the area known as Jejakabhukti. It was a part of the former state of Chhatarpur and is now included in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. Khajuraho was one of the capitals of the Candellas which they adorned with beautiful temples.

The earliest temple of a Vaiṣṇavite deity built in this place appears to have been the Varāha⁵² temple. The colossal Varāha is a powerfully modelled sculpture decorated all over with rows of gods and goddesses including Sarasvatī, *Navagrahas*, Gangā, Yamunā, Brahmā, Śiva, avatāras of Viṣṇu etc. On the upper half of this figure occurs two ornamental female feet probably of Bhūdevī which it should have supported.

Lakṣmaṇa temple standing on the site is the first fully developed and organised temple. An inscription dated A.D. 953-54 in the reign of king Dhaṅga was originally in the debris accumulated at the base of this temple and is now fixed in its Maṇḍapa passage. This is the famous stone inscription of Candella ruler Yaśovarman.⁵³ It records the erection of a temple of Viṣṇu under the name of Vaikuṅṭha by the prince Yaśovarman also called as Lakṣavarman of the Candrātreyā family. According to it, Yaśovarman had received the image of Vaikuṅṭha, from Devapāla, whom he set up in the temple founded by him. Devapāla is mentioned as a son of Herambapāla who had obtained it from the Sāhi king of Kira (kashmir), who in turn had got it from Bhoṭa (probably Tibet). The inscription starts and ends with obeisance to Vāsudeva. It describes Vaikuṅṭha as the one who

⁵² Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 36-38.

⁵³ Kielhorn, F., 'Stone Inscription of Yaśovarman', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 122-135.

frightens the whole world with his roaring, as boar and man-lion and slew the three chief Asuras, Kapila and the rest-

*Dadhānānekām yaḥ kiripuruṣasim (hobhaya) juṣaṁ
tadākārocchedyām tanumsuramukhyānajarāt. jaghāna
trinugranjañcagati kapilādīnavatuḥ vah sa Vaikuṅṭhaḥ.*⁵⁴

Also, there is reference to three strides of Hari. One curious point is the reference of Śiva bearing on his head the holy water which fell on Hari's lotus feet. Thus, here is clear reference to subordination of Śiva to Hari.

Lakṣmaṇa temple⁵⁵ is the first organised and well planned temple of Khajuraho. The temple is a major *pañcāyatana* temple of Vaikuṅṭha with four subsidiary shrines at the four corners of its platform terrace. The small shrine facing the temple possibly housed Garuḍa, the mount of god. But now it contains an image of Brahmānī, locally called Devī. The temple enshrines a majestic three faced Vaikuṅṭha image.⁵⁶ Its central *saumya* (placid) face is flanked by Nṛsimha (Lion) and Varāha (Boar) faces. However, the inscription mentioned above, refers to a four faced Vaikuṅṭha image different from the present three-faced one in the sanctum. This image does not have Himalayan or Chamba features in its face, physiognomy, dress, *mukuta* and jewellery. It is a heavy figure of stone, difficult to be easily transported without damage. It wears a double-looped *mekhalā* and *pādāṅgada* ornament. Stylistically, the present Vaikuṅṭha image belongs to about A.D. 1075-1100 and must have been installed when the original image brought by Yaśovarman was missing.

⁵⁴ Killhorn, F., 'Stone Inscription of Yaśovarman', *EI*, Vol. I, p. 124, V. 1.

⁵⁵ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 101.

Besides the Vaikuntha image, the sanctum contains the figures of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Pārvatī, different *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and various Kṛṣṇa-līlā scenes.

Lakṣmī lustrated by the elephants, occupies the *lalātabimba*⁵⁷ of the lintel of the sanctum door, flanked by Brahmā on left and on the right by Śiva. Below in the centre of the threshold is a figure of four-armed pot bellied Kubera. Matsya *avatāra* is shown as the rescuer of the four Vedas, where human heads are represented near the image of the Fish. Main cardinal niche contains the incarnations of Viṣṇu – Varāha, Nṛsimha, Hayagrīva. Kūrma *avatāra* as well as earlier mentioned Matsya *avatāra* are shown in human form. The western cardinal niche represents the Yogeśvara Viṣṇu. The extraordinary image of Viṣṇu is with the raised index finger of his left hand near his mouth suggesting one (*eka*) or *ekāntin*, the single minded devotion. Devangana Desai says that Viṣṇu is asking his devotees by his hand gesture to observe silence and guard the secrets of the doctrine that he is expounding.⁵⁸

Various Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes include Tṛnāvratavadha, slaying of suta Lomahaṛṣana by Baiarāma, fight with wrestlers of Kaṁsa, Kāliya damana, Ariṣṭāsura vadha, Yamalārjuna episode, Pūtanāvadha etc. Thematically, except one scene-Kubjā-anugraha the panel depicts the heroic deeds of demon killing. However, it fails to highlight Kṛṣṇa's childhood. It accords well with the spirit of the temple's inscription which invokes Vaikuṅṭha Viṣṇu the principal deity of the temple as 'Daityāri', the enemy of demons and calls the pattern king Yaśovarmana as 'Kunṭhitāri' the subduer of enemies. The king's mother is linked to Devakī, the mother of Kṛṣṇa. In sculptural

⁵⁷ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 120.

depiction, Kṛṣṇa is represented as 'Daityāri' who vanquishes enemies, like Vaikuṅṭha-Viṣṇu and the patron king Yaśovarman, according to Devangana Deasi.⁵⁹

The Mahā-maṇḍapa of this sanctum has the Viśvarupa form of Viṣṇu.⁶⁰ This is twelve headed and twelve armed form of Viṣṇu standing in *tribhaṅga* pose and holding *cakra*, *gadā* and arrow in the surviving hands. The principal head which was human was broken, but the lion's head on proper right and boar head on proper left is preserved. The god wears *kunḍalas*, *keyūras*, wristlets, *kaustubha maṇi*, *hāra*, *upavita*, torque, *vanamālā* and anklets. Headless Garuḍa depicted by the side of the attendants of Viṣṇu is in praising attitude. He is shown seated on a weaker stool. The halo of the Viśvarupa Viṣṇu is flanked by seated figures of three headed and four armed Brahmā on right and four armed Śiva on left. The main figure partly resembles Ananta form of Viṣṇu.

Other images of Mahāmaṇḍapa include four armed Śiva and Pārvatī. North eastern shrine contains images of Agni, Varuṇa and Yama. The southeastern shrine contains the figure of four armed Nṛvarāha and eight armed Sūrya.⁶¹ The image of Sūrya is carrying rosary, *triśula*, lotus flower, *śaṅkha* and *kamaṇḍalu*. This image represents *Hari-Hara-Hiraṇyagarbha* combining the characteristics of Hari, Hara, Sūrya and Balarāma. North western shrine contains one Ardhanāriśvara form among other images.

⁵⁹ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, p. 125.

⁶⁰ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, p. 295.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Devangana Desai opines that most of the temples at Khajuraho including Lakṣmaṇa temple show the patronage enjoyed by them.⁶² It also heralds a new age in religious life of Khajuraho with the assertion of Brāhmaṇic-Vedic elements. The temple symbolizes the augmented power of the Candellas marching from chieftainship to kingship.⁶³ The effort of Candella kings to glorify the origin of their dynasty (born from mythical Candrātreyā) is due to their possible tribal origin. She shows how the sculptors of the Lakṣmaṇa temple try to denigrate the non-vedic heretical sects and to consolidate brāhmaṇical based vedic order.⁶⁴ Temples constructed before Lakṣmaṇa temple were brick temples. This is the first edifice whose rich splendor indicates the wealth of its patron Yaśovarman.

The importance of acquiring the much sought after Vaikuṅṭha image can be seen in the context of power politics of North Indian states of 10th century A.D. One of the cardinal niches of the sanctum bears an image of Viṣṇu as Hayagrīva (Devapāla is called as Hayapatī in the inscription engraved in the temple).

She further shows how the characters of the drama *Prabodhacandrodaya* or its proto type have been dramatically presented by the architect of Lakṣmaṇa temple. Heretically non-vedic sects of Kāpālikas and Kṣapaṇakas are discriminately placed in the lower portion of the sanctum walls.

It seems that the *sūtradhāra* (architect) has a well-planned presentation of sculptures in the scheme of the temple. He might have

⁶² Desai, Devangava, 'Patronage of Lakṣmana Temple at Khajuraho', in B.S. Miller (ed.), *Powers of Art*, pp. 78-83.

⁶³ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ Desai, Devangava, 'Patronage of Lakṣmana Temple at Khajuraho', in B.S. Miller (ed.), *Powers of Art*, pp. 78-83.

been guided by the *ācārya* of the religious system to which the temple belonged.

Michael Willis⁶⁵ also supports this view point. According to him in the first half of the 10th century, strong regional dynasties began to emerge across North India. The most well known of these were the Candellas, Kalacuris, Paramāras and Kacchapaghātas. These dynasties fostered the temple building on an unprecedented scale. To accompany the new building projects, long inscriptions were prepared. Thus, he finds growing regional and localising tendency behind the patronage of these temples.

IV

The period of the early Paramāras of Western Mālvā comes under the purview of our study. The Paramāras, who had their capital in Dhar near Ujjan, were no exceptions as regarding the use of Vaiṣṇava symbol and eulogy of Vaiṣṇava incarnations as the royal prerogative. They used Viṣṇu's vehicle Garuḍa as their emblem on their inscriptions. The Dharamapuri grant of Vākpatirāja⁶⁶ dated 974-75 A.D. contains the sign of a flying Garuḍa in human form and facing left holding a snake in the left hand. This inscription opens with a symbol denoting *siddham*, and following it, it has two *mangala-ślokas*. The first of three stanzas purports to eulogise the beauties of manly throat of Śrīkaṇṭha (Śiva), desiring him to increase their happiness and the second to describe the body of Muraripu (Kṛṣṇa) with a request to him to protect the world. All the grants of the Paramāras include this Garuḍa symbol and the above mentioned eulogy.

⁶⁵ Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopakṣetra*, pp. 85-99.

⁶⁶ Trivedi, H.V., 'Dharamapuri grant of Vākpatirāja, V.S. 1031', *Inscriptions of the Paramaras, Candellas, Kacchhapaghātas and Two Minor Dynasties, CII, Vol. 7, pt. II*, pp. 10-14.

Another Paramāra inscription is Udepur Praśasti of the Kings of Malava.⁶⁷ It is a fragmentary inscription, whose date is lost. It is found at the courtyard of the great temple of Śiva at Udepur (Gwalior). As the opening verses are addressed to Śiva, Pārvatī and Gaṇeśa, the inscription may originally belong to a Śaiva temple, which was built by either Udayāditya or by one of his immediate successors. Udayāditya was a Paramāra ruler. Even here, we find an incidental reference to Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu. According to the inscription, Udayāditya restored a temple or statue of Viṣṇu in boar incarnation—

*Yena Dharaṇivarāha paramārenadhṛto nirāyāsāt tasyai-tasya-
bhūmiḥ=Uddhāraḥ vat = Kiyannmānaḥ.*⁶⁸

It means how easy was the rescue of this earth for that Paramāra by whom the primeval boar was restored without difficulty. Buhler says that as the king could do that, the feat of the boar—the *bhūmera uddhāraḥ* – the uplifting of the earth out of the waters was of course a small matter for him.⁶⁹

From Gaonri, a village 3 miles to north east of Narwar, 11 miles to south east of Ujjain on the Ujjain Dewas road, three inscriptions are found together.⁷⁰ Of them, two are Paramāra inscriptions dated 981 A.D. and 986 A.D. They refer to grants given to vedic brāhmaṇas. These inscriptions start with the same eulogy. Then it mentions donation of village Payalī Pattana on western boundary of Manyakheta to twenty six brāhmaṇas. The object is to establish a *sattra* (charitable feeding house) where a thousand brāhmaṇas belonging to different denominations were to be fed. The donor of the grant is

⁶⁷ Buhler, G., 'Udepur Prasasti of Kings of Malwa', *EI Vol. I*, pp. 222-238.

⁶⁸ Buhler, G., 'Udepur Prasasti of Kings of Malwa', *EI*, Vol. I, p. 238, verses 22 and 24.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 238, fn. 94.

⁷⁰ Rao Bahadur K.N. Dikshit, 'Three Copper Plates from Gaonri', *EI*, Vol. 23, pp. 101-113.

Suvarnavasadeva (Govinda IV). The ruler was Vākpatirāja. Of the twenty six brāhmaṇas roughly, twelve brāhmaṇas had either Vaiṣṇava names like Govindasvāmin, Vāmanasvāmīdeva or their fathers name correspond to Vaiṣṇava affiliation like Śrīnivāsa, Viṣṇu, Hari etc. Viṣṇu in this inscription is described as *Lakṣmīvadanenduna* (worshipped by Lakṣmī), Muraripu etc. A big religious complex (of Vaiṣṇava) is referred in the number of brāhmaṇas with Vaiṣṇava leanings (12 brāhmaṇas out of 26).

V

The Kacchapaghātas were ruling at the same time in and around Gwalior. Their records of which only one is found in Madhya Pradesh attests to their Vaiṣṇava leanings.

An inscription in Gwalior Museum⁷¹ records the construction of a number of wells and a temple of god Viśvamurtti, surrounded by twelve other temples –

Viśvamurttin-san-mandiram dvādasa mandirair-vritam (tam).

The grant was issued by Vaccila, son of Kakkuka of Nanda family. One of their ancestors Gugga was a minister of Kacchapaghāta rulers. The inscription alludes the incarnation of Viṣṇu as Mādhava in the Nanda-kula in order to rescue the helpless earth from under the trampling feet of the demons and states that he raised the nomadic tribe of the Ābhīras to the status of *drāṅgikas* by granting them, the *udraṅga* (rights). Here, too is an evidence bearing almost directly kings gaining legitimacy by connecting themselves to Kṛṣṇa. Verse 13 of the inscription of which only the second half is preserved seems to record

⁷¹ Ramesh & Suri, "An Unpublished Inscription in Gwalior Museum", *EI*, Vol. 40, pp. 191-196.

the construction of a temple (*surasadana*). The inscription is dated Monday 11th April 981 A.D.

Michael D. Willis finds⁷² direct links between the temple and the dynasty in case of Kacchapaghātas also. At the Sas-bahu temple at Gwalior fort, the dedicatory inscription states that the temple was founded by Padmapāla and completed by his successor Mahipāla. The links between the dynasty and the temple are reinforced by the building's dedication to Padmanābha (Viṣṇu) in honour of Padmapāla. Willis says that after the abeyance of royal sacrifices, power was seen as flowing down from the devine through whole or partial incarnation (in case of Viṣṇu) or manifestation (in case of Śiva). The regional princes maintained and amplified their programmes of temple construction. This pattern of patronage prevailed until the establishment of Delhi Sultanate.

VI

Another Vaiṣṇava inscription is Thuban Inscription of Harirājadeva of Pratihāraḷa.⁷³ Thuban is a small village situated on the left bank of river Orr near Chanderi in Guna directirct of Madhya Pradesh. It is a pilgrimage centre of Jainas. Many Jaina, Vaiṣṇava and Śiva temples exist in the low valley of the river in the nearby jungle. The inscription records the construction of the temple of Janārdana-Vāsudeva by Keśava, the son of Mottana and Māhata. It opens with paying homage to the deity Keśava. It praises different forms of Viṣṇu Narahari, killer of Hiraṇyakaśipu (Nṛsimha), Boar incarnation etc. It is dated 998-99 A.D. The king Harirājadeva was a scion of the Bundelkhand Branch of the Pratihāras.

⁷² Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopakṣetra*, p. 281-300.

⁷³ Jain & Trivedi, "Thuban Inscription of Harirājadeva", *EI*, Vol. 40, pp. 105-108.

Not very far from Budhi Chanderi (roughly 5 miles north west of it) is a place called Lakheri. Nearly a furlong to the east of the village, there is a shrine room.⁷⁴ The enshrined idol is a group of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva carved in a relief on a stone slab. The central place is occupied by Śiva flanked by Brahmā and Viṣṇu. This slab originally formed the lintel of the door. The temple is of the early Medieval period.

VII

Besides there, many small Vaiṣṇava temples are found in various parts of Madhya Pradesh. A fragmentary inscription from Barah in Narwar⁷⁵ district forms the concluding portion of a *praśasti* recording the construction of a temple of Viṣṇu (name of the builder lost). Then followed a few names of traders (*vaṇik* by caste) who were partners in the work. The names of the engraver and composer are given as Sthivarkka and Nārāyaṇa. This inscription is dated 1040 A.D. The commercial class is found here involving them in temple construction independent of the rulers.

In Vidiśā district of Madhya Pradesh, a village Kagpur has a small lintel dedicated to a Viṣṇu shrine (10th century A.D.)⁷⁶

In the same district, sculptures discovered during the construction of a road near the Betwa bridge include four armed Viṣṇu⁷⁷ holding *cakra*, *gadā*, wearing *kirītamukuta* and *vaijayantimālā*. Four such sculptures have been found belonging to late 9th or early 10th century A.D.

⁷⁴ Garde M.B., *ARG*, 1924-25, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Togrā in Shivpuri, has an image of Nṛsimha.⁷⁸ An inscription found here describes the construction of a Viṣṇu temple. This inscription is fragmentary and many be of late 9th century.

VIII

Thus, the period c. A.D. 800-1000 saw the multiple facets of Vaiṣṇavism. The new emerging dynasties more vigorously took recourse of religion to legitimise and identify themselves with them. Visnu is more frequently called after the name of its builders like Vaillabhāṭṭasvāmin.⁷⁹ Somasvāmin⁸⁰ and Padmanābha⁸¹, while in early Gupta period, Gupta rulers resort to allegorical meaning of Vaiṣṇavite deities (Varāha), now the king took the epithet of Ādivarāha⁸² in a much more explicit way. Temples were more explicitly patronised by the rulers, as in the case of Candellas.

As regarding the Vaiṣṇava images, Matsya, Kūrma, Paraśurāma, Balarāma, Buddha and Kalki *avatāras* found expression in the sculptures of the temples. We may call it as evolved Vaiṣṇavism of ancient period.

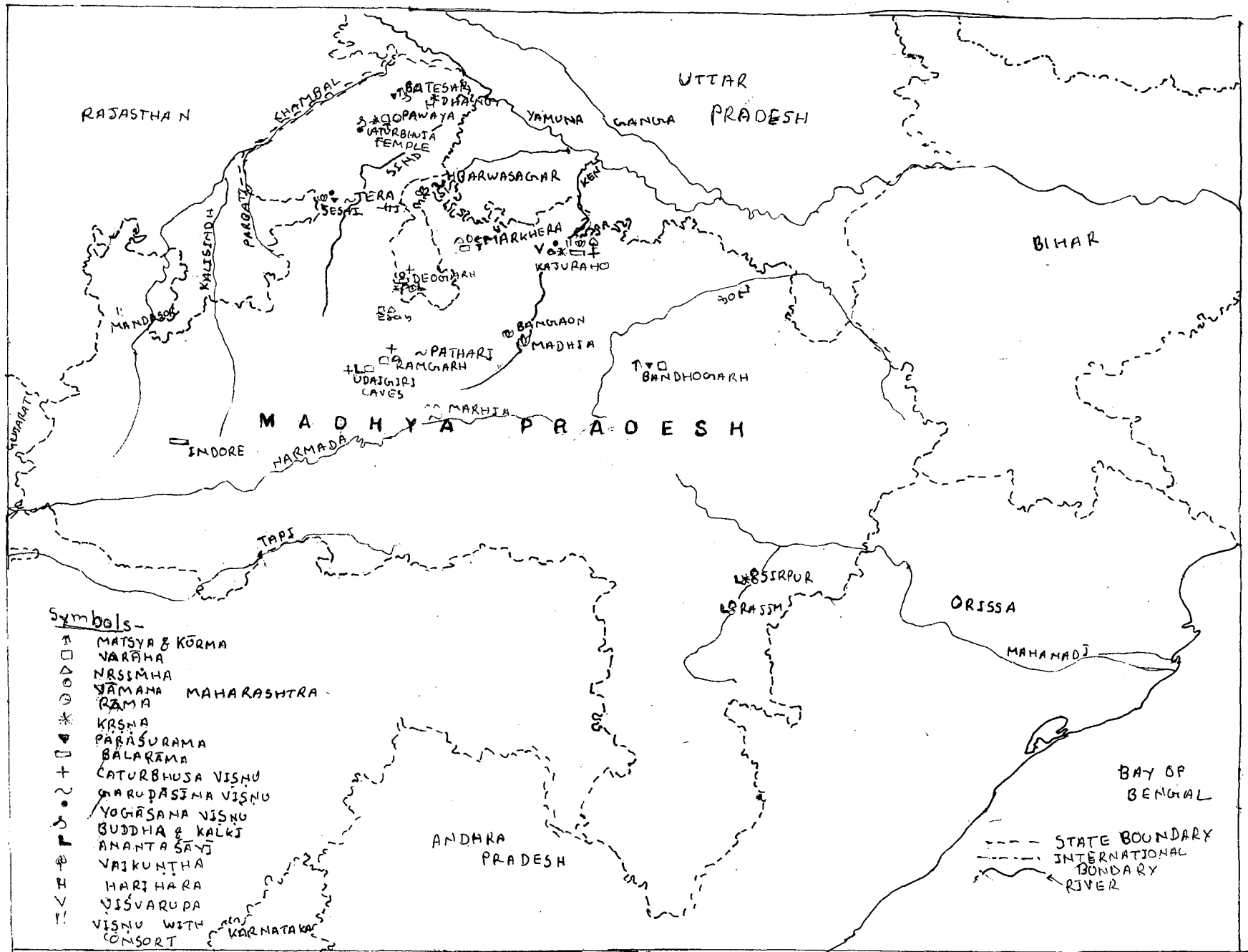
⁷⁸ Willis, Michael D., *The Inscriptions of Gepaksetra*, p. 1-4.

⁷⁹ Hutzsch, E., 'Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhāṭṭasvāmin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 154-162.

⁸⁰ Mirashi, V.V., 'Karitalai Stone Inscription of Laksmanarāja II', *CII*, Vol. IV, pt. I, pp. 185-195.

⁸¹ Willis, Michael D., *The Temples of Gopaksetra*, pp. 287-300.

⁸² Hutzsch, E., 'Two inscriptions of Vaillabhāṭṭasvāmin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 154-162.



MAP IV : FORMS OF VISHNU AND HIS INCARNATIONS IN MADHYA PRADESH AND CHHATTISGARH [c. A.D. 300-1000]

CHAPTER - 5

FORMS OF VISNU AND HIS INCARNATIONS

The time span (c.A.D. 300-1000) covered in the present research saw new patterns of Vaiṣṇavism emerging in different parts of Madhya Pradesh from the preceding phase. As mentioned earlier, Vaiṣṇava worship in the region was of the form of *Bhāgavatism* in the pre 300 A.D. period. The *Garuḍadhvaja* found near the Heliodorus Pillar Inscription at Besnagar¹ was associated with it. Near this pillar is found a four-handed figure with the crown, headdress and earrings like the usual Viṣṇu figures. But this figure is round in shape. And so according to Bhandarkar², this may be the image of Garuḍa. M.D. Khare has found the remains of a Vaiṣṇava temple of 3rd century B.C.³

The worship of *Garuḍadhvaja* or Garuḍa as the vehicle of Viṣṇu continued in the succeeding periods. However, one major change in post 300 A.D. phase, was the emergence of the worship of *avatāras* (incarnations) in Madhya Pradesh as elsewhere, as a part of Vaiṣṇava worship.

Avatāra worship did not emerge abruptly. Further, not all the ten *avatāras* of Viṣṇu namely Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Paraśurāma, Buddha and Kalki (and some times Balarāma) were found at the early stage of *avatāra* worship. All this came through a process of evolution of Vaiṣṇava religion similar to what is found in other regions.

¹ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Excavations at Besnagar', *ASIAR*, 1913-14, p. 190.

² *Ibid*, p. 195.

³ Khare, M.D., "Discovery of a Viṣṇu Temple near the Heliodorus Pillar", *Lalit Kala* -13 (1967), pp. 21-27.

Investigating into the evolution of these *avatāras* and forms of Visnu is the aim of this chapter. It covers the whole chronological span of this research work (c.A.D. 300-1000) to find the evolutionary pattern, if any, in the worship of various images of Viṣṇu in different parts of Madhya Pradesh. An attempt has also been made to find out whether variations are found within the region in different phases. Keeping in view the different dynasties, which came into prominence in different parts of Madhya Pradesh at different stages, it may be assumed that variations in the forms of Viṣṇu may be noticed in the material which is available from the region.

I

Avatāras of Viṣṇu

Matsya and Kūrma avatāras

Starting from the two *avatāras* Matsya and Kūrma, we find that these are mentioned as the first two *avatāras* of Viṣṇu in the textual list of *avatāras*. However, their sculptural representations are not available early and date much later than the sculptures of other *avatāras*. The earliest known representation of fish as Matsya *avatāra* is found in Lakṣmaṇa temple⁴ at Sirpur in Raipur district of Madhya Pradesh, while the earliest representation of Kūrma *avatāra* can be found in cave no. 19 at Udaigiri in Vidiśā district in Madhya Pradesh, where the *Amṛtamanthana* scene⁵ presents Viṣṇu in the form of a tortoise. However, Kūrma *avatāra* is mentioned with the ten *avatāras* of Viṣṇu only in the third sub period (c.A.D. 800-1000). Bandhogarh rock inscriptions of Yuvarājadeva⁶, belonging to 10th century A.D.,

⁴ Krishna Deva, 'Lakshmana Temple at Sirpur', *JMPIP*, No. 2, (1960), pp. 35-42.

⁵ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 40-41.

⁶ Refer to Appendix-I.

found from Rewa in Madhya Pradesh, speaks of the construction of images of Matsya and Kacchapa along with other incarnations. Images of Matsya and Kūrma have been found alongside the inscriptions.

Besides the above, Matsya and Kūrma *avatāras* figure in the group of ten *avatāras* in Baṭeśvara temple complex (Morena district), Sun temple at Sesai⁸ (Shivpuri district) and Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho⁹. Rarely do these *avatāras* get independent representation.

Varāha avātara

Of all the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Varāha *avatāra* seems to have been the most important. Its worship remained dominant throughout the period in Madhya Pradesh. The earliest known Varāha image is found from Ramgarh¹⁰ (Vidiśā district) among the other rockcut sculptures. Holding in his left hand a *vanamālā*, the image is approximately of the same size as are the other images.

Udaigiri in Vidiśā district has a great panel of Boar incarnation in cave 5.¹¹ The Varāha figure is notable for its size (7m by 4m)¹². No other relief panel in India is as large as this one. The composite animal-human form of god is holding the human figure of Pṛthvī (earth). Lakṣmī is standing on a lotus stalk to the right of the god. Śeṣa is in worshipful attitude. Ganga and Yamuna, the two rivers are shown on their respective *vāhanas*, crocodile and tortoise. The combined waters of these two rivers are received by the ocean. The whole cosmic deeds of Varāha are watched by amazed spectators-devas, ṛṣis (sages) and asuras. This Varāha panel (as mentioned earlier) may recall

⁷ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, p. 85.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 161-168.

⁹ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 38-55.

¹⁰ Carmel Berkson, 'Some New Finds at Ramgarh Hill, Vidisha District', *AA*, Vol. 40, pp. 215-232.

¹¹ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 33-37.

¹² Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 11.

Candragupta as a mighty ruler and his authority over western Malwa, which was earlier under the authority of the western Kṣatrapas.

Ēraṇ in Sagar district has the Boar Inscription of Toramāṇa¹³ which extols the image of Varāha statue containing this inscription. This is a very large image covered with sculptures of ṛṣis. From the same place an image of Varāha is found with the inscription mentioning it as the gift of Maheśvaradatta and Varāhadatta.¹⁴ The figure is notable for the extraordinary power which it conveys. At a still later date a stone sculpture of goddess Vārāhī (the female counterpart of Varāha) belonging to 8th century A.D. is found from here.

Varāha temple at Deogarh¹⁵ (Lalitpur district, U.P.) is of slightly earlier than 6th century A.D. The Varāha figure in this temple is shown emerging from the ocean where the nāga and nāginī are in supplicating attitude. Śrīdevī is shown the right of Varāha.

The second sub period (c.A.D. 550-800) doesn't find Varāha as a dominant deity. The only reference to Varāha is in Rajim Stone Inscription of Nala king Vilāsatunga found from Raipur.¹⁶ This record is incised on a stone slab which is built into the left wall of the temple of Rājīvalocana. Varāha temple forms one of the subsidiary shrines of the main temple.

The third sub period (c. A.D. 800-1000) once again abounds in Varāha images and inscriptions referring to Varāha incarnation.

¹³ Harle, J.C., *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Bajpai, K.D., *Sagar Through the Ages*, pl. XI.

¹⁵ Banerjea, N.R., 'New Light on the Gupta Temples at Deogarh', *JAS*, Vol. V, No. 182, p. 42.

¹⁶ Refer to Appendix-I.

Bandhogarh rock inscriptions of Yuvarājadeva¹⁷ and Kāritalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II¹⁸ refer to Varāha *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Temples of the Pratihāra period are noted for containing Varāha images. Early Pratihāra temples like Sun temple at Umrī¹⁹ (Tikamgarh district) and Markhera Sun temple²⁰ (Tikamgarh district) contain the image of boar incarnation. Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior²¹ contains the image of four armed Nṛvarāha. The god is shown raising up the goddess Pṛthvī (earth) with his upper left hand. Wearing *vanamālā*, *hāra* and *mekhalā*, the god is attended by two figures. Adjoining Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin temple inscription refers to Bhoja as Ādivarāha²².

Udepur praśasti of the kings of Malwa²³ found from Gwalior refers to restoration of a statue of Dharaṇivarāha by a Paramāra ruler, Udayāditya. Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho²⁴ contains a figure of four armed Nṛvarāha.

Nṛsimha

Unlike the Varāha incarnation, Nṛsimha *avatāra* doesn't have a separate sanctum ascribed to it. In most cases, Nṛsimha form is associated with one or another form of Viṣṇu. However, it remained popular throughout the period.

The earliest known Nṛsimha temple is found in Ēraṇ in Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh.²⁵ Belonging to the 5th or the 6th century

¹⁷ Refer to Appendix-I.

¹⁸ Refer to Appendix-I.

¹⁹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, p. 115.

²⁰ Ibid, 143-148.

²¹ Ibid, 135-143.

²² Refer to Appendix-I.

²³ Refer to Appendix-I.

²⁴ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

²⁵ Meister & Dhaky, *North India: Foundation of The North Indian Style*, pp. 18-56.

A.D., the Nṛsimha temple is one of the image in the group of four east facing temples. An image of Nṛsimha is found in rockcut sculptures of Ramgarh²⁶ (Vidiśā district) of an early Gupta date.

A peculiar image of Nṛsimha is found on the caitya window of the famous Daśavatāra temple at Deogarh.²⁷ The god is shown sitting on a full blown lotus in *ardhaparyankāsana* holding mace, disc, conch and lower left hand on the thigh. The fierce lion-face of the god is surrounded by the thick locks of mane spreading on the shoulders. The god is wearing an ornamental *mukuta*. Since the doorway consists of the image of Nṛsimha, N.R. Banerjee calls it a Nṛsimha temple.²⁸

Vāmana temple at Marhia²⁹ (Jabalpur district) contains the image of Nṛsimha slaying the demon Hiranyakaśipu. It is for the first time that Nṛsimha image is shown with the demon Hiranyakaśipu. Another Nṛsimha image from Sindursi³⁰ (Jabalpur district) found as a rock cut sculpture shows the terrific god sitting in meditation. The image is belonging to 5th century A.D. A Nṛsimha image is found at Besnagar belonging to Gupta period.³¹

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Sirpur (Raipur district) has an eight handed image of Nṛsimha.³² The upper two pairs of hands are in *abhaya mudrā* and two front hands are engaged in the act of destroying the demon. The lower right hand is seizing the hand of the demon while the lower

²⁶ Berkson, Carmel, 'Some New Finds at Ramgarh Hill, Vidisha District', *AA*, Vol. 40, pp. 215-232.

²⁷ Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, No. 70, p. 21.

²⁸ Banerjee, N.R., 'New Light on the Gupta Temples at Deogarh', *JAS*, Vol. V, No. 1 & 2, p. 42.

²⁹ Chandra, Pramod, 'A Vāmana Temple at Marhia', *AA*, Vol. 32, pp. 125-143.

³⁰ Trivedi, C.B., 'Rockcut Sculptures at Sindursi, District Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh', *PP*, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 45.

³¹ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 86.

³² *Ibid*, p. 92.

left hand is broken. The Sirpur stone inscription, found in this temple, eulogise Nṛsimha.³³

Rājīvalocana temple at Rajim in Raipur district has a six handed image of Nṛsimha datable to the 7th century A.D.³⁴ Here, the god is shown standing on a demon lying prostrate holding a sword in his hand. Two upper hands of the god are completely mutilated.

The Pratihāra group of temples contain the images of Nṛsimha in the Sun temple at Umri (Tikamgrh)³⁵ the Markhera Sun temple³⁶ (Tikamgarh), Caturbhuja temple at Gwalior³⁷, Gadarmal Śiva temple³⁸ (Vidiśā district) and Jarai Math Temple at Barwasagar³⁹ (Jhansi, U.P.). A mutilated image of Nṛsimha is found in Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho.⁴⁰ Thus, the Nṛsimha image remained prevalent throughout the period. Only difference is that early images were mostly two handed, while later sculptures have more than two hands. In the Gupta period, the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu was seldom presented with the god.

Vāmana avatāra

Vāmana *avatāra* is a well known incarnation of Viṣṇu venerated by kings and people alike since the ancient period. One of the Vāmana image (of early Gupta date) is found from Ramgarh in Vidiśā district.⁴¹ The three faced and eight armed god is taking the stride with his left foot and is holding mace, conch shell, bow, disc, small shield etc.

³³ Refer to Appendix I.

³⁴ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 90.

³⁵ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 115.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 143-148.

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 135-143.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 154-155.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 168.

⁴⁰ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 93.

⁴¹ Carmel, Berkson, 'Some New Finds at Ramgarh Hill, Vidisha District', *AA*, Vol. 40, pp. 215-232.

Vāmana temple at Marhia⁴² (Jabalpur district) has the image of the god with stunted bow shaped legs belonging to the end of 5th century A.D.

Pawaya in Gwalior contains some stone sculptures of Viṣṇu belonging to the 5th century A.D.⁴³ Here, a *torana* is found depicting Vāmana and Trivikrama. The panel contains the whole scene of sacrifice, where the king Bali is shown offering the boon to Vāmana. Later on, the Vāmana is soon turned into an eight-handed Trivikrama, holding dagger, the disc, the staff and the garland. One hand is placed on the chest. The god is flanked by two *cauri*-bearers. This panel belongs to the 4th century A.D. This is the earliest eight handed Trivikrama.

A panel projecting in the centre of the doorway of Daśāvātāra temple at Deogarh depicting Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu has a small figure holding an umbrella in his right hand.⁴⁴ This may represent Vāmana *avatāra*. The left hand of the god is in the *varada-mudrā*. Another panel in the same temple depicts Trivikrama.⁴⁵ Here, the king Bali is seated on a raised platform. The god is shown with the right feet firmly placed on the ground and the left foot aslant. The scene shows king Bali approached by Vāmana for the gift. The gift being granted, he turned himself into a gigantic figure, seen on the left side of the panel.

Kāritalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II⁴⁶ alludes to Vāmana incarnation in its opening verse.

⁴² Chandra, Pramod, 'A Vamana Temple at Marhia', *AA*, Vol. 32, pp. 125-143.

⁴³ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 104.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Sirpur (Raipur district) contains an image of Vāmana.⁴⁷ Rājīvalocana temple at Rajim⁴⁸ (Raipur district) contains a four handed image of Trivikrama crushing the Brahmānda. Two upper hands of the god hold the disc and conch. Lower hand is in *kaṭihasta mudrā*.

Among the Pratihāra group of temples, Markhera Sun temple⁴⁹ (Tikamgarh district) and Gadarmal Śiva temple⁵⁰ (Vidiśā district), each has an image of Vāmana. Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior for⁵¹ too has an image of Vāmana with Bali and his guru Śukrācārya. Siyadoni stone inscription⁵² from Lalitpur district invokes Vāmana avatāra.

Rāma and Kṛṣṇa avatāras

Of the two *avatāras*, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa *avatāra* seems to be more popular than the Rāma avatāra. Rāmāyaṇa scenes, though familiar to the kings, common people and local architects, it found lesser expression in the monuments constructed during this period. The earliest known example is found in Deogarh Daśāvatāra temple of the 6th century A.D.⁵³ Here Rāmāyaṇa scenes include Rāma redeeming Ahalyā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā going into exile, all the three in the hermitage of Atri, Lakṣmaṇa mutilating Śūrpanakhā, Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā, Hanumāna bringing the mountain to cure Lakṣmaṇa etc.

⁴⁷ Longhurst, 'Ancient Brick Temples in Central Provinces', *ASIAR*, 1909-10, pp. 11-17.

⁴⁸ Dikshit, M.G., *Sirpur and Rajim Temples*, pp. 27-32.

⁴⁹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, pp. 143-148.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 154-155.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 135-143.

⁵² Refer to Appendix-I.

⁵³ Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, No. 70, pp. 16-18.

Supia pillar inscription of Skandagupta⁵⁴, Mandasor inscription of Bandhuvarman⁵⁵ and Gwalior Prasasti of Bhoja⁵⁶ mention Rāma *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes have a longer life than Rāmāyaṇa scenes. Another difference among the two is that Rāmāyaṇa scenes depicted Rāma's adulthood, while Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes are related to the childhood of Kṛṣṇa.

Deogarh (Lalitpur district, U.P.) Daśāvatāra panels⁵⁷ depict Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes. Among these scenes, some are a women handing over a child to Vasudeva, Nanda and Yaśodā with two children, Śakaṭavadha (killing of the cart demon), Kaṁsavadha, Kṛṣṇa receiving his friend Sudāmā, etc. Lakṣmaṇa temple at Sirpur⁵⁸ shows Keśivadha, Kāliyadamana and Kaṁsavadha scenes. Some new chapters of Kṛṣṇa's life are depicted here.

Various episodes of the early life of Kṛṣṇa came to be commonly used by the sculptors of the Pratihāra period. In Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior⁵⁹, they are carved in continuous panels. These include arrival of newly born child Kṛṣṇa at Gokula from the prison of Kaṁsa, Pūtana vadha, Śakaṭabhaṅga (killing of cart demon), Yamalārjuna episode (saving the two trees of Yamalārjuna), Keśivadha (killing of horse demon), Dadhimanthana, Kāliyadamana, Mallayuddha (wrestling), Kuvalayapīḍavadha (killing of elephant Kuvalaya), etc.

⁵⁴ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁵⁵ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁵⁶ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁵⁷ Vats, M.S., 'Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *MASI*, No. 70, pp. 18-20.

⁵⁸ *ASIAR*, 1909-10, pp. 27-32.

⁵⁹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, pp. 135-143.

Śiva temple at Dhang⁶⁰ (Bhind district) and Bateśvara temple complex⁶¹ (Morena district) contain similar Kṛṣṇa līlā scenes.

From these scenes of Kṛṣṇa-līlā, it appears that only the episodes of Kṛṣṇa's life pertaining to his childhood have been carved in the temples and not those connected with the later part of his life. Moreover, the scenes like *cīra-harana* and *rāsa-līlā* with gopis have not been shown in any of the temples of the Pratihāra period, which point out the fact that perhaps these scenes gained popularity in the successive centuries.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho⁶² is replete with the scenes of Kṛṣṇa līlā. One notable thing is that here Kṛṣṇa is shown in his boyhood. In one such scene, *Tṛṇāvratavadha* (killing of storm demon), Kṛṣṇa is shown seated on the shoulders of the demon. Several other scenes like *Kuvalayapīḍavadha*, *Kāliyanāga* episode, *Śakaṭabhaṅga* etc. All scenes project the power and vigour of the god even in his boyhood. As Devangana Desai says, Kṛṣṇa is represented as 'Daityāri', who vanquishes enemies.⁶³

Balarāma and Paraśurāma *avatāras*

Balarāma and Paraśurāma *avatāras* found less expression in inscriptions and monuments. An image of Balarāma datable to 5th century A.D. has been found from Indore⁶⁴ and is now preserved in the collection of the Gwalior Museum. Balarāma is standing under the canopy of a five hooded snake. In the upper left hand, he holds a ploughshare and in the lower left the wine flask. Upper right hand is

⁶⁰ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 78.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 83.

⁶² Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

⁶³ Desai, Devangana, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Desai, Kalpana, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 135.

resting on the serpent hood and lower right hand is placed on his waist. It is an early four handed image of Balarāma.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho⁶⁵ shows Balarāma in the act of killing suta Lomahaṛṣana. Balarāma has conopy of serpent hoods, wearing *kuṇḍala*, *graiveyaka*, *hāra*, *kaustubha maṇi*, *keyūra* etc. The god is two armed and pot-bellied.

Both Balarāma and Paraśurāma found place among the Daśāvatāras in Bateśvara temple complex⁶⁶ (Morena district), Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior⁶⁷, Sun temple at Sesai⁶⁸ (Shivpuri) and Sun temple at Markhera⁶⁹ (Tikamgarh district). Bandhogarh rock inscription of Yuvarājadeva⁷⁰ mentions Balarāma.

Buddha and Kalki *avatāras*

Buddha and Kalki, the two most recent *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, found representation in sculpture only towards the end of this period (c. A.D. 300-1000). Pratihāra group of temples – Bateśvara temple complex⁷¹ (Morena district) and Caturbhujā temple at Gwalior⁷² contain images of these two *avatāras*. Besides, Kalki *avatāra* found reference in Sirpur stone inscription of Mahāsivagupta.⁷³

Buddha *avatāra* doesn't figure as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the inscriptions in Madhya Pradesh from c.A.D. 300-1000.

⁶⁵ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, p. 288.

⁶⁶ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 135-143.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 161-168.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 143-145.

⁷⁰ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁷¹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 85.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 135-143.

⁷³ Refer to Appendix-I.

II

Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu

Anantaśāyī form of Viṣṇu was quite popular in the Gupta period. However, later on its popularity decreased. The first ever known Anantaśāyī or Śesaśāyī image of Viṣṇu is found in the Udaigiri caves in Vidiśā district.⁷⁴ The god is sleeping on the coils of primeval snake surrounded by Brahmā, Lakṣmī and Garuḍa.

Mandasor inscription of Naravarman⁷⁵ refers to one who is sleeping on the waters of bed. Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh⁷⁶ (Lalitpur district, U.P.) has a four-armed Viṣṇu sitting on Ananta, holding his usual attributes. His foot is being pressed by Lakṣmī. In another figure from the same temple, the god is sleeping on seven hooded snake, surrounded by Lakṣmī, Garuḍa and other gods.

Varāha temple at Deogarh⁷⁷ has a figure of Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī at his feet and Brahmā seated on a lotus at the centre over the reclining figure. The god is surrounded by various gods and goddesses. Similar figure has been found among the rock cut sculptures at Sindursi⁷⁸ (Jabalpur district) belonging to the Gupta period.

In the sub period (c. A.D. 550-800), too, the Anantaśāyī Viṣṇu remained a favourite sculpture in the temples. Lakṣmaṇa temple at

⁷⁴ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, p. 38-39.

⁷⁵ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁷⁶ Vats, M.S., *Gupta Temple at Deogarh*, *MAI*, No. 70, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁷ Banerjee, N.R., 'New Light on Gupta Temples at Deogarh', *JAS*, Vol. V, No. 1&2, pp. 37-49.

⁷⁸ Trivedi, C.B., 'Rockcut Sculptures at Sindursi', *PP*, vol. IV, pt. I, p. 43.

Sirpur⁷⁹ (Raipur district) contains a large figure of Viṣṇu reclining on the folds of serpent Śeṣa, the whole scene representing the birth of Brahmā.

Rājīvalocana temple at Rajim⁸⁰ (Raipur district) has an Anantaśāyī image to which a Garuḍa at base was added during the Pāṇḍuvaṃśin period.

This form of Viṣṇu seems to have lost its importance in the last sub period (c. A.D. 800-1000). The only known such image is found from Dharmanātha temple at Dhamnār.⁸¹

III

Caturbhuja Viṣṇu

Viṣṇu in his different forms with his attributes remained prevalent throughout the period. Caturbhuja image or four armed Viṣṇu was a popular form of Viṣṇu worship throughout the period. The first such Caturbhuja image is found from Ramgarh hill in Vidiśā district.⁸² Six Caturbhuja images are found from this place.

Udaigiri caves⁸³ have five such images. Ēraṇ in Sagar district has a group of four east facing temples.⁸⁴ All these shrines and relics are dedicated to a Caturbhuja image of Viṣṇu holding sword and goad.

⁷⁹ ASIAR, 1909-100, pp. 11-17.

⁸⁰ Meister & Dhaky, *North India: Period of Early maturity*, pp. 299-317.

⁸¹ ASIAR, 1905-6, pp. 107-113.

⁸² Berkson, Carmel, 'Some new finds at Ramgarh Hill Vidisha district', *AA*, Vol. 40 (1978), pp. 215-232.

⁸³ Patil, D.R., *The Monuments of Udayagiri Hill*, pp. 25-41.

⁸⁴ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, pp. 18-56.

The Caturbhuja image is found among the rock cut sculptures at Sindursi⁸⁵ (Jabalpur district) and Dithwara⁸⁶ (Jabalpur district) in Madhya Pradesh.

Varāha temple at Deogarh⁸⁷, belonging to end of 5th century A.D., has similar such image. Caturbhuja standing image found less representation in second sub period (c.A.D. 550-800). The only known image was in Rājīvalocana temple.⁸⁸

Among the Pratihāra group of temples, Temple 20 in Naresar group of temples⁸⁹ (Morena district) has one four armed standing Viṣṇu with two *āyudhapuruṣas-Cakrapuruṣa* and *Gadādevī* and wearing *kiriṭa-mukuta*, *ekāvalī* etc. Caturbhuja temple at Gwalior⁹⁰ has four such images.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho⁹¹ contains four images of standing Viṣṇu. The four armed god is standing in *tribhaṅga* pose holding *gadā* and *śaṅkha*. One hand of the god is in *abhayamudrā*. The god is wearing *Kiriṭa-mukuta*, *Kaustubha maṇi* and *vanamālā*

Garuḍāsīna Viṣṇu

Garuḍāsīna Viṣṇu was another popular form of Viṣṇu. Garuḍa, the vehicle of Viṣṇu has always been popular among the people of Madhya Pradesh. The famous Heliodorus pillar of Besnagar⁹² of 3rd

⁸⁵ Trivedi, C.B., 'Rockcut Sculptures at Sindursi', *PP*, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 44.

⁸⁶ Trivedi, C.B., 'Newly discovered Gupta sculptures from Madhya Pradesh', *Puratattva*, No. 11, pp. 150-151.

⁸⁷ Banerjee, N.R., 'New Lights at the Gupta Temple at Deogarh', *JAS*, Vol. IV, No. 182, pp. 37-42.

⁸⁸ Dikshit, M.G., *Sirpur and Rajim Temples*, pp. 29-32, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 56.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 135-143.

⁹¹ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

⁹² *ASIAR*, 1913-14, p.

century B.C. alludes to the construction of a *garuḍadhvaja* by *bhāgavata* Heliodorus.

Vāmana temple at Marhia⁹³ has an image of Garuḍa bearing aloft Viṣṇu. Mandasor inscription of Mahārāja Gauri⁹⁴ invokes Garuḍāsīna form of Viṣṇu. A village near Kharod in Bilaspur district contains a small temple having a little image of Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa.⁹⁵ Khoh inscription of Mahārāja Sarvanātha (A.D. 512-13)⁹⁶ has Garuḍa, the vehicle of Viṣṇu as counter surface mark.

In the second subperiod, (c. A.D. 550-800), Pāṇḍuvamśin rulers introduced *śaṅkha*, *cakra* and *garuḍa* as a seal emblem on their inscriptions.⁹⁷

Among the Pratihāra group of temples, Baṭeśvara temple complex⁹⁸, Śiva temple at Terahi⁹⁹ (ranod district), Śiva temple at Pathari¹⁰⁰ (Vidiśā district), and Gadarmal temple at Badoh¹⁰¹ (Vidiśā district) has the image of Garuḍāsīna Viṣṇu as *lalāṭabimba*.

Jarai Math Temple at Barwasagar¹⁰² (Jhansi, U.P.) has a four armed Viṣṇu seated on Garuḍa just above the *lalāṭabimba*.

The popularity of Garuḍa as an ensign of Viṣṇu culminated in the adoption of sign of flying Garuḍa in human form in Paramāra

⁹³ Chandra, Pramod, 'A Vamana Temple at Marhia', *AA*, Vol. 32, pp. 125-145.

⁹⁴ Refer to Appendix-I.

⁹⁵ *ASIAR*, 1909-10, pp. 11-17.

⁹⁶ Fleet, J.F., 'Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of Maharaja Sarvanatha', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 125-129.

⁹⁷ Sircar, D.C., 'Bonda Plates of Mahāsiva Tivara', *EI*, Vol. 34, pp. 111-116.

⁹⁸ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 85.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 121-125.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 129-132.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁰² Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 168.

inscriptions. Dharmapuri grant of Vākpatirājadeva (dated 974-75 A.D.)¹⁰³ shows humanified Garuḍa holding a snake in its left hand.

Hayagrīva

Hayagrīva, the animal-human form of Viṣṇu, deserves notice. Though present in some parts of Madhya Pradesh, since the Gupta period, it found less representation among the sculptures. A small complex of Gupta period depicting Viṣṇu in the form of Hayagrīva is found in central Madhya Pradesh on the two sides of Narmada in Vindhyan range. One is in Pipariya¹⁰⁴ and another image is found in Vāmana temple at Marhia¹⁰⁵, both in Jabalpur district.

Long after these Gupta period temples, Hayagrīva appeared in Lakṣmaṇa Temple at Khajuraho.¹⁰⁶ Khajuraho inscription of the reign of King Dhaṅga (A.D. 953-54) mentions a person Devapāla as Hayapati.¹⁰⁷

Yogāsana Viṣṇu

Towards the end of this period, Yogāsana Viṣṇu, a new form, emerged. Caturbhuja temple at Gwalior has a four armed seated image of Viṣṇu wearing *Kirītamukuṭa*.¹⁰⁸ Another such figure is found on the upper lintel just above the *lalātabimba*.

Sun temple at Sesai¹⁰⁹ (Shivpuri district) has one lintel dedicated to this Yogāsana form of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu holding *padma* and *śaṅkha* in his two upper hands is shown with his lower hands in *dhyāna mudrā*.

¹⁰³ Trivedi, H.V., Dharmapuri Grant of Vākpatirājadeva, *CII*, Vol. VII, pt. II, pp. 10-14.

¹⁰⁴ Meister & Dhaky, *Foundation of The North Indian Style*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Chandra, Pramod, 'A Vāmana Temple at Marhia', *AA*, vol. 32, pp. 125-145.

¹⁰⁶ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

¹⁰⁷ Refer to Appendix-I.

¹⁰⁸ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of the Pratihara Period*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 161-168.

On two sides of the god are carved Śiva and Brahmā along with Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Pārvatī.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho has several images of Yogāsana Viṣṇu. In each of these images, the four armed god is shown with two lower hands in *dhyānamudrā* and two upper carrying *gadā* and *cakra*.¹¹⁰ A tortoise incarnation of Viṣṇu is represented on a lotus seed in this image.

Viṣṇu with Consort

Viṣṇu with his consort Lakṣmī was very rarely represented. Only towards the end of this research period (c. A.D. 300-1000), they found a place in the sculptures of the temple. Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho¹¹¹ has an image of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa in *ālīṅgana* posture. The Nārāyaṇa image is carrying *śankha*, *gadā* and *cakra* in three hands and embracing Lakṣmī with the fourth hand. The god is wearing *kiriṭamukuta*, torque, *yajñopavita* etc., while Lakṣmī is wearing *mukuta*, *kuṇḍala*, torque and *hāra*.

A monolithic temple at Dhamnār contains an image of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa.¹¹² Dhamnar is halfway between Kotah and Ujjain in Central India. The block over the doorway of the temple contains a seated image of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. The god is shown holding *gadā* in his upper right hand. The lower left hand of the god is around Lakṣmī's waist. Rest of the hands are broken. Over the entrance of the porch is a couple of figures probably showing Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. The date assigned to the temple is 800 A.D.

¹¹⁰ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, p. 288.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 135-143.

¹¹² *ASIAR 1905-06*, pp. 107-115.

IV

Besides all the forms of Viṣṇu, some syncretic forms of Viṣṇu deserve notice. Three such forms appeared towards the end of this period- *Trimurti*, *Vaikunṭha* and *Harihara* form.

Trimurti

Trimurti form presents Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva combined into one image along with the image of the Sun. The first epigraphical reference to this composite form, perhaps, is found in Kāritalai stone inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II (dated A.D. 840-41)¹¹³ in which he paid obeisance to Druhiṇa (Brahmā), Upendra (Viṣṇu) and Rudra (Śiva) simultaneously. However, it does not refer to the sun.

Jarai Math temple at Barwasagar, Jhansi¹¹⁴ (Pratihāra period) has the seated image of Viṣṇu on Garuḍa, flanked by four armed Brahmā on his mount Hamṣa and Śiva seated on Nandi bull.

A temple in Gyarpur, Gwalior, belonging to the 10th century A.D. contains another such *Trimurti* with Viṣṇu flanked by Brahmā and Śiva.¹¹⁵

It appears that this *Trimurti* form was quite popular in Bundelkhand area towards the end of this research period (c.A.d. 300-1000). In Bargaon, 13 miles from Damoh, an image depicts bull faced Mahādeva in sitting posture, surmounted by Viṣṇu standing with feminine grace and holding *gadā*¹¹⁶ On the opposite side, bearded

¹¹³ Refer to Appendix-I.

¹¹⁴ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, p. 168.

¹¹⁵ Garde, M.B., *ARG*, 1932-33, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁶ Hiralal, 'Trimurti in Bundelkhand', *Indian Antiquary, The Journal of Oriental Research*, (hereafter *IA*), Vol. 67, (1918), pp. 136-138.

Brahmā is depicted. All three were combined into one main figure of Sūrya. A broken figure of Chāya is also found alongside.

In Mādhia, 35 miles north east of Damoh, a six handed image is found¹¹⁷. It has four hands of Viṣṇu and two hands of Brahmā and Śiva each. This figure holds *triśula*, *mṛgāṅka* (of Śiva), lotus (of Viṣṇu) and an open hand with thumb bent (Brahmā). Other figures in this image include Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī, Śiva-Pārvatī, Brahmā-Brahmānī, Garuḍa and bull.

Above the doorway of the Sun temple at Sesai (Shivpuri district)¹¹⁸ is carved in the centre an image of Viṣṇu seated in *padmāsana* holding *śaṅkha* and *padma* in his upper hands and his lower pair of hands kept in *dhyānamudrā* with upturned palms in his lap. He is flanked by Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī, both seated in *lalitāsana* at the ends of the lintel on the left and right sides respectively. Goddess Sarasvatī holds a Viṇā in her hands and Lakṣmī carries a lotus stalk and *varada-mudrā* in her left and right hands respectively. The images of Brahmā and Śiva are carved in between the images of Viṣṇu and his consorts to show the idea of unity in the three gods of Hindu trinity. Sarasvatī for the first time is shown with Viṣṇu, here.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho¹¹⁹ contains an eight armed and three headed composite image of Sūrya carrying *varada*, rosary, *triśūla* and lotus flower in right hands and lotus flower, *śaṅkha* and *Kamaṇḍalu* in left hands. This image represents *Hari-Hara Hiraṇyagarbha* image, combining the characteristic of Hari, Hara, Sūrya and Balarāma.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Trivedi, R.D., *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, pp. 35-39.

¹¹⁹ Krishna, Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

Vaikunṭha

The *Vaikunṭha* form of Viṣṇu is referred in the Stone inscription of Yaśovarman¹²⁰ found at Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho. This inscription refers to the dedication of the temple to the *Vaikunṭha* form of Viṣṇu distinguished by three heads respectively– lion, man and boar which corresponds with the image now inscribed in the sanctum.¹²¹

Harihara

The Harihara form represents the inseparable unity of Viṣṇu and Śiva in a single body where the right half of the body shows Śiva and left half Viṣṇu with their distinguishing features like crown, attributes, *vāhanas* etc.

Śiva temple at Dang (district Bhind)¹²² has a four armed Harihara standing with a combined body the right half of which shows Śiva and the left half Viṣṇu, crowned with *jaṭābhāra* and *kirīta-mukūṭa* respectively. The image holds Śiva's *triśūla* in the upper right hand and Viṣṇu's *cakra* in upper left hand. In the background stands the Nandi bull whose head is visible on the right side of the god.

Jarai Math temple at Barwasagar (22 km east of Jhansi in Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh)¹²³ has one such Harihara image.

The north western subsidiary shrine of Lakṣmaṇa Temple at Khajuraho¹²⁴ contains one Harihara image. The north eastern shrine has one peculiar image. It shows an image of god seated in *pralambapādāsana*. The two armed god is seated with both hands

¹²⁰ Refer to Appendix-I.

¹²¹ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

¹²² Trivedi, R.D, *Temples of The Pratihara Period*, pp. 35-39.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 168.

¹²⁴ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, pp. 281-309.

being held on the knees without any attributes. Below his seat is a miniature figure of Nandi. Also, this figure is attended by *Śaṅkhapuruṣa* and *Cakrapuruṣa*. It is perhaps a new variety of Harihara form, according to Krishna Deva.

Viśvarūpa Form of Viṣṇu

Viśvarūpa form of Viṣṇu is the last to emerge in the sequence of the syncretic forms of Viṣṇu. Though as early as Mandasor inscription of Naravarman (dated A.D. 406-06)¹²⁵ mentions a form of Viṣṇu who has thousand heads (*sahasra sirase tasmāpuruṣāya*). However, it is only towards the end of our period (c. A.D. 300-1000) that this image found a place among the Vaiṣṇava images.

Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajuraho has a twelve-headed and twelve armed form of Viṣṇu¹²⁶. The god is shown with twelve heads. The principal head was broken. Lion's head and boar's head on two extremes are preserved. Subsidiary nine heads are arranged fan shaped behind the three large heads. A headless Garuḍa is standing in praying attitude. Lakṣmī is shown seated on a stool. The halo of the god is flanked by Brahmā and Śiva.

V

Thus the period c.A.D. 300-1000 shows an evolutionary pattern in the forms of Viṣṇu being worshipped in different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Earlier Vāmana, Varāha, are found as the principal deities. However, later on this trend changed. Though these deities continued to be worshipped, they found a secondary place in a sanctum. In stead, we find Vaikunṭha form, Rājivalocana (lotus eyed

¹²⁵ Bhandarkar, D.R., 'Mandasor Inscription of Naravarman', *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 261-266.

¹²⁶ Deva, Krishna, *Temples of Khajuraho*, p. 295.

god probably Rāma), Caturbhuja Viṣṇu, as the principal deity. Subsidiary shrines surrounding a temple continued to be dedicated to Vāmana, Nṛsimha, Varāha *avatāras*. However, throughout the period, no separate shrine is found dedicated to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa *avatāras*, though they were repeatedly portrayed in different panels of the temple throughout the period. Balarāma, Paraśurāma, Buddha, Kalki, Matsya or Kūrma have even less representation.

CHAPTER – VI

CONCLUSION

The present study shows the varying trends of Vaiṣṇava worship in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh region in the period c.A.D. 300-1000.

New regional trends emerge in this period. Geographically, the spread of Vaiṣṇava centres to different parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh took place in stages. Starting from the Vidiṣā area, in eastern Malwa in which the Heliodorus pillar and a temple complex were erected, a Vaiṣṇava centre was in existence till the end of the 3rd century B.C. In the Gupta period, different parts of the Northern Madhya Pradesh showed Vaiṣṇava leanings, while in post-Gupta period only the Chhattisgarh region yield evidence for Vaiṣṇava affiliation. Even then, material for the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in the region is in form of stray evidences of Vaiṣṇavite names or of Vaiṣṇava symbols on seals. Only towards the end of this period, a new Vaiṣṇava enclave came up in Sirpur. Towards the end of this period (c.A.D. 300-1000), multiple Vaiṣṇava centres emerge in most parts of Madhya Pradesh. However, it remained dominant in Northern and Central Madhya Pradesh. Among these, regions in and around Gwalior are specially noted for Vaiṣṇava affiliation especially under the rule of the Imperial Pratihāras. This is evident from the ancient name of Gwalior itself Gopagiri or Gopādri¹ (Gopa being the well known term associated with Kṛṣṇa).

As in the case of other religions, Vaiṣṇavism, too, received royal patronage from different dynasties at different stages of time. The Guptas and their feudatories patronized it. All the Gupta rulers used

¹ Hultzsch, E., 'Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhāṭṭasvamin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 154-162.

the epithet *Paramabhāgavata* to express their Vaiṣṇava leanings. In some cases, particularly Udaigiri caves in Vidiśā district, Gupta ruler may have used a particular deity (here Varāha) to give allegorical expression of their power (as explained in Chapter-II). In the post Gupta period, form of patronage differed under the Śara-bhapuriya and Pāṇḍuvaṃśin rulers. They patronized it to the extent of stray donation of land to brāhmaṇas of Vaiṣṇavite leanings. The Pāṇḍuvaṃśin rulers used the epithet *Paramavaiṣṇava* to show their Vaiṣṇava leanings. In the third sub period c. A.D. 800-1000, different rulers patronized Vaiṣṇavism in a more explicit form. The Gurjara Pratihāra ruler Bhoja took the title of Ādivarāha.² Leaving aside the disguised link with the deity of the early period, they unequivocally assumed the mythical deeds of the Varāha along with the name. Several other rulers including the Candellas (whose case has already been discussed) patronized Vaiṣṇavism to further their claims of supremacy.

The evolutionary aspect of Vaiṣṇavism is also reflected in the form of Viṣṇu worshipped over the period (c. A.D. 300-1000). Some of the incarnations/forms like Varāha, Nṛsimha, Vāmana, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma remained prevalent throughout the period. Different regions in most cases, preferably inclined to a particular form. New names are added to the list of incarnations (as the sculptures depict) towards the end of this period. Even some of the forms, for example Nara Nārāyaṇa, declined in importance in post Gupta period and onwards. This aspect of continuity and change is well reflected in the forms of Viṣṇu worshipped during the time span of this research work.

² Hultsch, E., 'Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhāṭṭasvamin Temple at Gwalior', *EI*, Vol. I, pp. 154-162. This was used also in the motif and terminology for the coin named *Ādivarāha-dramma*.

APPENDIX - I

VAISNAVITE NAMES AND EPITHETS IN INSCRIPTIONS: A
CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED CHART

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Ēraṇ Stone Inscription of Samudra Gupta [Bhandarkar, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 220-224]	Lost, second half of 4 th century A.D.	Gupta	Acyuta, Janārdana	-	Sagar District
Udayagiri Cave Inscription of Chandragupta, year 82 [Bhandarkar, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 242-244]	A.D. 400-01	Gupta	Not named	Viṣṇudāsa (slave of Viṣṇu)	Vidiśā District
Mandasor Inscription of Naravarman, The Krita year 461 [Bhandarkar, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 261-266]	A.D. 405-406	Gupta	Sahasra-sirase Puruṣāya, Vāsudeva	-	Mandasor District
Tumain Inscription of Kumārgupta and Skandagupta, G.E. 116 [<i>EI-26</i> , pp. 115-118]	A.D. 435	Gupta	Lost	Harideva, Śrīdeva	Guna District
Mandasor Inscription of Kumāragupta and Bandhuvarman, The Krita years 493 and 529 [Bhandarkar, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 322-332]	A.D. 437-438 A.D. 473-74	Gupta	Śāraṅgin (one who holds bow)	-	Mandasor District

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Pattana Plates of Pravarasena II [EI-23, p. 81-888]	4472 A.D.	Vākāṭaka	Mahāpuruṣah pādāmūla	Nārāyaṇarāja	Multai tahsil, Betul District
Supia Pillar Inscription of the Time of Skandagupta: The Year 141 [Bhandarkar, CII-III, pp. 317-19]	A.D. 460-61	Gupta	Rāma	-	Rewa District
Mandasor Inscription of Malva Samvat 524 [EI-27, pp. 12-18]	A.D. 467-68	Gupta	Govinda	-	Mandasor District
Khoh Copper-Plate Inscription of the Mahārāja Hastin. The year 156 [Fleet, CII-III, pp. 93-100]	A.d. 475-76	Parivrājaka Mahārāja	-	Gopasvāmin	Nagod
Ēraṇ Stone Pillar Inscription of Budhagupta. The Year 165. [Bhandarkar, CII-III, pp. 339-41]	A.D. 485-86	Gupta	Janārdana, Caturbhuja	Mātrviṣṇu, Dhanyaviṣṇu, Indraviṣṇu, Varuṇaviṣṇu, Hariviṣṇu.	Sagar District
Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of The Mahārāja Jayanātha year 177 [Fleet, CII-III, pp. 121-125]	A.D. 496-97	Parivrājaka Mahārāja	Bhagvat pādevyah	-	Nagod District
Mandasor Fragmentary Inscription [EI-30, pp. 127-132]	End of 5 th Century A.D.	Mānavāyani	Cakrapāni, Garuta-madratha-yāyin [one who moves in the chariot of Garuḍa]	-	Mandasor

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Ēraṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāna [Fleet, <i>CII-III</i> pp. 158-161]	Not given, end of 5 th century A.D.	Hūṇa	Varāhamurtti, Nārāyaṇa	Mātrviṣṇu, Dhanyaviṣṇu	Sagar District
Ēraṇ Posthumous Stone Pillar Inscription of Goparāja. The year 191 [Fleet, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 91-93]	A.D. 510-11	Gupta	-	Goparāja, Mādhava	Sagar District
Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of the Mahārāja Sarvanātha. Year 193 [Fleet, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 125-129]	A.d. 512-513	Parivrājaka Mahārāja	Bhāgavata pādānām	-	Nagod District
Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of the Mahārāja Saṁksobha. The year 209 [Fleet, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 112-116]	A.D. 528-29	Parivrājaka Mahārāja	Vāsudeva	-	Nagod District
Mandasor Stone Inscription of Yaśodharman and Viṣṇuvardehan. Malva year 589 [Fleet, <i>CII-III</i> , pp. 150-158].	A.D. 533-34		Hari, Uddhava	Varāhadāsa [Slave of Varāha]	Mandasor District
Pipardulā Plates of Narendra, Year 3. [Shastri, Pt. II, pp. 5-7]	First half of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabha-purīyas	-	Nandapura bhoga	Raipur District
Kurud Plates of Narendra, year 4. [EI-31, pp. 263-66]	First half of 6 th century A.d.	Śarabha-purīyas	-	Keśavaka village	Raipur district

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Rawan Plates of Narendra [Shastri A.M., pt. II, pp. 12-13]	First half of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabhapuriyas	Śrīdharasvāmin		Raipur District
Mahasamund Plates of Sudevarāja [JESI Vol X, 1978, pp. 93-97]	Later half of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabhapuriyas	-	Mādhavasvāmin	Raipur District
Sarangarh Plates of Sudevarāja [Shastri, pt. II, pp. 50-52]	Later half of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabhapuriyas	-	Viṣṇusvāmin	Raigarh District
A stray Śarabhapuriya Plate [Shastri, pt. II, pp. 59-61]	Later half of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabhapuriyas	-	Anantasvāmin	Raipur District
Mallar Plates of Pravararāja, Year 3 [Shastri, pt. II, pp. 56-58]	Last part of 6 th century A.D.	Śarabhapuriyas	-	Śaṅkhacakra-bhoga	Bilaspur District
Bonda Plates of Mahāsīva Tivara, yr. 5, [EI-34, pp. 111-116]	Last quarter of 7 th century A.D.	Pāṇḍu-vaṃśins	-	Madhusūdana Opādhyāya, Viṣṇuhoṣa, Śrīdhara bhutasvāmin, Viṣṇubhavasvāmin, Vāmanasvāmin, Gopendrasvāmin	Raigarh District
Adhabhara Plates of Mahānannarāja [EI-31, pp. 219-222]	Later half of 7 th century A.D.	Pāṇḍu-vaṃśins	-	Nārāyaṇa Opādhyāya	Bilaspur District

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Sirpur Stone Inscription of the Time of Mahāśvagupta [EI, II, pp. 184-197]	Later half of 7 th century A.D.	Pāṇḍu-vamśins	Acyuta, Hari, Nṛsimha, Kaṁsa- niṣudana [Killer of Kaṁsa], Kalki	Vāmana, Śrīdhara	Raipur District
Senkapat Inscription of the Time of Śivagupta Balārajuna [EI-31, pp. 31-36]	Last part of 7 th century A.D.	Pāṇḍu-vamśins	Viṣṇu	-	Raipur District
Rajim Stone Inscription of the Nala King Vilāstunga [EI-26, pp. 49-58]	Middle of 8 th century A.D.	Nala	Rājivalocana (lotus eyed god) Viṣṇu, Varāha, Hari, Vāmana	-	Raipur District
'Kāritalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja I' [CII-IV, pt. I, pp. 182]	A.D. 840-41	Kalacuri	Upendra	-	Jabalpur District
Pathari Pillar Inscription of Prabala [EI-9, pp. 248-250]	A.D. 861	Rāstrakuta	Murāri, Kṛṣṇa, Hari, Trivikrama, Viṣṇu		Vidiśā District
Two Inscriptions of Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin Temple at Gwalior [EI-I, pp. 154-162]	A.D. 875 and A.D. 876	Pratihāra	Viṣṇu, Vaillabhaṭṭasvāmin	Śrīmad Ādivariha	Gwalior
Gwalior Prasasti of kind Bhoja [EI-18, pp. 99-104]	Not mentioned, First half of 10 th century A.D.	Pratihāra	Lakṣmaṇa, Narakadviṣah (enemy of Naraka) Nārāyaṇa, Rāma	-	Gwalior

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Bandhogarh Rock Inscriptions of Yavarājadeva I [CII, Vol. IV, pt. I pp. 182-185]	2 nd half of 9 th century A.D.	Kalacuri	Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha Ādivarāha, Paraśurāma	-	Rewa District
Gopalpur rock Inscription of Yuvarājadeva I [CII-IV, pt. I, pp. 185-186]	2 nd half of 9 th century A.D.	Kalacuri	Haladhara	-	Rewa district
Kāritalai Stone Inscription of Lakṣmaṇarāja II [CII-IV, pt. I, pp. 186-195]	Not mentioned third quarter of 10 th century A.D.	Kalacuri	Varāha, Trivikrama, Somasvāmin	-	Jabalpur District
Kalacuri Inscription from Kāritalai [EI-33, pp. 186-188]	Not mention-ed third quarter of 10 th century A.D.	Kalacuri	Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī	-	Jabalpur District
Siyadoni Stone Inscription [EI-I, pp. 162-179]	A.D. 903-968	-	Viṣṇu- bhaṭṭāraka, Nārāyaṇa- bhaṭṭāraka, Tribhuvan- svāmīdeva, Vāmana- svāmīdeva, Cakra- svāmīdeva, Trivikrama, Murārī.	Keśava, Govinda, Mādhava.	Lalitpur District, Uttar Pradesh
Stone Inscription of Yaśovarman [EI-I, pp. 122-135]	A.D. 953-54	Candella	Vaikunṭha Vāsudeva, three strides of Hari	-	Khajuraho

Inscription	Date	Dynasty	Name/Form of Viṣṇu invoked	Personal names	Place
Dharamapuri Grant of Vākpatirājadeva [CII-VI, p. 10-14]	A.D. 974-75	Paramāra	Muraripu	-	Dharamapuri District
Three Copper Plates from Gaonri [EI-23, pp. 101-113]	A.D. 981 and A.D. 986	Paramāra	Muraripu, Lakṣmivadanenduna	Govindasvāmin, Vāmanasvāmin, Śrīnīvāsa, Viṣṇu, Hari, Govinda	Ujjain
Udepur Praśasti of kings of Malwa [EI-I, pp. 222-238]	Lost, end of 10 th century A.D.	Paramāra	Varāha	-	Gwalior
An unpublished Inscription in Gwalior Museum [EI-40, pp. 191-196]	A.D. 981	Kacchapa-ghāta	Viśvamurtti, Mādhava	-	Gwalior Museum
Thuban Inscription of Hari-rājadeva [EI-40, pp. 105-108]	A.D. 998-999	Pratihāra-kuṭa	Janārdana-vāsudeva, Narahari, Varāha, Killer of Hiranya-kaśipu	Keśava	Guna District
An Inscription from Gyaraspur [Grade, ARG, 1932-33, pp. 6-7]	10 th century A.D.	-	Jagannātha	-	Gwalior

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