

A PROJECT ON PRĀCHĪNA-VĀSTU-KOSHA



Kalpatharu Research Academy Publication
Chief Editor: DAIVAJÑA K.N. SOMAYAJI

ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF INDIAN TEMPLES

VOLUME ONE

By
Prof S.K.Ramachandra Rao



KALPATHARU RESEARCH ACADEMY

POST BOX NO.1857, BANGALORE-560018

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PREFACE

It is a matter for gratification that the Kalpatharu Research Academy, Bangalore, has been able to complete several significant projects within the short span of a decade of its existence. We have brought out six Volumes of Pratimā-Kosha (Encyclopaedia of Indian Iconography) and seven of the planned twelve Volumes of Āgama-kosha as major projects. Many other short time projects (like Mandalas in Temple Worship, Srichakra, Lalita-Kosha and Ganesha-Kosha) have also been published.

We have now launched on another major project dealing with Indian Art and Architecture in the traditional perspective, Prāchīna-Vāstu-Kosha. The first volume of this project is being published now. As our other publications, this also has been undertaken by the Kalpatharu Research Academy with the active co-operation of the Vidyāṅkārā, Sāstra-Chūdāmani, Vedānta-nidhi Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao, a versatile scholar and well-wisher of the Academy.

We look forward to the reception of our publications by all individuals and organizations, interested and involved in the resuscitation of the traditional values of Indian Culture. The Academy is contributing its mite to the proper understanding of the essential features of our heritage.

We are indebted to the author, Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao, and the officers of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Department of Education, Government of India, New Delhi. And to the Payonidhi Printers (P) Ltd. for neat and speedy execution of printing the work.

BANGALORE
14-1-1993

Daivajña K.N. Somayaji
Chief Editor and Director
Kalpatharu Research Academy.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Temples have naturally attracted the attention of the world, for they constitute a precious heritage of our country. Many volumes have appeared on this subject, treating it from historical, archaeological, photographic, and art perspectives. But the temple in India is a creation of Vāstu-Sāstra, Āgama and Silpa-sāstra; and this aspect has largely been ignored. It is in order to provide this basic understanding of the traditional approach to the Indian Temples that this project has been undertaken by the Kalpatharu Research Academy.

This is as it were an inside story of Indian Temples, an unravelling of the real significance of the structure of a shrine, based on texts, a large number of which are still in manuscripts, and on oral tradition preserved by the priestly class.

I am grateful to Daivajna K.N. Somayaji, Director of Kalpatharu Research Academy, at whose instance I have undertaken this work. I am grateful to Sri. B. Kesar Singh for the excellent photographs he has provided me with.

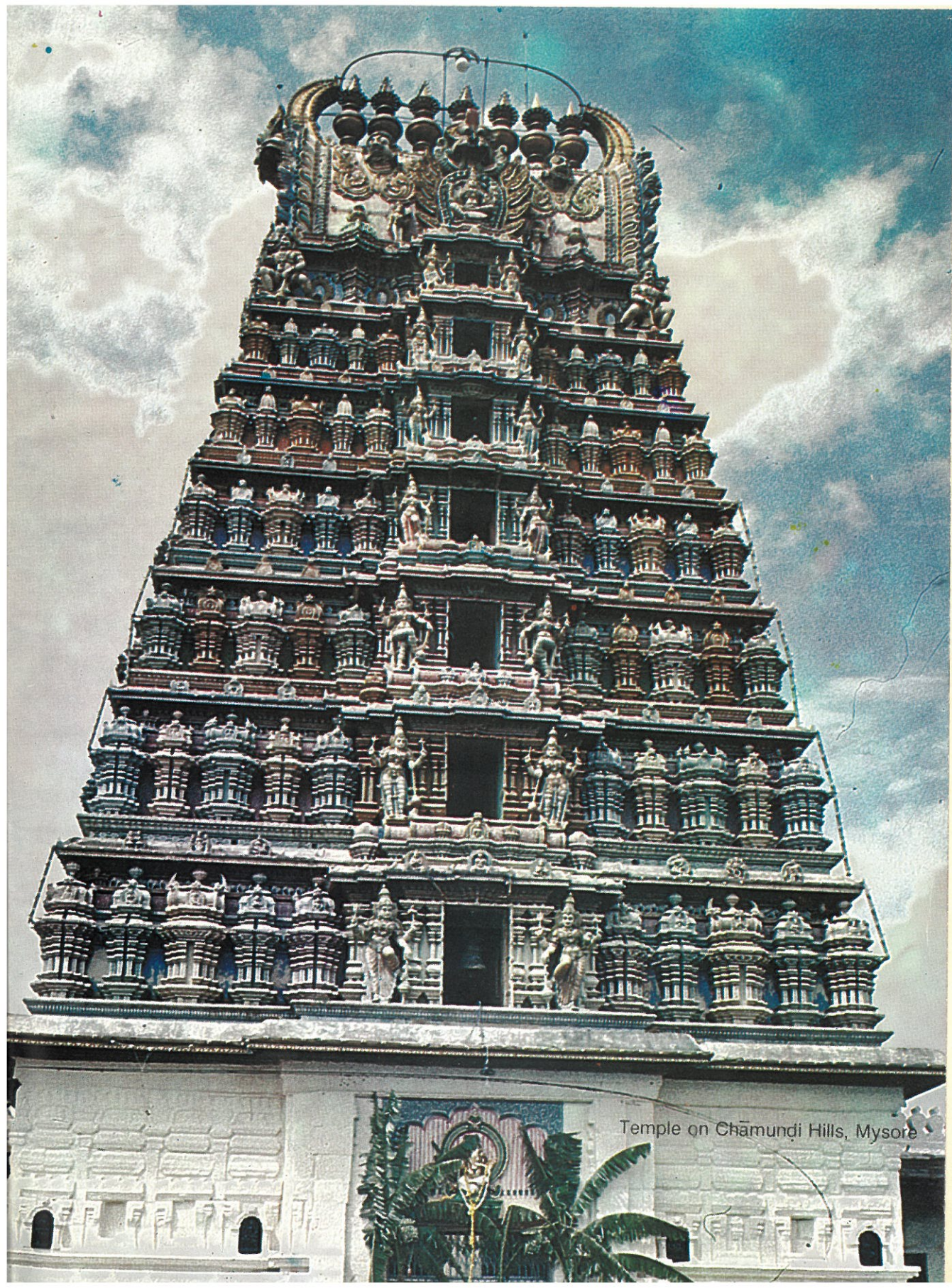
I thank M/s. Payonidhi Printers for the fine printing and get-up of this book and also for the co-operation they offered in the preparation of this volume.

S.K. Ramachandra Rao

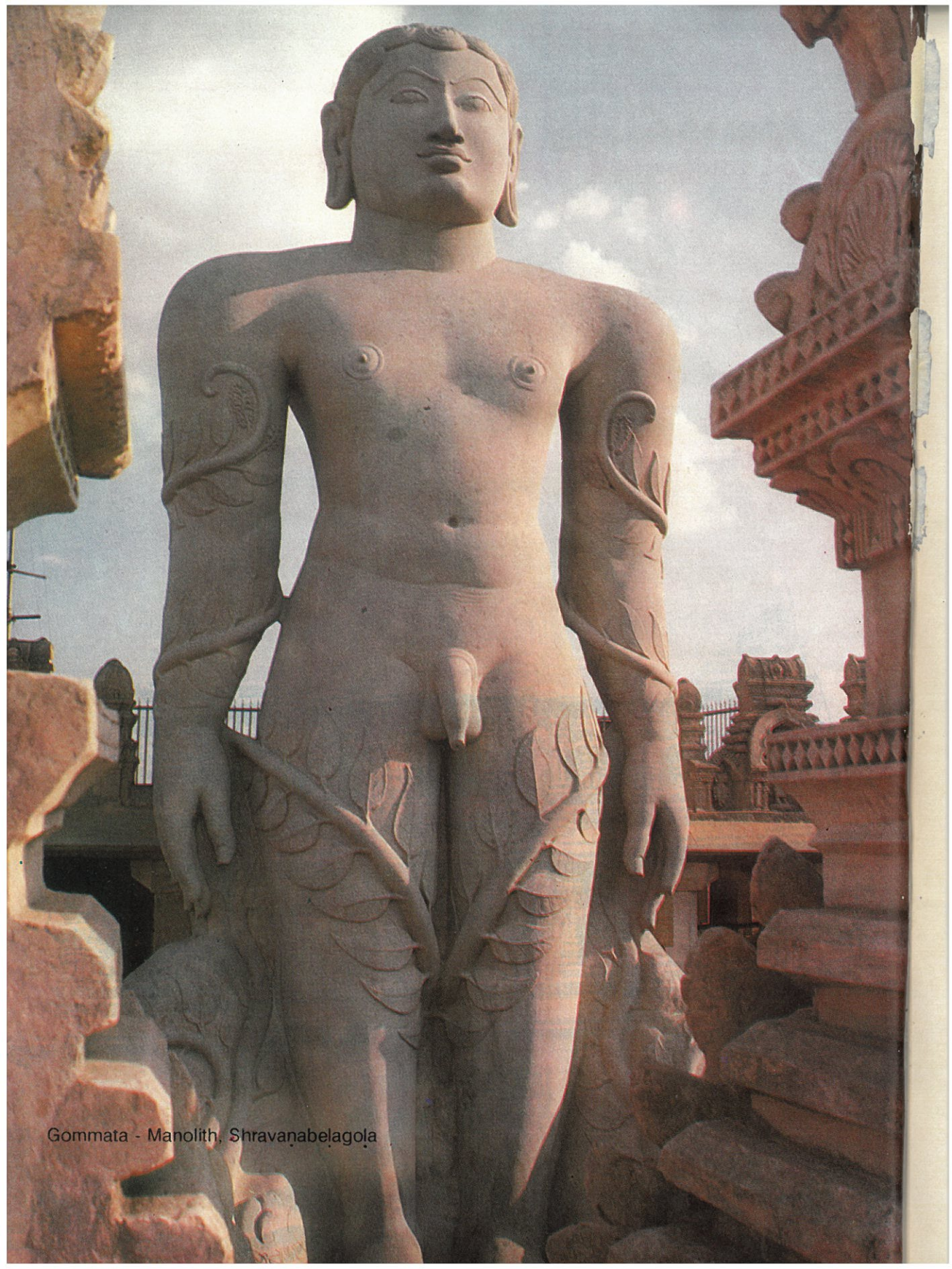
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Temple on Chamundi Hills, Mysore



Gommata - Manolih, Shravanabelagola

CHAPTER ONE

DIMENSIONS OF ANCIENT INDIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Art in India has never been regarded in terms of the 'useful' and the 'fine'. The distinction that is often made now between the craftsmen and the artists is not relevant in the Indian context. It is a borrowal from the West, and has caused quite some confusion here. In India, art not only developed out of the needs and functions of daily life, but kept itself closely aligned to utility in the household or in the community. Art to be meaningful must necessarily be useful; but the element of beauty is concurrently involved in it. Our domestic utensils and household appliances, furniture and fabric, ritual implements and religious structures are all essentially useful; but when there is in them an aesthetic appeal, it cannot be missed or ignored.

That is why Atharva-Veda describes art as an 'overflow' (an ucchhishta) of daily life. It is true that great art is an expression of individual genius, of the personal urges of an individual artist. But the mould into which it is poured reflects the needs of the community, the aspirations of a whole group of people, and the pressures within the

collective life. The Individual artist operates only as a chosen vehicle (a nimittamātra) for the community, and his talents must conform to the collective needs and tastes; he must follow the idiom that the community understands and approves. He is not encouraged to be eccentric or outlandish, at any rate in his art; and he is not allowed to regard himself as out of the ordinary. This is partly why our great specimens of ancient medieval art are without the 'signatures' of individual artists.

Further, when conformity to collective expectations and inclinations becomes dominant an element of storeotype enters into the art-works almost unavoidably, thus crystallizing characteristic forms and styles in accordance with cultural values. The context of conformity to the set stereotypes no doubt imposes a constraint upon the artist who relies on inspiration and aspires for originality. The artist would have to accommodate his genius within the framework of functional art. And we have eloquent specimens of such accommodation in our paintings, sculptures, handicrafts, household articles

and public buildings (like temples and palaces).

The role of an artist who operates within the stylized functional frame work is discussed in texts like Sukra-nīti- s̄ara.

It is true that not all icons, which answer to stylized stereotypes are equally attractive to all people. And some whose hearts are set on some icons will find beauty in them, although they may lack conformity with canonical injunctions.

एकेषामेव तद्रम्यं लग्नं यत्र च यस्य च हृत् ।
शास्त्रमानविहीनं यद्रम्यं तद्विपश्चिताम् ॥

(4,4,105)

However, an art-work that is beautiful and correct in all details is hard to find. So whatever is properly done (according to the traditional prescriptions) is indeed what is beautiful, and not otherwise.

सर्वाङ्गैः सर्वरम्यो हि कश्चिल्लक्ष्ये प्रजायते ।
शास्त्रमानेन यो रम्यः स रम्यो नान्य एव हि ॥

(op.cit. 104)

The artist must, therefore, work within the stylized framework and, whatever his innovations are, they must be within the constraints provided by the framework. And it is wrong to imagine that the constraints for the artist were either severe or numerous. In the field of icon-making, for instance, the textual iconometric prescriptions are valid only for icons meant to be ritualistically

installed and worshipped; for other images, the artist was free to exercise his fancy. So also in the building of temples, the sanctum and its surrounding came within the scope of traditional prescriptions; with regard to the structures outside this area and the decorations of the temple, the artists and builders could freely use their imagination. The texts employ the expression 'yathāruchi' ('according to ones own taste'); and it is not without significance.

The canonical texts of sculpture and architecture make mention of a detail known as 'ūhāpoha' ('ūhā' means conjecture or addition; 'apoha' meaning removal or omission). As architectural terms, 'ūhā' refers to the additional moulding of a member of the temple, not prescribed in the texts but necessary to fill a gap. And 'apoha' (also called pratyūhā) refers to leaving out a moulding that is indicated in the texts, so that a structure would be complete without it. Some texts, however, come down heavily on the sculptors who give free rein to this provision: Mānasāra (7, 268-269), for instance, says:

अज्ञानादङ्गहीनं च कर्ता चैव विनश्यति ।
तस्मात्तु शिल्पिभिः प्राज्ञैः ऊहापोहान्न योजयेत् ॥

But most of the texts extoll the reasonable, judicious and imaginative use of this provision. We read in Kārikāgama:

ऊहप्रत्यूहसंयुक्तं यथायुक्तिं यथारुचि ।

The craftsmen working in wood, gold, iron, cane or stone used their heads and hands while manufacturing their ware; functional propriety was of course the primary consideration but elegance was not to be ignored. Function determined the form of the article wrought by the craftsman; stereotypy largely referred to this aspect. But every article that was wrought by hands (and all Indian arts and crafts answered to this description) involved an element of novelty, innovation, originality or even genius. It was, in short, a work of art.

The ideas of mass production and mechanical reproduction were far from the minds of the ancient and medieval craftsmen-artists. They are evils introduced in recent years. They have not only arbitrarily distinguished between 'artists' and 'craftsmen', but have robbed the craftsmen of their artistic sensibilities and the artists of their craftsmanship.

In the socio-economic context of the ancient and middle ages, the artist-craftsmen were formed into 'gaṇas' (or śreṇis), or guilds. There are numerous references to five of such crafts-guilds collectively known as 'pañchajanāh' or 'pañchālas' suggesting that there was close cooperation among the five groups: workers in iron (āyasa), wood (dāru), copper (tāmra), stone (śilā) and gold (svarṇa).

The purāṇic accounts refer to the creator Viśva-karmā himself as the primordial craftsman who fashioned all things that human beings depend upon (viśva-karmā kartā śilpasahasrāṇām, manushyāś chopajāvanti, śilpam vai

bhūṣaṇādikam'), and relate that from him emerged five master-craftsmen: Suparṇa (who taught the art of making ornaments in gold, 'bhūṣaṇānām prayojakah'), Sānaga (worker in iron and other metals, 'karoti loha-karmāṇi'), Sanātana (worker in wood, maker of implements like ploughshare and vehicles like cart and chariot, and builder of houses and temples), Ahabhūna (fashioner of vessels and utensils for household use in brass and copper, 'gārhapatyadharma-sya vinirmātā) and Pratna (sculptor in stone 'śilā-karma cha śilpinām') (cf Brahmaṇḍa-purāṇa, pataḥ 2). These are identified with another group of five 'offsprings' of Viśva-karmā: Manu, Maya, Tvashṭā, Śilpi and Viśvajña, who are more intimately associated with traditional crafts, and regarded as the progenitors of several artisans (like goldsmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, stone-sculptors and masons).

There are references to manuals of handicrafts being prepared in this country between the eighth and the fourteenth centuries. Besides the five groups mentioned above, which are said to have descended directly from Viśvakarmā, the traditional list (Brahma-vaivarta-purāṇa) of nine handicrafts is frequently enumerated as likewise originating from Viśvakarmā; and this is more comprehensive.

(1) svarṇa-kāra: goldsmiths and jewellers.

(2) śaṁkha-kāra: shell-workers, skilled in carving ivory, tortoise-shell, bones of animals and snail-shells.

(3) mṛt-pañcha: workers in pottery, ceramic, brick, clay and terra cotta.

(4) kuvindaka: weavers in cotton, silk, wool and gold lace; skilled in brocades, embroidery; the group also includes mat weavers and workers in coir (kayar, coconut-fibre), felt rugs and pile carpets.

(5) kāṇḍa-kāra: workers in pith, reed and rush; the group includes makers of flower garlands (mālā-kāra) and gardeners in general.

(6) charma-kāra: leather-workers.

(7) pratimā-kāra: workers who make images and dolls in metal, wood, clay or stone; the group includes painters (chitra-kāra), stone-sculptors (śilpi) and wood-carvers (takshaka).

(8) sūtra-dhāra: 'string-holders', workers in wooden furniture (carpenters), wood-inlay, lacquered ware, puppet-making, and making of dolls and toys.

(9) karma-kāra : smiths of all kinds.

Each of these crafts appears to have had a guild to regulate the activity and secure the interests of the craftsmen.

That these guilds functioned like the presentday co-operatives has often been suggested. Each guild had its own organization and infrastructure. Training in the crafts was imparted at home, the skill passing from father to son. The guild was not only a social and economic organization; it also provided the necessary religious foundation for the craftsmen. Religion has always been the essential aspect of Indian culture and its forms

were determined by utility. The styles were largely guided by religious considerations. The craftsmen were, of course, acquainted (in common with the other sections of the population) with the two great epics (Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata) which stirred their imagination and offered excellent themes and motifs for their work; they were also conversant with the textual tradition of crafts which comprehended the religious inclinations as well as practical guidance in the actual production of the craft articles.

We read in Samarāṅgaṇa-sūtra-dhāra that the craftsman-artist was facilitated in his work by several factors like inherited wisdom or tradition, skill, instruction, study of texts, practice and intelligence.

पारम्पर्यं कौशलं सोपदेशं शास्त्राभ्यासो

वास्तुकर्मोद्यमो धीः।

सामग्रीयं निर्मला यस्य सोऽस्मिन्निष्क्रियान्येवं वेत्ति

यन्त्राणि कर्तुम् ॥

Inheritance of craft-skill is an important element, as the early exposure to the specific craft would further augment this detail, and the craftsman-artist would later be unerring and confident. He would preserve and continue the traditional forms and styles as well as the time-honoured techniques of production. The effort involved in vague and aimless experimentation would thus be saved; and the urge for innovation placed under restraint. The craftsman artist would grow

up with well-defined coördinates in the household and in the guild.

We have a corresponding situation with regard to the ancient and medieval architecture. The building of houses, mansions, palaces, public utility structures (like tanks and wells) and temples was handled by guild-members. According to Mānasāra (Chapter 1), there were four guilds that were involved: *sthapati* (architect), *sūtra-grāhi* (in charge of measurements), *vardhaki* (joiner and in charge of the strength and quality of materials) and *takshaka* (worker in wood, stone and metal). The *sthapati* represented *Viśva-karmā*, the architect of the world, and he was the leader of the other three groups of workers. All of them worked within the framework of textual tradition pertaining to architecture ('*kurvanti śāstrādeśena vāstuvastu prayatnataḥ*').

The text also provides information regarding the different qualifications necessary for the four groups of workers involved in building. The *sthapati* should be well-versed in all aspects of building and must be thoroughly conversant with the texts (*sarva-śāstrajñāḥ*); he must be competent to direct and guide all other workers ('*tribhyo gurur iti smṛtaḥ*'). The *sūtra-grāhi* must know the history of *vāstu*, must be skilled in major and minor measurements, and must be able to prepare adequate drawings (*rekhaññāḥ*); he needs also to be acquainted with texts pertaining to *śilpa* (*śāstra-vit*). The *vardhaki* must be skilled in the practical aspects of the job (*karmajñā*), acquainted

with the tradition (*śrutajñā*) and resourceful (*vichārajñā*); he must also be able to make drawings (*chitra-karmajñā*). The *takshaka* must be clever in executing the work entrusted to him (*karma-vit*).

The role of textual tradition in the equipment of the workers involved in a building is an important one. It involves drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture and mythology; some astrological calculations are also thrown in. Textual tradition, however, does not consist of a group of texts which are studied by the craftsmen-artists. It is true that many of the *purāṇas* contain chapters devoted to painting, sculpture and architecture; it is also true that there are several independent treatises in Sanskrit on these subjects. But one does not expect the craftsmen-artists to undertake a study of these texts; the only possible exception is the *sthapati*, who is more literate than the others and, therefore, competent to study the texts, if he so desired.

The textual tradition really signifies a body of knowledge which is handed down from generation to generation, without an ostensible medium: youngsters absorb it unconsciously and involuntarily. The essential details of the craft (the techniques, the themes, the materials, forms, styles and functions) are grasped by the individual as he grows up in the craft-milieu, watching the elders work and listening to their talk; and helping them in their work and receiving instruction. He is also helped by an exposure to religious discourses and other cultural activities that go on in the village. Thus the textual tradition is an inarticulate but effective transmission, not

only of the skills, but of the wisdom that is in the background.

In fact, it was this unwritten traditional wisdom that was at some point of time committed to writing in the texts and incorporated in the āgamas and the purāṇas. When the tradition was thus crystallized in the texts, it acquired the prescriptive dimension that was characteristic of a śāstra. We have now a śilpa-śāstra, providing a comprehensive framework for both sculpture and architecture. It describes the details, formulates the varieties, provides the norms, suggests the methods, and enjoins some rules to be followed.

It must be noted that the expression śilpa-śāstra is also a general and collective one; it does not refer to any single text, nor even to a group of texts. As a matter of fact, the texts bearing on śilpa-śāstra are too numerous and too varied in content and treatment to be accommodated within any one group; and different regions in the country follow different texts. Further, the texts appeared at different periods of time; and therefore reflect social, economic and cultural changes. The idea of the śilpa-śāstra is more relevant to the craftsmen-artists and architects than the texts themselves. It has a definitive and normative character, and deals with the subject-matter in broad outlines, without imposing restrictions on minor details.

Even as the unwritten tradition of śilpa (a term which refers to all works of art: painting, sculpture and architecture) in course of time crystallized itself in a general śilpa-śāstra (early and sporadic

efforts to reduce the traditional ideas in a written form, to be found in the purāṇas and the early āgama texts), the general śilpa-śāstra became later the subject-matter of several texts bearing on different aspects of painting, sculpture and architecture. We have now references to more than four hundred texts on śilpa-śāstra, although not more than twenty of them have achieved some popularity or acceptance among the craftsmen and architects.

There are twenty works ascribed to Viśvakarmā, the primordial architect-sculptor, and another twenty to his successor Maya. Among the most reliable works which are extant Brhatsaṃhitā of Varāha-mihira, Mānasāra (in seventy sections), Kāśyapa-śilpa (in 88 paṭalas), Samarāṅgaṇa-sūtra-dhāra (incomplete, 11th cent) Aparājita-prcchā (Bhuvana-deva, 239 sūtras), the four works of Maṇḍana-sūtra-dhāra (15th cent), and Śilpa-ratna (Śrī-kumāra 16th cent, in two books, pūrva-bhāga consisting of 46 chapters dealing with painting, sculpture and architecture) are some of the better-known ones.

A significant feature about the few works mentioned above is that they deal with sculpture (śilpa) and architecture (vāstu) together. It is probable that this was the earlier notion, that architecture and sculpture always go together, and that they cannot be treated separately. But the titles of later works suggests that there was a tendency in later times to deal with the two aspects independently. Maṇḍana-sūtra-dhāra, for instance, wrote

Vāstu-maṇḍana and Prāsāda-maṇḍana dealing with architecture alone, and Rūpa-maṇḍana to deal with sculpture and iconography. Still later, the tendency to write books on specific topics even in architecture like building of houses (Manushyālaya-chandrikā and Grha-vāstu-sāra), building of palaces (Prāsāda-kalpa), building of temples (Mandira-vāstu), excavation of tanks and wells (Vāpī-kūpa-lakṣhaṇa), decoration of houses (Prāsādalaṅkāra-lakṣhaṇa), construction of water-ways (Jalārgalam) and designing buildings (Vāstu-ratnāvalī).

Likewise in the field of sculpture, there were texts dealing with icons for worship in temples (like Śilpatantra, Pratimā-lakṣhaṇa, Devatā-mūrti-lakṣhaṇa, and Sanatkumāra-śilpa), images for secular purposes (Chitra-karma-śilpa, Sārasvata-śilpa, Śilpa-lekha etc.), selection of wood or stone for sculpture (Śilā-saṅgraha, Dāru-saṅgraha-dīpikā, Pāṣaṇa-vichāra etc.), installation of icons (Pratiṣṭhā-tantra, Pratiṣṭhā-vidhi etc) and so on.

While this tendency to write on specific issues was no doubt welcome, because an elaborate treatment of even the minor details would then be possible, it encouraged an increased isolation of sculpture from architecture, and resulted in indifference to secular sculpture and architecture. Attention was focussed almost exclusively on the building of temples, the making of icons and consecrating them, so much so that religion came to be regarded as the main interest of śilpa-śāstra. Religious edifices, worship-worthy images, sacrificial utensils and

implements and articles used in ritual sequences were associated in the popular mind with art and architecture.

It is not generally recognized that the textual tradition allows in a significant manner decorations, embellishments, and ornamentations of walls, pillars and ceilings with designs and forms which are altogether non-religious in character. Not all parts of a temple are religious in function. The texts themselves speak of dance-halls (nṛtta-maṇḍapa), assembly-halls (sabhā-maṇḍapa), administrative enclosures (rājāṅgaṇa), picture galleries (chitra-maṇḍapa), kitchens (pāka-śālā) and store-rooms (bhaṇḍāra) within the premises of the temple.

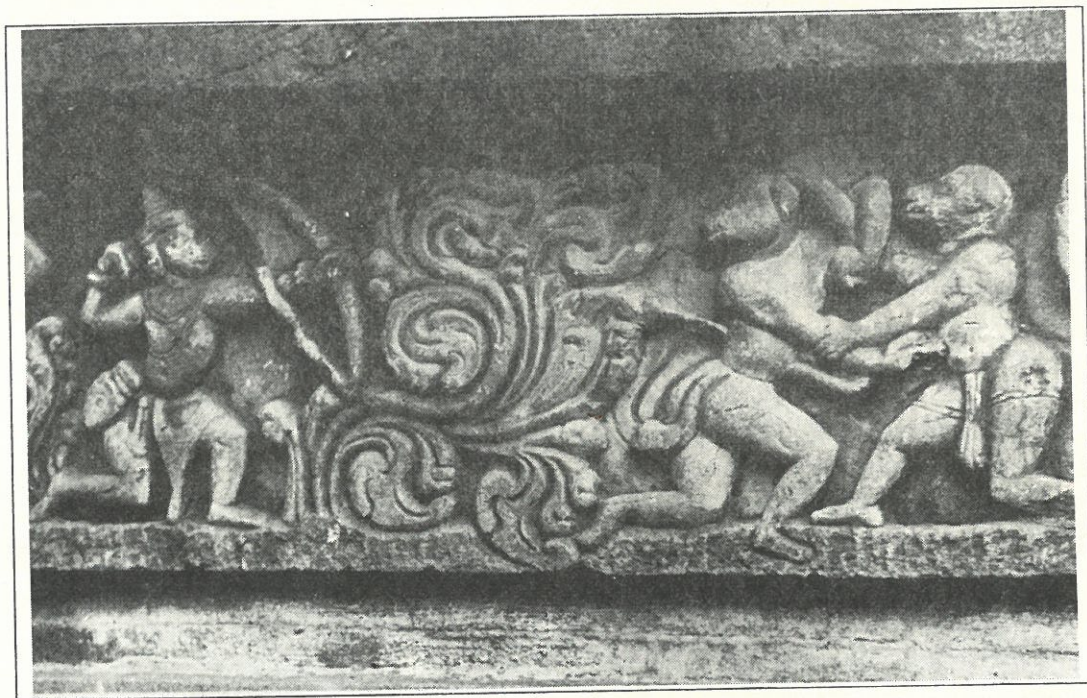
There is reason to believe that the temples were actually built on the model of palaces. The expression in Sanskrit, 'prāsāda' stands for the temple as well as for the palace. In the temple-culture, the god in the sanctum was treated like the king in his private apartment; like the king, the god also had his retinue (parivāra), assembled outside the sanctum. The temple was the god's city, and periodically, the god was conducted in a procession round this city. The rituals in the temple include the royal mini-strations (rājopachāras), including an audience where music, dance and other forms of entertainment were presented. Thus the sacred has the secular as its model, in structure as well as function.

This ideology inspired decorations of the temple with paintings and sculptures depicting several aspects of secular life, besides the themes of the epics and the purāṇas. The temple was not merely

a place of worship, but an art-gallery for people to visit, enjoy and also learn. Paintings and sculptures in temples, unlike their counterparts in palaces of kings or mansions of noblemen, have always been vehicles of cultural transmission. The narrative sculptures of popular episodes from Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhāratha and Bhāgavata or from Pañcha-tantra in the temples bring home to the visitors the significance of the episodes and characters in it; they reinforce the impact of the stories they would already have known. Likewise, the sportive forms of Śiva (the *līlā-mūrtis*) that some temples abound in are not meant for worship; they are meant for edification and enjoyment; and

for the instruction of the students of sculpture and mythology.

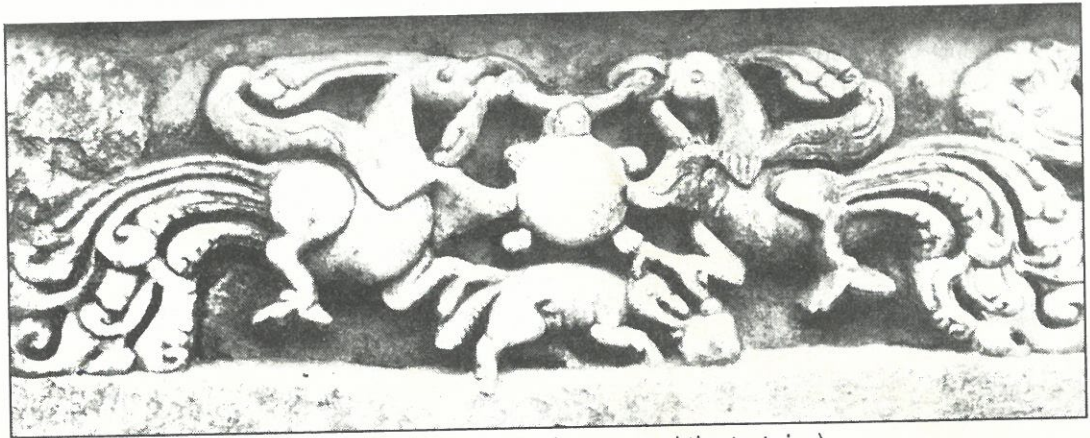
We should recognize that not all sculptured images in the temple are icons meant for worship, and that everything within the temple premises is not strictly sacred or religious. The temple as a public institution combines the sacred and the secular, the religious and the social, the devotional and the romantic. Even the āgamas allow this, and the *śilpa-śāstras* allow freedom for the imaginative sculptor and painter to express all his feelings and thoughts. It is not unusual to find in temples thoroughly irreverent and even profane representations on pillars and walls: and no



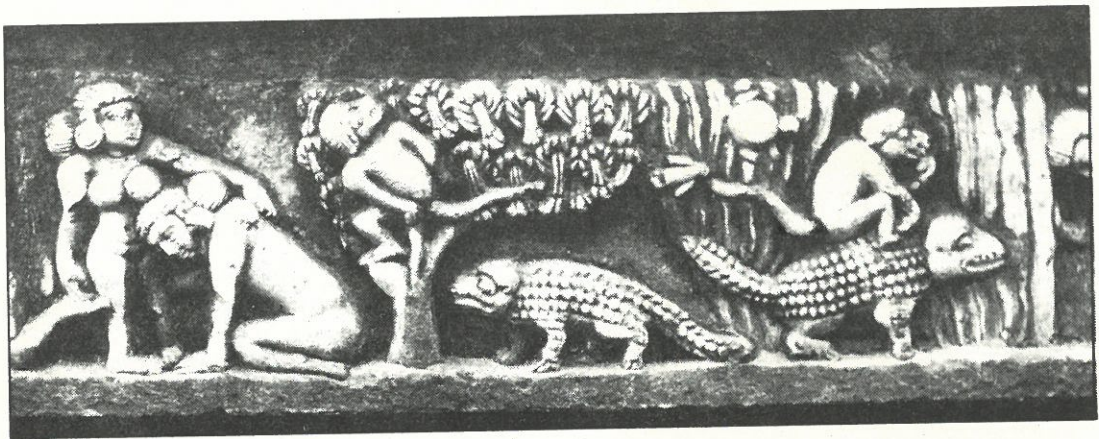
A scene from Rāmāyaṇa (Rāma killing Vālī).
Panel from Tripurāntaka temple at Balligāve



Scene from Mahābhārata (Bhima's fight with Duhsāsana),
wood-carving from Kaviyoor temple, Kerala



A story from Pañchatantra (swans and the tortoise),
panel from Tripurāntaka temple at Balligāve



Another story from Pañcha-tantra (monkey and the crocodile),
panel from the same temple

Indian will take them amiss. The sculptor attempts to portray the world in all its variety within the temple premises: and naturally this comprehends themes which are devout and themes which are taken directly from daily life. The *śilpa*-texts describe the *śilpi* as conversant with reality (*yathārtha-vit*), and his job is to give expression to his views and judgments in sculptures which are not strictly religious.

The background of the cult of temples in the country, has not been sufficiently understood. Before the cult took shape, there were household shrines (*grhārchā*) which were both necessary and sufficient. The temple as a public institution was not meant to be a substitute for the household-shrines. The *āgamas* insist that the household-shrine is of primary importance even for the priest who worships in a temple. That is to say, the temple has different functions to fulfil: worship

is one of them, and it is really not as important as people generally imagine. The temple is but ostensibly a place for collective worship, and this involves several social interests, not strictly related to devotion. The assemblage of people is an important aspect of the temple, and when people gather, the shrine assumes a new dimension. The temple is not an extension of the household shrine, but it is an extension of the social significance of the family. It oftentimes served as a school (ghaṭikāsthāna), where students gathered round a teacher to study disciplines both sacred and secular.

Some early temple-complexes (like those of Aihole and Māmallapuram) were designed as monuments of experimentation and achievement by certain guilds of sculptors and architects than as places of worship. In the āgama texts, the temple is hailed as what contributes all that is good to all people ('sarveshām sarva-sampat-pradam'). The art and architecture of a temple sought to fulfil several social needs of the people who gathered there periodically.

When we undertake to study ancient and medieval art and architecture, the approach needs to be multi-pronged.



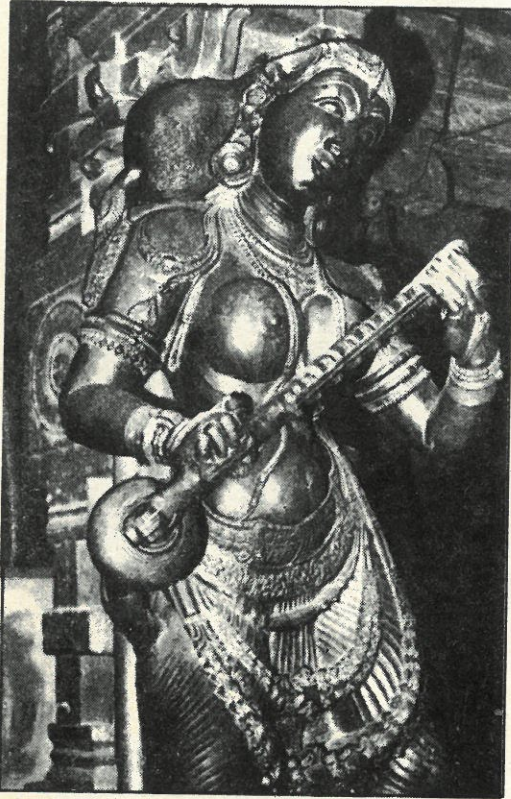
Sarasvatī playing on viṇā
(sculpture from Kanakagiri Temple)



The Musician
(from Srīraḡgam Temple)



Musicians
(relief sculpture from Mallikārjuna temple at Śrī-śailam)



Viṇā-player (sculpture from a temple,
now preserved in the Madurai Museum)

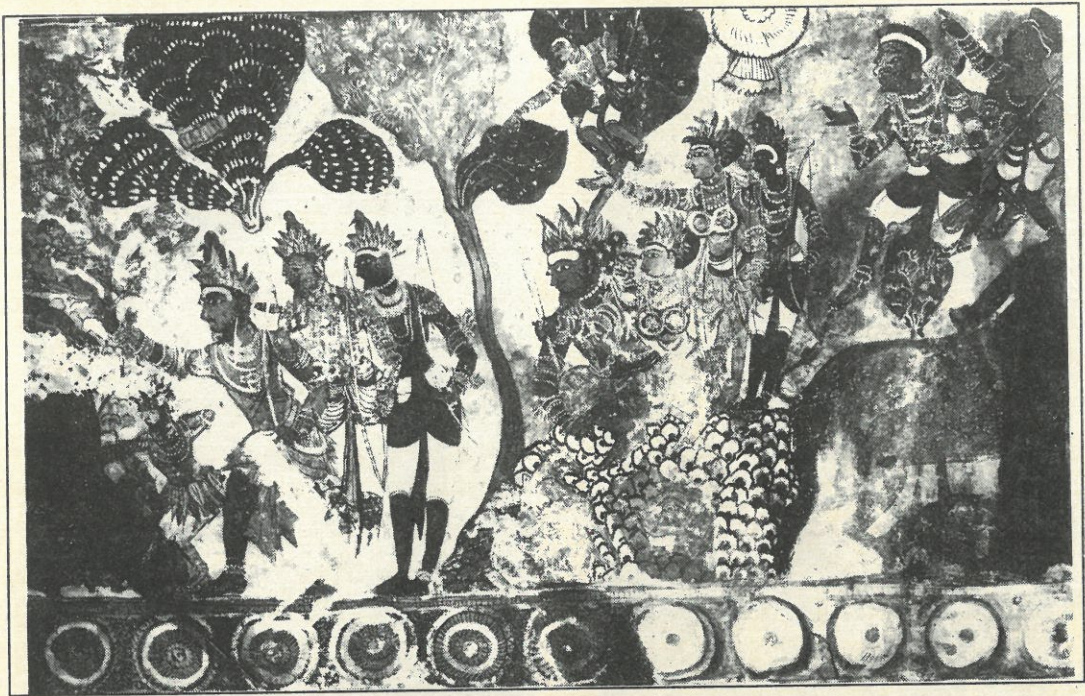


Lady with mirror (sculpture from the great
temple at Śrīraṅgam)

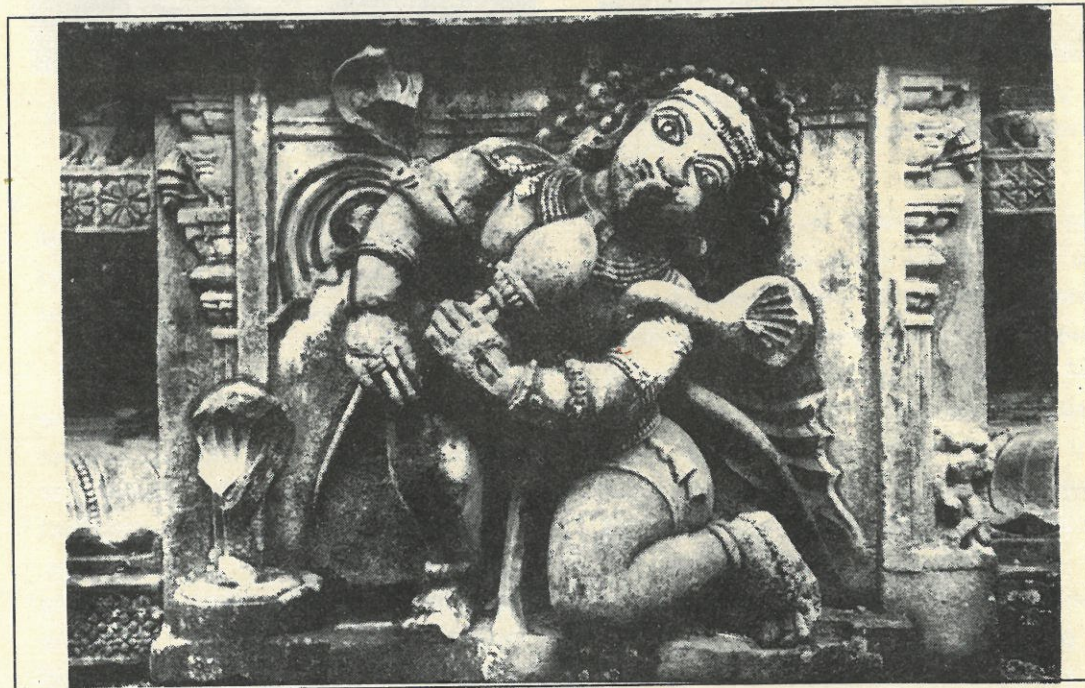
The attempt should be to reconstruct the spirit of the times when the temple came to be built and decorated with sculptures and paintings, and the political and economical pressures that prevailed then. History alone does not hold the key for this problem; more significant than historical occurrences are the sociological processes that were set afoot by them, for art and architecture are results of such processes. A temple or a public structure of secular character is an expression of collective effort and social interest. It comprehends, and

preserves for posterity, the trends of thinking that was in vogue at that period and also the methods of work that prevailed then.

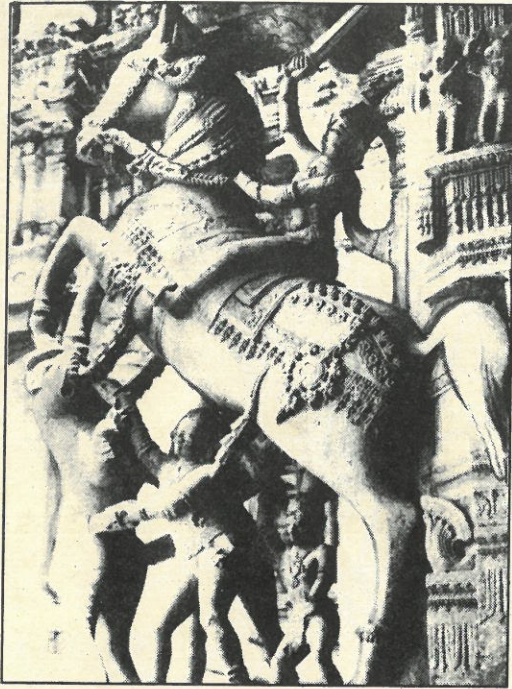
There are some temples in the medieval period (like the Hoysaḷa temples in Karnāṭaka) where the names of individual sculptors have been inscribed in the specimens that are available. Sometimes, such inscriptions are more informative and descriptive. Epigraphs also sometimes tell us when, why, and by whom a temple was sponsored, repaired or extended. Details of temple



Hunting scene (from the temple at Lepākshi)



Snake-charmer (sculpture from the Nārāyaṇa temple at Melukoṭe)



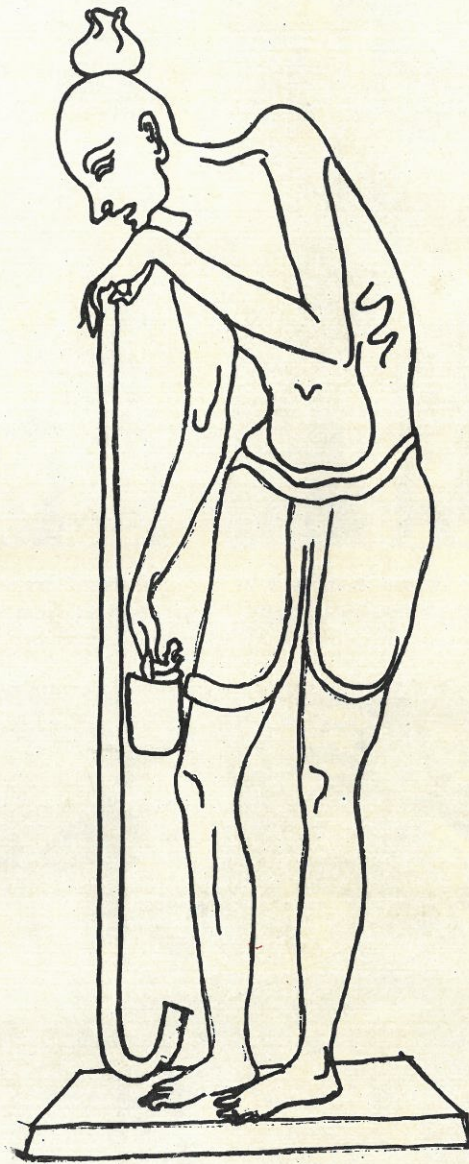
Tiger attacking a horse (stone sculpture in the Kalyāṇa-maṇḍapa of the Śrīraṅgam temple)



An assembly of sages (painting on the wall of the Gopālapuram palace, Keraḷa)



Animals (relief sculptures in the temple at Śrī-Sailam)



Beggar (sculpture from Ādikeśava temple at Tiruvattār)



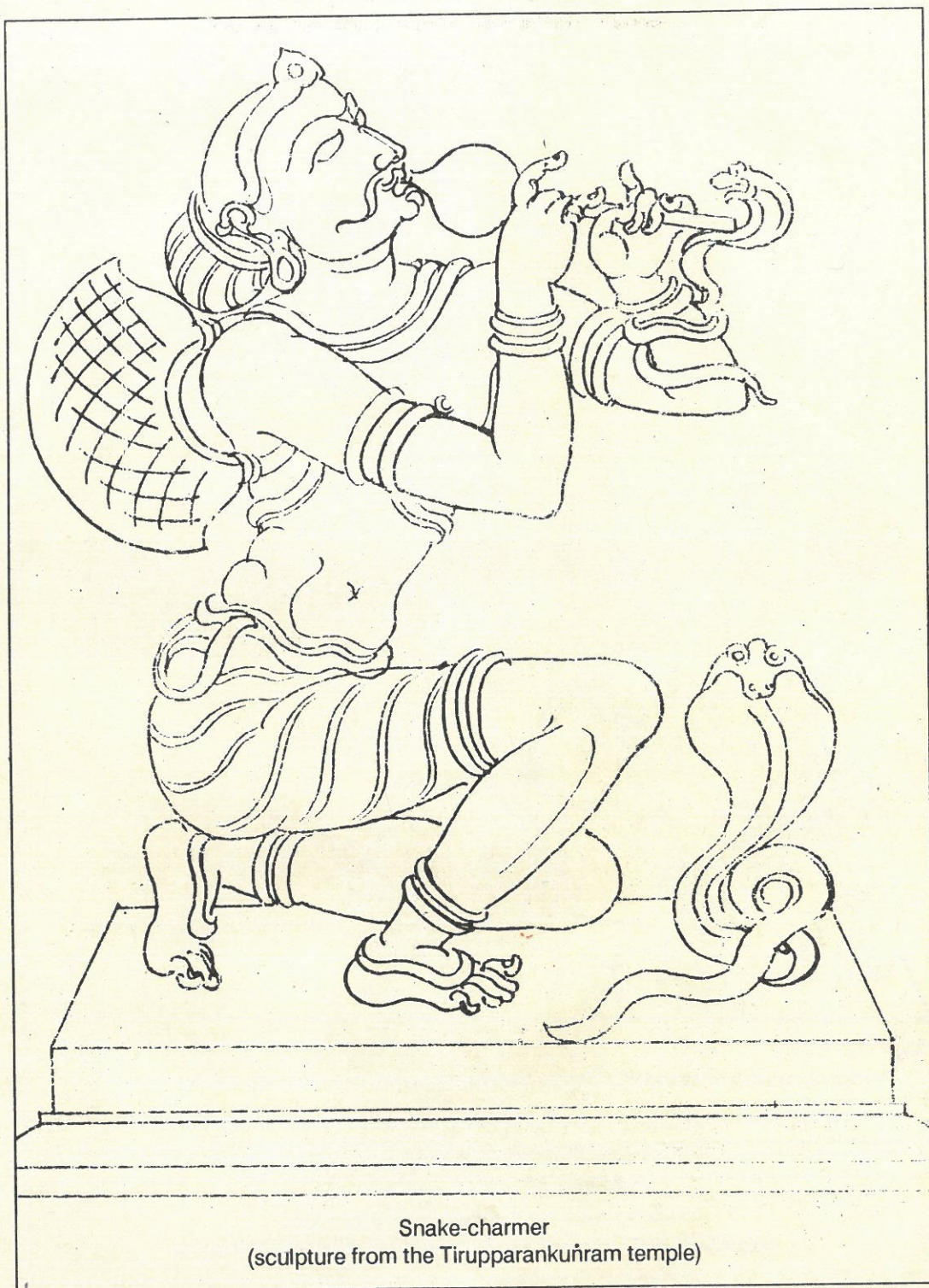
Musicians
(sculpture from Lepākshi temple)



Kurava chief carrying his wife
(stone sculpture from temple at Kṛṣṇāpuram, Tirunelveli dist)



Plucking out the thorn from a hunter's foot
(sculpture from the Śrīvaikunṭham temple, Tirunelveli dist)



Snake-charmer
(sculpture from the Tirupparankuñram temple)



Drum-beater
(stone carving from Nelliappan temple)



Lady dressing her hair
(stone carving from Devarāja-svāmi temple, Kuṁbhakoṇam)



Composition
(stone sculpture from Mallikārjuna temple, Śrī-śaila)



Rāma, Lakshmana and Hanumān

property, jewellery, staff and services also become available frequently from the same source. In addition, there are numerous medieval manuals (like Koil-oḷagu of the famous Śrīraṅgam temple or Tirumalai-oḷagu of the Tirumala-Tirupati temple) which relate events and stories connected with the kings, his officers, donors and priests relating to temples of some celebrity (like those at Chidambaram, Śrī-raṅgam, Madurai, Jagannāthapuri, and Tirumalai).

Many affluent temples have for long years maintained records of receipts and expenditure, filling the dry figures with other interesting information concerning the community which supported the temple. The families of the traditional sculptors and artists associated with

temples also preserve documents relating to art-work executed in the temples.

Each of the major temples has its own mythological account telling us how the temple came to be built and decorated and consecrated. Such accounts, known as *sthala-purāṇas*, no doubt involve interplay of gods and sages with human beings, and suggest supernatural events; but they provide an insight into the human situation, when read carefully.

Besides the wealth of information gathered from these sources, a detailed study of the content of the sculptures in a temple is likely to provide exceedingly interesting information. For instance, the sculptural representation of the 108 *karaṇas* (or classical dance-postures) in

the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram, the Bṛhadiśvara temple at Tañjāvūru and the Śārngapāṇi temple at Kuṁbhakoṇam is of great significance in tracing the development of Bharata-nāṭyam. Likewise, the depiction of musical instruments in sculptures can throw considerable light on the evolution of Indian music during medieval times.

The āgamas also mention several dance-sequences and musical instruments that become relevant in the context of a temple. Temple music and dance which provide backdrops for the present day classical music and dance have not

till now been sufficiently studied. The temple sculptures are likely to help such a study greatly.

The garments, ornaments, decorations, foot-wear, utensils, weapons, appliances and other details of daily life are also depicted in paintings and sculptures that are found in temples and palaces. Situations like warfare, marriage, travel, romance, fight, entertainments and so on can be seen in numerous narrative sculptured panels. It should be possible to recreate the living conditions of a bygone age for our edification by studying sculptures and paintings.



CHAPTER TWO

THE TEMPLE IDEA

Man is a unique animal: he can create culture. This he does, not to satisfy an impulse of fancy, but in order that he may survive. Culture guards him against present and possible shocks and stresses, and affords meaning to his otherwise animal existence. As an aspect of this culture, he creates images in his mind and fashions icons by his hands. The former represents religion and the latter art. Man has been an image-creator and an icon-fashioner throughout his career on earth. And, therefore, religion and art have always been with him. The temple represents a combination of religion and art; and its roots go back to a very remote past, in fact to the earliest stages of his career. Ever since man became a *homo sapiens*, he has also been *homo religious*. And he has built temples and worshipped in them since that time.

Man needs religion. He needs it in order to secure himself from inconveniences from nature and from fellow-men. Religion is a sort of safety-valve for stresses in life: anxieties about an uncertain future and irritation from present ills. There is perhaps no dispute about fear being the source of religion; it is still the mainstay

of religion the world over. The argument that religion is a method of adapting to the mysteries that loom large in life as well as in nature is not to be brushed aside lightly. But man's life in the world is not guided only by negative impulses. Man has also a capacity to wonder, to be struck by beauty and sublimity; and this has played no mean part in the development of religion.

Added to it is a tendency, inherent in man, of transcendence, of reaching out into the unseen and the as-yet-unactualized. This capacity for transcendence combined with the ability to wonder is basic to religion as well as art. This is a necessary involvement in the 'Idea of the Holy'. In the various expressions of religion such as rituals, ceremonials, shrines, magical cults and worship paraphernalia, art is necessarily included. The images and the icons go together.

The image-making tendency representing religion discovered and projected a hidden but real power in the world around. The more uncanny and mysterious the aspect of nature, the greater was the likelihood of the presence of this power.

A high mountain, the rugged peak, a deep gorge, forest fastness, or the source of a stream would naturally provoke in man a sense of mystery, beauty and sublimity. It is not accidental that the early men worshipped them with awe and adoration; they were regarded as divinities in themselves.

Likewise, unusual objects like odd-shaped stone, a splinter from a meteor, a weird shape of a decayed tree-trunk, instilled in man not only curiosity but a certain feeling of reverence. The origin of shrines and objects of worship may be traced to these early attitudes. The early man had these attitudes not because he was ignorant, but because he was sensitive to encounter with the unusual. These attitudes have survived all through man's history; the accumulation of wisdom and progress in sophistication have not dulled the edge of these attitudes among the more sensitive of human beings even today. When we trace religion and art to the primitive times, they should not by any means be regarded as in themselves primitive.

Man's creativity furthered the cause of religion and art. He did not rest content with natural shrines or natural objects of worship; he sought to create them. Probably his early efforts were to replicate whatever won his fancy. A temple-tower or the church-steeple resembles a mountain peak; the dome of a mosque resembles a hill-top. The *Linga* is perhaps a stone replica of decayed tree-trunk or a miniature representation of a mountain.

But the capacity to create images and icons transcended the prototypes of nature. The forms of the images and the shapes of the icons took numerous forms, determined by man's experience, expectations and imaginations.

Man used icons before he made them. If we throw back our minds to a remote past, we find that man's reaction to the mysteries around was not marked by a desire to conquer nature but to adapt himself to it. He had to fall back on his dreams and imaginations to give him the needed courage and confidence in his dealings with nature. When the cave-man set out on a hunting expedition, he naturally resorted to a device of compelling events to follow his imaginations. He drew a magic circle, and placed inside it a crude sketch of the animal he desired to hunt; or he sketched on a tree or carved on a rock a wild animal with an arrow struck in its body. He may also have mumbled a few syllables from an *abracadabra*. He may have carried on his person the small pebble over which the *abracadabra* was mumbled or an unusual stone, when he went out to hunt. He ascribed his success to this ritual or icon (the magical diagram, the unusual stone, or the charmed pebble). The ritual was repeated, and the icon was preserved.

The ritual and the icon came naturally to be associated with each other; and they occupied a place of enormous importance in his simple scheme of life. When he was not carrying the icon on his person, he placed it in a spot specially meant for

it, and guarded it with care and zeal, for it contained his guardian spirit, his protective deity, his personal god. The spot which housed this icon was a 'shrine'. It was plain ground, cleaned for the purpose, or a simple stone-platform as a seat for the icon, outside his cave or rude hut, probably under a nearby tree. To guard it against intruders of lifters, he had a fence round it or built for it a crude cover. The shrine-structure thus came into being.

In an icon of this sort, it is not the object itself that is as important as the imagery associated with it. The capacity of man's mind to make images and conjure up visions transforms an otherwise irrelevant object into an icon with a special relevance for himself. The tendency to use and make icons deepened man's awareness of himself in the milieu of the animate and the inanimate world in which he found himself favourable to the unseen but powerful forces inhabiting and enlivening the world.

It is both logically and psychologically incorrect to imagine that man's idea of the Holy resulted in the icons. It is actually the other way about. He first used the icons, attracted by their unusual shape or mysterious aspect. His continued contact with them made him discern an extraordinary power in them. When such an icon became more and more intimately involved in his living contact with the world, the icon was no longer an object among other objects but a holy presence. When he lost it, he tried to make an image of it; the icon was now an artifact. He used

not only his memory but imagination and skill in reproducing it. Whether a natural object or an artifact, the icon inspired in him a sense of the holy. It was his personal god. It filled his mind with feelings of reverence and gave him emotional satisfaction.

Although using or making icons is a phenomenon that is uniquely human, responsiveness to icons is reported even among the primates. Interesting in this context is a study conducted by the psychologist Wolfgang Köhler on chimpanzees. Köhler made a small image of a donkey out of rags. The image was doubtless crude and resembled a donkey only remotely. But the psychologist's rude art made it altogether unlike any other natural object, and different from the familiar artifacts such as boxes and chairs. When this was introduced into the chimpanzees' field of vision, the reaction of the animal was evident fear and awe. The object, however, held the chimpanzee's interest and provoked its curiosity; but it also encouraged the animal to keep a safe distance.

The early man's response to natural icons was probably not very different, for similar would be the response even among the sophisticated folk now. Even when icons were fashioned by man's skill and in conformity with his ideas of the Holy, others still reacted to it with fear and awe, a mixed feeling called reverence.

An icon (Greek *eikon*) strictly means an image, a representation, a likeness. But an icon is characteristically an image with

a difference, a representation with a new slant of meaning, a likeness of something our eyes have actually never seen. It is not a duplication of a common object, but the concretisation of an idea concerning an unusual object. A natural monument reveals an ambivalent attitude to keep the spirit of the dead away, and to perpetuate his memory. The earliest of man's intuitive guesses was that death was not the end of the person's existence; that he continued to live on in some way, and that the disembodied spirit may harm or help the living. It was necessary, therefore, to take the disposal seriously and propitiate the spirit adequately. Both the disposal of the dead body and propitiation of the continuing spirit became elaborate magical rituals.

It might strike one as blasphemous that many of the important shrines of the present day can be traced to burial practices. But it can hardly be disputed. When the pious and wealthy Nāṭṭukōṭi Chettīars of Tamil Nāḍu undertook to renovate many of the dilapidated Śiva shrines in the region, it was discovered that under the floor for the sanctum in most of these shrines funerary pots, heaps of ash, and skeletal remains had been placed. In fact, the old Tamil term for shrine, 'pallippaḍai', signifies the spot where the dead person ("one who has gone to interminable sleep") is buried. Tamil inscriptions of the middle ages describe many Śiva Temples as such shrines.

It was an old custom to denote the spot where the dead body is buried by

a mound of earth and rubble. The mound represented the mountain. The background belief was that the disembodied spirit soars up onto a mountain. The celebrity of Kailāsa as the abode of Śiva may be traced to this belief. It was also a widespread practice in very early times to drag the dead body to a mountain top and leave it there. Burial and cremation were later methods of disposal. The burial mounds were usual features in the territorial arrangement of primitive clans. When the dead person was a respected chieftain or a priest of high status, the mound would be larger and more lasting, for it was believed to house a powerful mana. It would also be periodically visited, and regarded with veneration. Myths would naturally gather round the shrine and the mana would attract devotees who gathered there to propitiate the spirit. The simple mound would be transformed into an elaborate structure.

The stone age graves make an interesting study. Numerous clans and tribes in India continued the practice until comparatively recent times. After the dead body was buried, three large stones were placed in the centre (gathered up in a heap), and a ring of stones enclosed them.

Toḍas of Nilgiris burn their dead inside a circle of stones and bury the ashes in the same spot. They erect an upright stone block over the remains and surround it by rough, round or conical stones placed in a circle. Their funeral huts are also built inside a ring of stones. The hut is meant to receive the spirit of the dead; it is

called the 'home of death' (*sāvumane*). The three stones that the primitives kept on the buried body were apparently meant to prevent his ghost from getting up and coming out. The two side-stones developed into pillars and the central stone was placed on top of the superstructure erected over these pillars. The funeral hut was square or circular in plan, and the sloping roof over it was invariably conical or pyramidal, symbolising the soaring up of the spirit. The shrines for the *bhūta* in coastal *Karnāṭaka* and *Keraḷa* have preserved this primitive form.

The ring of stones represents a magic circle to preserve the central stone's *mana* (which symbolises the spirit of the dead person). The central stone stood for the mound, and later when the stone had to be more impressive it assumed the form of a low dome-shaped sepulchral tumulus (*stūpa*), or a conical or pyramidal structure (*vimāna*).

The *stūpas* have been well-known in India from the Buddha's own days; and they represent an interesting and important aspect of Indian architecture. But the *stūpa* was not a Buddhist innovation. Jouean-Dubreuil has shown that the *stūpa* form was directly derived from the Vedic tomb. The tomb called *agnidriya* was hemispherical and hollow, with a central shaft and two raised stone platforms on either side of the shaft meant for the *agni* and *soma* rituals; the dome was made in timber and covered with clay. The whole structure was an imitation of the *āryan* hut; and the central shaft was a clever device to

serve as a chimney, for the rituals inside the *agnidriya* involved setting up of fires.

It is true that the Buddhist adaptation of the *stūpa* was unique as a religious monument. When *Aśoka* is reputed to have built 84,00 *stūpas*, they were not all burial mounds; they were more in the nature of memorial structures. But each *stūpa* was to contain a relic of the Buddha or of some honoured sage. The renowned *stūpa* at *Sāñchi*, for instance, contains the relics of *Sāriputta* and *Moggallāna*, two of the most eminent disciples of the Buddha, who died in far-off *Nālandā* in *Bihār*.

The temple may be regarded as a direct descendent of the *stūpa*, which in its turn had been involved from the primitive funerary mound. The custom of installing a stone-block or *linga* on the spot where the burial has taken place is even now prevalent in India. And some of the tombs of saints (*samādhi* or *brindavana*) continue to function as shrines. There is also the custom of planting trees over the burial spot or the place in which the funerary urn (in cases of cremation) has been hidden. They are referred to as *chaitya-vṛkshas* (from the Sanskrit word *chiti*, which means cremation) and are held as sacred. The spirit of the dead is believed to inhabit certain species of trees, which received worship by proxy. It is not an accidental occurrence that almost every important temple in India is associated with a tree, called *sthala-vṛksha* ('shrine-tree'). It is reasonable to assume that the presence of such a tree invited in due course the construction



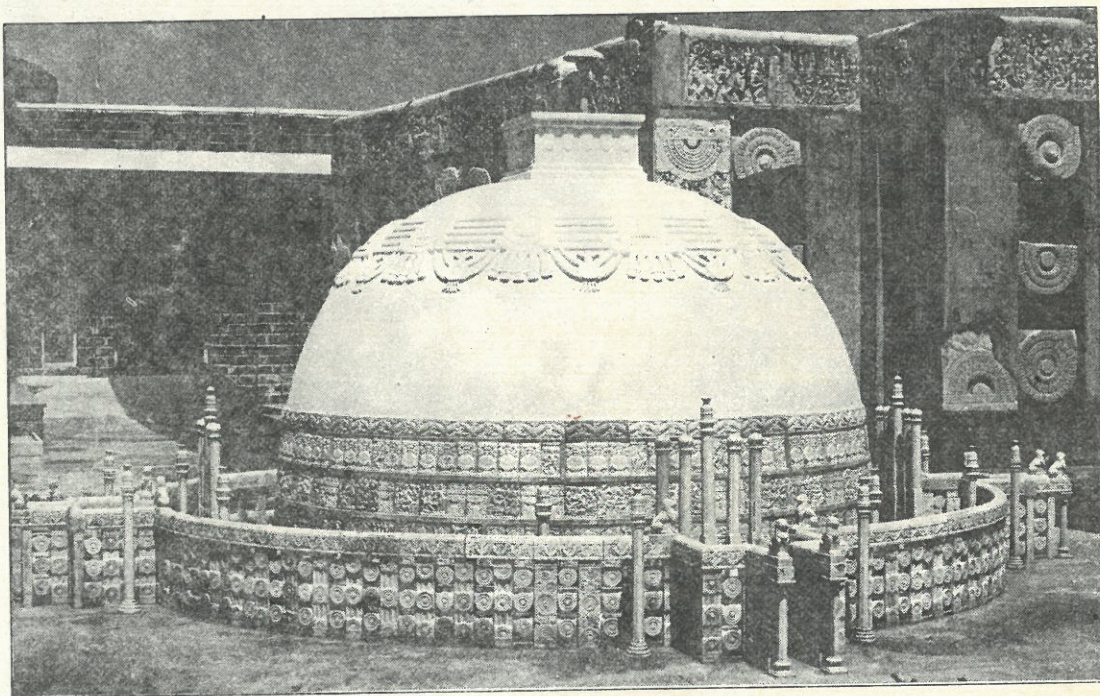
Cave temple dedicated to Śiva in Yāṇa in Karnāṭaka

of a shrine in its vicinity, or over the very spot in case of the tree's decay and disappearance. The legends concerning the famous shrines in India strongly suggest this event.

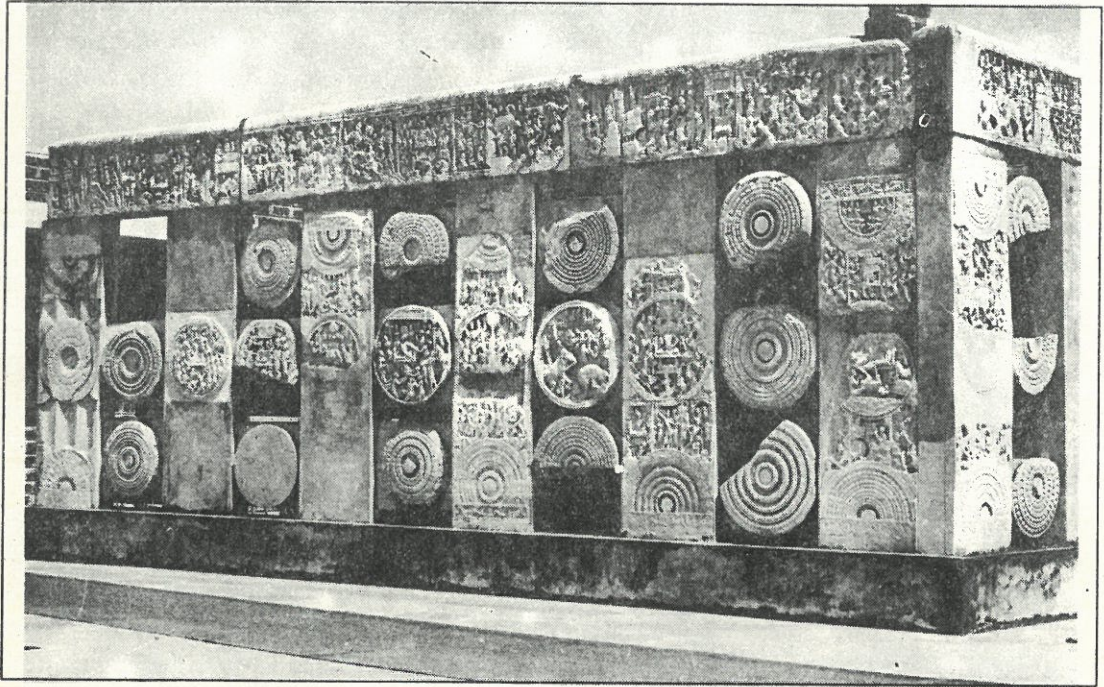
The caves were naturally the earliest shrines. And caves were also places where the primitive burial relics or the funerary urns were preserved. The memory of the cave-shrines lingered on in the Upanishadic 'heart-cave'. Where natural caves were not readily available, people constructed cave-like shrines. But these would obviously have been flimsy, being little more than thatched huts or bamboo-and-mud houses. Among the tribes in which this practice still survives, as among the Todas, the

resemblance of these shrines to natural caves is striking. We have no clues regarding their nature or appearance, for the ravages of time have wiped them out. But the tiled, sloping and conical roofs of the temples in the West Coast may be regarded as survivals.

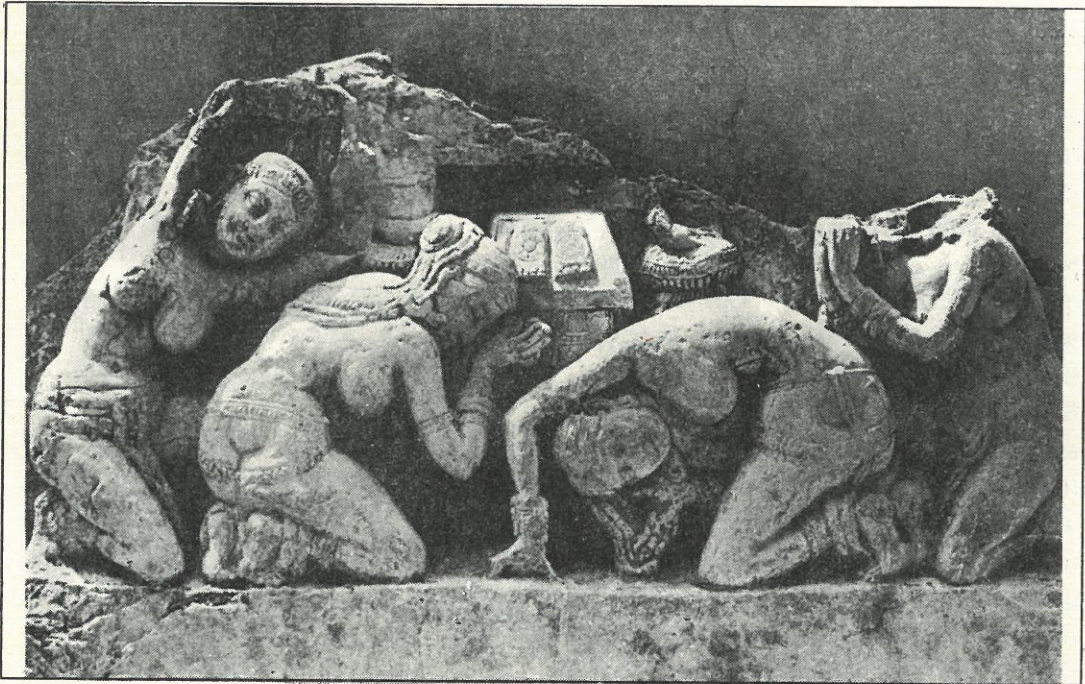
The stūpas are the earliest shrines on record as well as in actual evidence. The expression stūpa means a heap of grain or a mound of earth. As a heap of grain it was precious; and as a mound of earth it was a monument. The word is found in the Yajurveda in the sense of a precious monument (*vishṇoh stūpah*). We have already referred to *agnidriya*, which was the Vedic stūpa. The building of stūpas



Model of Amaravati Stūpa



Detail of Amarāvati Stūpa



Honouring of the Buddha, sculpture from Amarāvati Stūpa

must, therefore, have been a very ancient practice. But it loomed into enormous importance during the days of Aśoka.

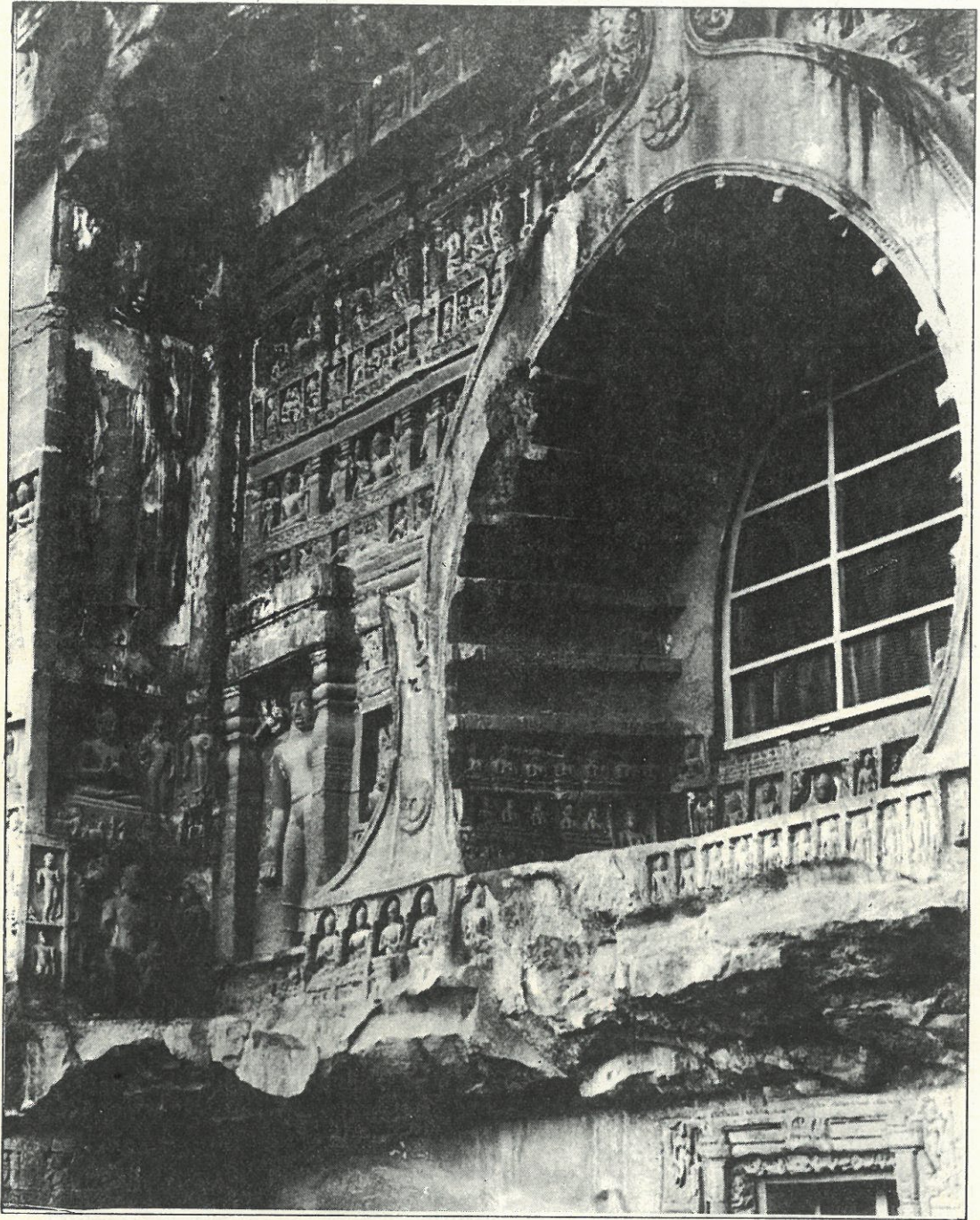
The large number of stūpas that emperor Aśoka is said to have built have all disappeared. But the architectural form of the stūpa that was finalized during his days survived in many later stūpas, like those at Bhārhut, Bodhgayā, Sarnath and Sāñchi, which were all structures built during the first and the third centuries B.C., although they have been repaired and enlarged periodically. This Buddhist adaptation was a massive hemispherical structure, filled with earth, pebbles and stone, mantled by bricks, and covered by stone slabs. It was erected on a broad circular platform (*medhī*), providing a passage for ceremonial circumambulation, and fenced by a running railing (*vedikā*). On top of this plain tumulus was a quadrangular terrace (*harmikā*), over which was placed a parasol (*chhatra*) signifying spiritual sovereignty.

The area of the stūpa was enclosed by gateways or ornamental arches (*torāṇa*) on the four sides; this enclosure derives from a *tāntrik* background. The real significance of the stūpa lies in the manasarticles that it contains. The technical expression for the stūpa is *dhātu-garbha* (the original for the Sinhalese 'dagoba'), which means 'the womb of the relic'. The relic may be the physical remains of a great man of spiritual strength, such as his bones, tufts of hair, or nail pairings (*śarīrika*), or articles that he had used such as his robes, begging bowl, or a piece of

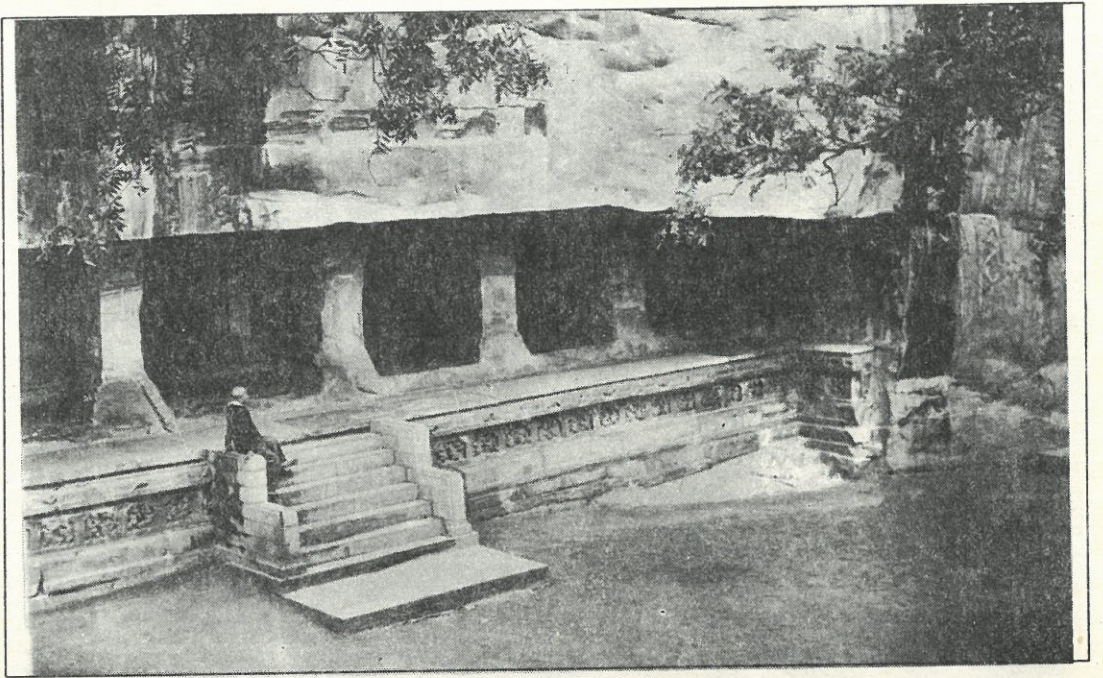
his staff (*pāribhogika*), or symbols of high attainment like the wheel, the triple gem or a miniature stūpa itself (*uddesika*). The introduction of such relics into the body of the stūpa is accompanied by magical rituals. The square enclosure facing the four quarters is meant to contain and intensify the power of this relic; it guards the relic from the intrusion of distracting and inimical forces. The *maṇḍala* form of a circle contained within a square with openings on four sides is concretized in the stūpa.

The relic is thus the essence of the stūpa. The stūpa is also called the 'egg' (*aṇḍa*) as it contains the 'relic-seed' within. The funeral tumulus is in a very real sense a magical monument. The wealth of sculptural representations involved in the gateways and pilasters are to be regarded as essentially mystical in character and purpose. While there are narrative sculptures depicting the main events in the Buddha's life, most of the carvings have a magical purpose. Sometimes, folk sprites and goblins (*yakshas* and *yakṣiṇīs*) are also represented, for the same purpose.

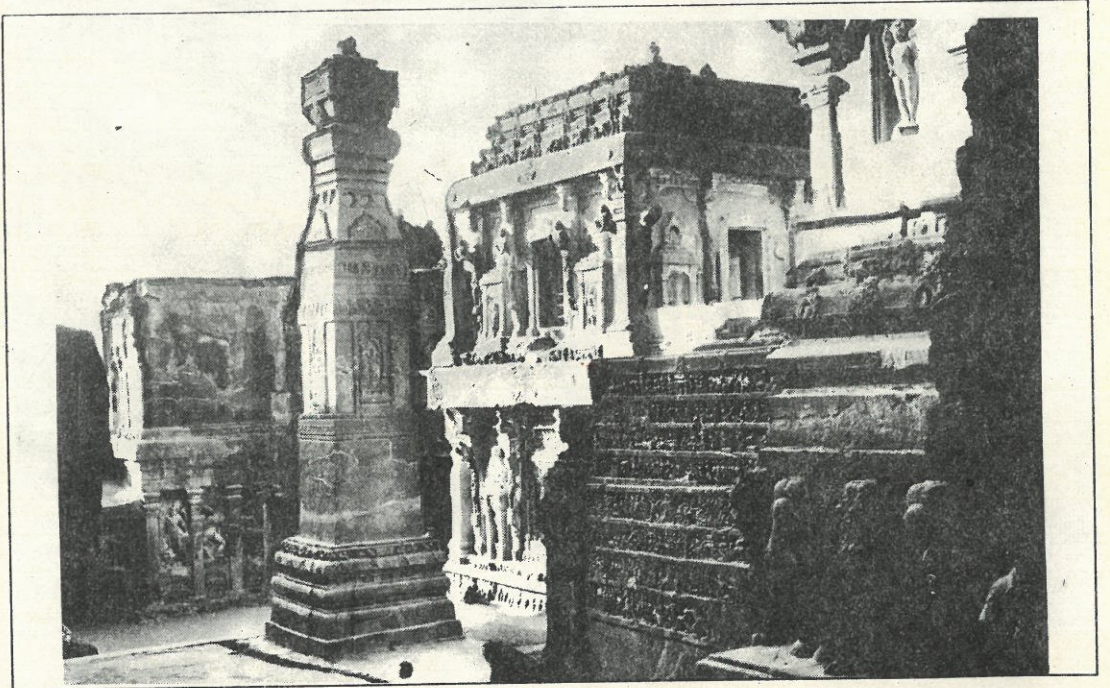
There is a measure of truth in the saying that a Hindu temple is successor to the Buddhist stūpa. But as it was mentioned earlier, the Buddhist stūpa, which can be traced back to the cave-shrines. It must be recognized that the Buddhist stūpa is as magical in its intent as the Vedic stūpa was, and it involved rituals even as the latter did, although of a different kind. Another innovation that was chronologically parallel to the Buddhist



Ajanta - cave : beautifully carved entrance



Bādāmi caves



Kailāsa cave-temple, Ellora

stūpas was the excavated caves like those of Junnār (one hundred and fifty caves, near Poona, about 100 A.D.), Krishṇagiri or Kānheri (eight caves, near Bombay, about 150-189 A.D.), Ajanṭā (about twenty-seven caves, the first few centuries after Christ) and Ellora (about thirty-three caves, about 550-750 A.D.). These caves were excavated from hard, living rocks on the faces of hills. They were elaborately carved and richly ornamented by pillars, arches and pierced windows. These excavated caves, however, were more in the nature of retreats and settlements for monks and hermits than shrines in the strict sense of the term.

They were far removed from the austere and simple cave-shrines, both in design and purpose. Even though they had a shrine area containing either a stūpa image or a Buddha icon, the major portion of the excavated cave was utilized for the assembly hall, habitation cells, porch, and verandah. These caves were meant to be ornate and architectural monuments. There was more of the art in them than of the shrine. Here is an instance of the image dominating the icon.

The significance of these cave-sanctuaries is that the simple shrine was fast becoming a public institution, where people gathered not only to offer worship but to meet monks and listen to their discourses. The sacred calling of the residents of these cave-monasteries had now secular involvements. Sects developed, affiliations began, and the shrine element was minimized.

It is not to be imagined that the cave-shrines were the only kinds of shrines that prevailed during those days. There must have been numerous shrines constructed of perishable material like wood, clay and bricks. For, an inscription of the Pallava king Mahendra-varman I (600-630 A.D.) refers to them and suggests that this king was the innovator of the rock-cut shrines. This inscription, found at Mandagapattu in South Arcot, claims that the king, who was celebrated as 'Vichitra-chitta' ('one whose mind was ingenious'), got constructed a shrine for Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu without the employment of bricks, timber, metals or mortar:

एतदनिष्टकमद्रुमलो-
हमसुधं विचित्रचित्तेन ।
निर्मापितवृषेण ब्रह्मे-
श्वरविष्णुलक्षितायतनम् ॥

We are not sure if he was the first person to conceive the idea of stone temples, for the stone-temples of Banavāsi and Tālaguṇḍa in Karnāṭaka were several centuries earlier. But, true to his title, this king Mahendra-varman was versatile. He was not only a patron of the great Sanskrit poet Bhāravi, but was himself an author. His Sanskrit farce Mattavilāsa-prahasana has come down to us. He appears to have come under the influence of the celebrated Śaiva saint Appar, and built many shrines to Śiva. In fact, he bore another title, Chettākāri ('builder of

temples'). Numerous temples in and around Kāñchīpuram, Pallāvaram, Vallam, Māmaṇḍūr and Tirukkalukkuṇṇam have been ascribed to him. The original structure of the famous Ekāmrānātha temple in Kāñchīpuram appears to have been commissioned by him.

But it was his successor, Narasiṃhavarman I (630-668 A.D.) who built the world-famous five monolithic shrines on the sea-shore in Māmallapuram, near Madras. He bore the title 'Māmalla' ('the great-fighter'), after which the township was named. Each of these shrines has been cut out of a granite boulder and shaped into a free-standing temple. This answers to the description of the 'Ratha' style of temples in the classical texts.

Ratha ordinarily means a vehicle, but its etymological import is to 'play and enjoy' (ramu kṛīḍāyām). In classical texts, four kinds of 'ratha's are distinguished: 'metrical' (chando- maya), where a hymn becomes a vehicle of expression; 'divine' (deva-maya), where a structure becomes a habitation of gods, a pleasure-resort for them; 'corporeal' (deha-maya), where the body of ours becomes a means for the conveyance of karma-dispositions through several lives; and 'transport' (vāha-maya), signifying the chariots used by kings and warriors in the battle-field. Rgveda uses the word ratha in all these four senses.

The old Indian texts of architecture take the expression to mean any solid construction for the habitation of gods, fashioned by the celestial mason. Tvashtṛ; they rely

on the Tattirīya-brāhmaṇa statement "Adamantine is ratha" ('vajro vai rathah'). The ancient caste nomenclature 'rathakāra' signifies not the "makers of chariots" but "the builders of temples"; it was a 'mixed caste' inasmuch as the work they did involved a variety of skills and a co-ordination of different professions. The five monolithic shrines in Māmallapuram were called 'rathas' in the sense of 'divine habitations' sculpted by men.

In Agni-purāṇa (chap. 47), the word 'rathaka' is used in the sense of a shrine or temple. The temples, like the chariots, were classified into seven types: semi-circular, circular, elliptical, rectangular, octagonal, hexagonal and oval. Like the temples, the chariots were also of four styles: nāgara (square), drāviḍa (octagonal), āndhra (hexagonal) and vesara (round).

These shrines have been popularly, but fancifully, named after the Pāṇḍava heroes and their consort Draupadi. The most interesting shrine in this group is the one named after Draupadi. It is actually a shrine dedicated to the Mother Goddess. It is architecturally simple and artistically elegant. It is a one-celled shrine containing the icon of standing Durgā carved in relief. The cell on a raised platform is approached by a flight of three steps. The opening is flanked by stylized 'door-guardians'; the other sides have niches containing replicas of the icon within the cell.

This represents a major shift in the conception of a shrine. It is not any relic

that is contained within the cella, as it was in the stūpa, but an icon carved by a sculptor. And the icon-containing chamber was not closed but was open to the worshipper. The square plan and the pyramidal roof (although four-cornered) are in a way continuations of the stūpa theme; but the suggestion of a hut is unmistakable. The four toranas of the stūpa occur here as four doors, three of which are blind, and the one facing the icon within the cella being open. The blind doors have also the representations of the same divinity as the sanctum contains. Thus the divinity is made to face all the four quarters. The intent of the four gateways to the stūpa is not lost here.

Further, the sanctum which is an innovation is a small one, admitting but one worshipper at a time. The shrine was no doubt public, but the idea did not accommodate the community assembly as yet. This may be seen as the beginning of a monumental temple. In the canonical description, it is the sanctum alone that constitutes the real temple. Here is therefore the basic shrine. The shrine named after Dharmarāja, which is located at the other end of the series, is actually dedicated to Śiva; it has a liṅga installed in the sanctum. But the cella is surmounted by a pyramidal and turrated vimāna which provided the model for all vimānas in the temples of the Dravidian style. The portico is open and pillared.

If these shrines are rather sparse in sculptural details and mythological representations, there are about ten excavated

rock-cut halls nearby which are in the nature of pillared assembly halls (maṇḍapas) where excellent sculptural panels are carved in rock-reliefs; the themes are mythological such as Varāha rescuing the earth, Durgā slaying the Buffalo-demon, and Krishṇa lifting the Govardhana hill. The patron king is also portrayed with his two consorts. Sculptures include secular themes and animal portraiture. These mandapas are not in the nature of shrines; art is of predominant interest here and they may be regarded as sculpture-galleries.

Ascribable almost to the same period are the two excavated cave-temples at Nāmakkal in Salem district in Tamil Nāḍu bearing some resemblance to the mandapas in Māmallapuram in the matter of sculptured panels. These, however, are cave-shrines and are dedicated to Viṣṇu. One of the caves is styled in the inscription there as 'Atiyanātha-viṣṇu-grha' ('House of Viṣṇu dedicated by the Atiya King'). The King of Atiya (or Aḍiyanmān) dynasty mentioned here was Guṇaśīla, who ruled from Tagaḍūr (present-day Dharmapuri) in Tamil Nāḍu, around 750 A.D. Three of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu (Vāmana, Narasimha and Varāha), provide themes for some very fine sculptures; and the narrative style has been employed. The representations are vigorous, if also somewhat stylized.

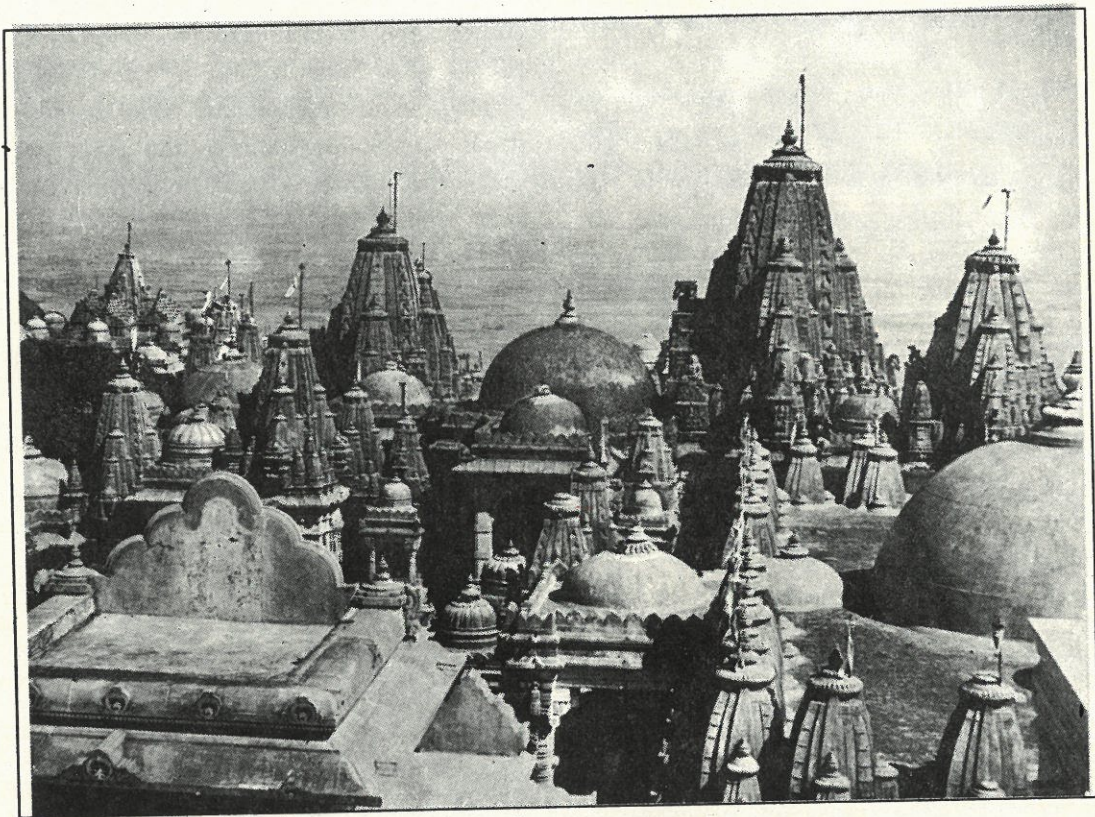
An interesting group of four cave-temples are to be found at Bādāmi, a charming valley in the Karnāṭaka region. The caves were excavated during the

reigns of the Chālukya kings, Kīrtivarman I and Maṅgalīśa, in the sixth century. These kings were in cultural contact with the North as well as the South, and we find in these cave-temples and also in the structural shrines due to them in the region, a fusion of several stylistic details and the emergence of fresh styles.

Of the four cave-temples, one is Jaina. The largest among them, known as cave No. III, is also the earliest (about 578 A.D.), and was carved at the instance of Kīrtivarman I (566-597). It is dedicated to Viṣṇu, and we have here a majestic and

splendid sculpture in relief of Trivikrama, and another imposing relief statue of Viṣṇu seated on the hooded serpent facing the corridor. Caves I and II, dedicated to Śiva, bear obvious impact of the last cave in the Ajaṇṭā group. These cave-temples illustrate the combination of sanctuary and shrine.

The structural stone-temples in the Kārṇāṭaka region are of great antiquity. Some of such temples in Aihole (in Bijapur district) like the Kontaguḍi and Lāḍ-Khān temple (before 500 A.D.), are earlier than the cave-temples. The impressive 'Durgā



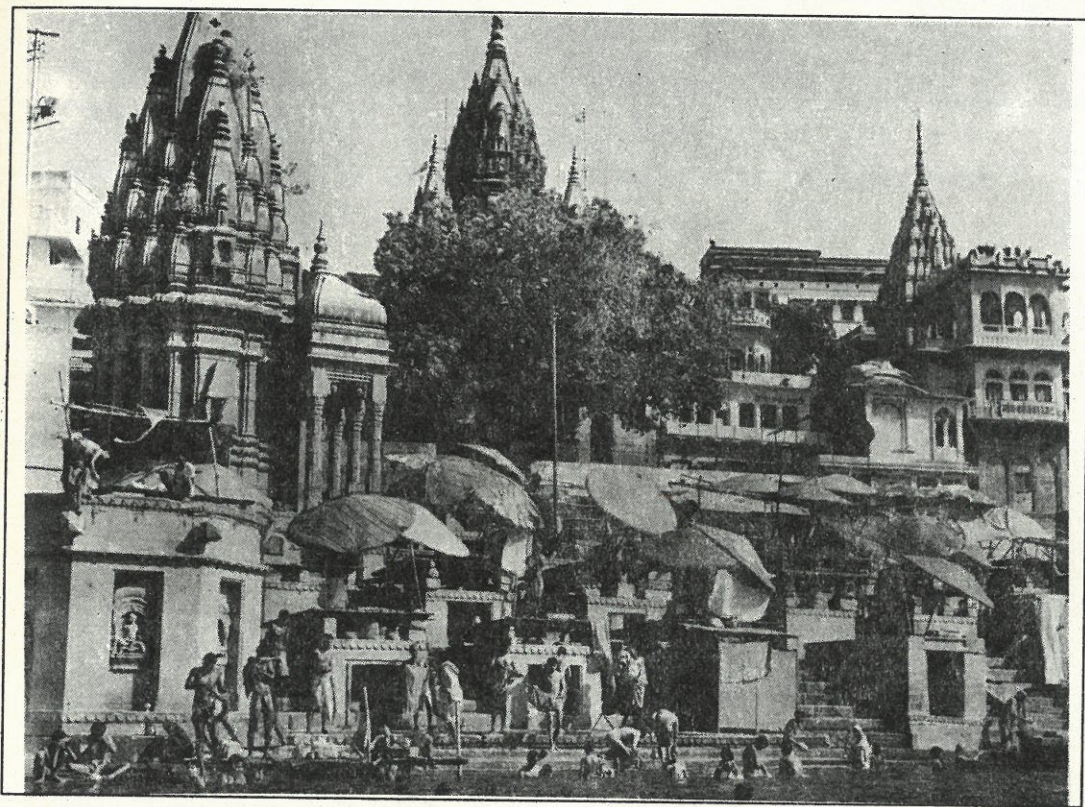
· Sikhara idea - Jaina shrines on the Śatruṅjaya Hill (Gujarāt)

temple on a raised platform 2.44 meters high in this small temple-town (containing no less than 70 temples) was begun around 450 A.D., although it was completed almost a century later. These temples appear to have been clever adaptations of the Buddhist Chaitya details, but they have incorporated the Gupta element of *śikhara*.

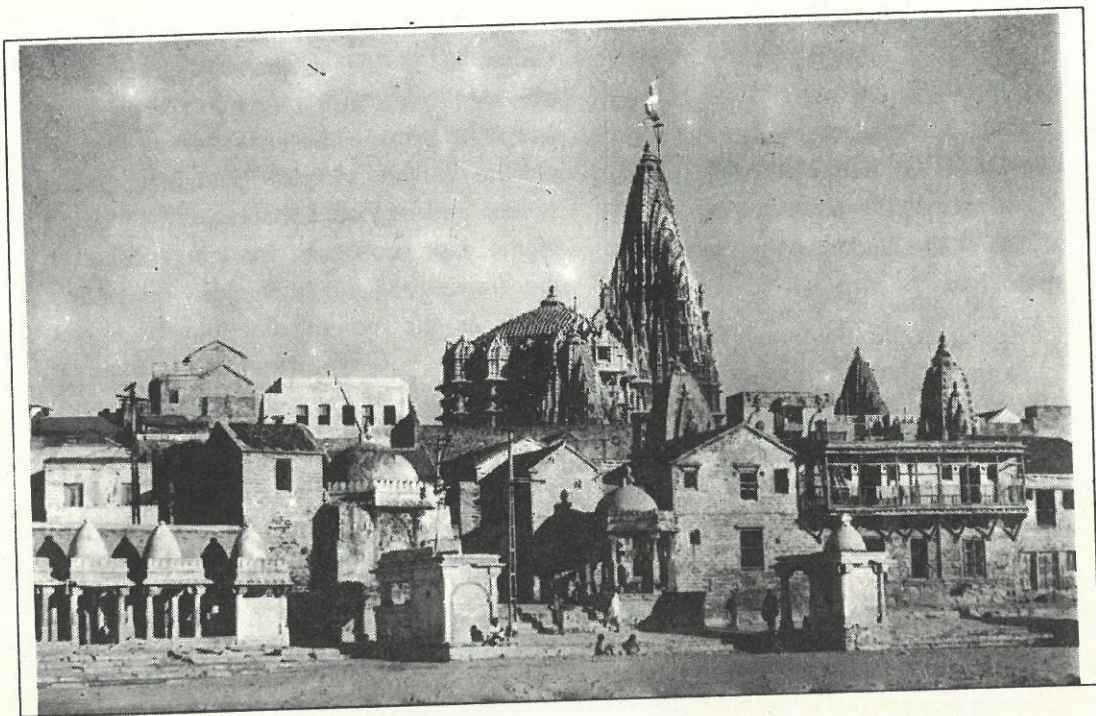
The Guptas (330-530 A.D.) were great temple-builders: and the earliest of the extant and independent structural temples in the North date back to their times. The *śikhara* as a monumental spire on top of the sanctum evolved in the fifth century,

probably under the patronage of the Gupta kings. As a massive dome surmounted by an ornamental pinnacle (*stūpi*), it became the characteristic feature of the Indian temple, permitting some stylistic and regional variations. The relation of the expression *stūpi* for the pinnacle of the formalized and pyramidal spire with *Stūpa* as the monumental tumulus is not accidental; nor is it merely a linguistic coincidence. The involvement of the *stūpa* idea is fundamental to the *śikhara* notion.

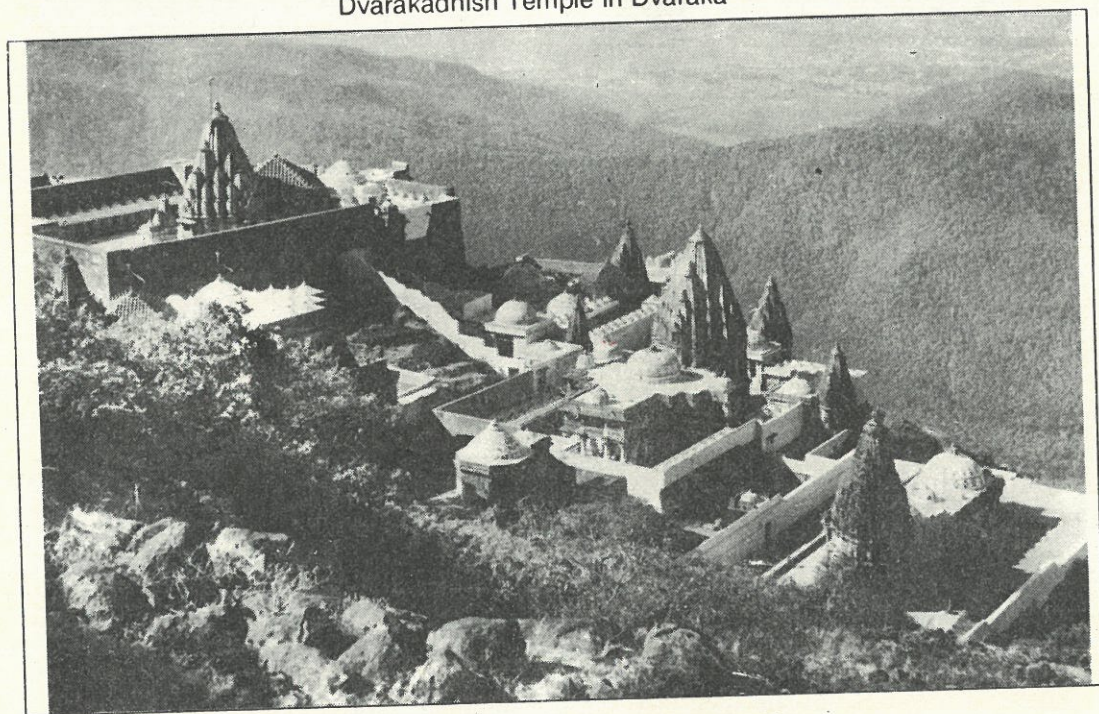
Śikhara is the top member of a shrine, the apex, cupola, above the *stūpa* or the dome ('*śikharam śirah murdhā cha śikhā*



Shrines along the river Gaṅgā in Vāraṇāsi



Dvārakādhīś Temple in Dvārakā



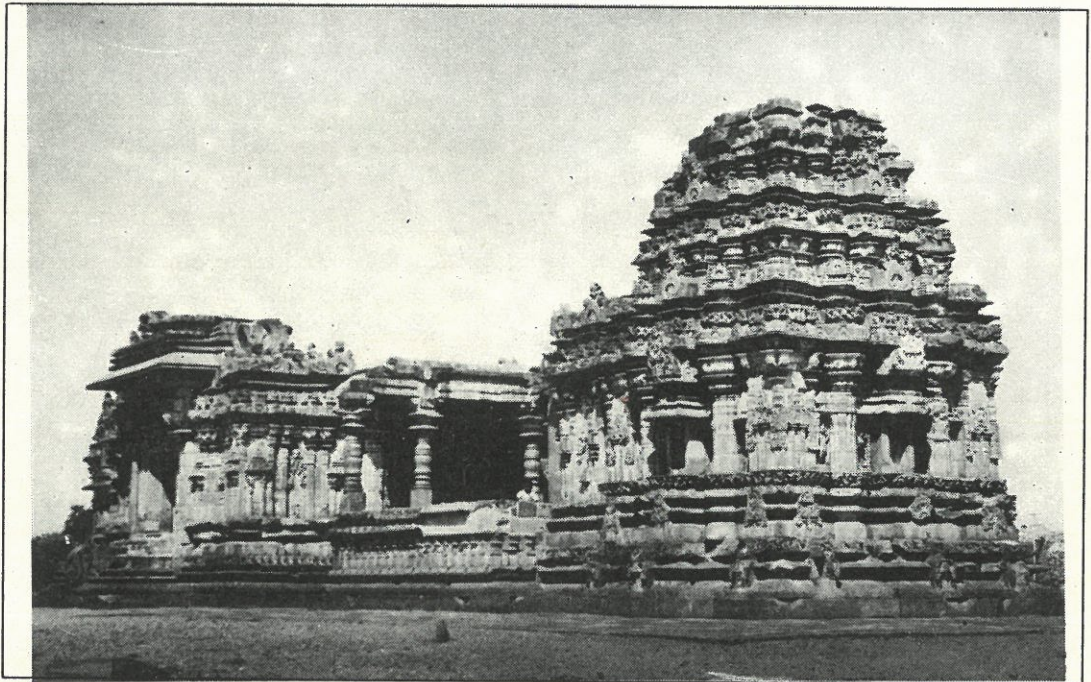
Jaina Temples on Girnār Hill - Gujarāt

mauliś cha muṇḍakam'). But there are several members in this detail. The lowest part is the one which is strictly known as śikhara, although the term is generally used to represent the whole member. Above the śikhara is 'śikhā' (the upper part of śikhara), or the pinnacle. Above this is 'śikhānta' (finial, the finishing portion of the pinnacle). Above this, is 'śikhāmaṇi' (crest-jewel, the top end of the finial).

Besides the early temples at Banavāsi and Tālagunda, which we have had occasion to mention and which were well-known shrines even during the days of the Sātavāhana rulers (the first two centuries after Christ), the Kadam̐ba inscriptions refer to many such temples in

Halmiḍi, Puligere, Halasi and Maḷavalli. The Praṇaveśvara temple at Tālagunda was earlier than 450 A.D. and the Jina temple at Halasi goes back to the days of the Kadam̐ba ruler Mṛgeśa-varman (about 455 A.D.). With the exception of the temples at Guḍimallam and Chejerala in Āndhra Pradesh, these temples are the oldest monumental experiments in South India.

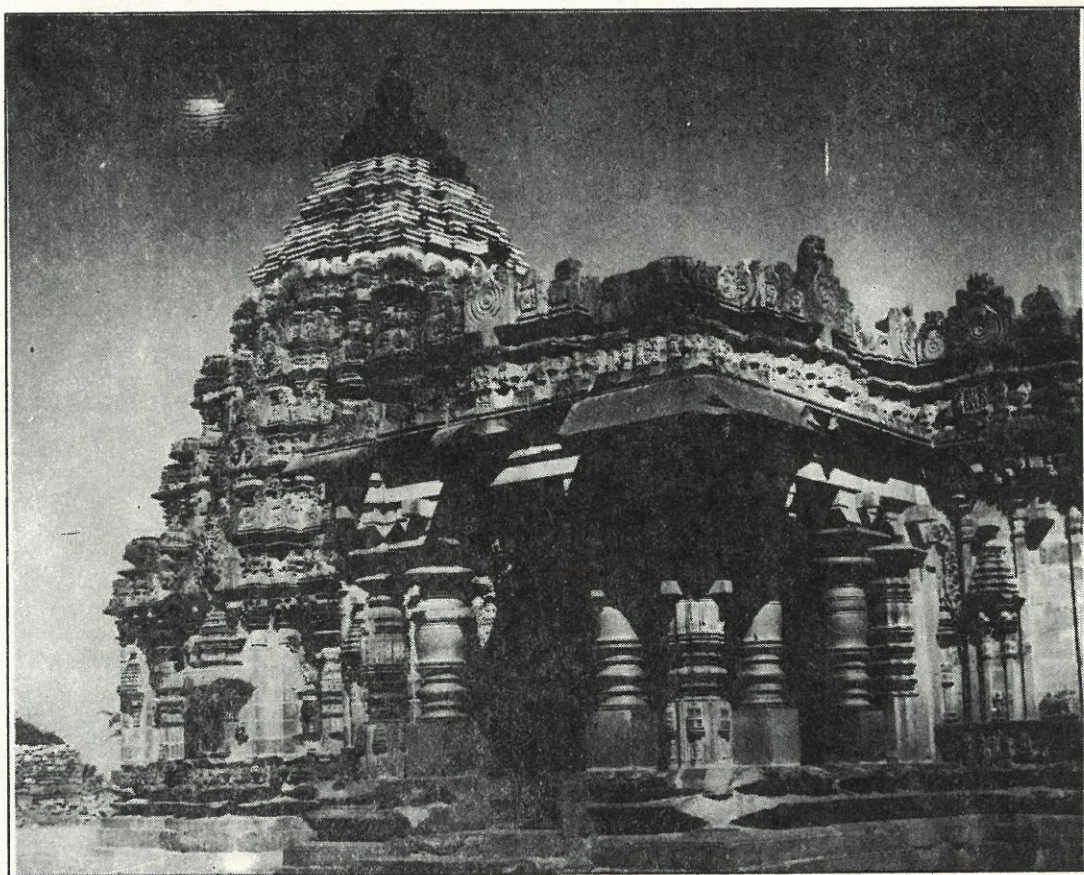
The Paraśurāmeśvara temple at Guḍimalla (near Reṇiḡuṇṭa in North Arcot district) is said to be a work of the second century A.D. The chief interest of this temple lies in the unusual and probably earliest iconic representation of Śiva found in its cella. We will have occasion to



Kāśi-Viśvanātha temple, Lakkundi

consider this interesting icon in some detail later on. Of greater significance, however, is the Kapotiśvara shrine at Chejerla in Āndhra Pradesh. This structural temple was built probably in the fourth century at the instance of the kings of the Ānanda gotra lineage who ruled over parts of the present-day Guṇṭūr district in Āndhra Pradesh during the first few centuries of the Christian era. Although it is now a Śiva shrine, it was undoubtedly meant to be a Buddhist sanctuary.

It was probably the king Dāmodara-varman, whom an inscription describes as "devoted to the feet of the perfectly enlightened Buddha" ('samyak-saṃbuddha- pādānudhyāta) that built this shrine, which is modelled after the oblong Buddhist chaitya-hall in the 'back - of - the elephant' (gajaprsthā) shape. There is an interesting suggestion that the Pallava ruler Mahendra-varman, who was a great enthusiast of the stone-shrines was a kinsman of the royal family of Ānanda-gotra lineage (as also of the Viṣṇukuṇḍi kings), was



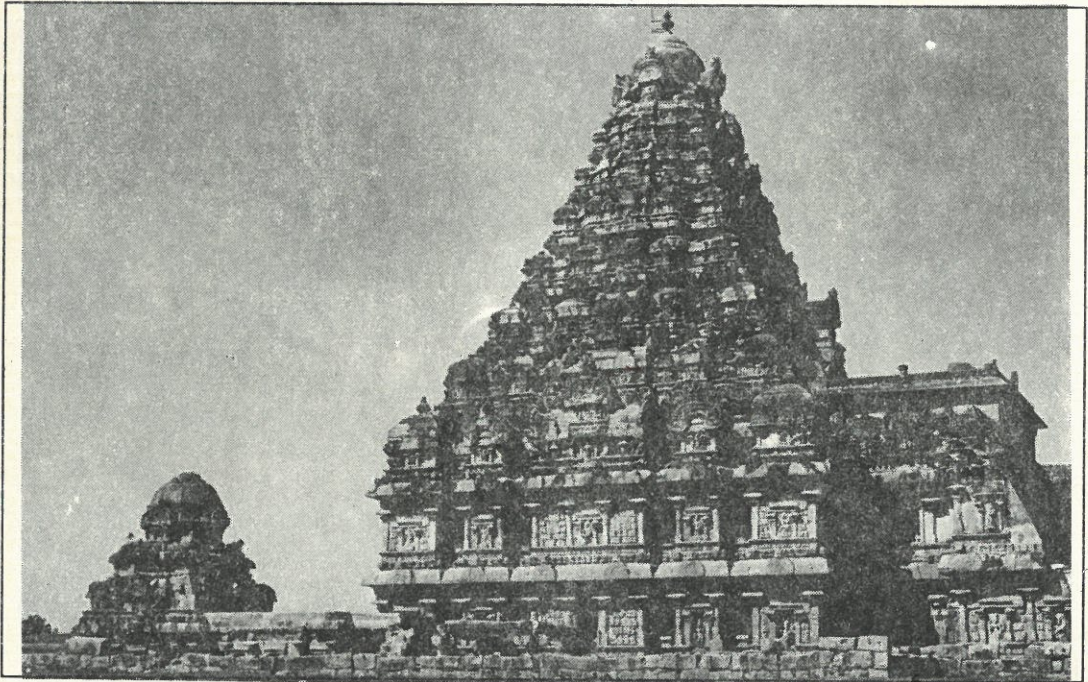
The Chaḷukya Mahādeva Temple at Ittāgi (Karnāṭaka)

inspired by the Chejerla temple. It may be noticed that rock-cut shrines (the so-called Pāṇḍava rathas), especially the ones named after Bhīma and Sahadeva, bear a definite resemblance to the Chejerla temple.

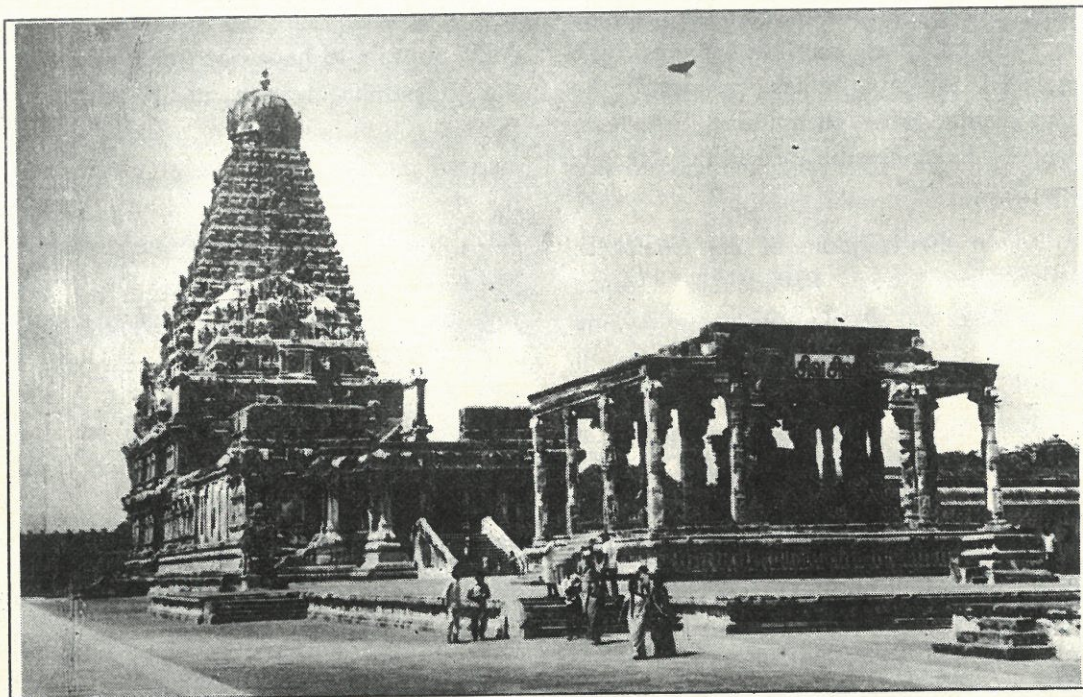
Within the kingdom of the Chāḷukyas of Bādāmi was Paṭṭadakallu (called Kisuvola in old texts), now in the Bādāmi taluk of Bijāpur district in Karnāṭaka. It was an important township, especially favoured by the Lakuliṣa-Pāśupata sect of the Śaivas. Even the Greek traveller Ptolemy (around 150 A.D.) mentions this town along with Bādāmi. There are about ten ancient temples in this place, most of them built during the seventh and eighth centuries. The most famous among them,

the Virūpāksha temple (built around 740 A.D.) appears to have been modelled after the Rājasimha temple at Kāñchipuram (about 700 A.D.); and it is likely that it inspired the Kailāsa temple at Ellora (built by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Kriṣṇa I, 757 A.D., around an old cave-shrine dedicated to Śiva). The earlier name for the temple was after Lokeśvara, the Mahāyāna Buddhist divinity who had close association with the Lakuliṣa-Śaiva cult; there is also a suggestion that it was named so after Loka-mahādevi, the queen of the Chāḷukya king Vikramāditya II.

A remarkable, and altogether unprecedented, feature about the Paṭṭadakallu temple is that we have an inscriptional mention of the architect who actually built



Shrine at Gaṅgaikonda-cholapuram (Tamiḷ Nāḍu)



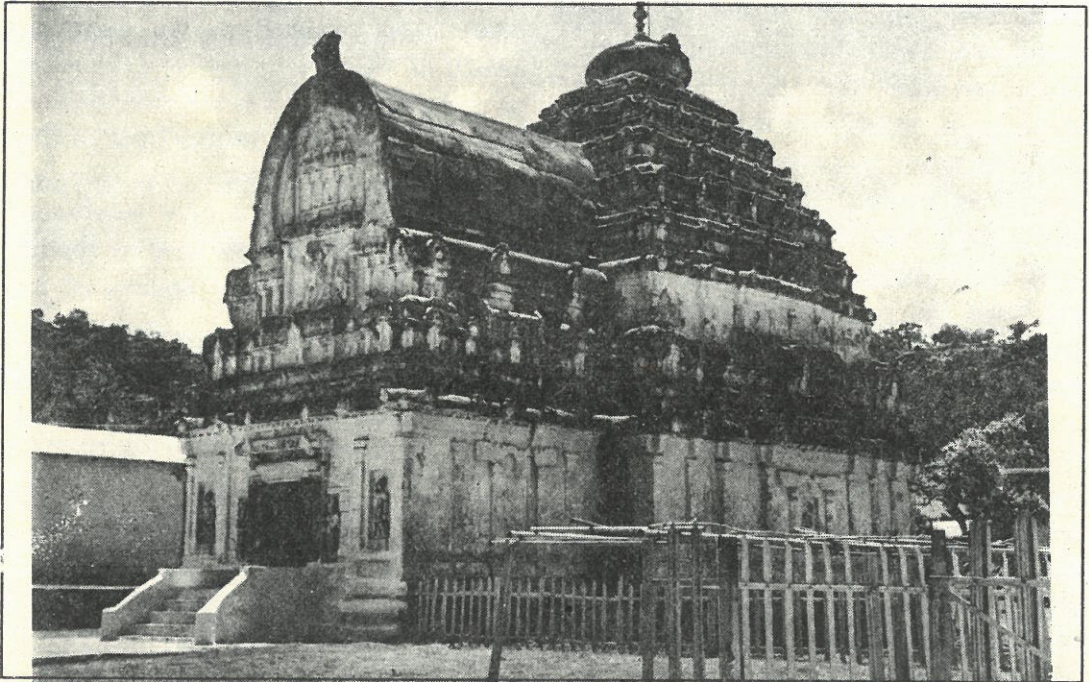
Brhadiśvara Temple in Tañjavūru



Shrine at Gaṅgaikoṇḍa-choḷapuram (Tamiḷ Nāḍu)

this structure : 'sūtradhānī' Anivāritagūṇḍa. For the first time in the history of temple-building, the craftsman is given his due recognition. The original shrine was probably austere and one-celled, with an imposing although modest śikhara; but it came to have in due course numerous pavilions. It became a complex structure, but not forsaking the dominant element of harmony. We should turn to the Vijayeśvara (now known as Saṅgameśvara) temple, if we want to have an idea of how the original temple would have looked like without a porch. This latter temple was an earlier one, having been built by Vijayāditya (696-733 A.D.).

A still earlier temple is the one dedicated to Śiva (or Viṣṇu, according to Percy Brown), Pāpanātha, with a short tower of the North Indian type. An obvious and bold disregard of the canonical proportions characterizes this temple, which was constructed before 690 A.D. A narrow circumambulatory passage, a disproportionately large vestibule, greatly spread out pillars, and the hesitantly low vimāna make the temple closer to the rock-cut shrines than to the structural ones. In the half-pavilion (ardha-maṇḍapa), structurally removed from the main shrine, is sculptured a fine Nāṭarāja group. The sculptor's name (Baladevamayya) is inscribed on the panel near the left shoulder of the main figure.



Ancient Kārtikeya Temple in Saṇḍūr (Karnāṭaka)

The temple-complex of the Chālukyas of Bādāmi, scattered in Bādāmi, Aihole, Pattadakallu, Kopaṇa, Puligere and Vak-kunda, marks an important phase in the evolution of temple architecture in India. It not only marks a definite transition from the rock-cut shrines to structural temples, but it reveals numerous experiments in stylistic variation. Here, perhaps, was the origin of the classical trichotomous classification of Indian temples into Nāgara, Drāviḍa and Vesara.

While this classification is neither neat nor absolute, it points to certain trends of stylistic variations, especially with regard to the śikhara treatment. Texts like Vishnu-tilaka, Mānasāra, Mukutāgama, Silpa-ratna, Maya-mata and Isāna-siva-guru-paddhati, which deal with this classification, give broad hints about their different features. There are texts (like Vishnu-tantra, and Mārkaṇḍeya-saṃhitā) which group temples into nine types; in addition to the above three, they mention Sārvadeśika, Kaliṅga, Varāṭa (the three regional styles, recognized in Kāmikāgama), Mandira, Bhavana and Yoga. But the variations detailed here are too minute and minor to be of much practical significance.

The trichotomous classification alone was regarded as valid and inclusive. And, both Silpa-praśna and Isāna-siva-guru-paddhati insist that this classification refers only to the śikhara. It is said that the word Nāgara actually means squarish, Vesara circular, and Drāviḍa polygonal (six or eight sided). But this refers, according to these texts, to plinth of the temple

(adhishṭhāna) rather than to the shape of the towering spire. Whatever the stylistically differentiating features, the territorial grouping is also done in the texts.

The classical description is that the Nāgara type prevails in the land between the Himālayas and Vindhya ranges, the Vesara between the Vindhya ranges and the river Krishṇā, and the Drāviḍa in the country between that river and Kanyakumārī. There is also a variant description, denoting the Southern style (between Krishṇā and Kanyakumārī) as Vesara and the Central style (between Vindhya and Krishṇā) as Drāviḍa. The significance of Vesara is that it is a mixed style. The Nāgara temple is square, cruciform in plan and its śikhara has a vertical emphasis. The Drāviḍa, on the other hand, emphasized the horizontal aspect; its śikhara is octagonal or domical, or in the shape of a vaulted roof. Another distinguishing feature of this type is the tall and storeyed towers on gateways (gopuras); but this is a later innovation. The Vesara is circular in plan or apsidal, and combines the śikhara-features of the other two types.

Mānasāra (18, 90-94) in one place gives an elaborate account of the three styles

(१) मूलादि स्तूपि पर्यन्तं वेदाश्च चायताश्रकम् ।
द्वयश्च वृत्ताकृतिं वाथ ग्रीवादि शिणराकृतिः ॥
स्तूपिकर्णसंयुक्त द्वयं वा चैकमेव वा ।
चतुश्चाकृतिं यस्तु नागरं तत्प्रकीर्तितम् ॥

(२) मूलाग्रं वृत्तमाकारं तद्यदायतमेव वा ।
 ग्रीवादि स्तूपि पर्यन्तं युक्ताधस्तद्युगाश्रकम् ॥
 वृत्तस्याग्रे द्व्यश्रकं तद्वेसरनामकं भवेत् ।
 (३) मूलाग्रात्स्तूपिपर्यन्तमष्टाश्रं वा षडश्रकम् ।
 पूर्ववच्चोर्ध्वदेशं स्याद् द्राविडं तत्प्रकीर्तितम् ॥

But elsewhere (53, 53) limits the significance of the stylistic variation to the pedestal

नागरं चतुरश्रमष्टाश्रं द्राविडं तथा
 वृत्तं च वेसरं प्रोक्तमेतत्पीठाकृतिस्तथा ॥

The description given in Ajītagama (kriyā- pāda, 12, 36-38) is more cryptic:

प्रासादरि विधः प्रोक्तस्त्रैविध्यमपि कथ्यते ।
 नागरं द्राविडं चैव वेसरं चेति नामतः ॥
 भौमादिस्तूपि पर्यन्तं नागरं चतुरश्रकम् ।
 कण्ठात्प्रभृति चाष्टाश्रं द्राविडं परिकीर्तितम् ॥
 कण्ठात्प्रभृति वृत्तं यद्वेसरं धाम कथ्यते ॥

Suprabhedāgama (1, 31, 38-39). also gives almost the same description:

नागरं द्राविडं चैव वेसरं च त्रिधा मतम् ।
 कण्ठादारभ्य वृत्तं यत्तद्वेसरमिति स्मृतम् ॥
 ग्रीवमारभ्य चाष्टाश्रं विनानं द्राविडाख्यकम्
 सर्वं वै चतुरश्रं यत्प्रासादं नागरं त्विदम् ॥

The account in Kāraṇāgama (1,7,116) is as follows:

नागरं द्राविडं चैव वेसरं च त्रिधा भवेत् ।
 भौमादि स्तूपि पर्यन्तं युगाश्रं नागरं भवेत् ॥
 वेदिप्रभृति चाष्टाश्रं द्राविडं चेति कीर्तितम् ।
 कर्णप्रभृति वृत्तं यद्वेसरं परिकल्पयेत् ॥

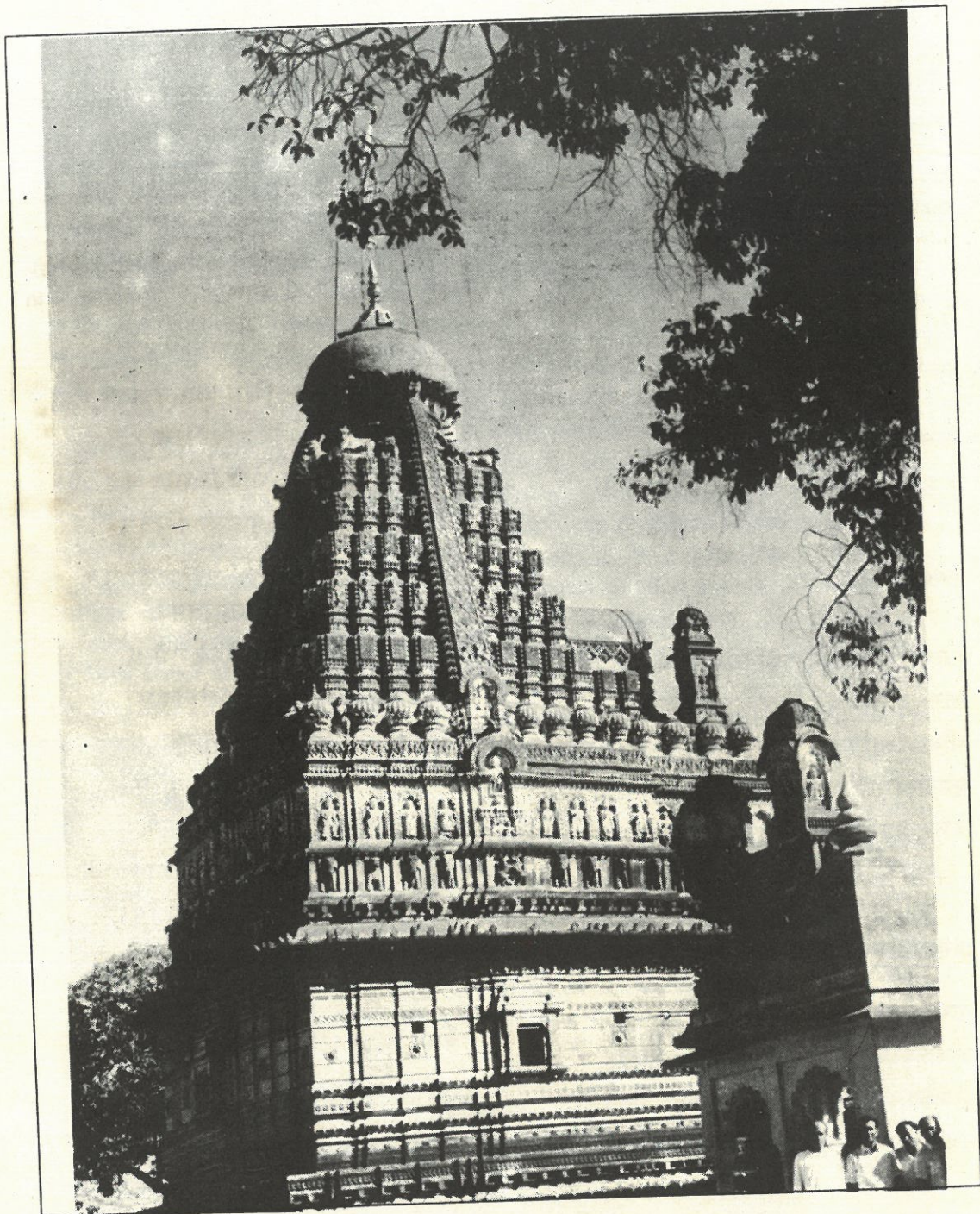
We have a long list of stylistic differences between the three modes in Kāmikāgama (65, 6-12):

प्रत्येकं त्रिविधं प्रोक्तं सञ्चितं चाप्रसञ्चितम् ।
 उपसञ्चितमित्येवं नागरं द्राविडं तथा ।
 वेसरं च तथा जातिश्छन्दोविकल्पमेव च ॥
 सविस्तारं वशाच्छन्नहस्तपूर्णायतान्वितम् ।
 युग्मायुग्म विभागेन नागरं स्यात्समीकृतम् ॥
 अन्तरप्रस्तरोपेतं ऊहप्रत्यूहसम्युतम् ।
 नैवसन्धार संस्तम्भं व्रातैः परिदृढैः शुभैः ॥
 द्राविडं वक्षतेऽथातः विस्तारं द्वयोर्ध्वकम् ।
 रक्ताच्छन्नप्रतिक्षेपाद्युग्मायुग्मविशेषतः ॥
 हित्वा तत्र समीभूतं भद्रालङ्कारसम्युतम् ।
 नैकद्वारं संयुक्तं यत्तु नातिरिक्तं न हीनकम् ॥
 बहुवर्गयुतं वापि दण्डिकावारशोभितम् ।
 नशावारं विमानोर्ध्वं निर्व्यूहाननसम्युतम् ।
 सक्षेत्रोपेतमध्यंघ्रियुक्तं तद्वेसरं मतम् ॥

Silpa-ratna (16-51) has the following:

मूलादि शिखरं युगाश्ररचितं गेहं स्मृतं नागरम् ।
 मूलादि शिखरं क्रियं षडुरगश्रोद्धेदितं द्राविडम्
 मूलाद्वा गलतोऽथ वा परिलसद्दृत्तात्मकं वेसरम् ॥

and (ibid, 52)



Jyotirlinga Temple, Ellora

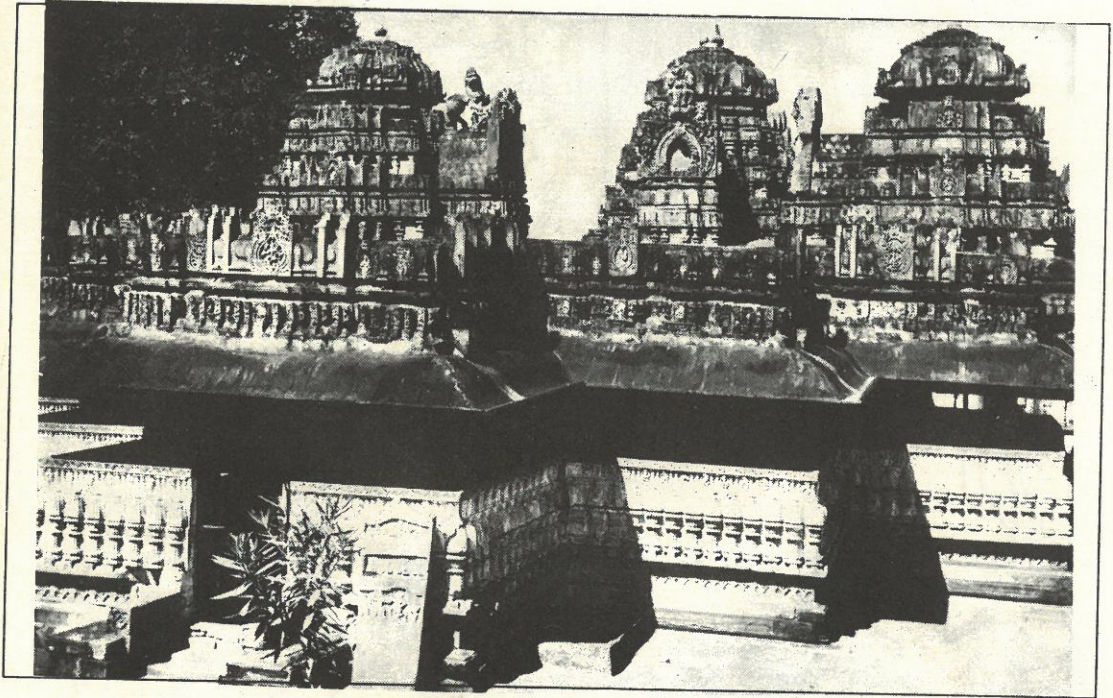
जन्मादि स्तूपिपर्यन्तं युगाश्रं नागरं भवेत्
वस्वश्रं शीर्षक कण्ठ द्राविडं भवनं विदुः।
वृत्तकण्ठशिरोपेतं वेसरं हर्म्यमीरितम् ॥

Another text, dealing with theatre, Bhāva-prakāśana (10, 5) also makes a three-fold classification:

चतुश्रं त्र्यश्रं वृत्तभेदात्सोऽपि त्रिधा भवेत् ॥

The temples built by the Chālukyas of Bādāmi are said to conform more or less to the Vesara typology, but we find examples of the other two types also. In fact, the textual incorporation of these

types must have followed the actual construction of these temples. The tendency to emphasize the element of tower over the sanctum in monumental and structural temples which we see initiated in the Pattadakallu complex found their fulfilment in both North Indian and South Indian temples. Two fine and early examples of the typical and stylized South Indian Drāviḍa treatment of the tower are the Shore-temple at Māmallapuram and Kailāsanātha temple at Kāchīpura, both built by the Pallava-ruler Narasimhavarman II (also called Rājasimha, about 680- 720 A.D.). It is probable that the Virūpāksha temple at Pattadakallu was directly influenced by them. But stylistic variations have been tried out here. The Gaḷaganātha

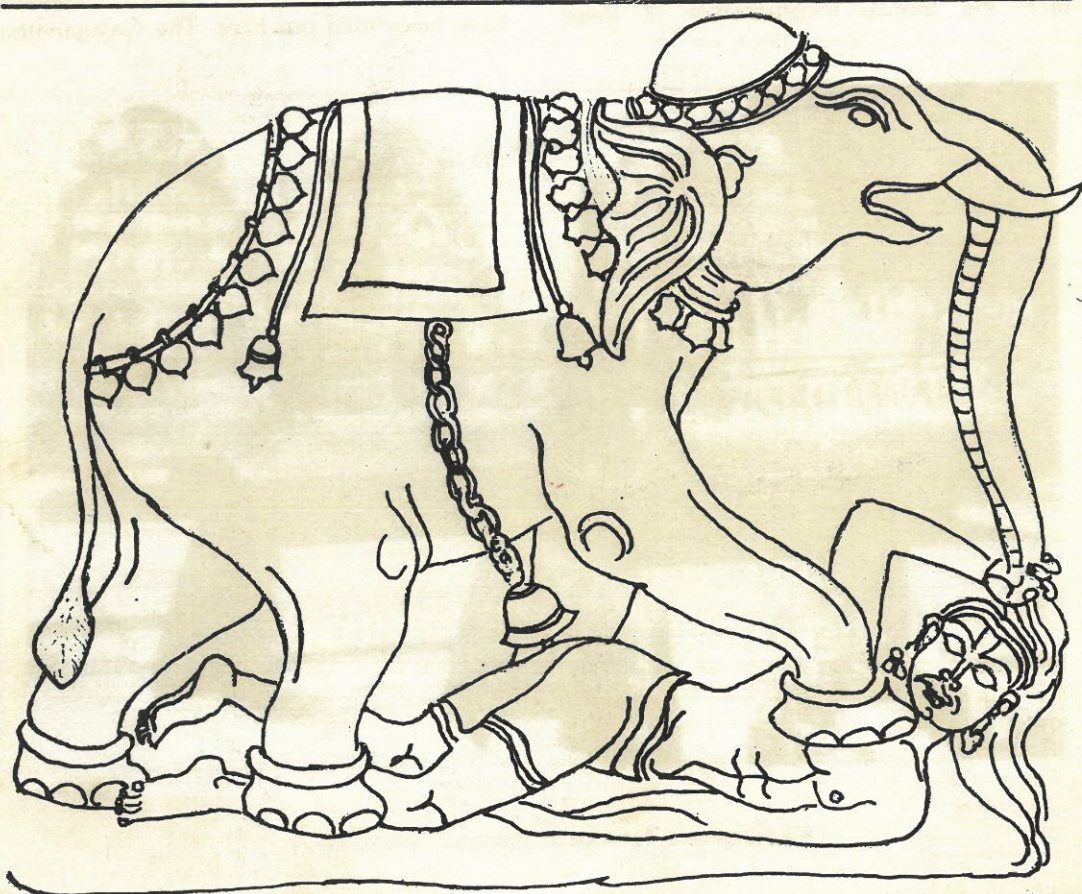


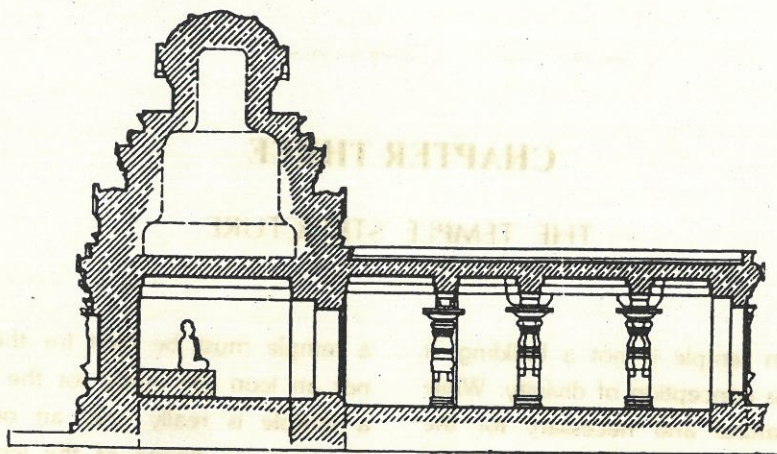
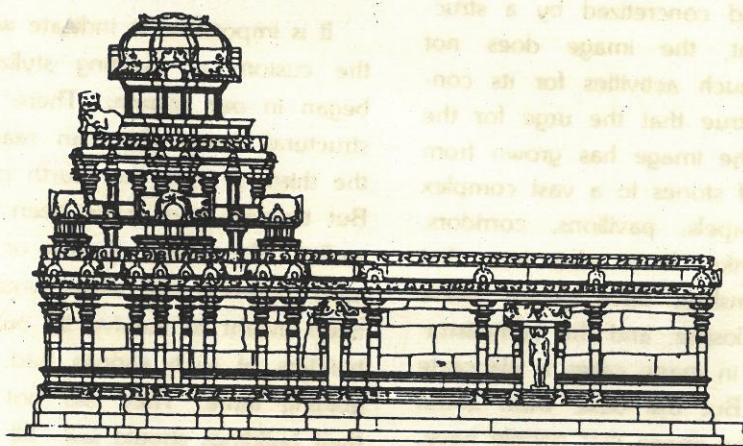
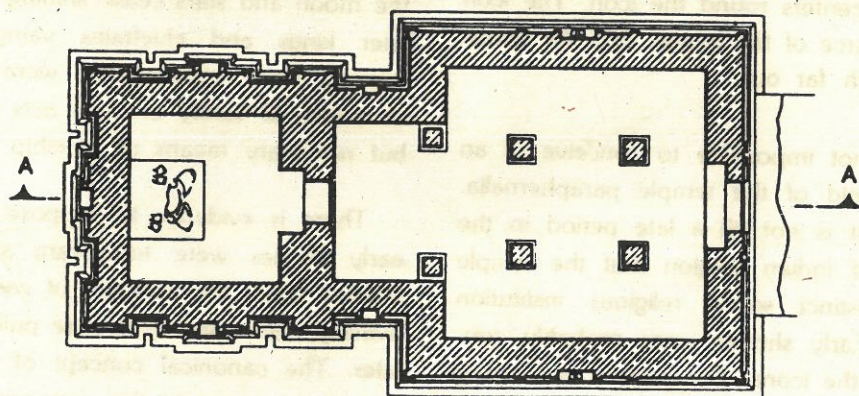
Kedāreśvara Temple at Ballīgāvi (Karnāṭaka)

temple has the tall śikhara with the āmalaka motif, which undoubtedly was the forerunner of the typical spiral Nāgara type. Likewise, the Viśveśvara temple provided the model for the characteristic Kalyāṇa- Chālukya tower.

The transportation of the Nāgara idiom to the North is best illustrated by the early, broad, squatty and low vimāna of the Paraśurāmeśvara temple of Bhuvaneśvar (built around 750 A.D.), which strongly reminds one of the Durgā temple at Aihole. Its development into a typical Orissan style with a tall tower and the tiered front pavilion roof can be seen in

the Mukteśvara temple, built about two centuries later, and the great Liṅgarāja temple built around 1000 A.D., in the same town. A variant idiom was evolved in Central India, with preference for pyramidal śikhara rising on an elevated masonry terrace, as illustrated about twenty temples that are extant in Khajurāho (in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh) built between 950 and 1050 A.D. These temples also reveal a tendency to integrate the several structural details into a neatly packed mass. However, sculptural enthusiasm dominates the architectural skill here.





ĀDINĀTH BASTI KAMBADAHALLI, Mandya

CHAPTER THREE

THE TEMPLE STRUCTURE

The Indian temple is not a building; it is an image, a conception of divinity. While it is both natural and necessary for the image to be projected into a spatial arrangement and concretized by a structural monument, the image does not depend upon such activities for its continuance. It is true that the urge for the expression of the image has grown from a simple ring of stones to a vast complex of shrines, chapels, pavilions, corridors, yards, and tanks. It is also true that sometimes townships have grown inside the temple enclosure; and the administrative machinery in many cases is elaborate and involved. But the basic truth about the temple is the image that people have, and this centers round the icon. The icon is the source of the image; and the image may reach far out.

It is not impossible to conceive of an icon devoid of the temple paraphernalia. In fact, it is not till a late period in the history of Indian religion that the temple as a distinct socio-religious institution began. Early shrines were probably confined to the icons. The custom of building the temple first and then preparing an icon to be installed in it is a later one. According to strict canonical considerations,

a temple must be built for the icon, and not an icon got ready for the temple, for a temple is really only an outgrowth of the icon, an image of the icon.

It is impossible to indicate when exactly the custom of building stylized temples began in our country. There is hardly a structural shrine that can reach back to the third or even the fourth century A.D. But temples must have been there much earlier. The village shrines of thatch and mud, bamboo and wood would not have been meant to survive till our days. The builders of such shrines had no eye for abiding fame. They did not aspire that their buildings should last "till the sun and the moon and stars cease shining", as the later kings and chieftains vaingloriously wanted. Early constructions were not instruments of vanity or even acts of piety, but necessary means of worship.

There is evidence to suppose that the early shrines were temporary structures, erected when the occasion of community-worship demanded, and were pulled down later. The canonical concept of 'pavilion' (maṇḍapa) supports this supposition. The old text Viśvakarma-prakāśa suggests that the purpose of the pavilion is to accom-

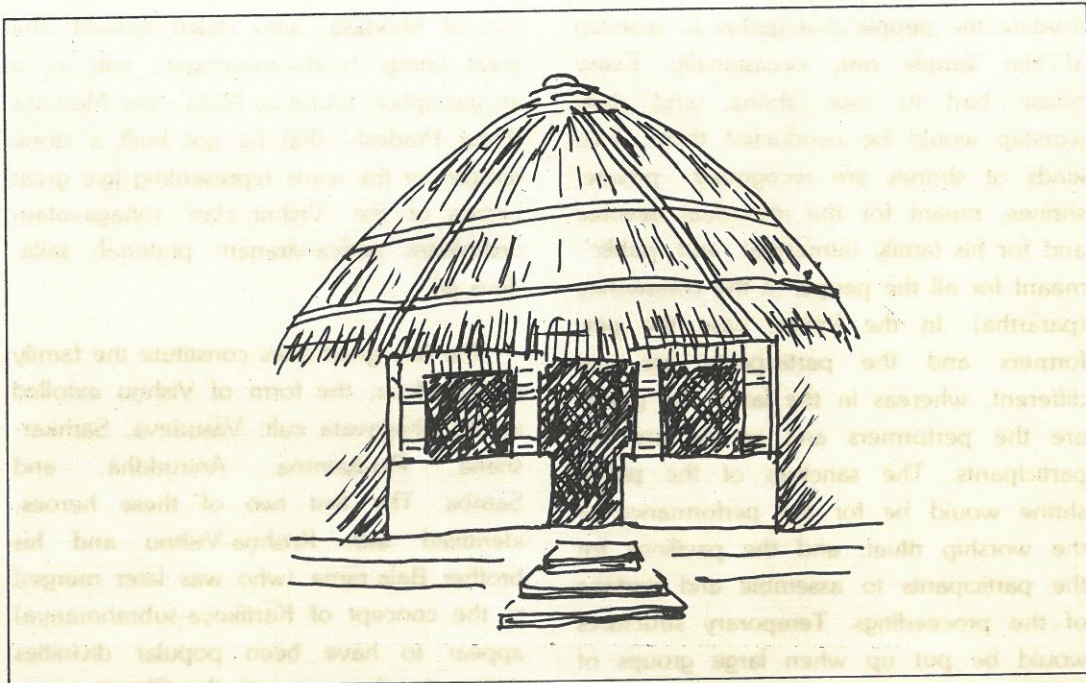
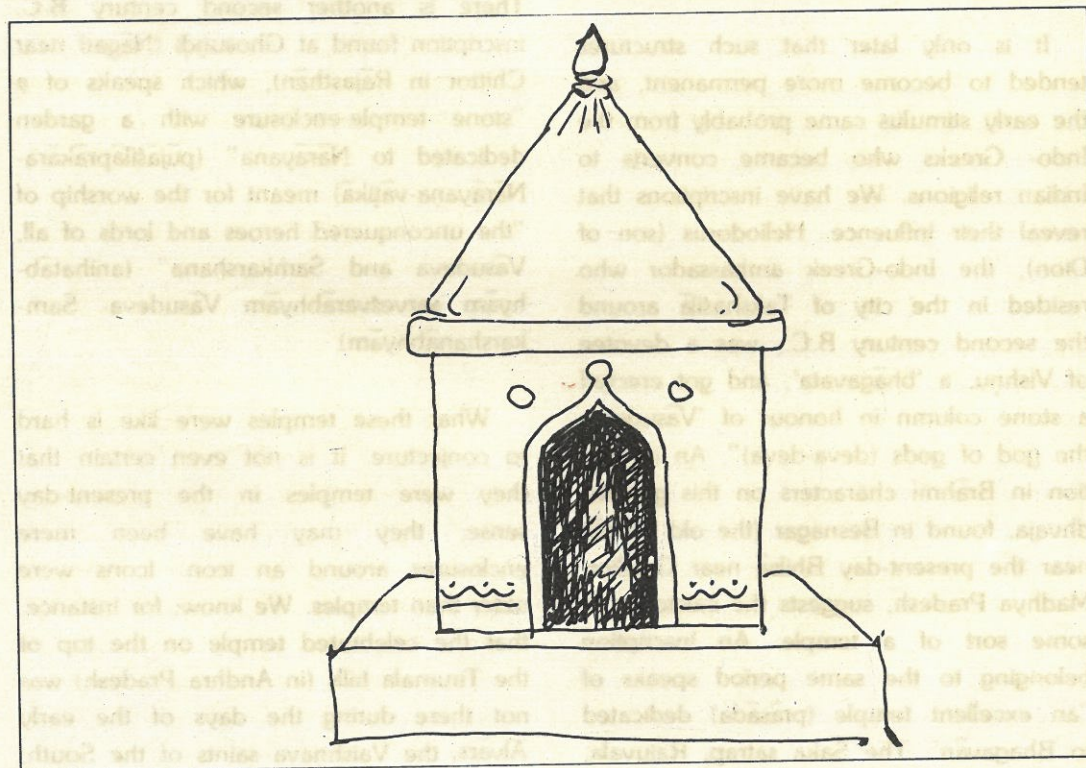
moderate the people that gather to worship at the temple only occasionally. Every house had its own shrine, and daily worship would be conducted there. Two kinds of shrines are recognized: 'private' shrines, meant for the individual devotee and for his family (ātmārtha); and 'public', meant for all the people in the community (parārtha). In the former case the performers and the participants are not different, whereas in the latter the priests are the performers and people are the participants. The sanctum of the public shrine would be for the performance of the worship ritual, and the pavilions for the participants to assemble and partake of the proceedings. Temporary structures would be put up when large groups of participants are expected to gather.

It is only later that such structures tended to become more permanent, and the early stimulus came probably from the Indo-Greeks who became converts to Indian religions. We have inscriptions that reveal their influence. Heliodorus (son of Dion), the Indo-Greek ambassador who resided in the city of Takshashilā around the second century B.C., was a devotee of Viṣṇu, a 'bhāgavata', and got erected a stone column in honour of 'Vāsudeva, the god of gods (deva-deva)". An inscription in Brāhmī characters on this garudadhvaja, found in Besnagar (the old Vidiśā) near the present-day Bhilsā near Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, suggests the existence of some sort of a temple. An inscription belonging to the same period speaks of "an excellent temple (prāsāda) dedicated to Bhagavān'. The Śaka satrap, Rājūvala,

son of Shodāśa, who styled himself 'the great satrap' (mahā-kshatrapa), tells us in an inscription found in Morā near Mathurā (Uttar Pradesh) that he got built a stone temple for the icons representing five great heroes of the 'Vrshni clan' (bhagavatām vrshnīnām pañca-vīraṇām pratimāḥ śaila-deva-gri)

The five great ones constitute the family of Vāsudeva, the form of Viṣṇu extolled in the Bhāgavata cult; Vāsudeva, Saṁkarshaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Sāmba. The first two of these heroes, identified with Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu and his brother Bala-rāma (who was later merged in the concept of Kārtikeya-subrahmaṇya) appear to have been popular divinities during the days prior to the Christian era. There is another second century B.C. inscription found at Ghosunḍi (Nāgarī near Chittor in Rājasthān), which speaks of a "stone temple-enclosure with a garden dedicated to Nārāyaṇa" (pūjāśilāprākāra-Nārāyaṇa-vāṭikā) meant for the worship of "the unconquered heroes and lords of all, Vāsudeva and Saṁkarshana" (anihataḥhyām sarveśvarābhyām Vāsudeva-Saṁkarshaṇābhyām)

What these temples were like is hard to conjecture. It is not even certain that they were temples in the present-day sense; they may have been mere enclosures around an icon. Icons were older than temples. We know, for instance, that the celebrated temple on the top of the Tirumala hills (in Andhra Pradesh) was not there during the days of the early Ālvārs, the Vaishṇava saints of the South,



viz., the third and fourth centuries A.D. Their Tamil songs describe the majestic Veṅgaḍam icon as free-standing and exposed to sunshine and rain; there was only a dwarf rampart enclosing the icon. The famous five-foot icon of Śiva (?) found at Guḍimallam (near Renigunṭa, in North Arcot district) has been assigned by Ānanda Coomāraswāmy to the first century B.C. It is now housed in Paraśurāmesvara temple, which is not a structure of any great antiquity. It is likely that this icon also was free-standing. We have from the village Burhikhār (in Bilāspur district, Madhya Pradesh) an inscribed sculpture of the same period (first century B.C.), worshipped as 'Chatur-bhujī Bhagavān' (four-armed Viṣṇu) and gifted by some lady Prajāvati. There is, however, no mention of a temple having been there to house it.

The Purāṇas, which are medieval works, contain not only praises of temples but promise great glory to the builders of temples. Agni-purāṇa, for instance, says that if a person merely desired to build a temple for Viṣṇu, all the sins that he had accumulated during all his previous lives would disappear. Haya-śiṛṣa-saṁhitā proclaims that if one should put a brick in place for building a temple and die soon after that act, he would have acquired the benefits of performing a sacrifice. Viṣṇu-rahasya promises heaven even for a child that playfully builds a temple in the sands. Such praises and promises suggest that temples had already been looked upon as acts of great merit, and that temples were being built in large

numbers by the rich and pious folk. This activity was encouraged by affirmations that a single temple built would confer merits that one would acquire by performing two sacrifices together, 'Rājasūya' and 'Aśvamedha' (Viṣṇudharmottara). It was the new substitute for the degenerating practice of performance of sacrifices.

The early Purāṇas had focussed the religious attention of the country on a few places which were regarded as especially favourite of the gods; the divine presence was supposed to be spontaneous and abundant there. Their celebrity has continued till our own day. Instances are Badarī-vana, Kedāra-nātha, Indra-dyumna (Jagannātha-puri), Kāśī (Banaras), Prayāga, Somanātha, Śimhādri, Veṅkāṭachala (Tirumalai), Setu (Rāmesvaram), Kāñchīpuram. Here the icons were reputed to be 'self-manifest' (svayam-vyakta), not made by man; and therefore what remained for man to do was to build temples over them. and the places themselves were considered holy, and visits to them were held especially meritorious. Pilgrimage, which still remains as one of the essential features of Indian religions, was largely the contribution of the Purāṇas.

The essence of the holy place was concretized in a shrine, often containing the icon that was reputed to be 'self-manifest'. Structural additions to such shrines, buildings to accommodate the pilgrims, tanks to provide water to them, free refectories to cater to their needs, and other acts of charity were deemed

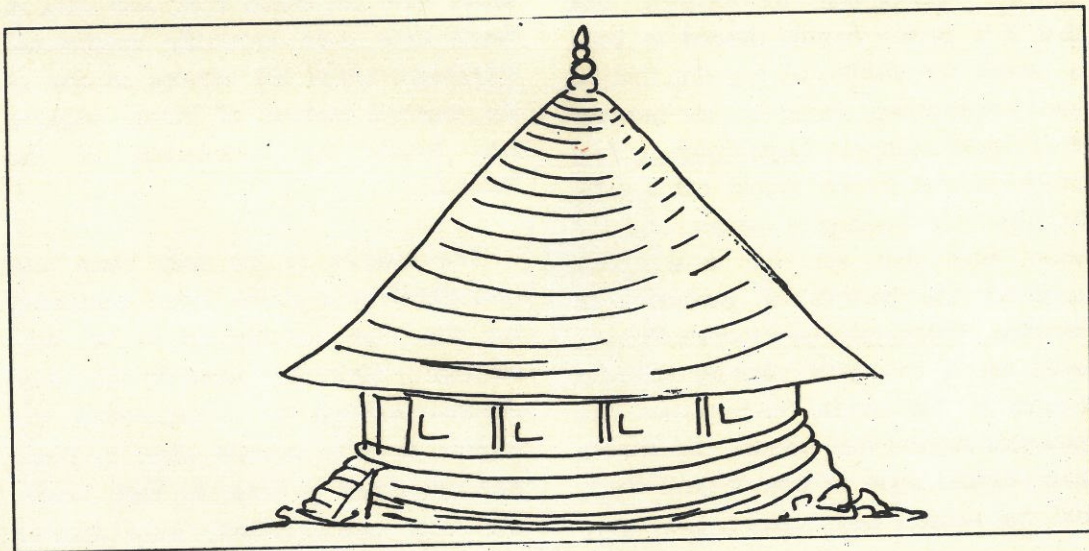
meritorious. There are instances where whole townships have grown out of shrines. There are in scriptures called 'independent' (svatantra) shrine, in contradistinction to the temples built for the sake of a village or township ('dependent' or paratantra shrines).

This is how vast temple-complexes evolved in hundreds of 'sacred sites' (kshetras), strewn all over the country. But when places which did not command such prestige emerged into importance owing to political or commercial reasons, they were also got sanctified by kings or chieftains or influential residents through the installation of icons and construction of shrines. Sometimes, icons were brought over from the ancient, sacred sites which had been deserted or which were not easily accessible to people. The conquering kings sometimes carried away prestigious icons as booty and got them set up in their own capitals. Or, more frequently, replicas of icons from the accredited sacred sites

were got made and installed. There are for instance hundreds of Kāśi-viśvanātha temples in the country today, and hundreds of Kedāreśvara shrines; Veṅkaṭeśvara shrines have sprung up in large numbers after the original shrine at Tirumalai.

Thus, not only architects but sculptors got busy during the middle ages. And to fulfil the new need, several texts prescribing the norms, styles, methods and measurements of the temples and icons came to be written. Craft-guilds were organized, and kings and chieftains undertook to be patrons of artists and craftsmen connected with temple-building. Craftsmen's organization was in terms of four classes of skilled workers; the designing architect (sthapati), the surveyor (sūtragrahin), the sculptor (takshaka), and the builder (vardhaki).

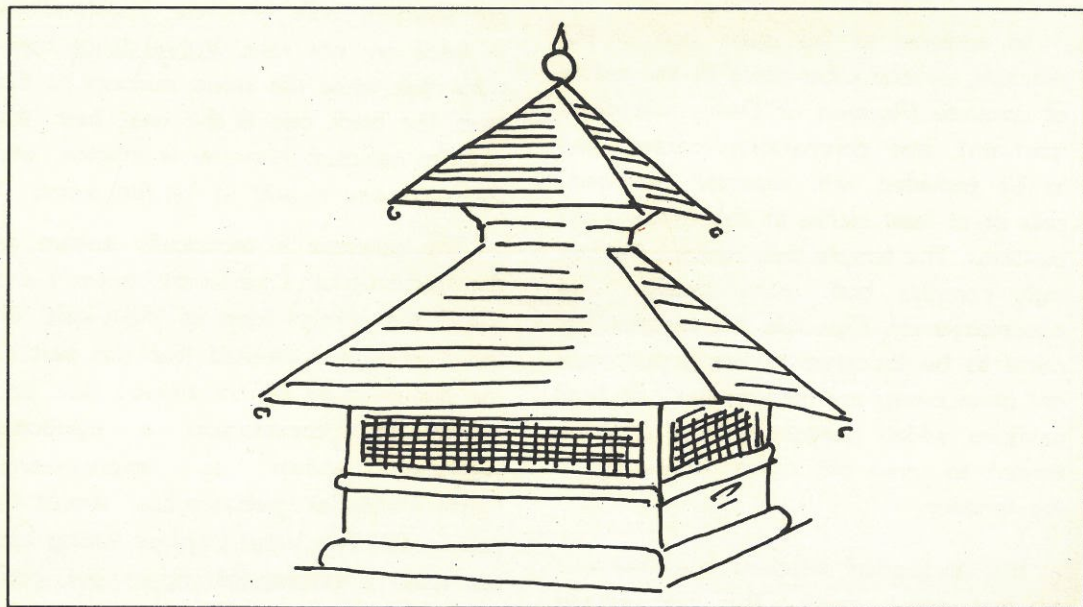
The architect directed and co-ordinated the activities of others; he was in general charge of the entire construction, and was



expected to have an expert acquaintance with the canonical norms. The surveyor was hierarchically next to the architect; his special area of work concerned with proportions, vertical and horizontal (*māna* and *unmāna*). The sculptor worked with stones, cut them into large and small pieces according to plan and design; he also sculpted images and attended to decorations. He was free to work as his fancy dictated, within the general framework provided by the architect. He was acquainted with canonical prescriptions and descriptions concerning icons and sculptural ornamentation, and his creativity was not only acknowledged but praised. The builder put the pieces, cut and worked by the sculptor together, and attended to the temple coming up (the term *vardhakī* means 'an increaser'). His professional affiliation was with the carpenter's craft ('joiner').

It may be remembered that early temples were constructions in wood, and carpenters were the main craftsmen who attended to them. The work of all these four classes of artisans was often supervised by a director or manager (*sthāpaka* or *sthānika*) who was not only learned in temple-craft but a priest as well; he was the administrative chief of the temple who had control over the other priests who were directly responsible for the details of worship in the temple.

Worship in the temple was more formalized than domestic worship and it involved many more details than the latter. It therefore necessitated many priests and assistants. And numerous festivals were incorporated into the normal working of the temple. The devotees who assembled had to be given token food blessed by the offering-rituals (*naivedya*, *prasāda* or



bhoga); and in olden days pilgrims were also fed in the temple. The temple had also to provide place for assemblies of devotees and their socio-religious performances.

All this meant not only an increase in the staff of the temple and a more elaborate administrative procedure but a growth in the spatial arrangement. The temple had to have several halls, not strictly connected with the routine worship: audience pavilion (raṅgamaṇḍapa), treasury and store-house (Śrī-bhaṇḍāra), the chamber for the performance of daily and occasional sacrifices (yāga-sālā, kitchen (pāka-sālā), dining hall (Śiva-kūṭa in Śaivite temples and Rāmānuja-kūṭa in Vaiṣṇavite temples in the South, bhoga-maṇḍapa in the North), marriage-hall (kalyāṇa-maṇḍapa), the rooms where the festival vehicles were kept (vāhana-maṇḍapa), and the temple-tank (kalyāṇi or teppakuḷam in the South).

In addition to the main icon in the sanctum, several other icons in the nature of consorts (Amman or Devī), attendants (parivāra), and companions (pārsva) had to be provided with separate chambers, cells or at least niches in canonically fixed positions. The temple thus became increasingly complex both architecturally and administratively. Especially the temples that came to be favoured by royal patronage got unnecessary and superfluous halls and pavilions added periodically; the structure tended to grow out of all proportion to the function.

But the added structure does not add to the shrine value. The real temple

consists of the sanctum in which the icon is housed, and the immediate structural involvements that are essential for the main worship ritual. In fact, the canonical texts describe the sanctum alone as the real temple. Śrī-prasna declares that the sanctum is the divinity's body and the icon is its soul (jīva). Usually it is a stone structure, square in shape and severely plain, although there could be niches for other icons on the outer walls. There will be no pillars, and the sanctum will be altogether devoid of windows. The shutting off of air and light was meant to preserve the icon which, in olden days, was made of wood, stucco, or even clay. Besides preventing of ill-effects of weathering, the dark interior added to the mystery of the divine presence in sanctum represented by an empty low platform (vedī, probably with a mystic diagram called maṇḍala), a copper vessel placed on a seat (kumbha), a sacrificial fire-place (kuṇḍa) or a sculpted icon (bīṁba). Although it is usual to find the sanctum built in stone, constructions in brick are not rare. Vishnu-tilaka mentions that while the stone sanctum is the best, the brick one is the next best; the wooden sanctum however is inferior, and the mud one is said to be the worst.

The sanctum is technically known as the 'garbha-grha' ('the womb-house') and 'Deul' the corrupt form of 'deva-kula' (in the North). It is insisted that this part of the temple must be constructed first, and before the construction a significant ceremony known as 'impregnating' (garbhādhāna or garbha-nyāsa) should be performed. This ritual involves letting into the earth a ceremonial copper pot, con-

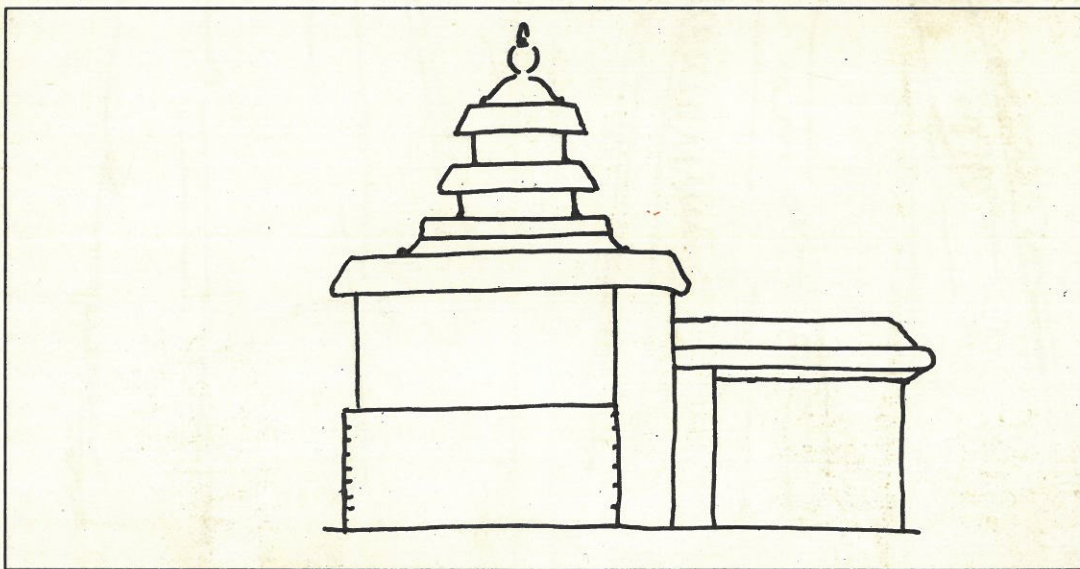
taining nine precious stones, several metals and minerals, herbs and soils, symbolising creation and prosperity. The building which contains this 'womb' is said to prosper, and not the one which lacks it (Siddhānta-śekhara). After the completion of this ritual, a stone slab (ādhāra-sīlā) is placed over the spot where the copper pot symbolises the womb, and the icon the soul. The sanctum that is built round it is the body. This is the significance of the sanctum being called 'the womb-house'. Texts like Śilpa-ratna, Tantra-samuchchaya and Isāna-sīva-guru-paddhati give an elaborate account of this ritual.

The sanctum is covered by a flat roof of stone slabs, and sometimes by wooden beams and planks. This serves as the base (adhiṣṭhāna) for the tower that rises above the sanctum. This super-structure known as 'vimāna' or 'śikhara' is an important part of the temple, especially of the temples built in villages and towns. It is

interesting to note in this context that holy places are classified into five kinds in an old text named Archana-navanīta.

The first variety is where the divinity is self-manifest (svayaṁ-vyakta), the second is where the icons are installed by gods (daivika), the third by sages (ārsha), the fourth glorified in the Purānas (paurāṇika), and last is where the shrine is man-made (mānusha). While the first four kinds of places are holy by themselves, the last variety needs to be sanctified by special effort. The background belief was that the entire area which the vimāna overlooked was rendered holy. Thus the vimāna construction was a means of sanctifying the otherwise ordinary place.

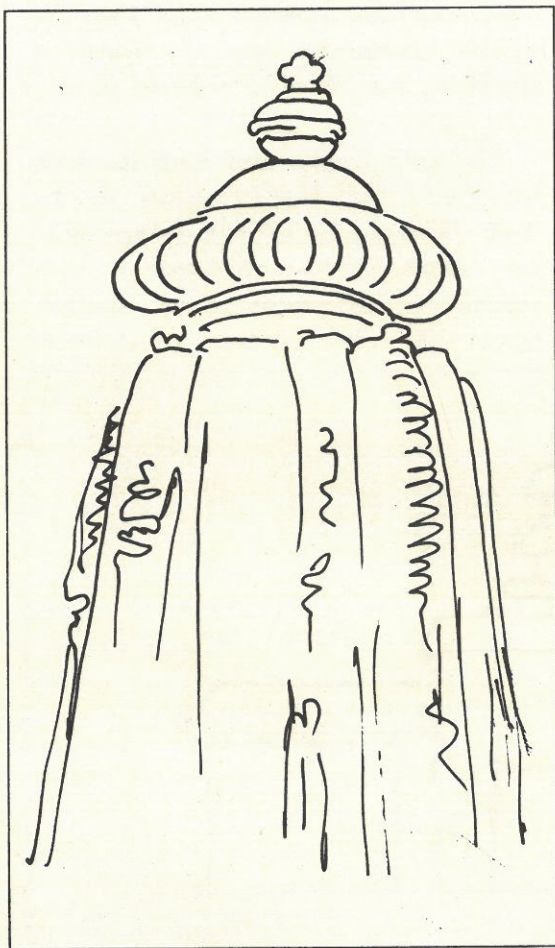
The early temples were understandably flat-roofed. The Gupta temples in the North belonging to the fifth century were flat-roofed. We have in Aihole an early specimen of such temples in the Lāṭ-Khān (about 500 A.D.), on the roof of which



is another sanctum whose roof consists of stone slabs grooved at the points and pieced together. Sometimes, the temple roof resembled the roof of the huts, as illustrated by the so-called Draupadī shrine in Māmallapuram. But there was a tendency for the roof to be vaulted or dome-shaped, probably in order to reproduce the shape of the cave-shrines or in imitation of the stūpa-form. The mean mud-shrines in the villages even today are surmounted by a mound of earth, as in the primitive funerary monu-

ment. In course of time, the tendency resulted in the pyramidal or curvilinear form. This was regarded as the part of the temple that gives the structure a monumental dignity.

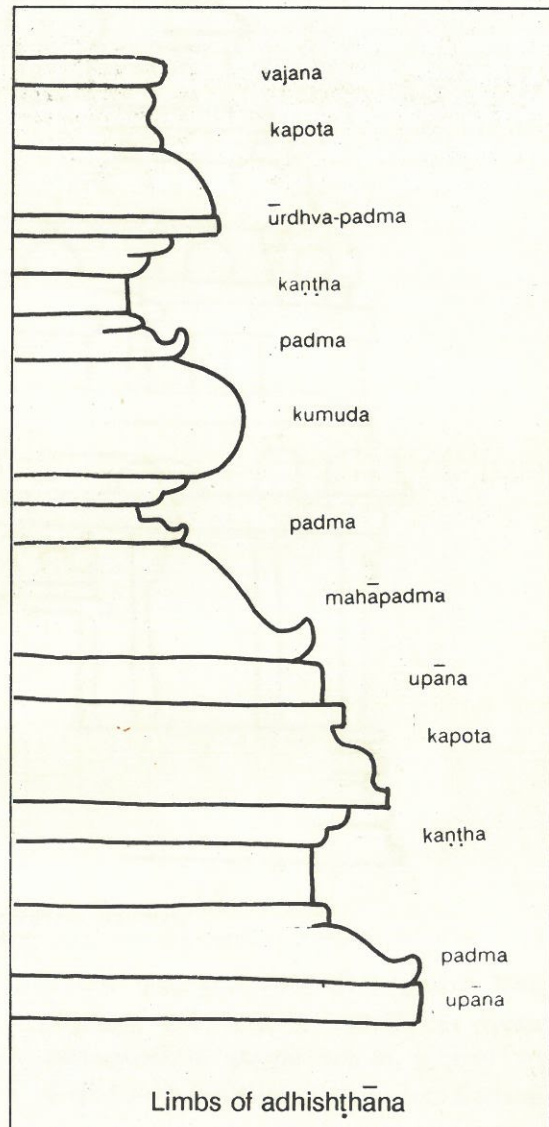
The North Indian temples, especially in Orissa, emphasized this aspect. Perhaps the upper storey of the temple (as in the Lāḍ-Khān temple of Aihole) was stylized into this part; and several storeys were amalgamated into a decorative spire. By about the eighth century, the towers became parabolic in character. Legends

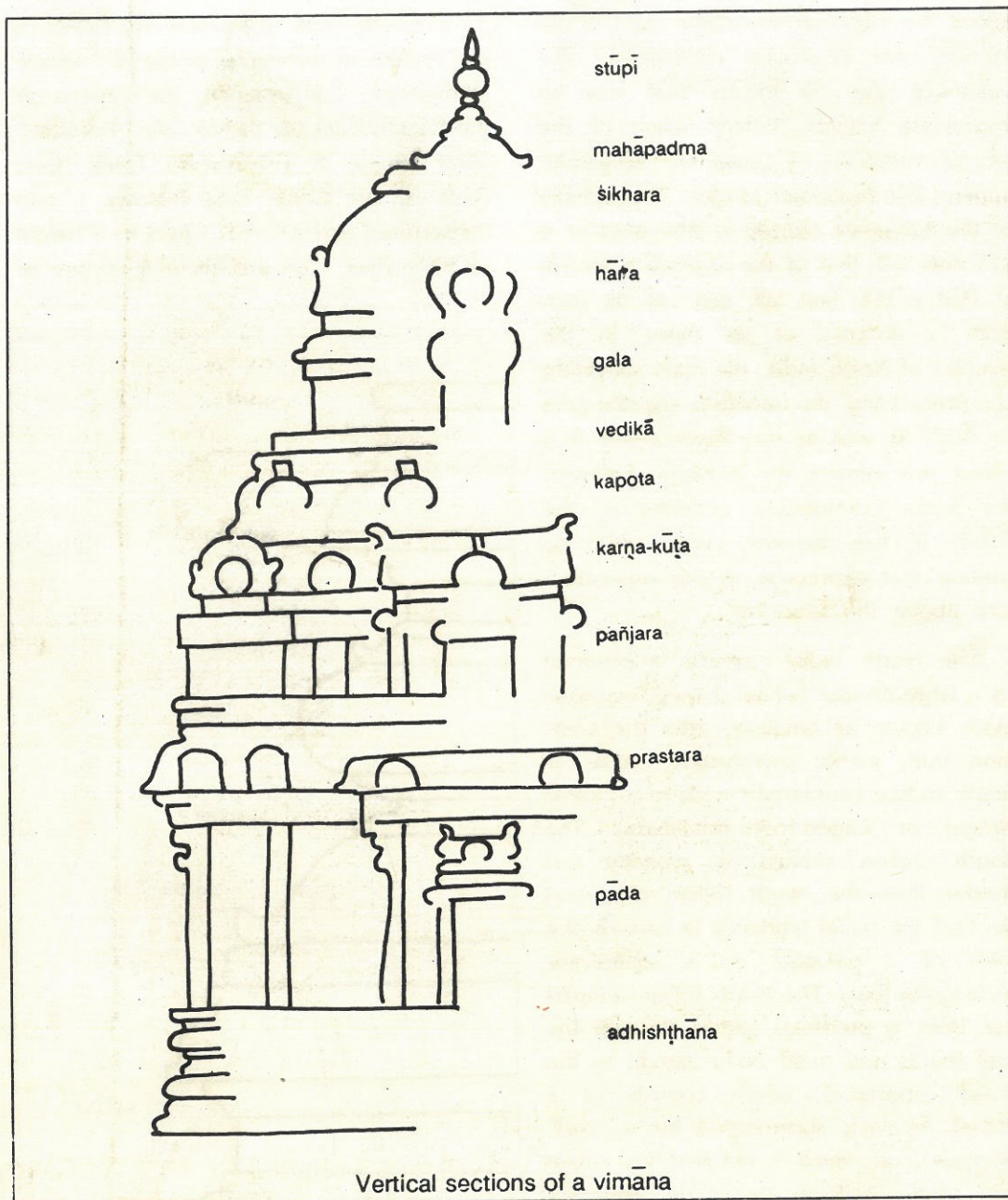


about the mythical mountain Sumeru (or Meru) were employed to highlight the value of the tall towers that rose to impressive heights. Indeed some of the temple-complexes in Orissa and Khajurāho appear like mountain ranges. The vimāna of the Liṅgarāja temple in Bhuvaneśvar is 125 feet tall; that of the Jagannāth temple at Pūri is 200 feet tall, and can be seen from a distance of six miles. In the temples of North India, the main sanctuary comprehending the sanctum (garbha-gr̥ha or deul) as well as the tower above it is called the vimāna (or sikhara). Although the same connotation obtained in the South it has become more usual to confine that expression to the superstructure above the sanctum.

The North Indian vimāna is crowned by a large circular (wheel-shaped) capstone block known as āmalaka, after the common fruit, emblic myrobelan; while its South Indian counterpart ends in a cupola (śṛṅga) or wagon-roof (khakhara). The South Indian vimāna is broader and shorter than the North Indian one, and we find the usual tendency is towards the form of a polygon, on a square or rectangular plan. The North Indian temples rise from a predestal (pīṭha) through the wall (bara) and main body (gaṇḍi) to the 'head' (mastaka), which consists of a ribbed āmalaka surmounted by a 'skull' (khopūri), on which is installed the kalasha (the finial). And on top of the finial will be seen the 'weapon' (āyudha) of the deity, a trident or a discus. However, we do not find the mention of 'āmalaka' in the classical texts of temple architecture

In South India, there was emphasis on the vimāna in the earlier phase of temple architecture. For instance, the vimāna of the Rājaraṅgīsvara (or the so-called Brihadesvara) temple at Tañjāvār in Tamil Nāḍu (built by the Choḷa King Rājaraṅga I, and consecrated in 1009 A.D.) rises to a height of 58 metres, "an architectural texture of



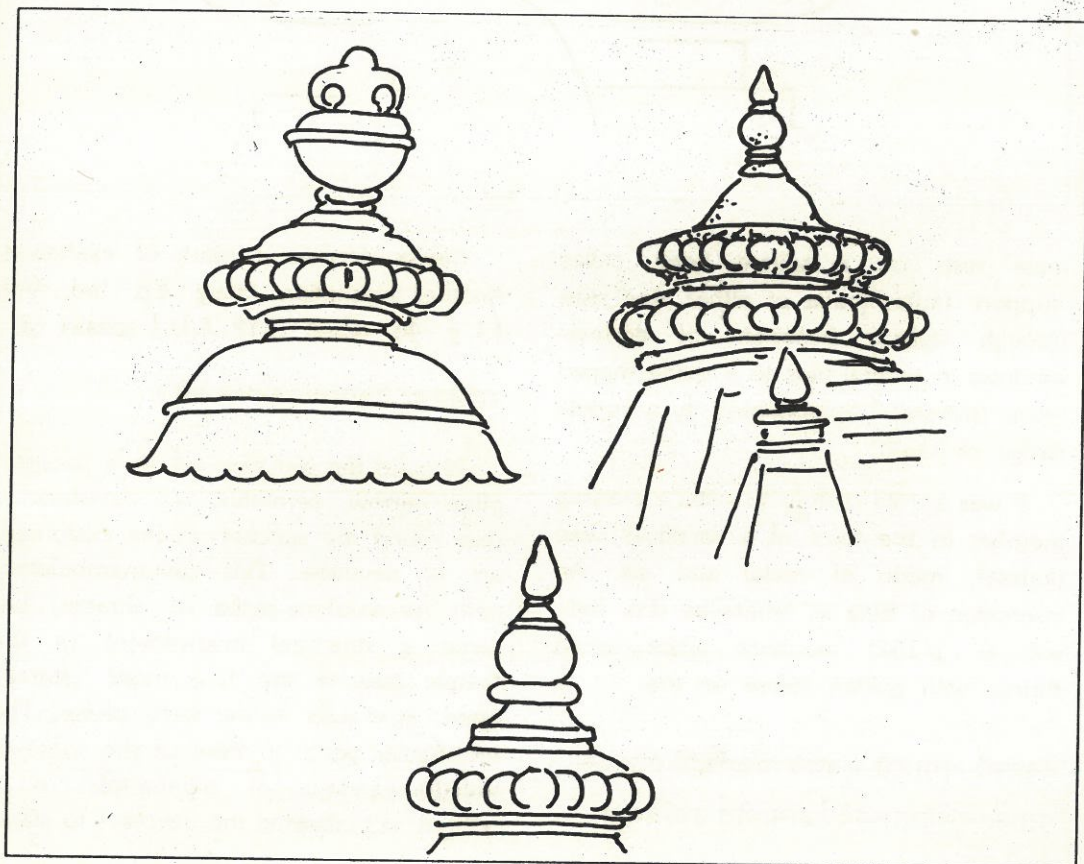


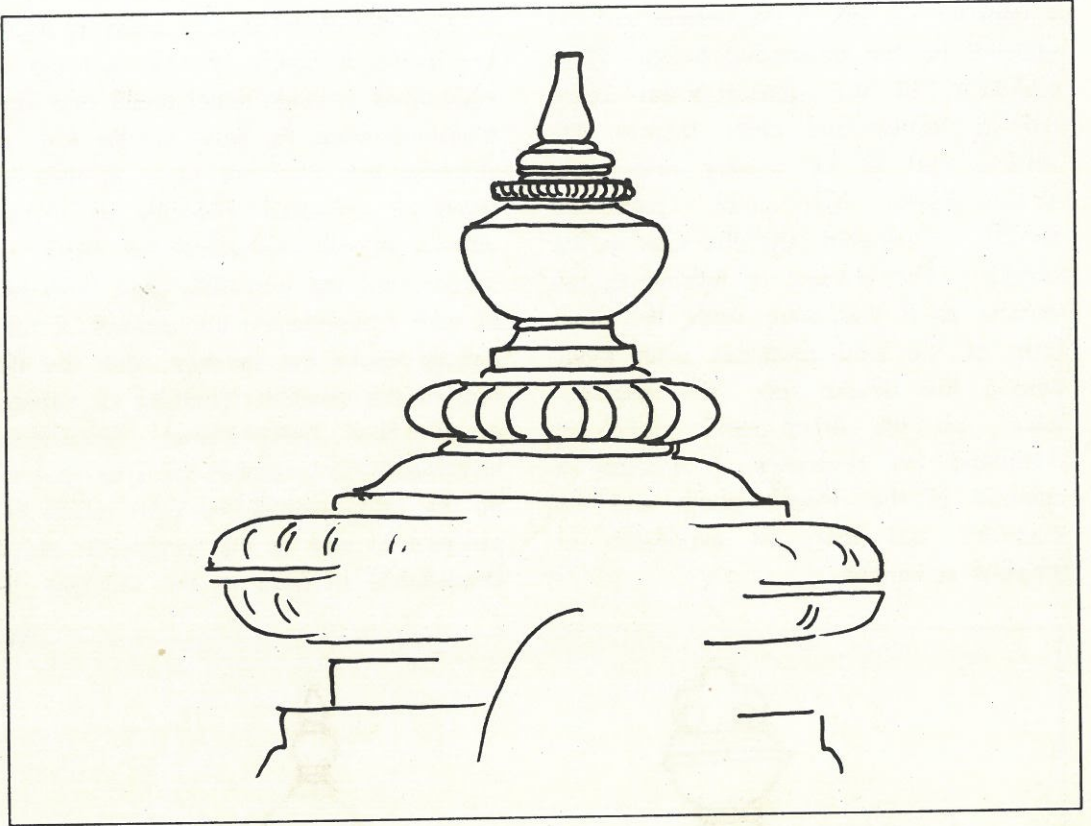
great beauty". But the tendency was in favour of shorter vimānas. For example, the vimāna of the temple at Gangaikōṇḍa-choḷa-puram (built by Rājendra-Choḷa in

1025 A.D.) was already only 46 metres high. Subsequent vimānas are less emphasized in their height, in comparison with the tower over the gateway (dvāra-gopura).

But the sanctity of the vimāna was not affected by the diminished height. While sculpture on the gateway-tower could contain secular and erotic themes, the vimāna had to be austere and could accommodate only the prescribed divinities, associated with the icon in the sanctum. The practice of bowing to the vimāna as if that were verily the outer form of the icon continues even today among the devout folk. The gateway-tower, on the other hand, does not command this reverence. It is more a creature of the donor's pomp and the sculptor's skill than an expression of religious sentiment.

The plan of the vimāna could be round or square; it could also be six-sided or eight-sided. It could either retain one form uniformly from its base to the top, or combine two or more plans at different levels. It consisted originally of several distinct storeys, sometimes as many as sixteen, but the prevailing style is devoid of such differentiation into storeys. It rises directly above the sanctum, with the flat roof of the sanctum (bhūmikā or kapota) as its base (adhiṣṭhāna). Sometimes, however, it encompasses the area covered by the circumambulatory path round the sanctum as well as the rectangular porch immediately in front of the sanctum. Its





mass rests on a square base, called 'support' (adhishṭhāna or pīṭha), and rises through stylized treatment of dormer-windows in several tiers to a dome-shaped tower (śikhara) summounted by a cupola (srnga or stūpī).

It was an old custom to instal a crowing member in the form of a sacrificial vase (kalaśa), made of metal and gilt. An inscription of Keta in Amarāvati (Ep. Ind., vol. 6, p-152) mentions white-washed shrines with golden kalaśa on top.

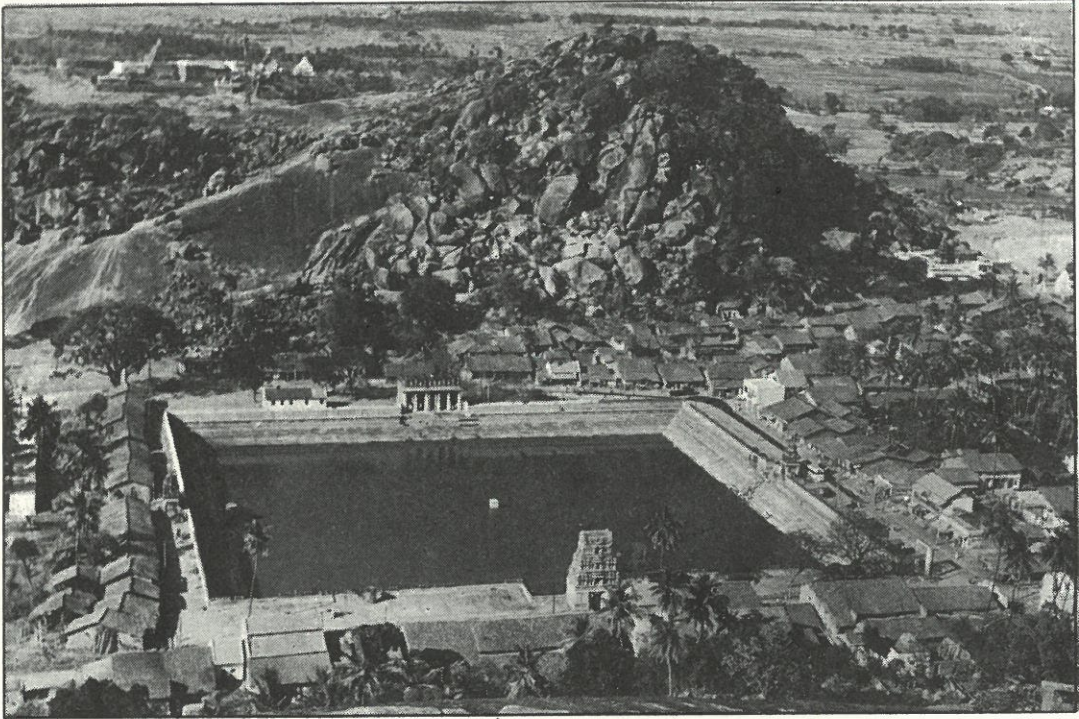
देवालयैः सुधाशुभ्रैः सुवर्णकलाशाङ्कितैः ।

पताकाचुम्बिताम्भोदैर्यद्भामानीत उन्नतिम् ॥

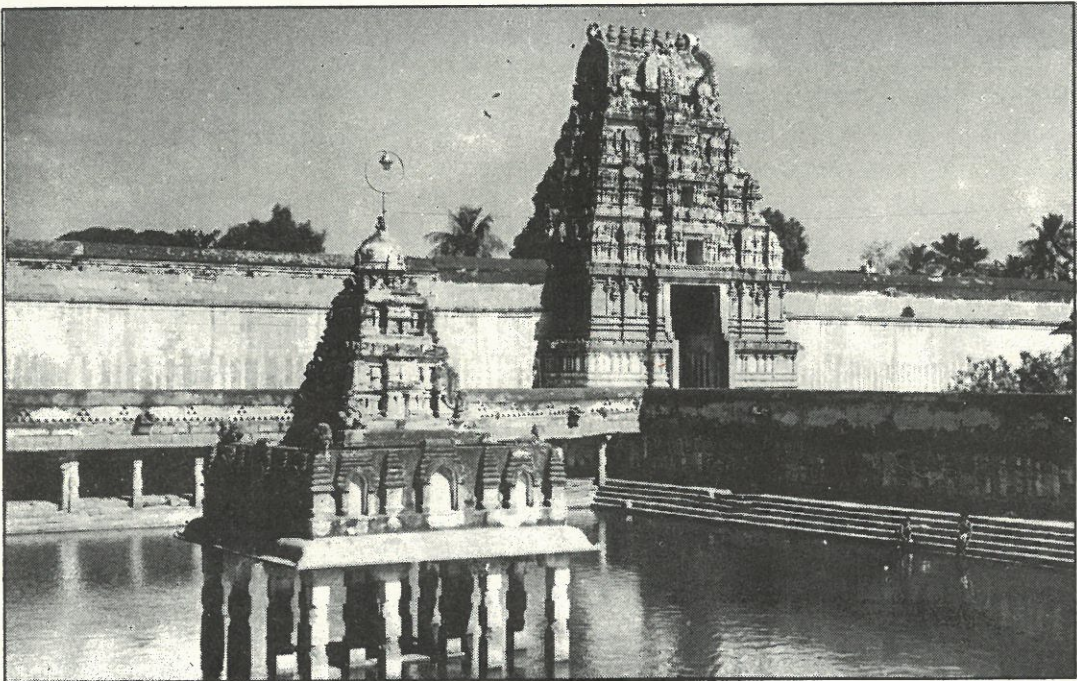
Kalaśa denotes a mark of exaltation. Another inscription (Ittagi, Ep. Ind. Vol. 13 p. 46, dated 1112 A.D.) speaks of

उत्तुंगास्पद देवायतनाग्रहेमकलशं ।

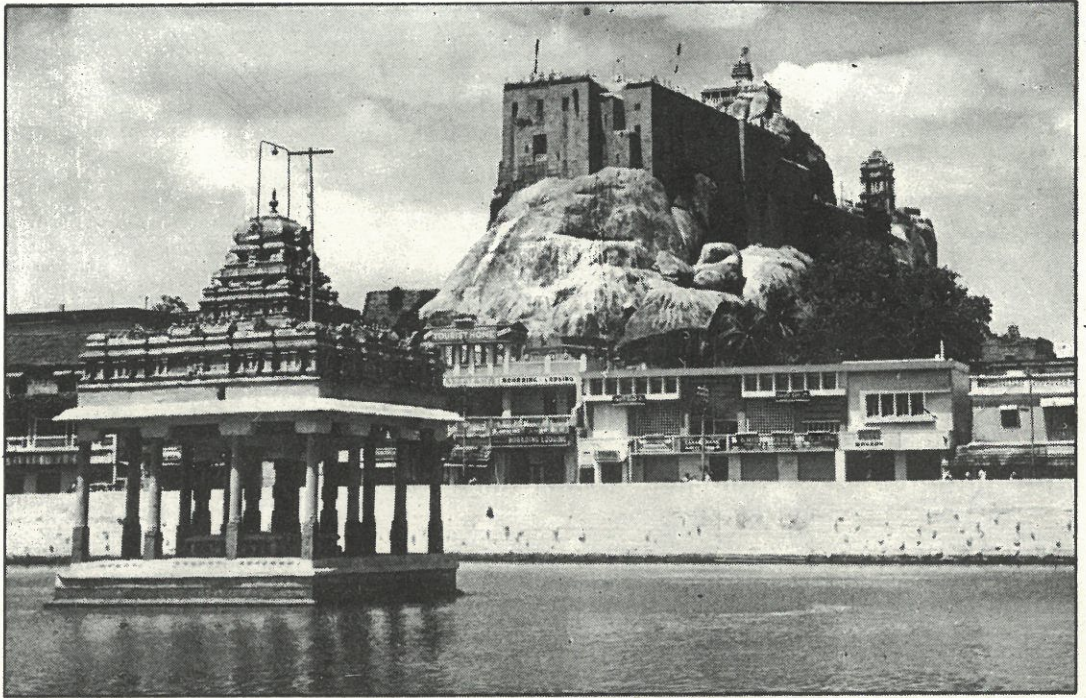
Around the sanctum will be a passage, often narrow, permitting the devotees to pass round the sanctum in the customary act of devotion. This circumambulatory path (pradakṣiṇā-patha or bhrama) became a structural involvement as the temple grew in size; it is more naturally open, as it was in the early phase. The rectangular porch in front of the sanctum (mukha-maṇḍapa or mukha-śālā) is a pillared hall, allowing the devotees to stand



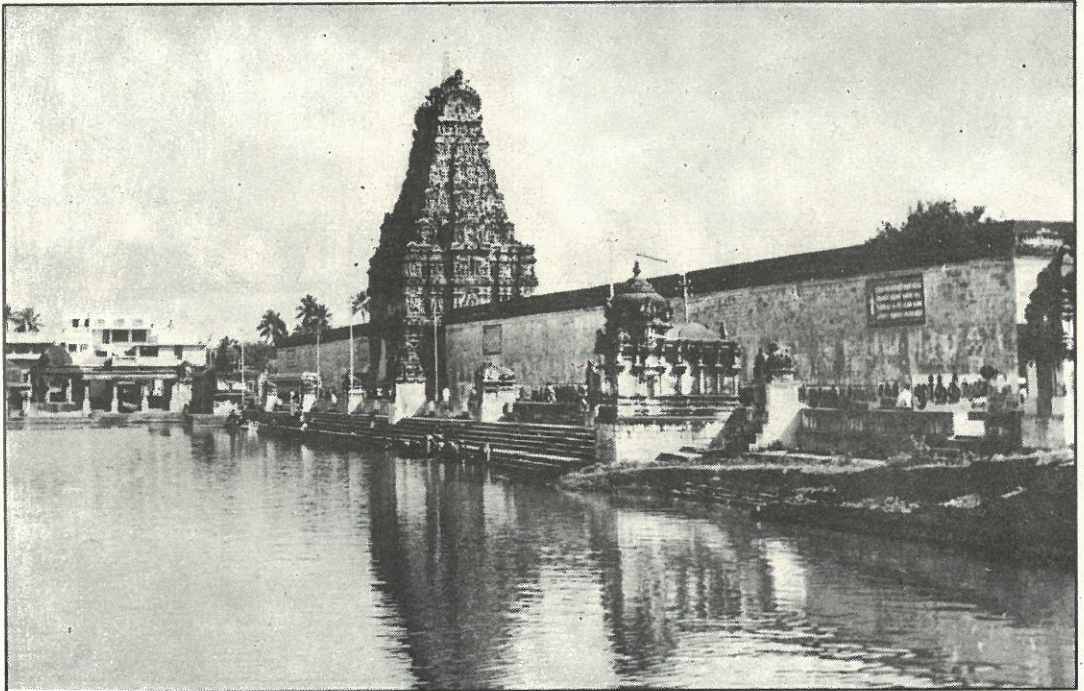
Tank in Śravaṇa-belgoḷa



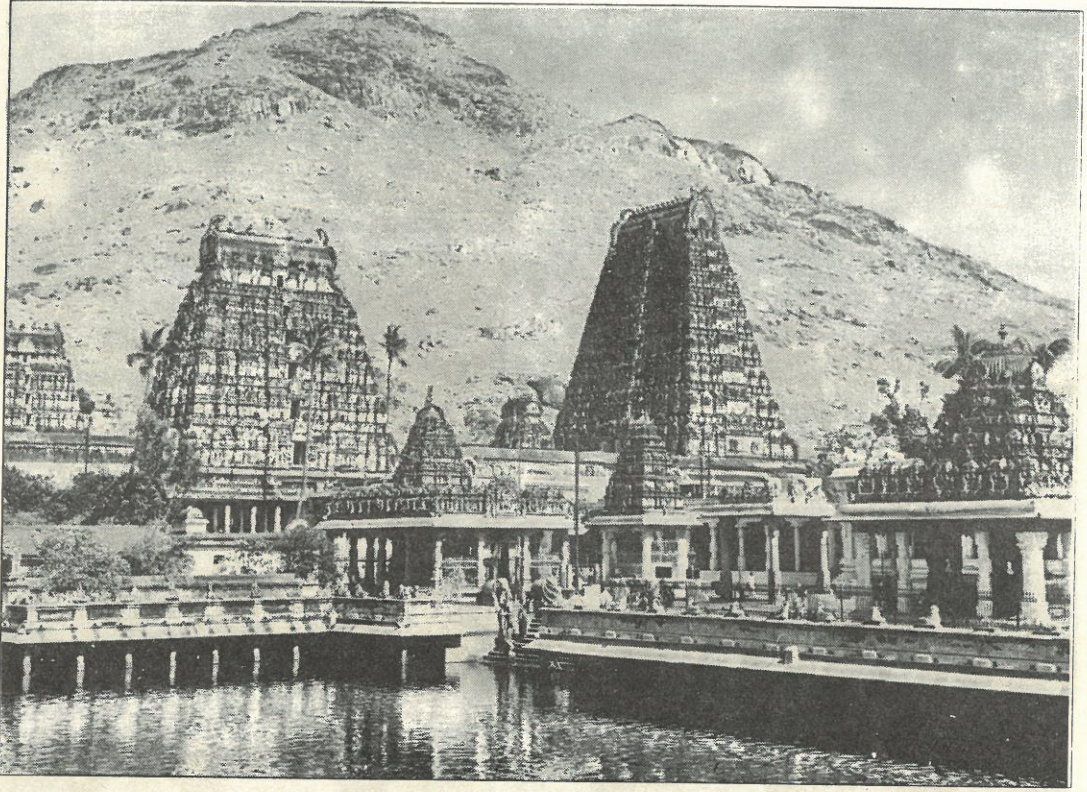
Tank in Kāmākṣī Temple in Kañchipuram



Tank adjacent to the rock-temple at Tiruchchirapalli



Tiruvārūr Temple



Tank in the Tiruvannamalai Temple

and watch the worship rituals as they are conducted inside the sanctum. When the temple became popular and the participants increased in number, there was need for an additional hall of considerably dimensions (nava-raṅga or mahā-maṇḍapa) to accommodate large assemblies. In such an event, the porch became merely a 'vestibule' (antarāla), structurally connecting the sanctum with the assembly-hall. This intermediary space was open in the early temples, as for instance it was in the Venkateśvara temple on the Tirumalai hills. But it tended to become a closed hall resting on pillars as the fortunes of the temple prospered.

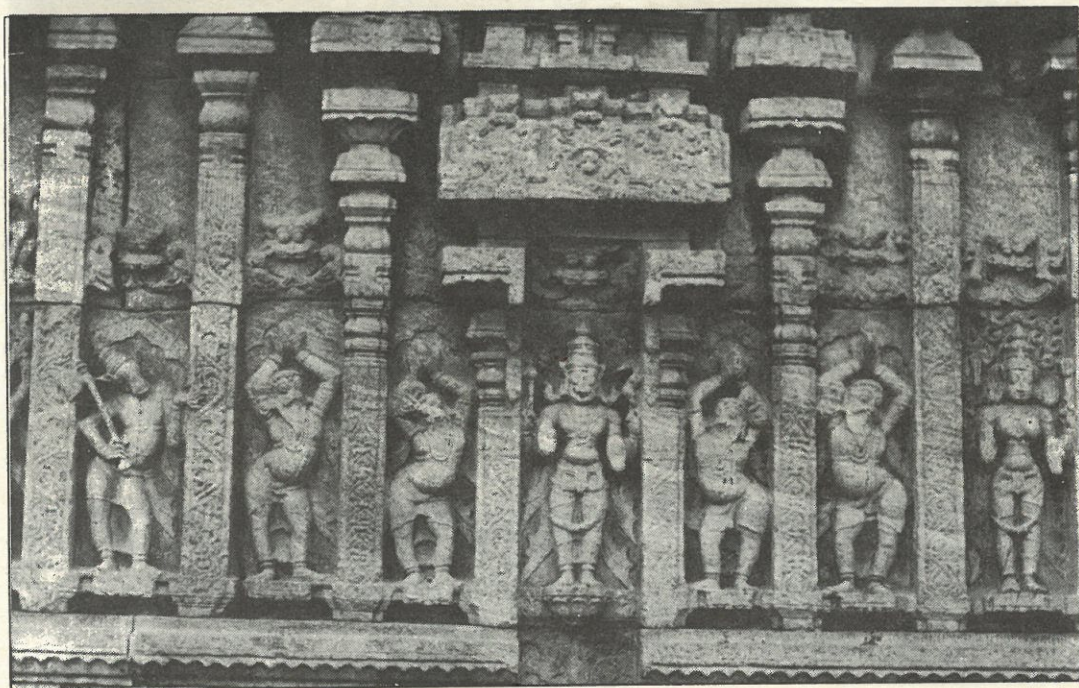
The area of the temple comprising of

the sanctum and the halls as well as the tanks and gardens came to be enclosed by a wall (prākāra), like the ramparts of a fort. But this was a later innovation, and became an especial feature of South Indian temples. Later canonical texts provide for as many as thirty-two such concentric and enclosing walls, but recommend not more than five or seven, although the need to have more than one was rarely felt. The texts explain that the prākāra contributes security to the shrine, strength, protection, beauty and accommodation for attendant-deities.

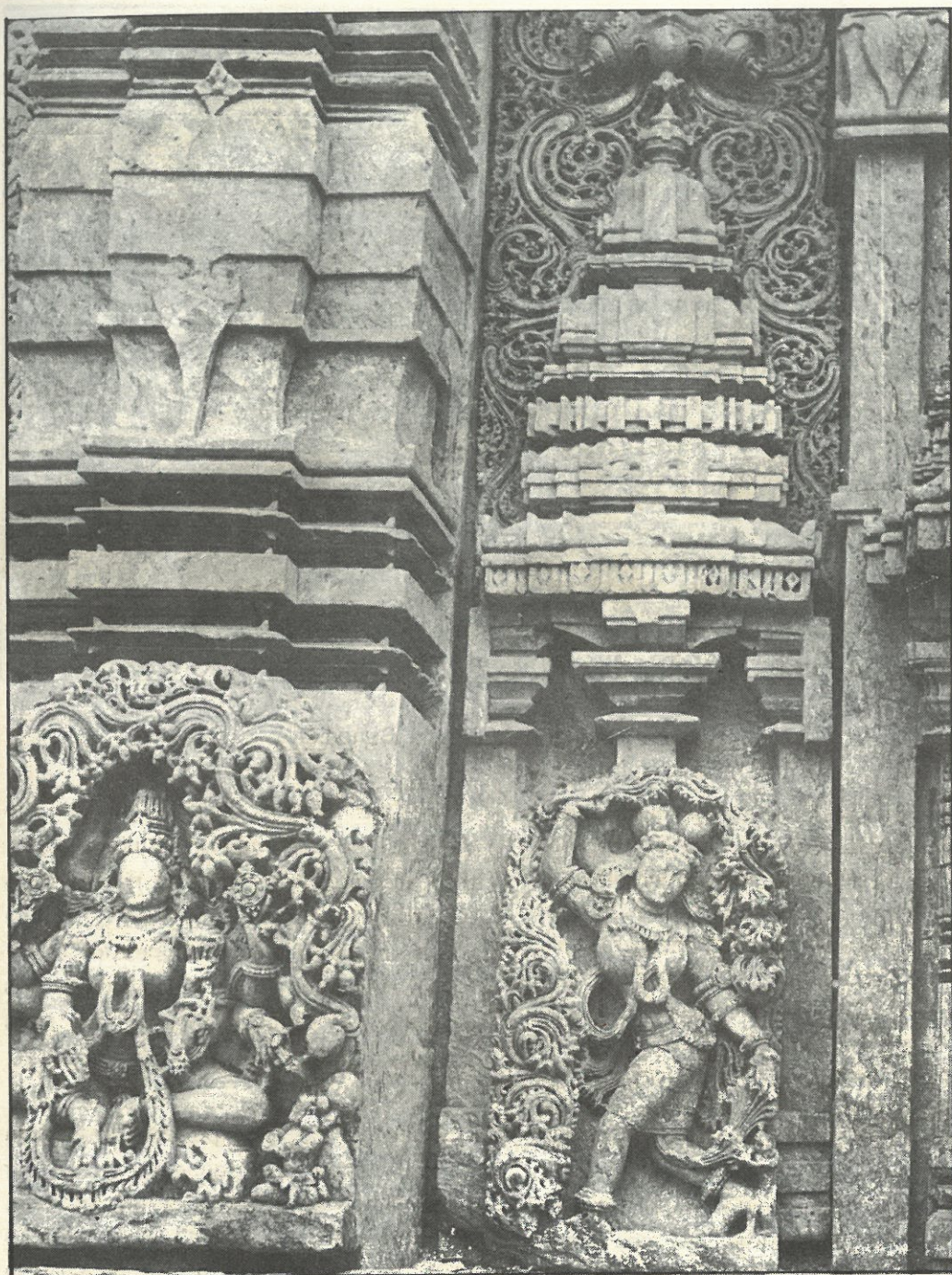
बलार्थं परिवारार्थं शोभार्थं रक्षणार्थकम् ।
पञ्च प्राकारं हर्म्याणामधुना वक्ष्यते क्रमात् ॥
(Mānasara, 31,1)



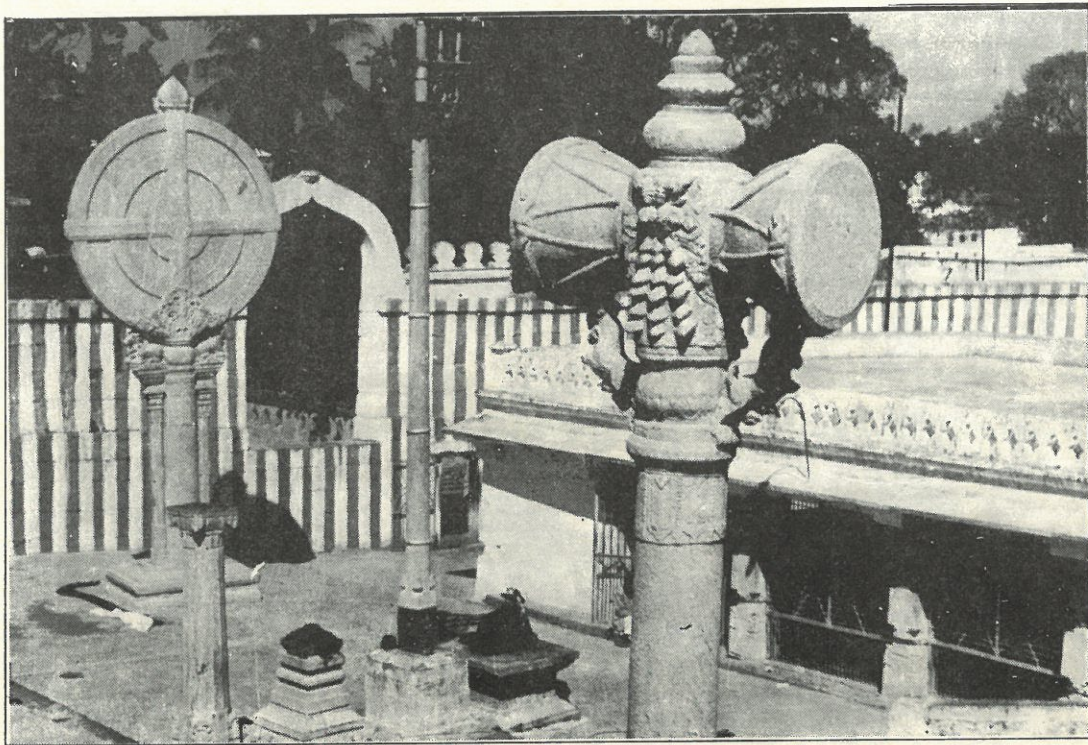
The famous Mahāmagham tank in Kumbhakoṇam



Prākāra wall (in temple at Yaḷandūr)



Prākāra (in Basti of Jinanāthapura)

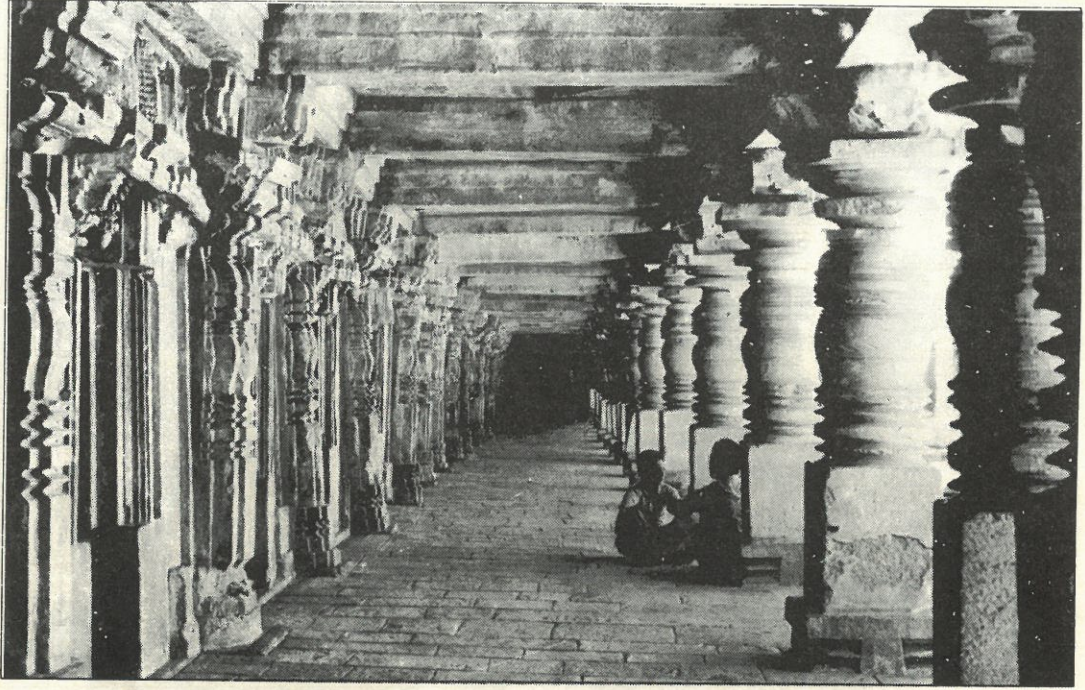


Prākāra (Gangādhara temple, Bangalore)

The prākāra idea also involves division of the temple-area into five courts; antar-mandala (innermost area), antar-nihāra (or antar-bhara), madhyama-hāra (or madhya-bhāra), prākāra (maryādā-bhittika, signifying the limits of the consecrated ground) and mahā-maryādā (or mahāmaryādi-bhitti, the outermost enclosure containing the door-way and tower, dvāra-gopura) (see *Suprabhedāgama*, 31, 115-128). The Raṅganātha temple at Śrīraṅgam in Tamil Nāḍu has seven enclosing walls, encompassing almost the entire township. Where there are multiple walls, the one nearest to the sanctum is styled as 'the inner enclosure' (antarmandapa) and the outermost as 'the limiting lines' (maryādāhara).

In the South Indian temples the prākāras are not merely boundary walls; they accommodate a series of pillared halls or pavilions, rooms for storage, resting places for pilgrims, and shrines for minor deities. Although their chief purpose is protection of temple property, the walls are also rendered elegant and artistic.

Although the texts prescribe that each enclosure must have doorways, on all four sides, with a tower over each one of them, and although we do find large temples (such as the one in Tiruvannāmalai in Tamil Nāḍu) answering to this prescription, it is commonly the wall facing the sanctum alone that has the opening. This doorway



Pillared Hall (in the temple at Somanāthapura)

is called mahā- dvāra, and usually it is an immense one, allowing the temple elephant or small chariot to pass through. Since the tenth century it has become customary to have a tower above the doorway. The ancient texts such as Vaikhānasāgama, Maya-mata and Isāna-sivaguru-paddhati mention the gateway-tower, but do not consider it as important.

'Gopura' literally means cow's pen, and the term was used to denote structure that was erected at the entrance of the cow's pen. The gateway to the town or village was also similarly indicated. Hence the expression

पुरद्वारं तु गोपुरं ।

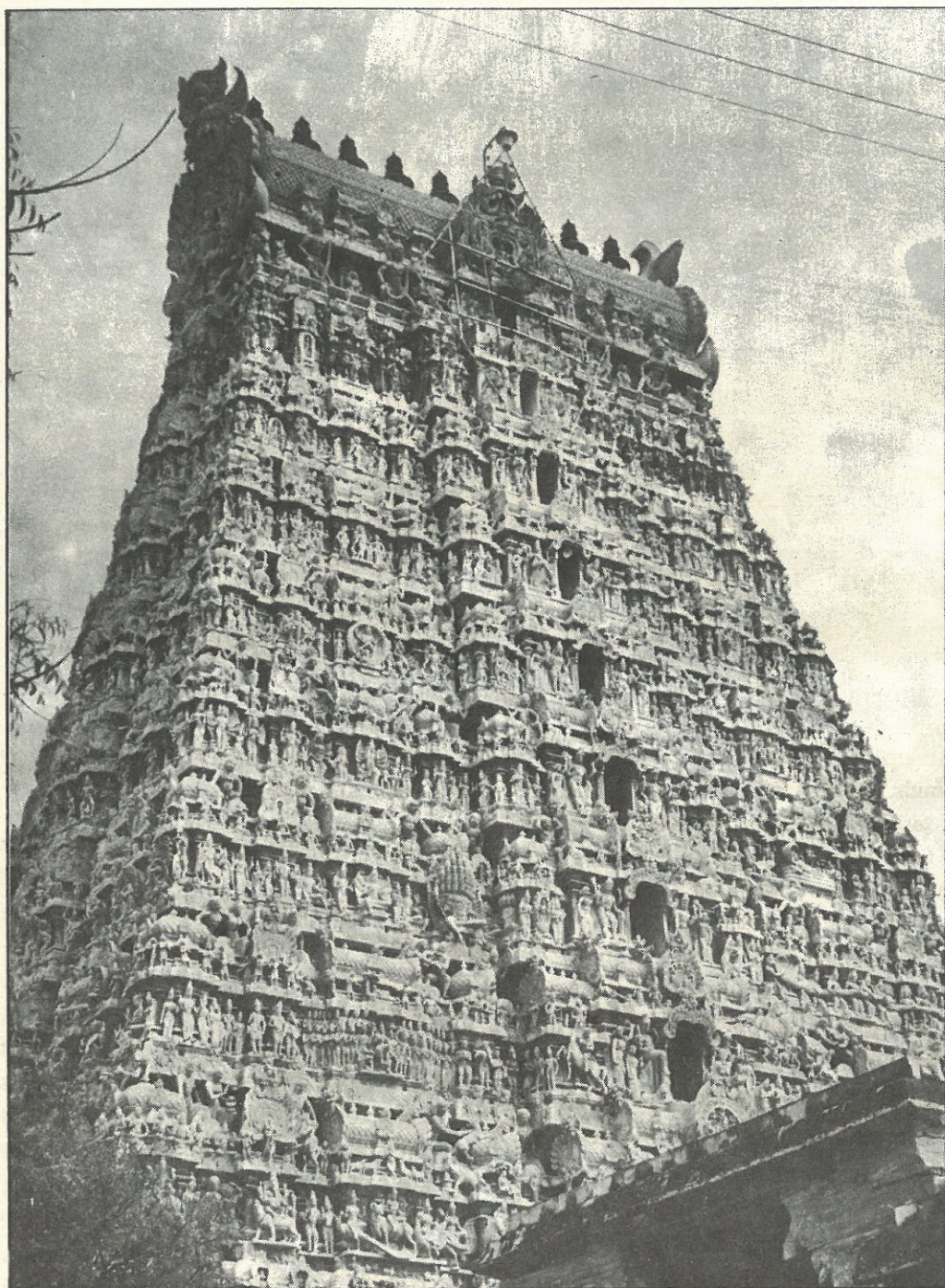
द्वारमात्रं तु गोपुरं ।

And it was the custom to represent the front portion of this tower-like structure in the form of the head or face of an alligator or iguana (godhā-mukham). We find even Kautilya makes a mention of a turret above the gate (Artha-śāstra, 24, 2, 'prākāra-samam mukham avasthāpya').

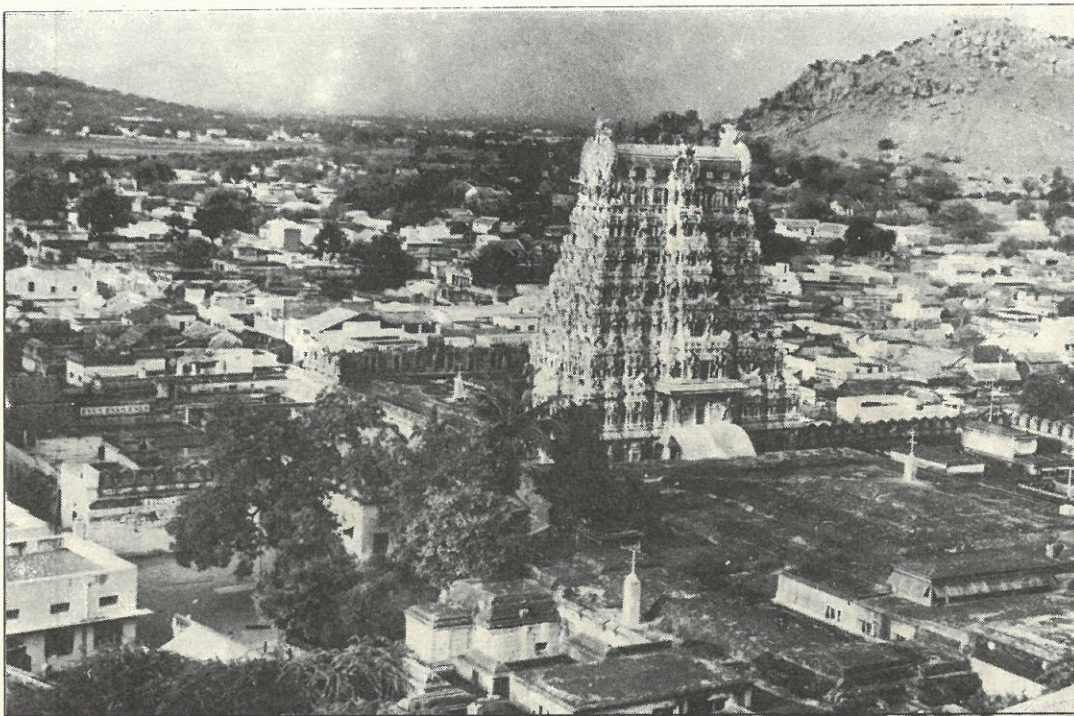
One of the earliest towers that can be regarded as impressive is on the gateway to the Avani-Kandarpesvara temple in Kīlaiyūr (near Tirucchi in Tamiḻ Nāḍu). The gopuras built by the later Chōḷa and Pāṇḍyan rulers between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries are majestic and massive, as in Madhurai, Tirunelveli, Chidambaram, Kumbhakoṇam and Tiruvanaikkāval (near Śrīraṅgam). Inscriptions often speak of 'huge and tall towers of temples' ('vipulothuṅga-gopuram deva-



Gopura of Varada-rāja temple at Kāñchipuram



Gopura of the Tirthendur temple



Gopura of Tiruparankunram temple

mandiram'). They are multi-storeyed pyramids, oblong in plan, rising tier upon tier, tapering till the wagon-roof *sikhara* with fans (*nāṣi*) on either end representing mythical heads (*kīrtimukha*), calls a halt. The really tall gopura may reach to the height of about 200 feet. As many as sixteen storeys are permitted in the texts. The entire mass, built of brick and mortar, is filled with stucco figures and decorations.

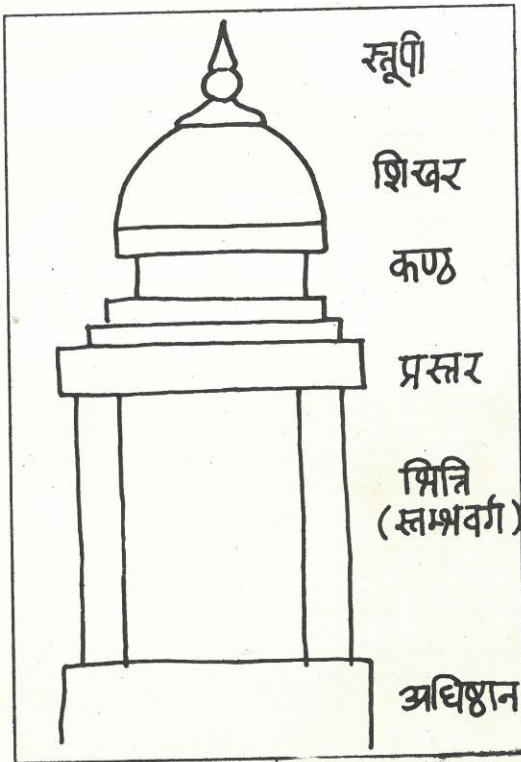
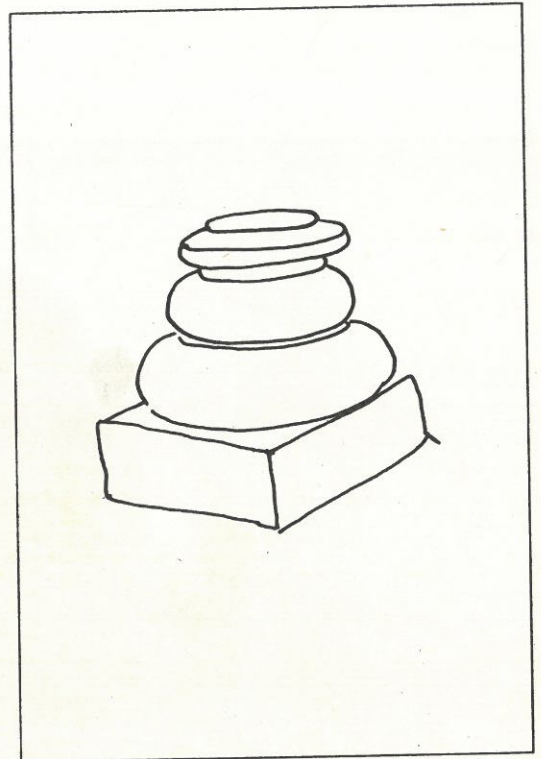
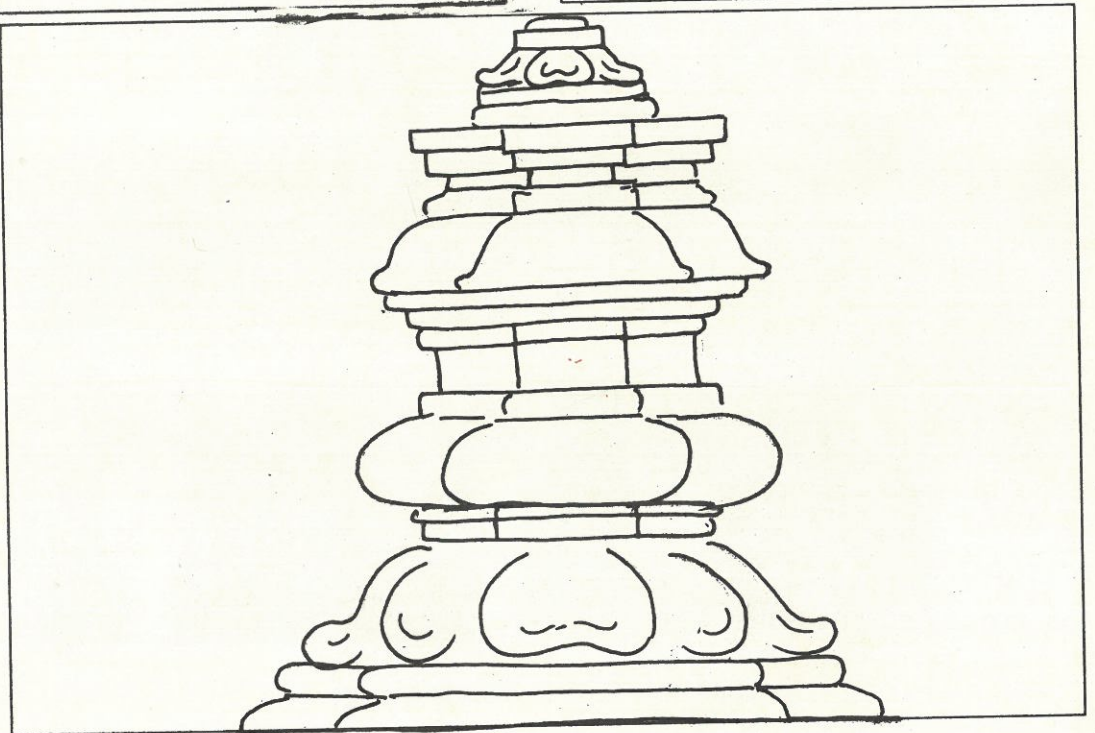
Despite its immensity and artistic profusion, the gopura is not regarded as an essential feature of the temple. And it is unique to the South Indian temples. Neither the enclosing wall (*prākāra*) nor the gateway-tower (*dvāra-gopura*) figures prominently in the North Indian temples. And many temple-complexes, as for in-

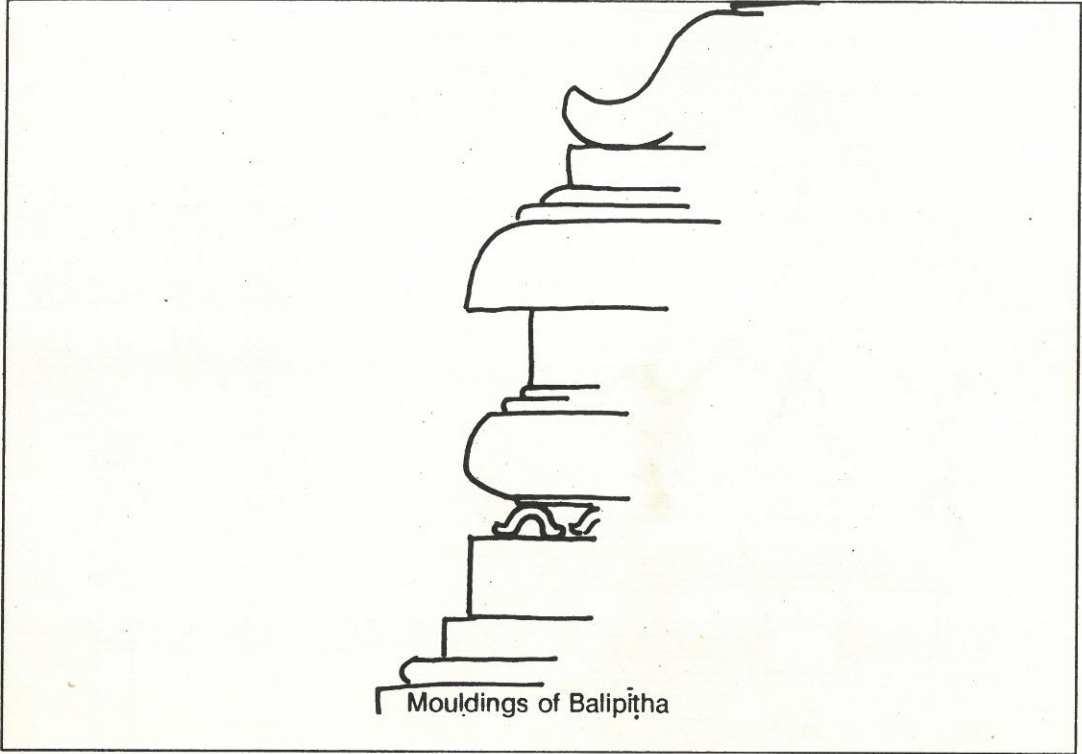
stance at Khajurāho, are devoid even of the enclosing walls.

The sanctum, *adytum*, *garbha-gṛha* which is the most important structural detail, is closely associated with 'the dispensing seat' (*bali-pīṭha*) which is installed in front of the sanctum directly facing the icon. It is a low stone altar, frequently modelled in the form of a flat lotus in bloom. In the early shrines it is a mere block of stone, but later, it assumed a relatively elaborate form with a base, cornices, wall-surface and the top-lotus. Actually there will be several 'seats' of this nature, installed in various ritualistically determined positions inside the enclosure and outside the sanctum. However, the one in front of the sanctum is

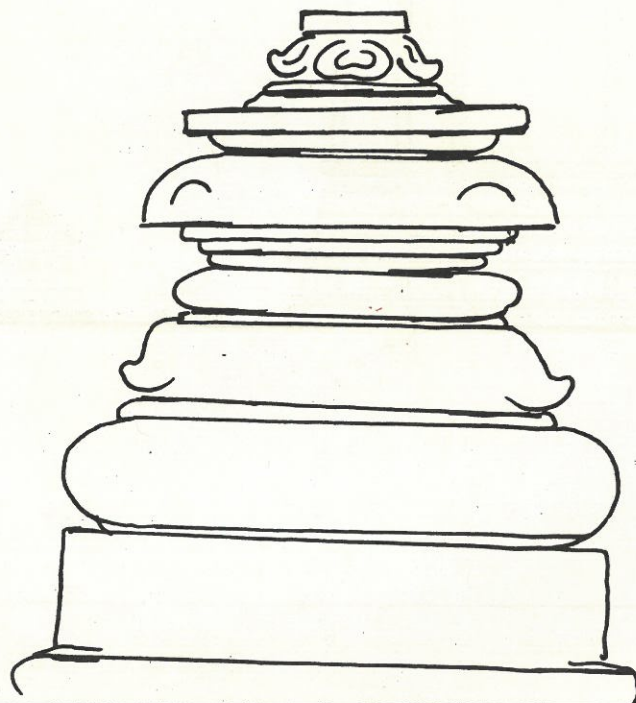


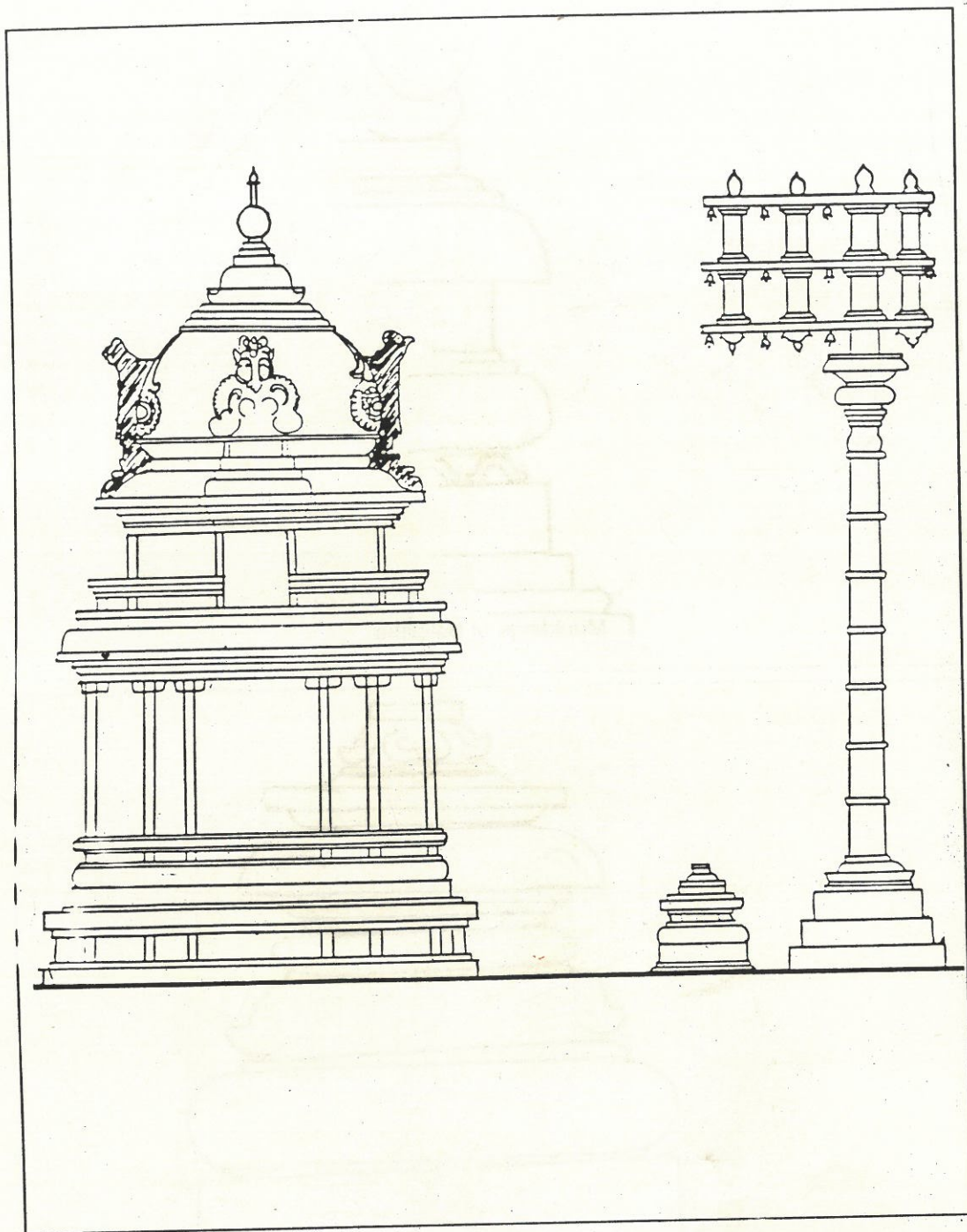
Gopura of Pārṇvati hill temple at Pune

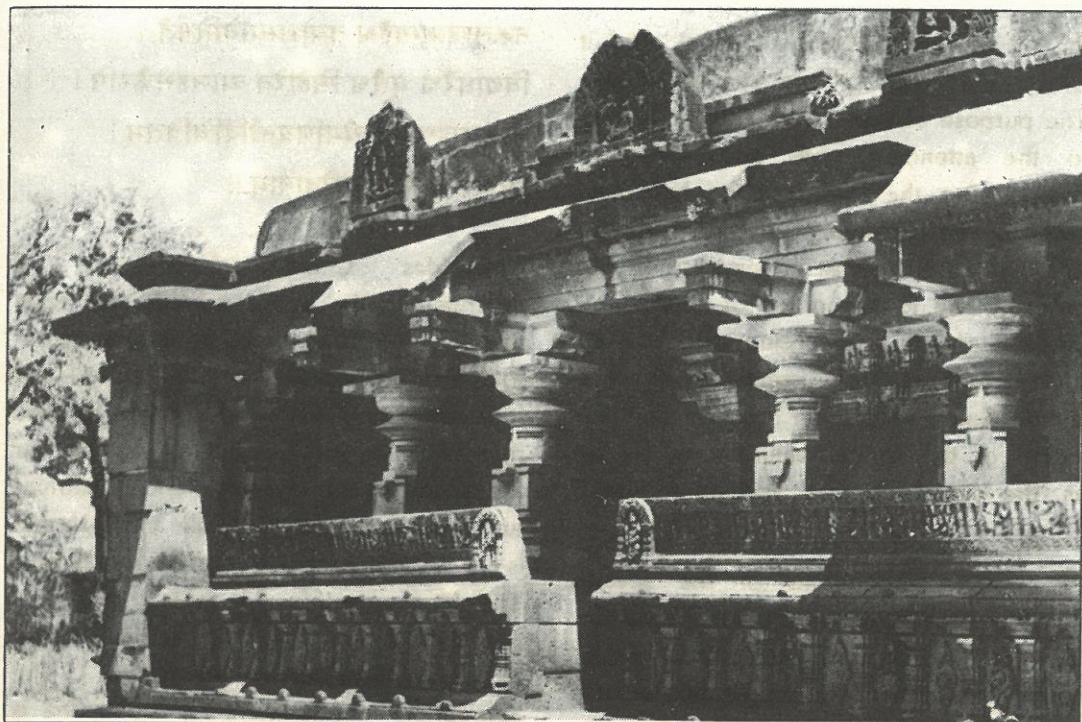




Mouldings of Balipitha







Doorway of the Jain temple in Belgāum



Entrance to the Nāgar-kōil temple

the 'chief seat' (pradhāna- pīṭha), and it is on this that the sculptor spends his skill. The purpose of these seats is to offer food to the attendant gods and secondary deities, after the main offering has been made in the sanctum. The canons specify that the real temple comprises of the sanctum, the tower on top of it, the icon inside it and 'the dispensing seat' in front of it. These are the essential parts of a shrine. Some texts even proclaim that the extent of the shrine reaches only as far as 'the dispensing seat' and no further.

The texts in course of time specified the relative proportions of the several details of the temple structure. Like the 'tāla-māna' scheme for sculpture, 'gaṇya-māna' was relevant for temple architecture, which consisted of six limbs (ṣaḍ-varga); base (adhiśṭhāna), columns (pāda or stambha), entablature (prastara), wings (karṇa), roof (śikhara) and dome or cupola (stūpi).

जन्मादि स्तूपिपर्यन्तं गण्यमानमिहोच्यते ।

If tāla-māna has 'aṅgula' as the unit, gaṇya-māna has kishku, and there are measurements which are vertical (tuṅga-gaṇya) and which are horizontal (vistāra-gaṇya).

Another interesting feature involved in stylized temples was the custom of having ornamental arches (toraṇa). The arches made use of mythical themes like the crocodiles from the mouths of which emanates strings of pearls and garlands of flowers Kārikāgama (55,67) says:

नक्तुण्डप्राग्रहैश्च तयोरास्यविनिर्गतैः ।
विद्याधरैश्च भूतैश्च सिंहैरिव व्यालहंसकैरपि ।
वालस्रग्दण्डकरन्यैर्मणिबन्धैर्विचित्रितम् ।
चित्रतोरणमेतत्स्याद्देवानाम् ॥

Besides Chitra-toraṇa, which is described in the above passage, the texts mention two other types of toraṇa: patra-toraṇa (fashioned like the lotus-leaves) and makara-toraṇa (arch with makaras). The makara-toraṇa is regarded as suitable for the residence of brahmins and kshatriyas and also for temples, while chitra-toraṇa is for vaiśyas and patra-toraṇa for śūdras. The Mānasāra (55, 93) which gives this information, also says that each is suitable for all ('sarvam sarvatra vā matam'). The appropriate measurement for the toraṇa is given as follows:

पृष्ठे तु पार्श्वयोश्चैव कर्तव्यस्तोरणास्तथा ।
द्वारस्योत्सेधमानं यत्तोरणस्योच्छ्रयं भवेत् ।
तदधं विस्तरं प्रोक्त उच्छ्रयो षड् विभाजिते ॥

The door is another important detail in temple architecture and the texts prescribe rules about the several aspects like jamb, lintel (dvāra-sākha), door-panels (kavāṭa), door-joints (dvāra-sandhi), door plank (phalaka), bolt (kīla-bhājana) tower over the doorway (dvāra-gopura) and the chamber associated with the doorway (dvāra-koshṭha).

The doors of the temple must always be two-panelled, and the two are described as mother and daughter:

कवाटद्वितयं कुर्यान्मातृपुत्र्यभिदं बुधः॥

(Vāstu-vidyā 14, 1)

Bṛihat-saṃhitā (56, 10) which recommends a temple-site of sixty-four squares prescribes that the door must be located in the middle of the front wall and that it must be in the same direction as the idol

चतुःषष्टि पदं कार्यं देवायतनं सदा ।

द्वारं च मध्यमं तत्र समादिकस्थं प्रशस्यते ..

According to Agni-purāṇa (104, 5, 24) the doors must always be had in one of

the four directions and never in the corners:

दिक्षु द्वाराणि कार्याणि न विदिक्षु कदाचन ।

Suprabhedā (31, 7, 131) recommends gate-ways in all the four directions (chatur-dvārān chatur-dikshu') on the outer wall. The door on the eastern side must be made in plaksha wood, the one on the south must be in udumbara wood; the door on the south must be made in asvattha wood, and the one on the northern side must be in nyagrodha wood.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Upanishads speak of the "inverted tree", *asvattha*, with roots hidden above and branches spreading below (*Kaṭha* 2, 3, 1). The tree is an ancient analogue of life here and beyond. We find references to it in the *Ṛigveda* itself, and we find it illustrated in the Indus Valley seals. The folk cults are filled with reverential involvements of trees. Trees have been claimed as totems, trees have been worshipped as divinities, and trees have played an important role in our economy. The two trends in the growth of the tree, the normal upward and the spiritual downward, emphasize the principle of complementarity in human life. The Indian temple has not only been associated with trees, but it is in fact a representation of the life-tree. The sanctum is a model of the normal tree with roots below and branches above; and the spiral tower of the sanctum symbolizes the inverted tree, with roots above and the spreading branches below.

We have seen that before the sanctum (the 'womb-chamber', *garbha-grha*) is constructed, the ritual of 'impregnation' (or 'depositing womb', *garbha-nyāsa*) is gone through. The 'womb' that is deposited in

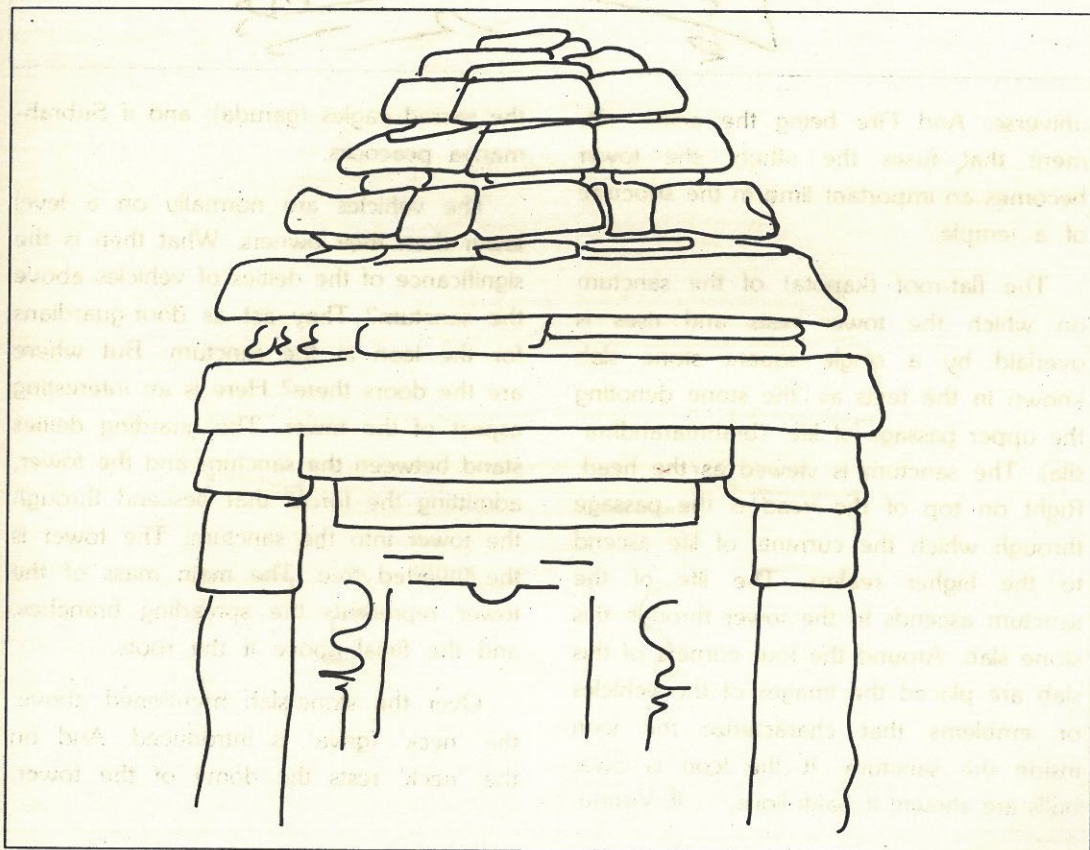
an underground chamber is a consecrated copper-pot containing the essential ingredients of growth and prosperity. It represents the roof of the temple-tree. The sanctum rises above it in distinct tiers: the most fundamental tier is nature itself or the earth (*prakṛti*, in Tamil *aḍippaḍai*), and over it is laid the primary plinth or 'base' (*tala*), to be covered by the secondary plinth or 'seat' (*piṭha*). The three levels of growth are securely bound by a ritual as well as an engineering device known as 'packing' (*bandha*). Above this packed surface is laid the 'bed' of the sanctum (*adhishṭhāna*, 'base' or 'support') which is seen as the floor.

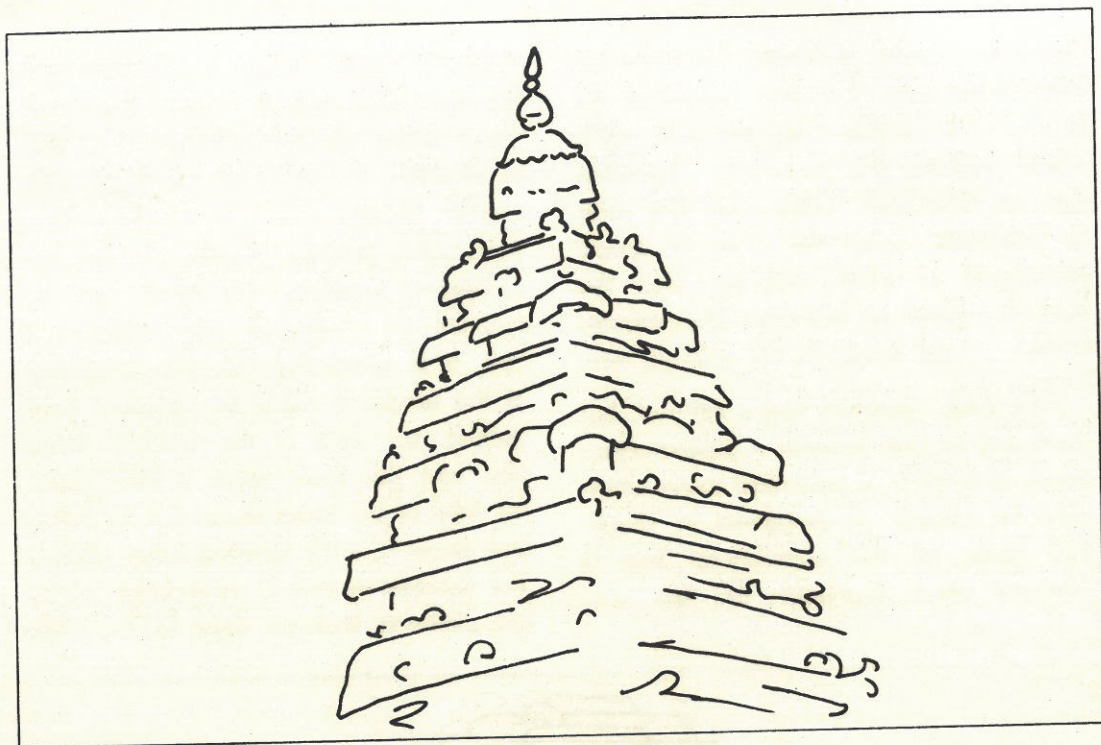
Walls rise from the 'bed' on all the four sides. It may be noted that the early sanctums were circular or apsidal in shape. A circle signifies the entire universe, and the sanctum is indeed a model of the universe. The primitive huts were also circular and they were nearer the model of the universe than modern buildings are. When the *āgama* texts began to look upon the world as being bound by the four directions, they insisted that the shape of the sanctum must be a square, with its opening normally facing the East. The spot

where the 'womb' is hidden would be the seat of the icon. The icon represents the sap of the temple tree, the four walls would indicate the spreading branches around. The roof resting over the walls is technically called the 'row of doves' (kapotapāli or simply kapota), after the birds that perch on tree-tops. The sanctum is thus a neat model of the growing tree.

The early sanctum had a flat-roof, but there was an urge towards a superstructure above it, a spiral or pyramidal tower which may be circular or polygonal in shape. The name for this architectural limb is 'vimana' which expression has two con-

notations: "that which is without comparison (māna-upamā)", and "that which brings about (vimayate) fruits". The latter connotation, according to the Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa, refers to the Fire-God, Agni, who bestows benefits on the performers of sacrifices. The tower over the sanctum is a physical representation of Fire. It is interesting that the foundation of the temple is made to represent Earth (pṛthvī), the walls of the sanctum Water (āp) and the tower over it Fire (tejas): the finial of the tower stands for Air (vāyu) and above it is the formless Ether (ākāśa). The sanctum is thus a constellation of the five elements that are basic to the entire





universe. And Fire being the active element that fuses the others, the tower becomes an important limb in the structure of a temple.

The flat-roof (kapota) of the sanctum on which the tower rests and rises is overlaid by a single square stone slab known in the texts as 'the stone denoting the upper passage of life' (brahmarandhrasīlā). The sanctum is viewed as the head. Right on top of the head is the passage through which the currents of life ascend to the higher realms. The life of the sanctum ascends to the tower through this stone slab. Around the four corners of this slab are placed the images of the vehicles or emblems that characterize the icon inside the sanctum. If the icon is Śiva, bulls are shown; if Śakti lions; if Vishnu

the sacred eagles (garuḍa); and if Subrahmanya peacocks.

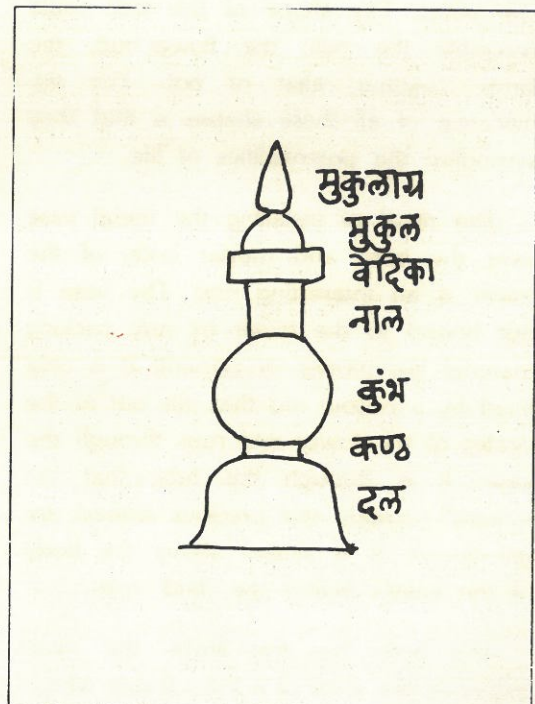
The vehicles are normally on a level lower than their owners. What then is the significance of the deities of vehicles above the sanctum? They act as door-guardians for the icon in the sanctum. But where are the doors there? Here is an interesting aspect of the tower. The guarding deities stand between the sanctum and the tower, admitting the forces that descend through the tower into the sanctum. The tower is the inverted tree. The main mass of the tower represents the spreading branches, and the finial above it the roots.

Over the stone-slab mentioned above, the 'neck' (grīva) is introduced. And on the 'neck' rests the dome of the tower.

The term *vimāna* refers to the structure between the top-slab (*upāna*) and the finial (*stūpī*). Early *vimānas* were circular and conical, in keeping with the circular shape of the early sanctums. It rose in tiers (from one to twelve *talas*) of diminishing circumference until it ended in the point of the finial. Later the body of the *vimāna* tended to be polygonal. Four-sided *vimānas* have become popular; six-sided and eight-sided ones are not rare. There are a few temples with the *vimāna* having as many as sixteen sides. The Kallalaṅgar temple at Madhurai is reputed to have as many as 64 sides. The prevailing shape in all such towers is pyramidal. But the early conical towers were close imitations of the conical thatched roof of the circular hut, built around a central bamboo pole which

projected beyond the roof. Whatever the later form, the idea of pyramid persisted. The branches of the inverted tree spreading alround is the vision in the background.

Above the *vimāna* rests the 'vase' (*kalaśa*), representing the roots of the inverted tree. Texts mention that the original *kalaśa* was born as one of the fourteen precious gems that came out of the milky ocean when it was churned; and they suggest that it symbolizes blessing (*Prāsāda-maṇḍana*). The old name for this unit was "kāma-kumbha" or 'the pitcher of desire'. In the architectural development of the Indian temple, this feature arrived late, and its arrival appears to be subsequent to the canonical texts. And the early *kalaśas* were probably only stone



blocks, round or ribbed. They were in the nature of cap-stones that held structurally as well as stylistically the vimāna, especially when it was tall and tapering, as in the North Indian temples. The copper vases were later innovations. Sometimes brass was used; opulence and vanity prompted gilded ones. But the āgama books favour copper. The kalāṣa is actually a vessel, like the vessel that is deposited under the sanctum. And, like the latter, this also is made to contain tokens of growth and prosperity, viz., cereals with subtle seeds (such as millet) and nine precious stones.

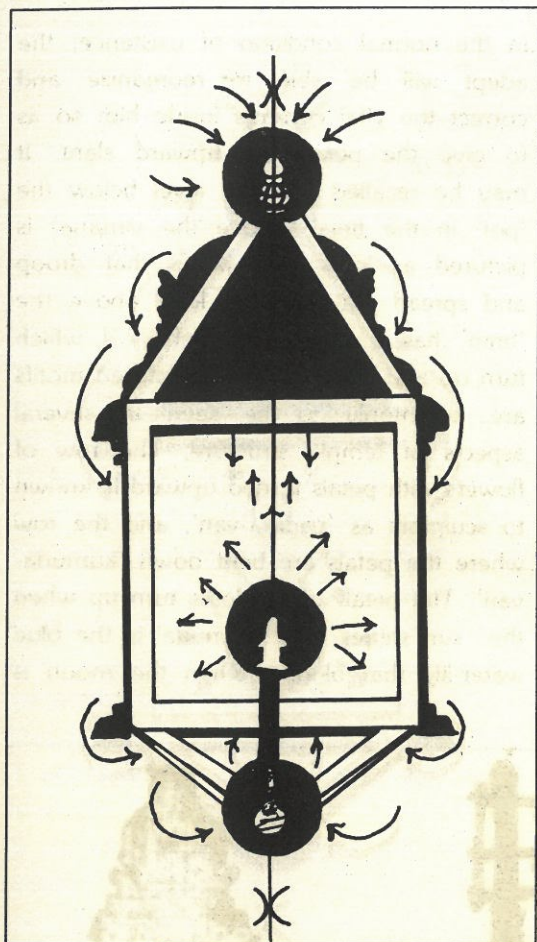
This feature has several members, such as 'the foot-hold' (pādagrahi) which is structurally imbedded in the masonry of the tower, 'the egg, (aṇḍa) or the belly, 'the neck' (grīva), 'the lotus-band' (padma-paṭṭikā), 'the rim' (kaṇṭikā), and the 'bud' (bīja-pūra). The shape of this unit could resemble the bell, the flower-bud, the lamp, coconut, altar or pot. The significance of all these shapes is that they symbolize the potentialities of life.

The ritual of installing the metal vase over the brick and mortar body of the tower is an interesting one. The vase is not bound to the tower by any packing material like mortar or cement. It is only fixed by a hollow rod that juts out of the center of the tower and runs through the vase. It is through this tube that the 'tokens' (cereals and precious stones) are introduced. It is sealed above the body of the kalāṣa before the 'bud' rises.

The body has five limbs: the 'seat' (pīṭha) in the form of a lotus flower whose

petals open out completely; the 'neck' on which the bulging out 'pot' (kuṁbhā), which is the next limb, rests; the 'brim' or lid for the 'pot'; the 'flower' which opens upward; and finally the 'flower' bud which tapers off to a point. The 'bud' is actually the central part of the flower whose peripheral petals are separated. It signifies new life and growth. The kalāṣa has an important hidden component, viz, 'the golden person' (suvarṇa-puruṣa), who is regarded as the very soul of the temple. The belly of the kalāṣa is made to contain a tiny cot made in silver, copper or sandal-wood, over which is laid on a soft feather-mattress the golden icon of this 'person', with one hand holding a lotus flower over the heart and the other carrying a triple-flag. Four little pots made in gold, silver or copper, and containing consecrated water are placed on the four sides of the cot. Near the recumbent 'person' is kept a golden or silver pot filled with ghee. The procedure of introducing this 'golden person' into the body of the kalāṣa is known as hrdaya-varṇaka-vidhi. It is described in detail in such texts as Aparāṇita-pariprcchā and Dīpāṇava.

The entire structuring of the kalāṣa thus represents the roof of the inverted tree. It bears a correspondence with the 'womb' under the sanctum. Both are roots, the latter urging the upward growth of the ordinary tree, and the former the downward growth of the inverted tree. The 'womb', the icon and the finial are structurally collinear and run along the same axis of divine consciousness. This consciousness in its ascent transforms itself



into the icon, and materializes into the sanctum. In its descent, it runs through the finial and is concretized as the mass of the tower. Under the ground it is in a dormant, nebulous condition; and in the sanctum it gets transformed into a world of materiality and activity. In the tower it rises above this world, before it is absorbed in the universal consciousness at the peak of the finial.

Man's approach is one of ascent of matter towards the spirit. But it becomes meaningful only if there is a complemen-

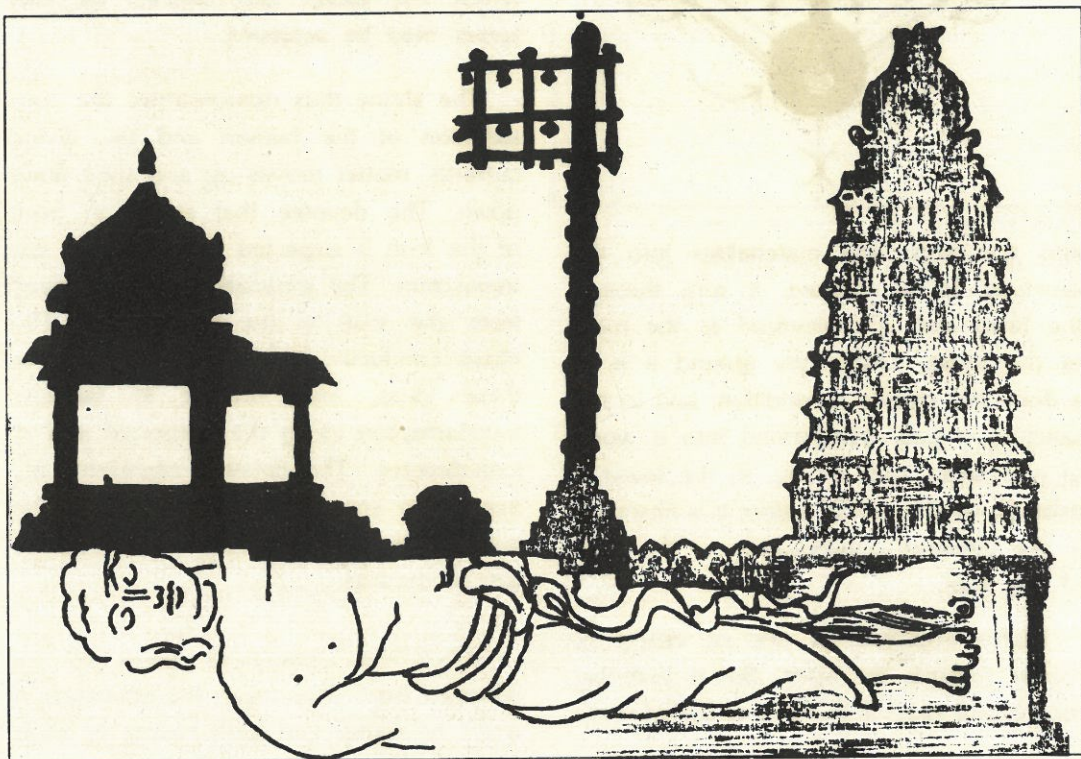
tary process of descent: the divine spirit must flow down into the material. The finial of the tower symbolizes the dual act of gathering the divine essence from the formless cosmos and communicating it to the main mass of the tower. The essence here acquires a concrete form and then descends into the sanctum, to be focussed in the icon. The sanctum is man's head, as will be evident in the analogue we will shortly consider. The stone slab over the roof (*brahma-randhra-silā*) is the top of the head, representing the esoteric passage known as *brahmarandhra*. The hollow tube in the vase is the external projection of the main channel in the human constitution, the *sushumṇā-nāḍi*. The axis on which the 'womb', 'the icon', and the finial are positioned is also the path along which the ascent and descent of vital forces may be achieved.

The shrine thus demonstrates the constellation of the human and the divine currents; matter moves up and spirit flows down. The devotee that stands in front of the icon is expected to partake in this transaction. The emanations that proceed from the icon is the transformer. The rituals conducted within the shrine involve these ideas, and attempt to facilitate transformation along the horizontal axis of icon-devotee. The devotee represents active matter and the icon passive spirit. The two are brought together in the creative act of worship.

When the Upanishads speak of the 'inverted tree', they mean the phenomenal world of matter and spirit having its roots

in the 'unmanifest' emanation of the Absolute. The reference is to man that is involved in the world of ignorance, passion, desire and activity. Man's roots are hidden in the abstract, 'thousand- petalled lotus' (sahasrara), a center just above the head, outside the physical frame. He spreads out into the world and moves away from his roots. He is therefore distressed. The task before him is to discover the roots, and make them the real base for his being and becoming. This means an upward thrust on his part, and a concurrent descent from the source of his being, the 'thousand- petalled lotus'. The Yoga texts speak of different psychic centres in the body, pictured as so many lotuses with their petals bent downward,

in the normal condition of existence; the adept will be able to reorganize and correct the vital currents inside him so as to give the petals the upward slant. It may be recalled that the level below the 'pot' in the finial (above the vimāna) is pictured as lotus with petals that droop and spread out, and the level above the 'brim' has a flower the petals of which turn up and close in. The sculptured motifs are commonly to be seen in several aspects of temple structure. The row of flowers with petals turned upward is known to sculptors as 'padma-vari', and the row where the petals are bent down 'kumuda-vari'. The petals of the lotus turn up when the sun shines. The 'kumuda' is the blue water-lily that blooms when the moon is



up. The divine grace is the sun, and man's effort is the moon. Their conjoint operation is what is pictured in such sculptured pieces.

The analogy of man's constitution with the temple architecture is a favourite theme in many canonical texts like Srī-prasna, Vishnu-tantra, Śilpa-ratna, Vatula-gama and Aparājita-śilpa. The texts insist that the devotee must approach the temple as if it were the body of the Divine. They further highlight significant correspondences. The sanctum is the head, the tower the top-knot of hair (śikhā), the pavilion middle parts of the body, the enclosure hands, and the entrance-tower feet. The icon within the sanctum is the personification of the mantras. The temple thus becomes a tool for the devotee and a technique of worship. We may recall what the Talmud suggests: "If you desire to perceive the invisible, then perceive the visible." This is precisely what the canonical texts drive at. Some texts (e.g. Pārameśvara-saṁhitā) point out that the base of the temple represents the earth, the sanctum the intermediate space, and the tower the heavens. In the scheme of 'seven worlds', the tower comprises three worlds: the seat thereof 'jana-loka', the pot portion 'tapo-loka' and the spike (stūpi) 'satya-loka'.

A more interesting thought is the projection of the temple architecture in terms of human constitution. The saying that "the human body is said to be the temple and soul the icon" is found in many texts. The architectural terms used

in all the texts are the names of parts of the human body and term used in iconography 'feet' (pāda), 'knee' (jānu), 'things' (jaṅghā), 'belly' (kukshi), 'neck' (grīva), 'shoulders' (kandhara), 'nose' (nāsikā), 'face' (mukha), 'head' (śirsha), 'hip' (kaṭi, for flight of steps) and so on. As a temple is laid out, it is said to picture a man lying down. His feet connote the entrance-tower, his genital organ hall (raṅga-maṇḍapa), his heart, "the porch" (anatarāla or śukanāśi), his head the sanctum, and the brows-meet the seat of the icon. There is another account which reckons the neck as the sanctum and the head as the tower; the heart, according to this account, is the porch where the devotee stands and looks at the icon.

The forehead of man is said to represent the sanctum, and top of head, the tower. The space between the eyebrows is the seat of the icon. The icon is located in the ājñā center. The finial of the tower is unseen above the head, in the sahasrāra region; and the 'womb' of the sanctum at the tip of the nose.

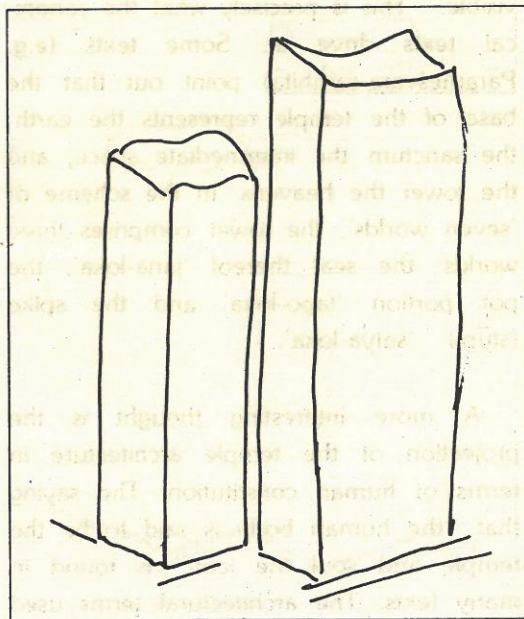
Mention must be made here of the structural detail-known as the altar or 'the dispensing seat' (bali-piṭha), which is an indispensable associate of the sanctum. As already described, it is a small but stylized stone-seat that is installed directly in front of the icon and very near the sanctum. Some texts prescribe that it must be outside the gopura or the first enclosure (Vishnu-tilaka, Mānasāra). It is on this seat that the food offerings to the attendant divinities and the guardian goblins are

placed, after the main food offering to the icon in the sanctum has been completed. There will be several such seats around the sanctum in positions determined by the canonical texts. Usually altars are provided in the eight directions, but the one in front of the sanctum is regarded as the chief (*pradhāna*), and it will be the most ornate, and stylistically majestic, with several limbs such as the base, cornices, wall-surface with door-lets or niches. It is usually made of hard granite, but it is also built in bricks and mortar. There is a provision also for metal ones and when the altar is wooden it is recommended to be covered by metal sheets (*Kāraṇāgama*). Texts like *Silpa-ratna* indicate that mud altars were also common at one time. Most texts suggest that the size of the altar should be $1/8$, $1/7$ or $1/5$ of the dimension of the sanctum. Depending on their size and shapes, altars are classified into several types such as *Śrī-bandha*, *Padma-bandha*, *Śrī-bhadra*, *Sarvatobhadra* and so on.

Its development and incorporation into the Indian temple-architecture are hard to delineate. Perhaps, it is a remnant of the Vedic *yūpa*, and in many temples we do find *bali-pīṭhas* which are merely crude stone blocks or wooden posts. In the well-known temples, it is not unusual to find two 'dispensing seats' placed together, one crudely simple and the other stylistically sculpted. The former can be presumed to be the original, and the latter a later addition. It is also likely that the stone-seat in early days was meant to offer animal food, and some canonical texts do

contain details of offerings which include flesh mixed with turmeric powder. Whatever the origin, this seat is ritually very significant. In fact, the area of the real temple reached only to these seats; whatever structure is beyond them is deemed to be secondary, answering more to the donor's fancy than to the prescriptions of the texts. A text clearly lays down that a shrine consists only of four limbs: the sanctum, the icon, the tower above the sanctum, and the 'dispensing seat'. And another text speaks of the 'dispensing seat' as a replica of the tower above the sanctum.

A text claims that the dispensing seat and the tower above the sanctum (*vimāna*) are indeed the same, for it is there that the gods assemble (*Nārāyaṇa-saṁhitā*). Indeed the shapes of the two closely resemble each other, with the difference



that the altar is crowned by a flat lotus motif while the tower ends in a round kalāṣa surmounted by a spike (stūpī). And like the tower, the altar may be square, circular or polygonal.

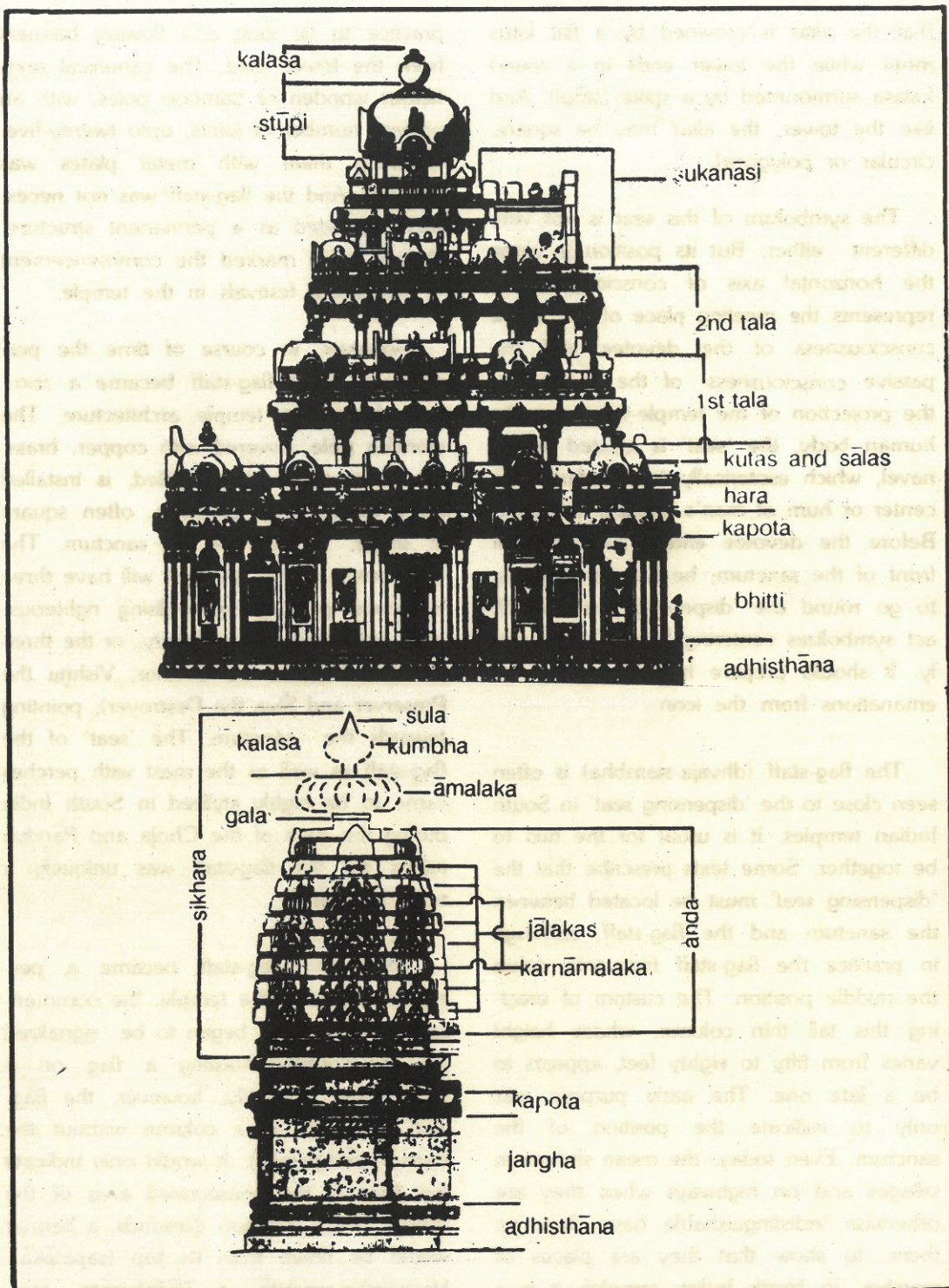
The symbolism of this seat is not very different either. But its position is along the horizontal axis of consciousness. It represents the meeting place of the active consciousness of the devotee and the passive consciousness of the divinity. In the projection of the temple-image on the human body, the 'seat' is located in the navel, which esoterically is considered the center or hum of man's physical existence. Before the devotee enters the porch in front of the sanctum, he has ceremonially to go round the 'dispensing seat', which act symbolizes centering himself adequately. It should prepare him to receive the emanations from the icon.

The flag-staff (dhvaja-stambha) is often seen close to the 'dispensing seat' in South Indian temples. It is usual for the two to be together. Some texts prescribe that the 'dispensing seat' must be located between the sanctum and the flag-staff, although in practice the flag-staff frequently takes the middle position. The custom of erecting this tall thin column, whose height varies from fifty to eighty feet, appears to be a late one. The early purpose was only to indicate the position of the sanctum. Even today, the mean shrines in villages and on highways when they are otherwise indistinguishable have flags on them, to show that they are places of worship. In North Indian temples, it is a

practice to fly long and flowing banners from the tower itself. The canonical texts favour wooden or bamboo poles, with an uneven number of joints, upto twenty-five. Covering them with metal plates was optional. And the flag-staff was not necessarily intended as a permanent structure. Putting it up marked the commencement of occasional festivals in the temple.

However, in course of time the permanently fixed flag-staff became a common feature in temple architecture. The wooden pole, covered with copper, brass, or even silver plates gilded, is installed on a raised stone platform, often square in shape, in front of the sanctum. The top portion of this tall mast will have three horizontal perches (symbolising righteousness, reputation and propriety, or the three divinities Brahmā the Creator, Viṣṇu the Preserver and Śiva the Destroyer), pointing towards the sanctum. The 'seat' of the flag-staff as well as the mast with perches came to be highly stylized in South India during the days of the Choḷa and Pāṇḍya rulers, for the flag-staff was uniquely a royal insignia.

When the flag-staff became a permanent detail in the temple, the commencement of festivals began to be signaled by ceremonially hoisting a flag on it (masūraka). Normally, however, the flag-staff will only be a column without the banner (nishpatakā). It would only indicate the limit of the consecrated area of the shrine. When occasion demands, a banner would be flown from its top (sapatakā). Hayasirsha-saṁhitā, a Pāñcharātra text,



which insists that a building (*prāsāda*) without a flag would be in vain, gives some interesting details about the position and height of the mast, the type of bamboo that is to be chosen, the colour of the cloth for the banner, and so on. The benefit of the flag-mast is here said to be "obtainment of all that is desired". Another text, *Śiva-sarvasva* describes the purpose of the flag as indication of the insignia of the deity, or of the characteristic vehicle of the icon that is within the sanctum.

The symbolism of the flag-staff is not clear in the textual accounts, probably because it was a late innovation and not a necessary involvement of the shrine. It was an introduction from royal association, and therefore the usual symbolism is that of victory and prosperity. A tall flag-post, richly decorated and elaborately installed, would mean a rich and prosperous temple commanding royal patronage; it is a sign of pomp and pride. God is the greatest of kings and the temple is His palace.

A text mentions that when the flag is hoisted in front of the temple, gods as well as manes will be delighted. Otherwise, according to the text, demons and goblins would sneak in and make the temple their abode (*Prāsāda-maṇḍana*). The association of flag-posts with tall lamp-posts in the temples is well known. One may recall that there is a custom of erecting tall *yama-dīpas* on occasions to provide satisfaction for the departed ancestors and to illumine their path towards our realm. The flag-post is also magical in its sig-

nificance. The texts assign Śiva to the bottom of the post, *Brahmā* to the middle portion and *Vishṇu* to the top.

While in the South, the flag-cloth (*patāka*) is occasionally tied to the flag-post, it is ever present in the temples of the North. The length of the cloth in the latter case will be equal to the length of the flag-post, which will be fixed to the top member of the tower over the sanctum. South Indian *vimānas*, however, are not meant to accommodate the flag-post, which is a distinct member, outside the inner enclosure.

But the 'flag' in the traditional context also means a resolve to exert and a will to succeed. Hoisting the flag suggests setting out to conquer. The devotee coming into the temple would have to resolve to conquer his own baser nature, to set out on a war with his own mean disposition; a look at the flag-mast would be a reminder for him in this regard. The Sanskrit word for the flag or banner, *dhvaja*, strictly means whatever is raised. It therefore has the connotations of hope, desire (especially erotic desire which is physically expressed as erection, and the Sanskrit expression is frequently employed in this context), pride, arrogance and will. Whatever raises man to a higher level of understanding and activity is a *dhvaja*. It is a call that God is high and above (*Mahābhārata*, 1, 33,17). The characteristic animal and the insignia of the icon on the banner gives a direction to the devotee's desire and will. When the

devotee sights the banner and bows to it, he resolves to rise higher.

The Indian temple is thus a constellation of symbolism. It is an image that is at once relevant to human aspirations and persistent in human thought and actions. The texts of Indian architecture which provide us with all the details of measurements and parts of the temple, and prescribe the rites of installation and rituals of worship, also indicate the real value of a shrine:

"The ritualists have their God in the fire; but the wise folk find Him in their own hearts. It is the dull-witted one that seeks God in an icon. Those who have higher understanding see God in everything."

The Indian temple as an art-form has a human as well as a divine character. It exists in its material outfit as something that endures in space and time and as something that was a response to a situational need. It is a building, accomplished by engineers and masons who follow the laws of the physical world and employ their technical skill. Indian temple has even a mathematical basis; the māna-orientation was almost in the nature of an obsession with the old temple-builders in India. But the inspiration to the building activity was in every case derived from religious mysticism. The temple has also a psychological and spiritual existence. It is in the nature of 'sacred art', bringing man into contact with the divine. It enables man to feel the spiritual presence, and to find it in his own heart.

It is not so much to pray that a devotee visits a temple as to feel this presence. He could pray anywhere, and as every devotee knows, the well-known and popular temples of the present-day are the last places in the world where one can really get into a prayerful mood. If one does not have an inclination for this presence, he does not get beyond what is physical and visible in the temple. It is not enough for the devotee to believe in God or to believe in the efficacy of prayer. He must have an intuitive apprehension of the presence that makes the temple a sacred enclosure and he must be eager to partake of that presence. Without such equipment, the temple would lack meaning and value.

Sensitivity to spiritual presence is not guided by considerations of utility. The Indian temple has been many things; art gallery, economic institution, political power, social organization, crafts-guild, fortress, and refectory. All this has only contributed to the decay of the temple as a spiritual institution. The temple now inclines to be in a less austere setting. The civilization of machine has made an inroad into it. It is no longer "static and peaceful" as it used to be when the twin demons of speed and utility had not as yet possessed it or us. The human perspective has altered, the temple has become a mere building, and worse, an office.

The sanctity of the Indian temple depends not on its art or its utility, but on its esoteric significance. The texts of

Indian architecture are no doubt prolix and full of technical details; but they do not lose sight of the truth that the temple is chiefly meant to be a tool of spiritual realization. The devotee goes to the temple with faith in his heart and expects to find grace in the shrine. It is only when man has faith that he can lay claim to grace. And faith does not need gnosis or understanding of the symbolism involved in the temple; it even excludes intellection. What it needs is the appropriate mood. In order to create an atmosphere or a mood of holiness and sanctity, which would enable a devotee's faith to become more receptive to this spiritual presence, certain traditional prescriptions like physical cleanliness, postural reverence, and ritual offering have been introduced.

The devotee would have intuitively apprehended the symbolism. Ability to vocalize or convey it is a different thing, and may be wholly unnecessary. He would not be seduced by the illusion of anthropomorphism; he would not mistake the human-looking icon for a mere human being, nor a temple for a mere building. Art in the temple will not distract him, and technical skill will not hold his attention. He flits over these obstacles and directly reaches the shrine to receive grace.

But when the traditional hold has been loosened, intellectual apprehension of symbolism becomes necessary. Understanding must augment faith. But nothing can be more harmful than attempting to understand ancient images by contemporary attitude. We often slip into the error of

wanting to understand things without really involving ourselves in them. No door can be opened with merely collecting an odd assortment of keys. The proper key must be selected and involved in the lock. The attitude for understanding needs to be relevant, legitimate and receptive. The pretensions and prejudices of the modern mind can easily lead one astray. Unless sincerity and humility are allowed to inspire the urge to understand, the understanding is bound to be defective and superficial.

The Indian temple has its own symbolism, at once profound, mysterious and relevant for all time. The 'manifestation' of this symbol-complex is in terms of elaborate and intricate spatial projections, material masses of constructions, passionate patterns of forms, and schematic representations of technical skill. Such manifestations, possessing an objective character, are sought to be described and classified according to prevalent styles in well-defined periods of time and within certain territorial confines.

But the 'content' of the temple is an abstract something hidden within (or revealed through) these 'objective' appearances, and quite unattached to styles or period. It has an inner dimension which is real for the devotee but elusive for a visitor to the temple. The latter is interested in what 'is' out there, while the former is concerned with what 'may be' in relation to himself. This veiling of the content for a casual person (that is to say, one devoid of faith) is one of the functions of art, for art does not reveal so much as conceal.

The content cannot be concrete. But it is real, provided the perspective is proper. One of the errors the casual man is prone to is the thought that whatever is not manifest either does not exist or is not relevant. He does not suspect that the things that do not appear before the senses may appear to the mind, that what is not apprehended by the intellect may be understood by intuition. Manifestation is in reality an incarnation of the content, which is available only to intuition.

It is natural that the aspect of manifestation comes to be formalized. The temple is a public institution; its appeal is collective. The priest performs the worship-ritual, not for his own sake but for the sake of all (*parārtha*), unlike in the worship at home. For the devotee, worship in the temple cannot be a substitute for worship at home. In fact, worship at home is obligatory, while the visit to a temple is optional. There is an interesting account of the origin of temples in a celebrated text, *Vishnudharmottara* :

Time is divided in ancient Indian thought into four immense periods, *Kṛta*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali*. *Kali* is the dark age we now live in, and temples appeared only during this period. In the first of these divisions, there was no need for temples because gods lived and moved amongst humans. In the next division, the presence of gods became scarce and they descended on earth only when men invoked them in sacrifices; but then they came as gods. In the third great division of time, men had only to make images

of these gods and worship them; and the gods came down in disguised forms, showering their grace. The worship at that time was only domestic; the shrines were within the precincts of homes. During the last phase of time, temples (as public shrines) began to be built and icons were installed. But the gods ceased to come down in their own or disguised forms.

However, their presence was felt when the icons were properly installed, and temples correctly built. The priests, who were professional performers of worship, were the only ones who were competent to compel this presence; others could only be participants and beneficiaries. In the early phases of this period, the sages merely installed the icons, and the divine presence was with them ever after. But in the later and decadent phases, the presence could be secured only by continuous worship and periodical festivals.

This is an interesting account, where historical facts are combined with the symbolic interpretations. Temples were later than domestic shrines. In the remains of the Indus Valley civilization, we find evidences of domestic shrines: but there is no trace of a public temple. And domestic shrines were later than the magical procedures (sacrifices and rituals), which came into vogue only at a stage when man felt separated from the supranormal forces. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes may, in a sense, be considered as distinct phases of religious evolution; but it would be an error to look upon that evolution as a

succession of disappearing and appearing phases. Magical rites, domestic shrines and temple-complexes co-exist in Indian life, and they have always done so. This co-existence has been possible because all three are essentially symbols; and as symbols they do not deny history, but transcend it.

Thus it becomes important to recognize that Indian temples have sprung from a traditional symbol that is at once ancient and enduring. The temple would remain an enigma for one who fails to appreciate the content as well as the manifestations of this symbol. The temple would present itself as 'luminous obscurity' (the expression of Frithjof Schuon, in another context); and one who would be content with considering only the content would see it as 'obscured light'. The symbol is revealed not only by its material manifestation but also by a vision of its content. The vision in this case is both aesthetic and spiritual.

In order to enable our understanding the aesthetic as well as the spiritual aspects of the temple-symbol, the Indian tradition has crystallized a doctrinal approach which comprehends the idea, the method, and the purpose behind the temple-building activity. The approach is referred to as 'Āgama', which indeed is a generic expression meaning "that which has come from a hoary past"; it is the ever-active presence of a useful framework for our thoughts and actions, for our growth and fulfilment. 'Āgama' with reference to temple deals with the temple-building activities as well as the procedures of

worship in temples. The former appears to emphasize aesthetics, while the latter the spiritual aspect. But the distinction between them is arbitrary and unreal for Beauty and Serenity cannot in fact be separated.

There are doctrinal formulations in Āgama regarding the selection of proper land for the temple, the purificatory ceremonies prior to the construction, the plan, 'lay-out', direction, size, relative proportions of the plinth and other structural parts, permissible decorations and embellishments, installation of icons and deities in the sanctum as well as in the niches and pavillions, rituals of daily worship and periodical festivals, purifications and sacramental activities, and so on. These formulations take manifestations and content of the symbol as two complementary elements.

The temple as an incarnation of the symbol is the medium of rituals. Ritual is active thought. Rituals are actions that lead to contemplation, and contemplation strives to achieve the serenity of consciousness that lifts one from the stress of common life. The Āgama focusses attention on the temple as a pattern of rituals. It provides us with a perspective to understand the symbol and act effectively with regard to it. It seeks to construct for us a half-way house between the limitations that we have and the perfection we aim at. Limitations are inherent in human life; we live amidst what pass for the commonplace and the ugly. Perfection is a divine quality; it is

also beautiful. The purpose of rituals is to facilitate the passage from the commonplace to the unique, from ugliness to beauty, from what is human to what may be divine.

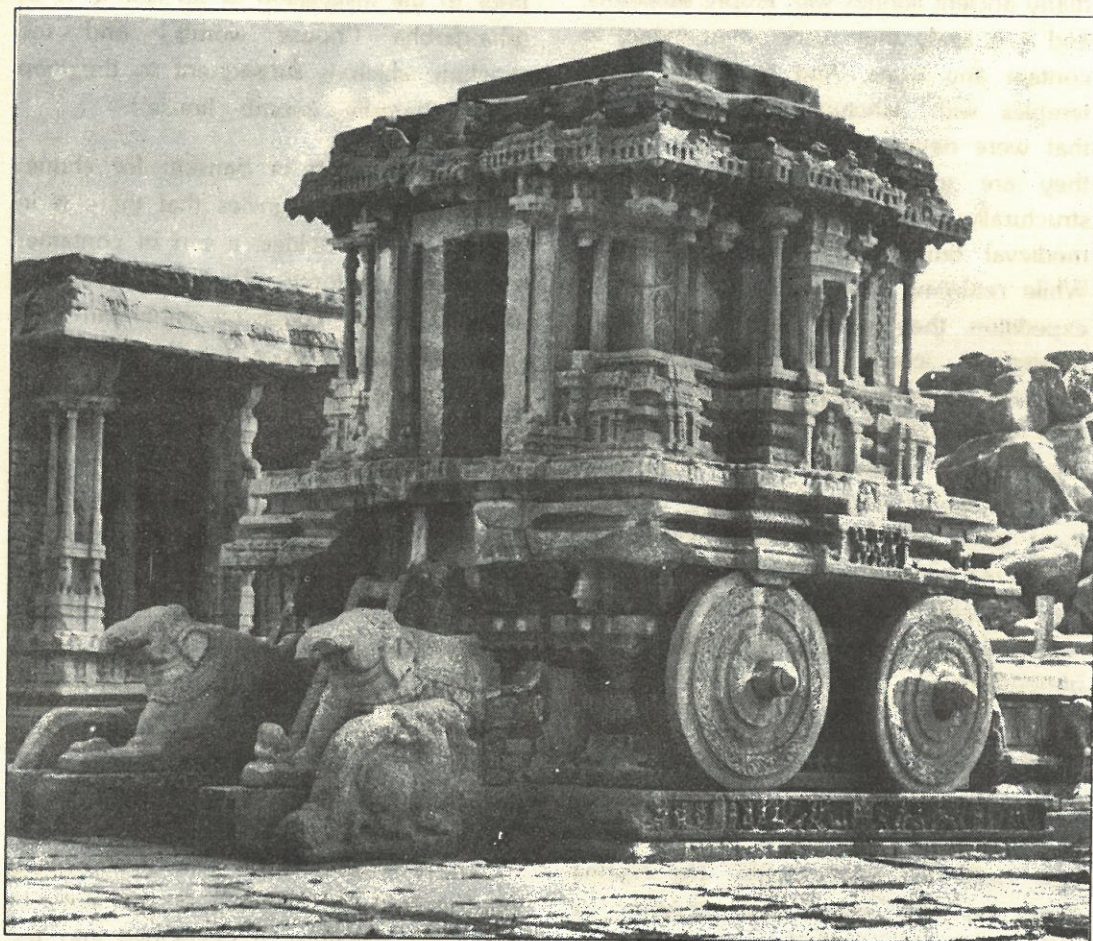
The Āgama had an earlier oral tradition, communicated through generations of craftsmen and priests. It has also a later written tradition, consisting of hundreds of texts and manuals meant for craftsmen and priests. The oral tradition has almost disappeared, for craftsmen as well as priests have fallen on decadent days. The texts and manuals have, for the same reason, gone into oblivion, neglected by those for whom they were meant and ignored by others in the community. Fortunately, however, many of these literary works are available, mostly in manuscripts and some of them in print.

The literary tradition comprises of works that are usually classified into three classes; revelations (*divya*), composition of sages (*muni-prokta*), and writings of ordinary men (*paurusha*). The revealed texts claim a hoary antiquity and have been relied upon by the other two classes of works. The compositions of sages are original works, based on inspiration, intuition and contemplation. They now exist only in citations and fragments. The third group of works is largely in the nature of compilations of relevant passages from the compositions of sages. They employ intelligence and reason, and are also liable to err. They are chronologically recent, and some of them are what the priests and craftsmen mostly have relied upon for several generations now.

The fundamental assumption in this mixed tradition is that Divinity has two aspects; the hidden and pervasive aspect (*nishkala*), and the manifest and specific aspect (*sakala*). The former is abstract and is likened to oil in the sesamum seeds, fire in fuel, butter in milk, and scent in flower. It is all-pervasive and is settled in the human heart as the 'inner guide' (*antaryāmin*). It has no form, and is not apprehended by sense-organs or by the ordinary mind. The latter, however, is concrete, like fire that has come out of the fuel, or oil that has been pressed out of the seeds, or butter that floats on the surface when milk is churned. It has numerous forms, and man can realize Divinity through these forms; but an act of worship is necessary. The tradition enumerates and describes not only the forms the Divinity may assume to facilitate man's approach but prescribes rituals that are involved in such an approach. We find in these texts descriptions of icons as visible symbols of Divinity and details of worship with regard to them (*archā*). This in fact is the burden of most of these books. Incidentally, they also discuss associated problems of practical import such as the methods and materials employed in the fashioning of icons, installation of these icons and consecration of temples. Sometimes they expatiate on alternate or accessory approaches such as fire- rituals (*homa*), meditational exercises (*dhyāna* or *yoga*), recitations (*japa*), and intellectual appreciation of spiritual involvement (*jñāna*).

When iconic forms and worship rituals became the principal contents of these texts (especially those texts of accredited human origin), there was naturally an introduction of sectarian differences. The three main sects flourishing in India for two thousand years now, Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava, developed their own distinctive lineages, their own metaphysical positions, their own deities, and their own rituals of worship. But the essential framework remains common for all of them. And

there is a tradition of each sect borrowing freely from the texts belonging to other sects whenever necessary. For instance, the manuals of the Pāñcharātra sect of Vaiṣṇava persuasion are chronologically early and numerically large. We find that the sectarians of the Vaikhanāsa division of Vaiṣṇava as well as the Śaiva rely on many prescriptions and explanations found in Pāñcharātra books. Prejudices and differences become wholly irrelevant in the higher reaches of approach to the Divine.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEMPLE AS A MAṆḌALA

The shrine itself was regarded as an object of reverence. The icon in it was an additional source of sanctity. There are many ancient shrines with empty sanctums; and it is likely they were never meant to contain any icons. And there are many temples with sanctums containing icons that were never meant for them : either they are scripturally disproportionate or structurally incongruous. Kings of the medieval times had a strange practice. While returning from a successful military expedition they would bring with them prestigious icons from the defeated kingdom as loots to be installed in their own capitals. Inscriptions are there that unabashedly narrate such instances. Temples would then be specially built for these icons, or empty sanctums of already celebrated temples would house them. And the temples from which icons were removed would continue to be held sacred nonetheless.

We have thus a curious situation. There were icons installed before they got housed in temples; and there were temples which later came to possess icons. The Āgama texts, do not regard the situation as paradoxical, because the temple has a sanctity of its own, independent of the

icon: and the icon's sanctity on the other hand is dependent on the temple. The Āgama recognizes the sanctum which is prior to the installation of an icon it is as *gr̥ha-garbha* ('house womb') and the sanctum which is subsequent to the icon as '*garbha-gr̥ha*' (womb- house').

The expression in Sanskrit for shrine, *āyatana* ('abode') signifies that there is in it a power that abides, a sort of container of certain field-forces. Thus, strictly speaking, the shrine could be either an icon (*bimba* or *bera*) or a temple (*mandira*). The temple is in fact regarded as a pattern of powers (*maṇḍala*), even as the human body is. If the body is the 'moving' *maṇḍala* (*chara* or *jaṅgama*), the temple is a 'stationary' one (*achala* or *sthāvara*). The symbolic correspondance between the two has already been mentioned. If the Tantra emphasizes the human *maṇḍala*, the Āgama focusses its attention on temple as the divine *maṇḍala*. The icon represents a condensation of the same divine force, corresponding to the 'soul' in man.

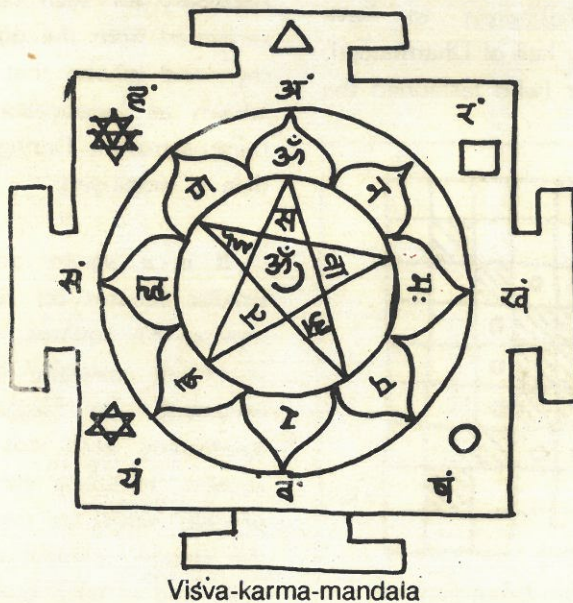
The evidence for the cult of concretely representing the *maṇḍala* occurs even in the Vedic literature. It developed into the *stūpa* symbolism. Involvement of geometri-

cal forms (square, circle, semi-circle, triangle, polygon and so on) helped in the crystallization of this cult. The Yoga-tattva-upanishad spells out the symbolism in terms of the five fundamental elements that constitute the material basis of the entire cosmos. Earth element is represented by a square, water by a semi-circle, fire by a triangle, air by a six-angled figure, and ether (sky) by a circle. The point without dimensions (dot, bindu) is the focus of all energy. All the other forms are only emanations from it: the icon in

the sanctum occupies this position, and the temple should represent the other forms. The architectural details of a sophisticated temple reflects this fundamental symbolism.

The first architect of the stylized temples is imagined to be the divine creator-sculptor, Viśva-karmā (the 'All-maker'). He is represented as five-faced. Each face has a name, a deity, a colour, an attribute, and a form: (excluding Isāna, which is formless)

<i>Name</i>	<i>deity</i>	<i>colour</i>	<i>attribute</i>	<i>form</i>
Sadyojāta	Śiva	crystal white	inertia	triangular
Vāmadeva	Vishṇu	blue	knowledge	square
Aghora	Brahma	reddish	action	circular
Tatpurusha	Indra	ash-coloured	mixture of above three	six-angled



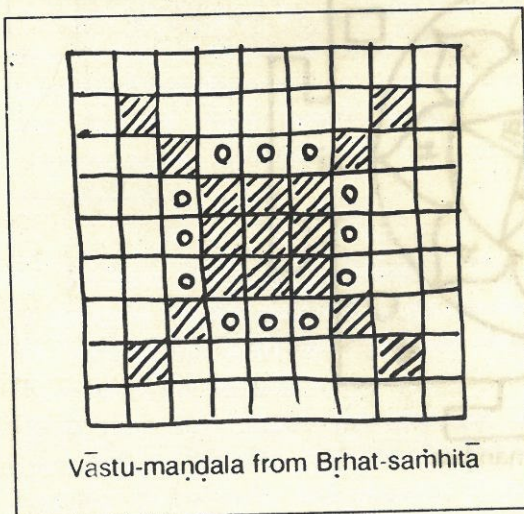
A combination of the above five forms is represented in a maṇḍala, known as Viśva-karma-maṇḍala, which is regarded as fundamental to all temple architecture. The four sides of the maṇḍala symbolize the four main directions: and the corners of this square represent four mid-directions: and each of the eight quarters is presided over by a deity. The inner circle symbolises the 'creator' (brahmā), symbolic of activity'. Guarded by the eight direction guardians, the mandala is symbolic of the entire universe. The 'All-maker' (creator) is also the progenitor of the whole mass of scripture, consisting of manuals of architecture, sculpture and painting, known collectively as Āgama. Early temples were reputed to be built by this 'All-maker'.

He had five offsprings: Manu, the first 'man', the 'contemplative' (man) man; Maya, the tribal architect or designer (who is reputed in Mahābhārata to have designed the assembly hall of Dharmarāja); Tvashṭṛ, the carpenter (who fashioned the

trident of Siva and the discus of Viṣṇu out of the trimmings he made of the Sun); Śilpin, the sculptor, proficient in all the three above crafts, and in addition skilled in metal work, weaving and clay-modelling; Arka (or Viśvajña), the master artisan or smith who worked with gold and silver. These are the crafts-progenitors and ancestors of guilds. The temple was their craft. It comprehends the five deities, the five qualities, and the five forms. The entire group of factors is pictured in the maṇḍala after Viśva-karmā.

Another image that enters into the maṇḍala background of the temple is that of the 'lay-out of the building site' (vāstu). It continues to be a custom in India that whenever a building is sought to be constructed, the area on which it comes up is first ceremonially propitiated. The idea is that the extent of the earth necessary for such construction must be reclaimed from the gods and goblins that own and inhabit that area. The ritual is known as 'pacification of the site-deity' (vāstu-śamana). During this ritual, a maṇḍala is employed.

It is a square subdivided into nine smaller squares on each side, altogether making 81 squares. There is a variant procedure specially meant for temples, according to Hayaśirsha-saṁhitā, of subdividing each side into eight smaller squares, in which case the total number of cells would be 64. The four sides of the square contain along with them 32 cells, and in each one of them a deity is invoked and propitiated. The deities in-



Vāstu-maṇḍala from Br̥hat-saṁhitā

clude gods like Sun and Indra, spirits like Yama, Gandharva and Nāga, 'demons' like Sin (Pāpa) and Disease (Roga), ancestors and animals.

Mānasāra mentions thirty-two varieties of square plans or plots:

1. Sakala:

one plot,
square or rectangular,
it could also be round
or oval

2. Paisācha:

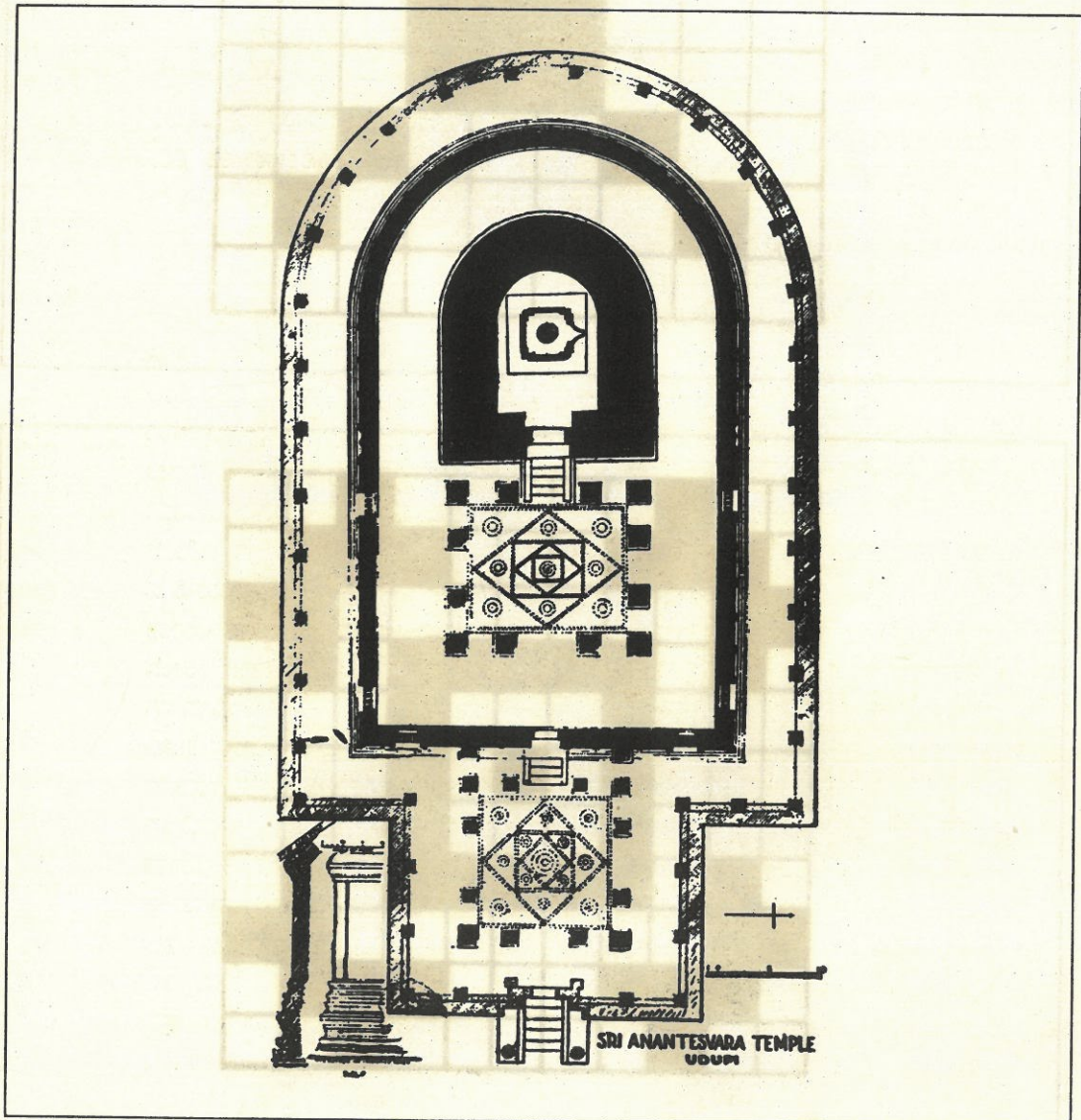
four plots

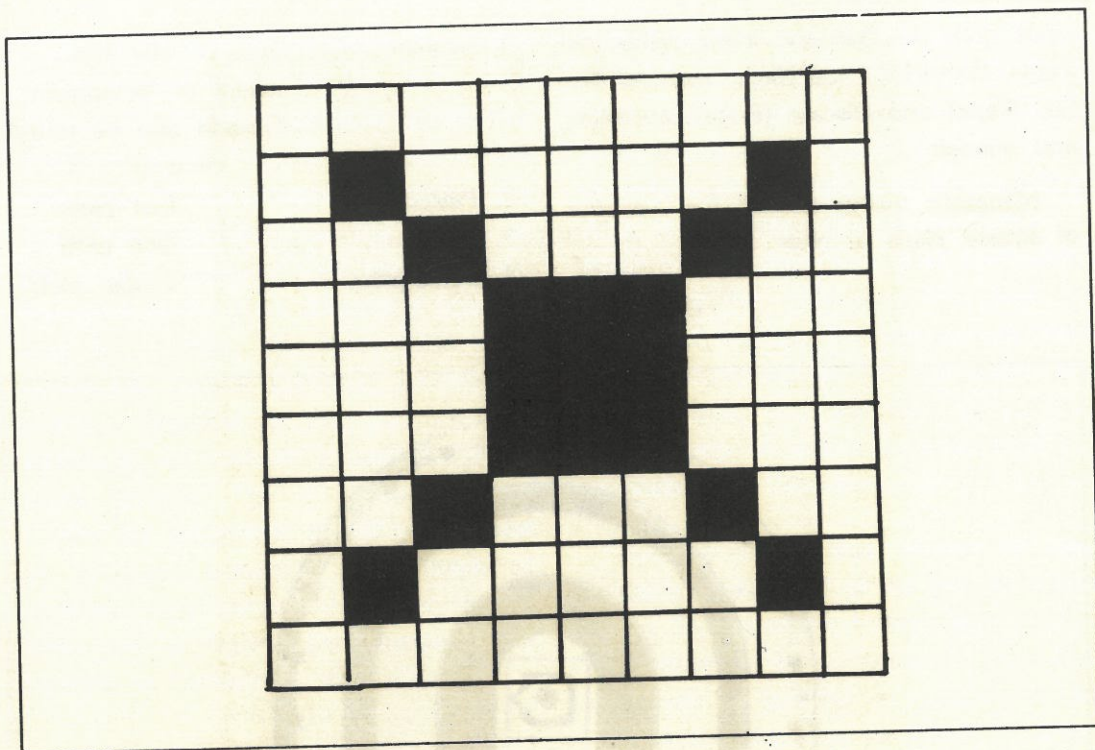
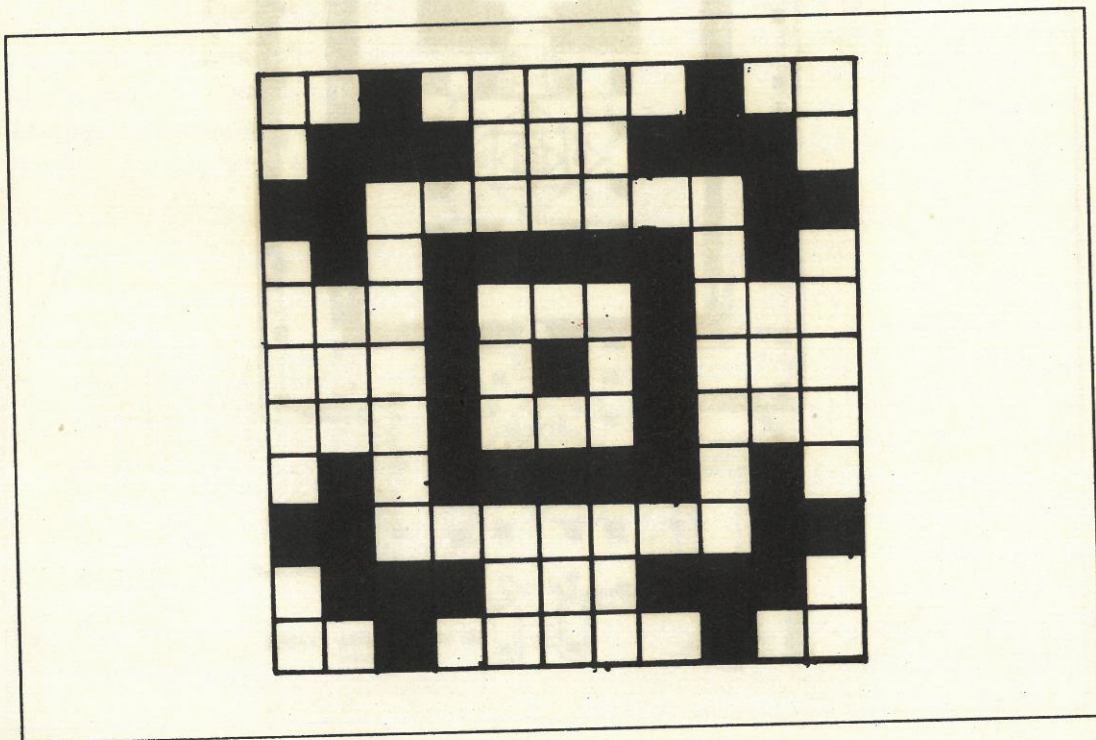
3. Pīṭha:

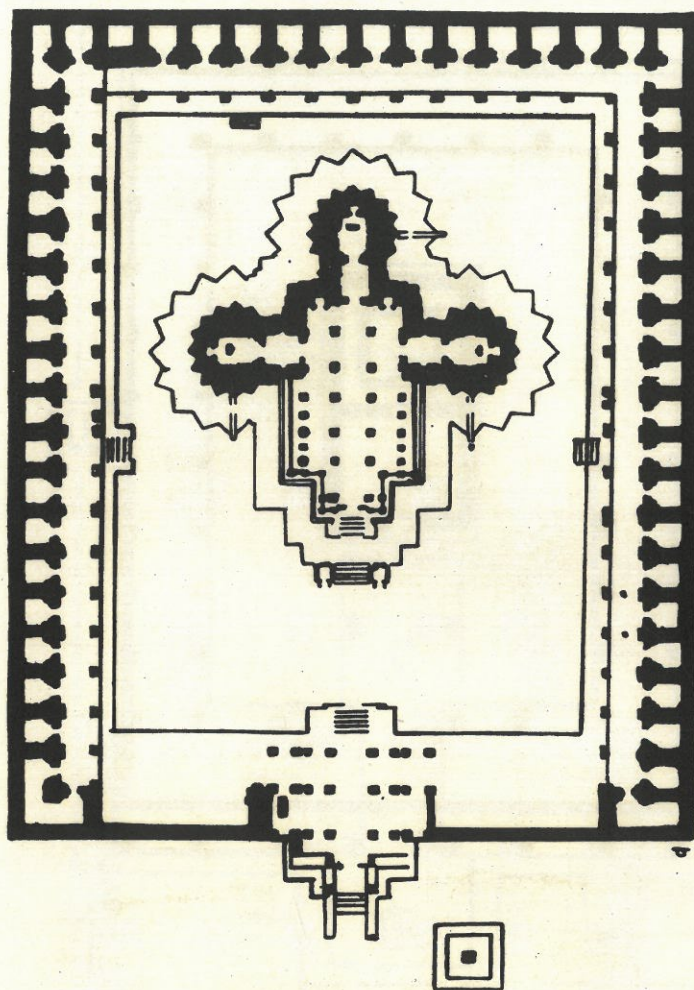
nine plots

4. Mahā-pīṭha:

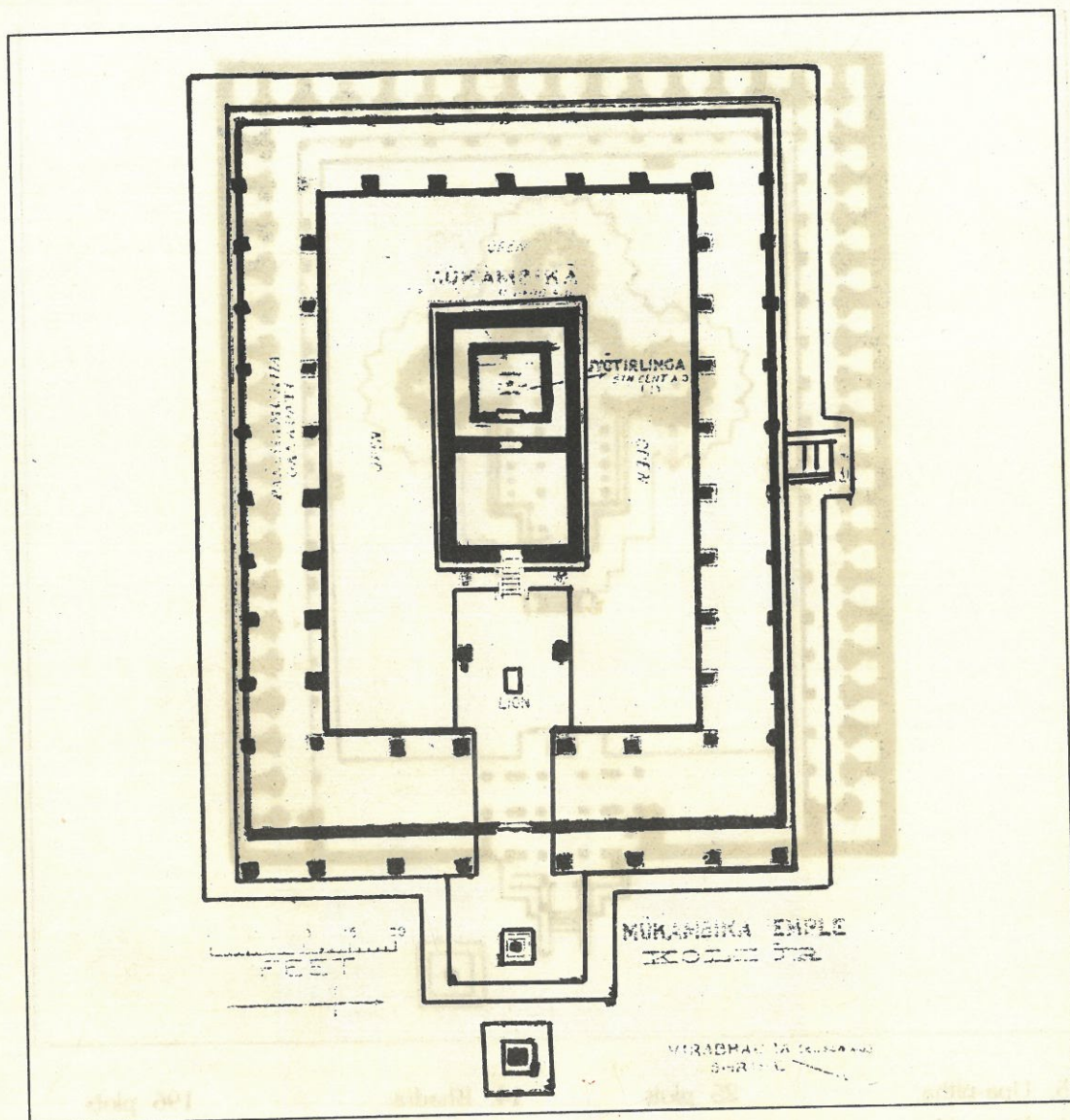
sixteen plots





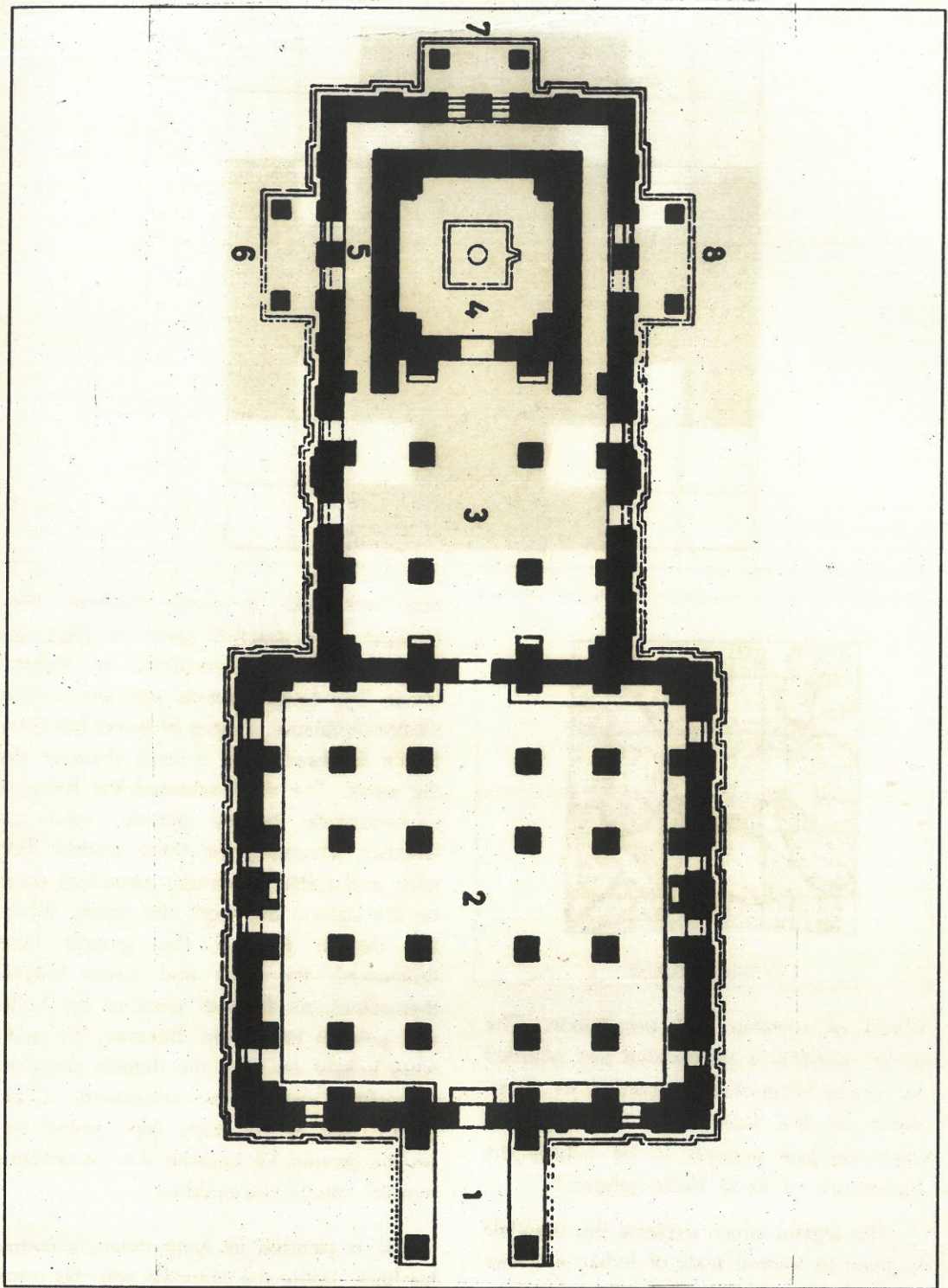


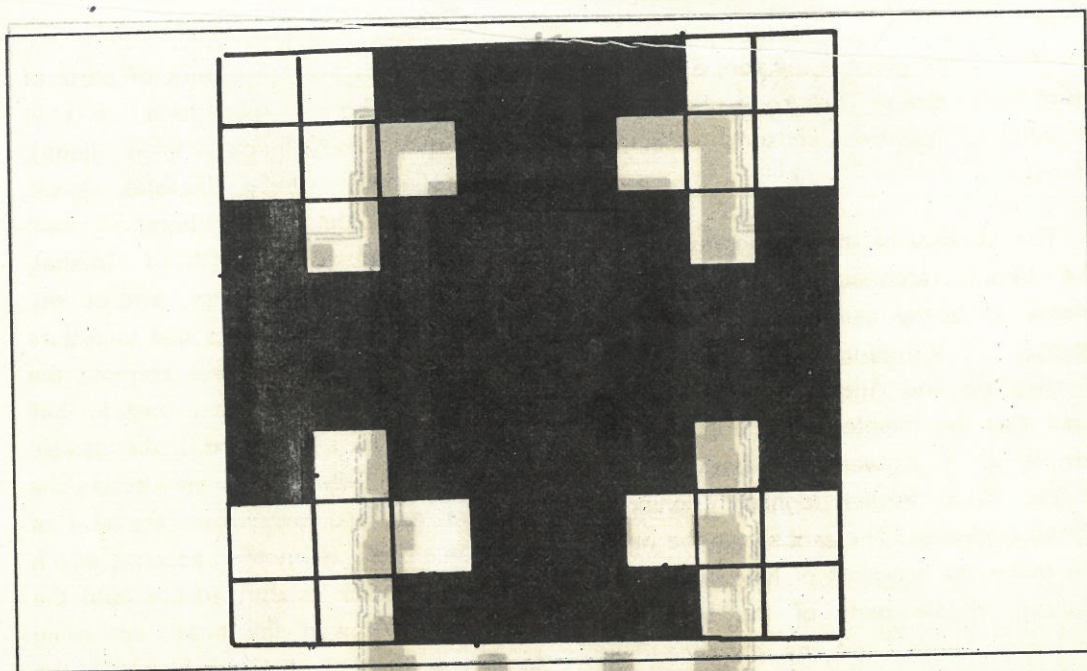
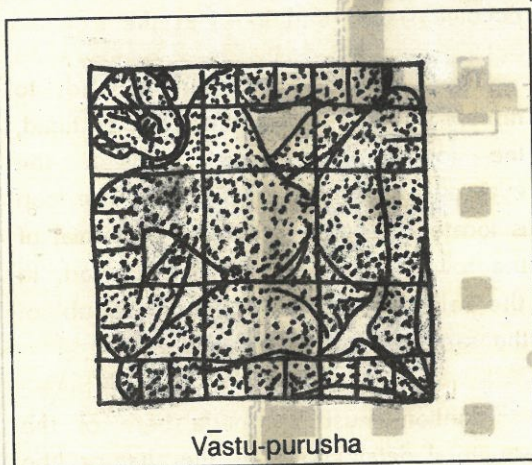
5. Upa-pīṭha:	25 plots	14. Bhadra:	196 plots
6. Ugra-pīṭha:	36 plots	15. Mahāsana:	225 plots
7. Sthaṇḍila:	49 plots	16. Padma-garbha:	256 plots
8. Chaṇḍita:	64 plots	17. Triyuta:	284 plots
9. Paramaśāyika:	81 plots	18. Kaṇāshtaka:	324 plots
10. Āsana:	100 plots	19. Gaṇita:	369 plots
11. Sthānīya:	121 plots	20. Sūrya-viśālaka:	400 plots
12. Deśya:	144 plots	21. Susaṁhita:	441 plots
13. Ubhaya-chaṇḍita:	169 plots	22. Suprātikānta:	484 plots



23. Viśālaka:	519 plots	30. Viśveśa-sāra:	900 plots
24. Vipra-garbha:	526 plots	31. Īśvara-kānta:	961 plots
25. Viśveśa:	625 plots	32. Chamoru-kānta:	1,024 plots
26. Vipula-bhoga:	676 plots		
27. Viprakānta:	729 plots		
28. Viśālāksha:	784 plots		
29. Vipra-bhakti:	841 plots		

The central-most area, consisting of nine cells (a square with three sub-squares on each of its sides), is assigned to Brahmā, the supreme deity and the chief





object of worship and propitiation. The entire maṇḍala is surrounded and guarded by seven demonesses regarded as attendants of the gods. The conception of vāstu-maṇḍala appears to be outside the framework of early Vedic religion.

The legend which explains this maṇḍala is given in several texts of Indian architec-

ture and also in some Purāṇas (like *Matsya*). The account given in *Rāja-val-labha* (*Sūtradhāra-maṇḍana*) is typical. When Śiva fought fiercely with the terrible demon Andhaka, a drop of sweat fell from Śiva's forehead with a loud thunder on the earth. The drop assumed the form of a ravenously hungry demon, who attempted devouring the three worlds. The gods and spirits, however, rushed at once on the demon and held him down. When the demon fell on the ground face downward, the gods and spirits lodged themselves on different parts of his body and pressed him down. Because the gods were lodged on him, the demon came to be called 'Vāstu' ('the lodgement of the gods'); and as his body was spread out on the ground he became the 'recumbent master' (*śayyā-rata-prabhu*).

He is pictured as lying down, showing his back, inside the maṇḍala with his arms

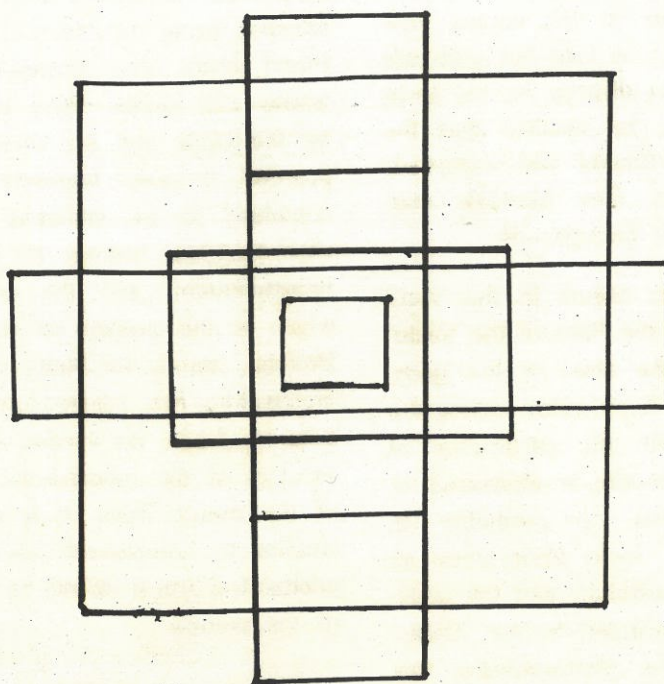
and legs so folded as to cover the whole area, and his head pushed into the north-eastern corner of the square (the *Isāna* cell). As many as forty-five gods are lodged on his body directly on his limbs and joints. It may be recalled that the mystical yantra 'Sri-chakra' also comprises of forty-five angles. The mandala may have had a Tāntrik background.

The word *Vāstu* occurs in the Veda (Rg. 7, 54, 1) and the 'lord of the *Vāstu*' is identified with the chief of the gods, Indra (*Vāstoshpati*). Even today, during the ritual connected with the pacification of the building-site a hymn is addressed to Indra. *Devarāja-yajvā*, an authority in Vedic interpretation, looks upon *vāstu* as the mid-region (*antariksha*), and the gaurdians of this are included in the '*Vāstu-deity*'. However, the *Vāstu-purusha* has been regarded in later lore as a demon, or at best as demi-god, whose permission is necessary before any construction can come up on the site. And, at the same time, care is taken to propitiate the deities that hold him down, for it is important that he should not get up.

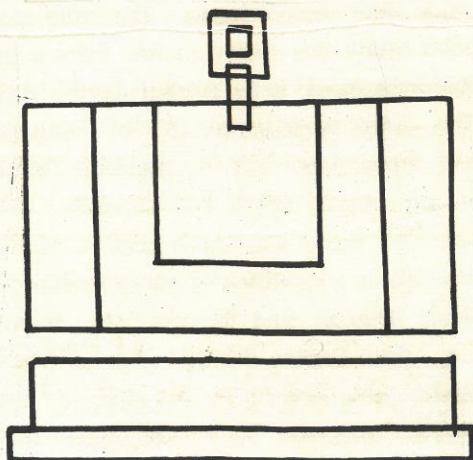
The expression mandala is classically employed to denote the air that encompasses the light of the sun and the moon; the orb that spins round the entire cosmos luminously. It thus symbolizes the totality of existence. The form it naturally takes is circular because circle is perfect and comprehensive. Perhaps the original shape was oval (corresponding to *brahmāṇḍa*, the *brahmā*-egg, or *Hiraṇya-garbha*, the golden womb), and it was transformed into a circle by a natural process.

Associated with this idea was the conjecture concerning the centre of the universe being the mythical mount, Meru, round which were arranged all the continents and islands. Meru was symbolized by the circle and the four quarters that guarded it were represented by forms contained in an enclosing square. The *vāstu-maṇḍala* belongs to this phase of representation; and the central square, which is the position of the chief deity *Brahmā*, stands for Meru. In the temple architecture, the square sanctum is the outer mandala, the *vimāna* on top of the sanctum is the monumental reproduction of the mount Meru. It is usual for the *vimāna* to comprehend also the several geometrical forms stylized in the mandala of *Viśvakarmā*.

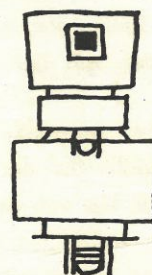
The reason why the sanctum (with the tower) is regarded as the real shrine is that it constitutes the position of *Brahmā* inside the *vāstu-maṇḍala*. The mid-most point inside this central square (where the diagonals meet) is the position of the icon. This point is lifted out of the mandala and transformed into the pinnacle (*stūpī*) of the tower above the sanctum. The sanctum, being the central portion of the mandala is a condition of concentration of divine energy; and the the icon is the very crystallization thereof. The different deities prescribed to be installed on the *vimāna* represent the several gods and spirits located on the limbs and joints of the site-maṇḍala personified. The entire structure is thus a visualization of the mandala.



Basic plan of Daśavatāra temple at Deogarh (Jhānsi) - 5th century

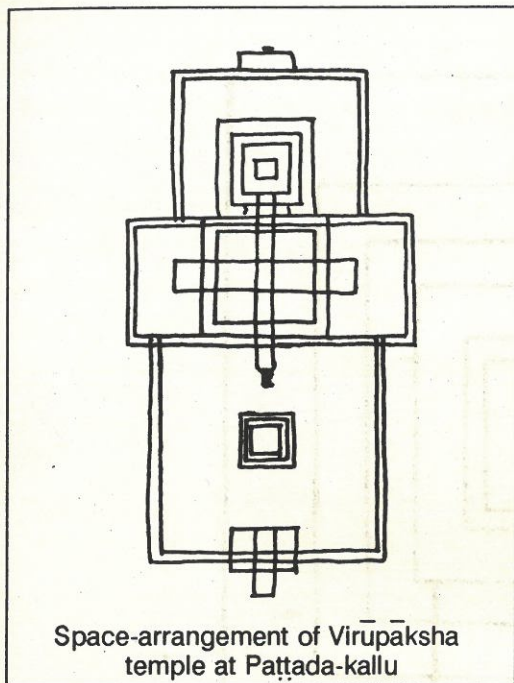


Basic plan of Viṣṇu-grha cave at Badami



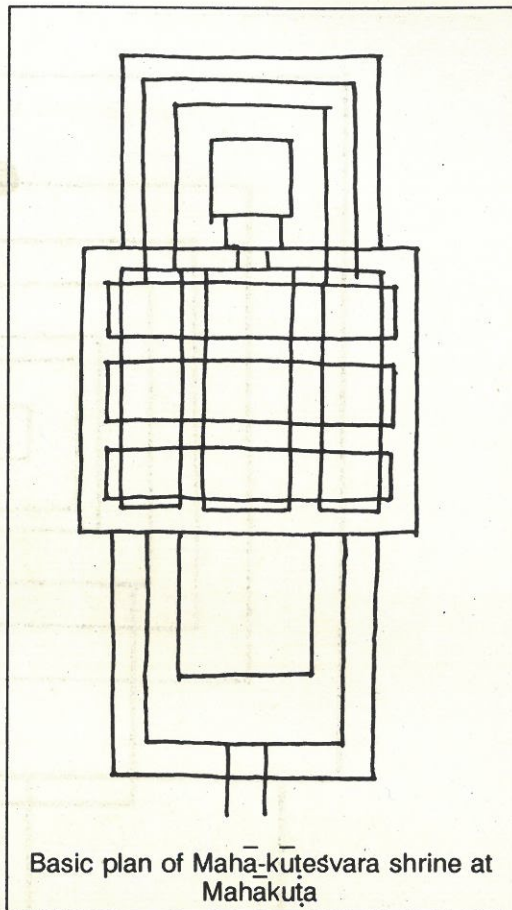
Rāwal-phadi Cave-shrine at Aihole

Extension of the sanctum in terms of porch, passages, assembly halls, pavilions and corridors is a projection of the basic

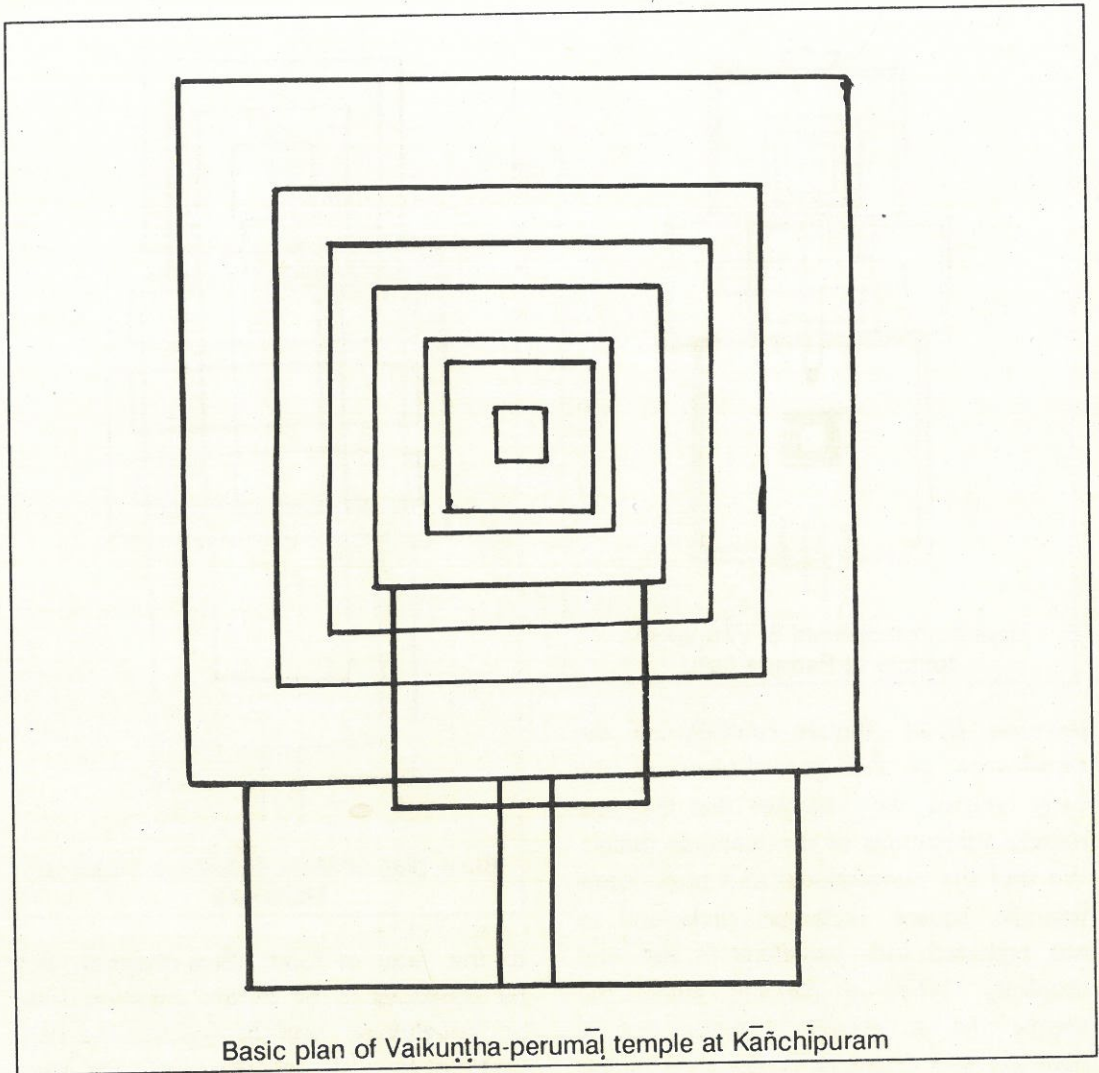


mandala. If we inquire carefully into the significance of the ground-plans of the early temples, we discover that they are merely adaptations of the maṇḍala design. We find the conventional and basic forms (triangle, square, rectangle, circle and so on) repeated with variations in size and simplicity. When a devotee enters the temple, he is actually entering into a mandala and therefore participating in the power-field. The field enclosures and the pavilions through which he must pass to reach the sanctum are symbolic. They represent phases of progress in the journey of man toward the divine beatitude.

As soon as the devotee sights the threshold of the gateway, he bends down and touches a maṇḍala on it before crossing it: this marks for him the transition from the 'way of the world' (loka-dharma)



to the 'way of God' (Śiva-dharma). But he continues to be in the common state of 'wakefulness' until he reaches the flag-post or the 'dispensation-seat'. He then has the first vision of the sanctum, and gets into the state of 'dream'. As he proceeds towards the sanctum and stands in front of the sanctum (in the vestibule), he sinks into the state of 'deep sleep'. When he looks at the icon, the higher state of 'semi-tranquillity' (śāntodita) descends upon him. And when he has suffused himself with the vision of the icon, he gets into the state of 'tranquility' (śānta).



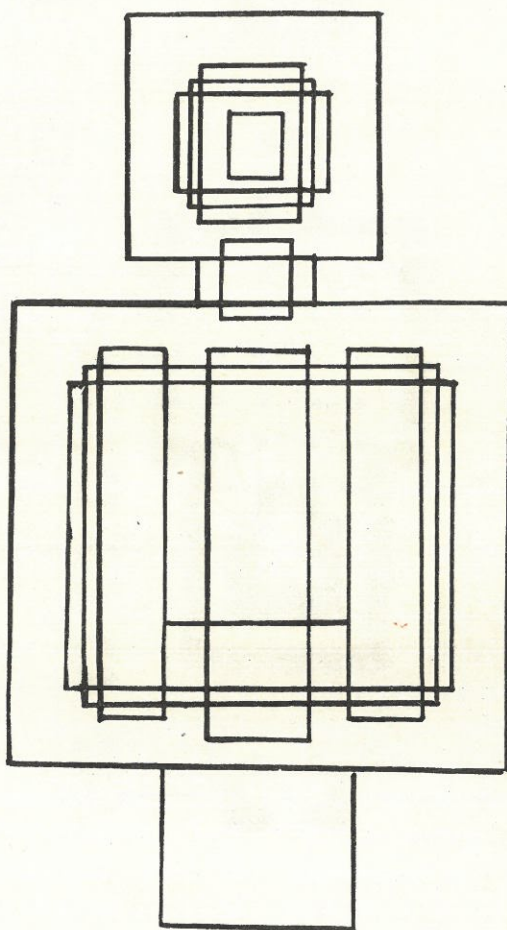
In accordance with this scheme of transition, architectural and sculptural details vary from phase to phase in the devotee's onward movement towards the sanctum. To signify the worldly aspect of the devotee as he enters the temple, the gateway and the tower over the gateway as well as the niches above the enclosing walls are filled with secular sculptures. The 'dispensation seat' is a miniature shrine,

with obvious maṇḍala-details in it: it lifts the devotee from the common condition of worldliness onto a dream-like vision of the sanctum.

The sculptural treatment of the columns and the ceilings, niches and the doorways in the pavilion has a dream-like quality. Mythological themes, legendary subjects, mythical animals, and unusual motifs abound here: they are designed to take

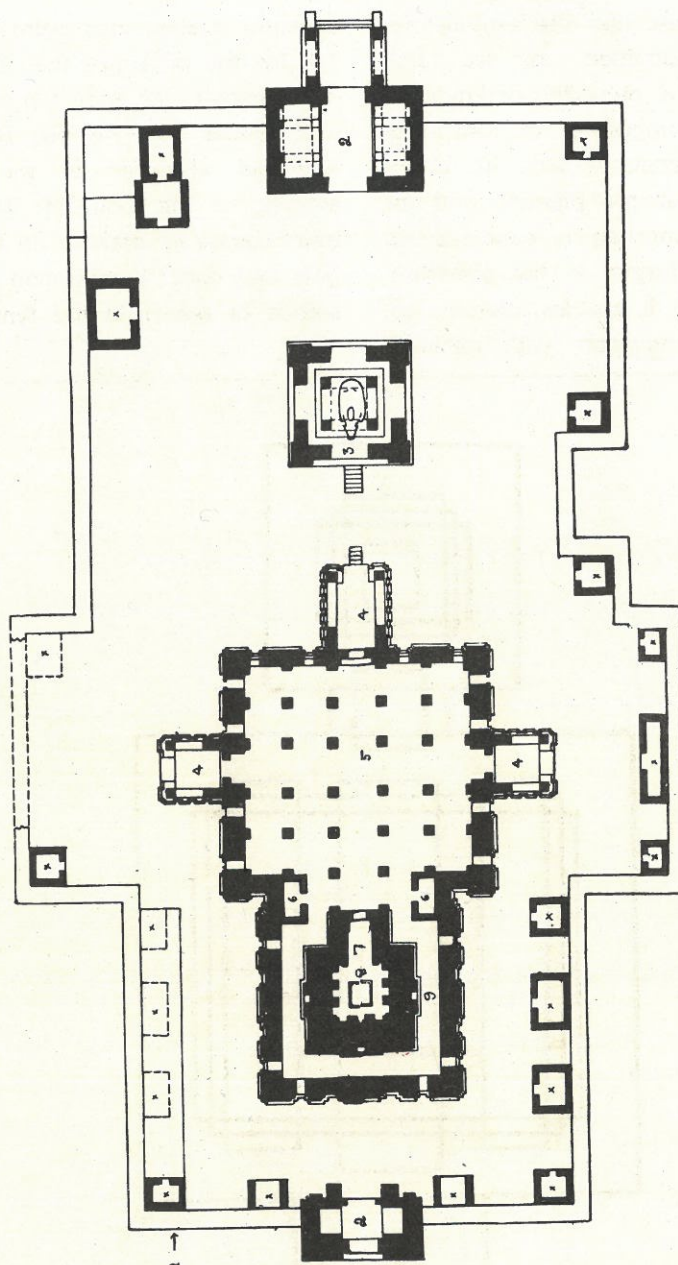
one away from dull and common-place reality. The vestibule and the ambulatory passages are restrained in sculptural decorations, and the prevailing darkness of these areas is suggestive of sleep-like condition. The sanctum with its outer walls divided by simple pilasters and its entrance plainly adorned is expected to lead the devotee further to the condition of 'semitranquillity'. It enables attention to be focussed on the icon, with minimal

distractions. The interior scheme of the sanctum is altogether plain: it is also dark, but for the oil lamps that lit up the icon. The devotee can here forget all the states and phases that he has passed through and get absorbed in the beauty and serenity of the icon. He is now in 'the inner square of Brahmā' in the *vāstu-maṇḍala* and direct communion with the chief source of power in the temple-maṇḍala.

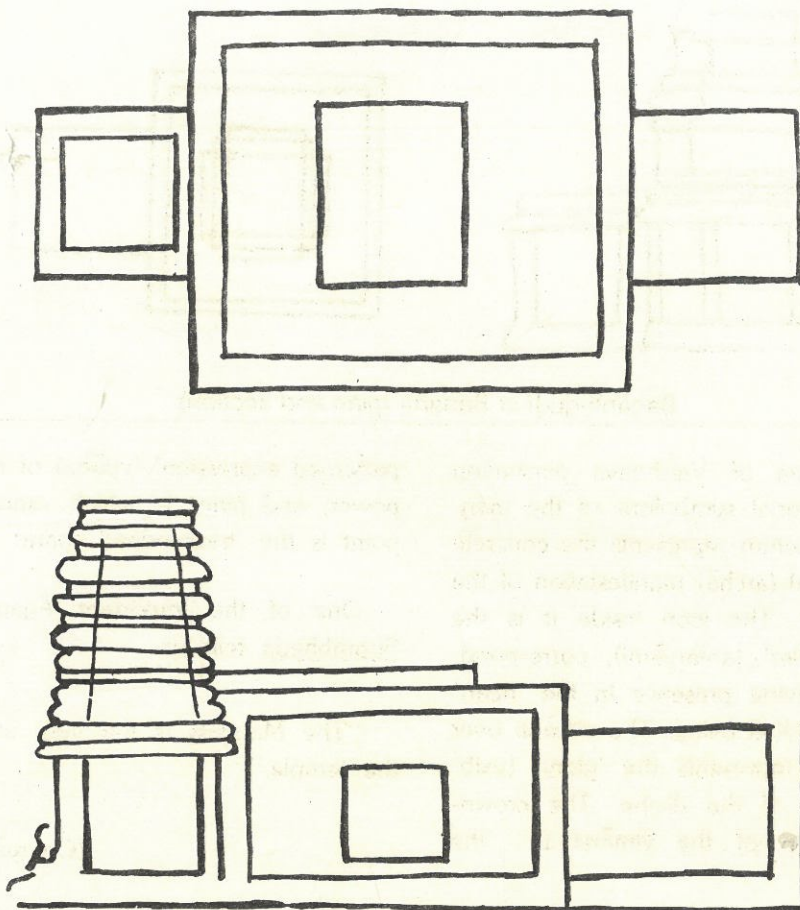


Bhūta-nātha shrine at Bādāmi : basic plan

Plan of Virūpaksha Temple in Pattadakallu



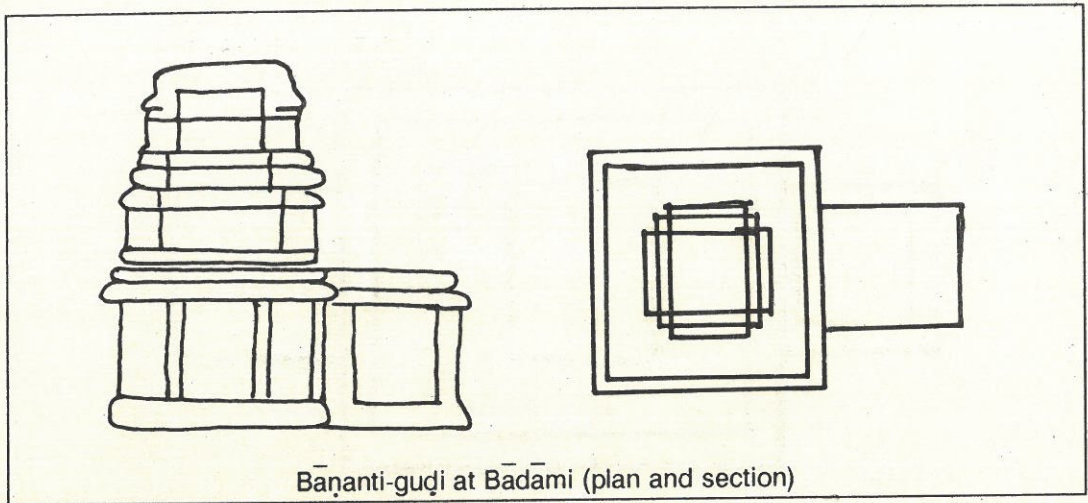
1. Enclosure 2. Main Entrance 3. Nandi-pavilion 4. Mukha-Mandapa 5. Sabha-mantapa
6. Antichambers 7. Antarāla 8. Sanctum



Gaḷaga-nātha temple at Aihole (plan and section)

Along the vertical axis, the square sanctum is the mandala of wakeful condition, the surmounting vimāna (square, circular or polygonal) is the concrete representation of the dream state, and the vase (kalaśa) of the deep sleep state. Even as in sleep the distinctions of form disappear, and the variety gets unified, so in the stūpī the ascent of forms culminate in a point (bindu). The 'pot' of the tower,

surmounted by semi-circular lid, is crowned by an upright needle (sūchi or stūpī). In the Orissan temples, the spheroid or ribbed āmalaka is surmounted by semi-circular 'skull' (khapūri), over which rests the pot of the tower. The entire structure of the vimāna, resting upon a square base and tapering off into a needle is a remarkable pattern of many maṇḍalas, animated by an upward thrust.



The Āgama of Vaiṣṇava persuasion has an additional symbolism of the maṇḍala. The sanctum represents the concrete and worshipful (archā) manifestation of the divine power. The icon inside it is the 'inner controller' (antaryāmi), corresponding to the divine presence in the 'heart' of each individual being. The vimāna over the sanctum represents the 'glory' (vaibhava) aspect of the divine. The crown-vessel on top of the vimāna is 'the

patterned expression' (vyūha) of the divine power; and pinnacle which vanishes in a point is the 'transcendent' (para) aspect.

One of the important Āgama texts, Suprabheda tells us-

"The Maṇḍala is the very essence of the temple."

(Charyāpāda, 2)

CHAPTER SIX

IMAGES FOR WORSHIP

As a necessary aspect of standardization, the form of the icons was sought to be clearly defined in terms of anatomical proportions, postures, and the weapons in the hands. The axiomatic assumption that prevailed for all time was that beauty in an icon is derived solely from the measurements prescribed in the canons (*Mānasāra*, 51, 70)

शास्त्रमानेन यो रम्यः स रम्यो नान्य एव हि ।

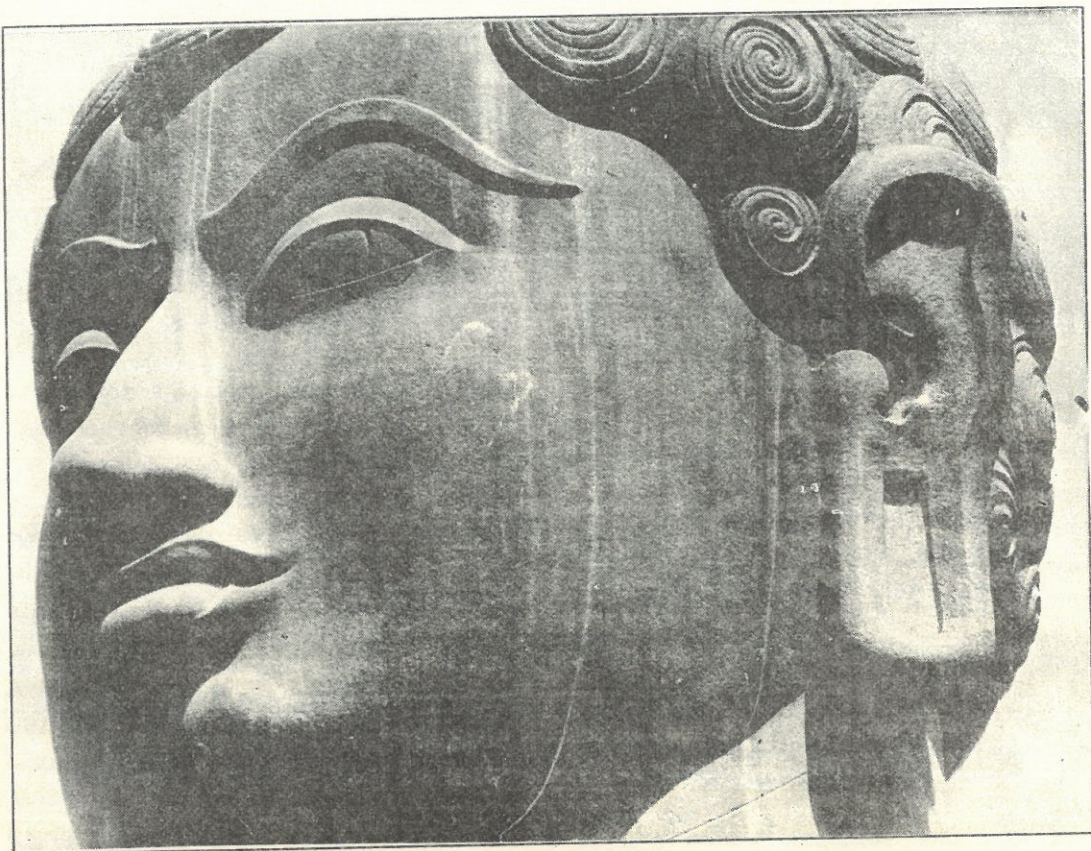
Thus iconic measures loomed large in the training of the *sthapati*. The iconometry, as standardized, takes into account the most proper height of the icon (*māna*), surface of the image (*laṁbamāna*), thickness (*un-māna*), and the space between limbs (*upa-māna*). When the icon is to be installed in a temple that is already built, the height and breadth of the temple, and size of the main door are among the relevant considerations. Some texts insist that the donor's measurements also become important when he causes the icon to be installed in a temple he himself has built.

An indispensable concept in Indian iconometry is the *angula* measure (*mānān-*

gula) as the unit, which approximates roughly to three-fourths of the common inch. The iconometric 'inch' increases in degrees, beginning with the atomic size (*paramāṇu*), which is unseen by the human eye. Eight of these make a 'mobile speck' (*trasa-reṇu*); eight of these in turn is equal to the 'tip of a thin hair' or the hair on the head (*vālāgra*); eight of these make the 'tip of a coarse hair', hair on the body (*romāgra*); eight of these make an 'egg of a louse' (*yūka*); eight of these will make the size of a barley grain (*yava*). Eight of the barley grains constitute a 'superior (*uttama*) *āṅgula* measure'; seven of them regarded as 'midling' (*madhyama*), and six of them is 'inferior' (*adhama*).

Constituted by the *āṅgula* measures, we have other measures such as the 'cubit' (*kishku*) which is twenty-four *angulas* (about eighteen of the common inches), the 'bow-length' (*dhanus*) which is four 'cubits', the 'churning-stick' (*daṇḍa*), which is a variant of the above, and so on. These are used in architectural enterprises.

There is also the measure known as '*mātrāṅgula*', (or '*dehāṅgula*'), the *āṅgula* which corresponds to the length of the

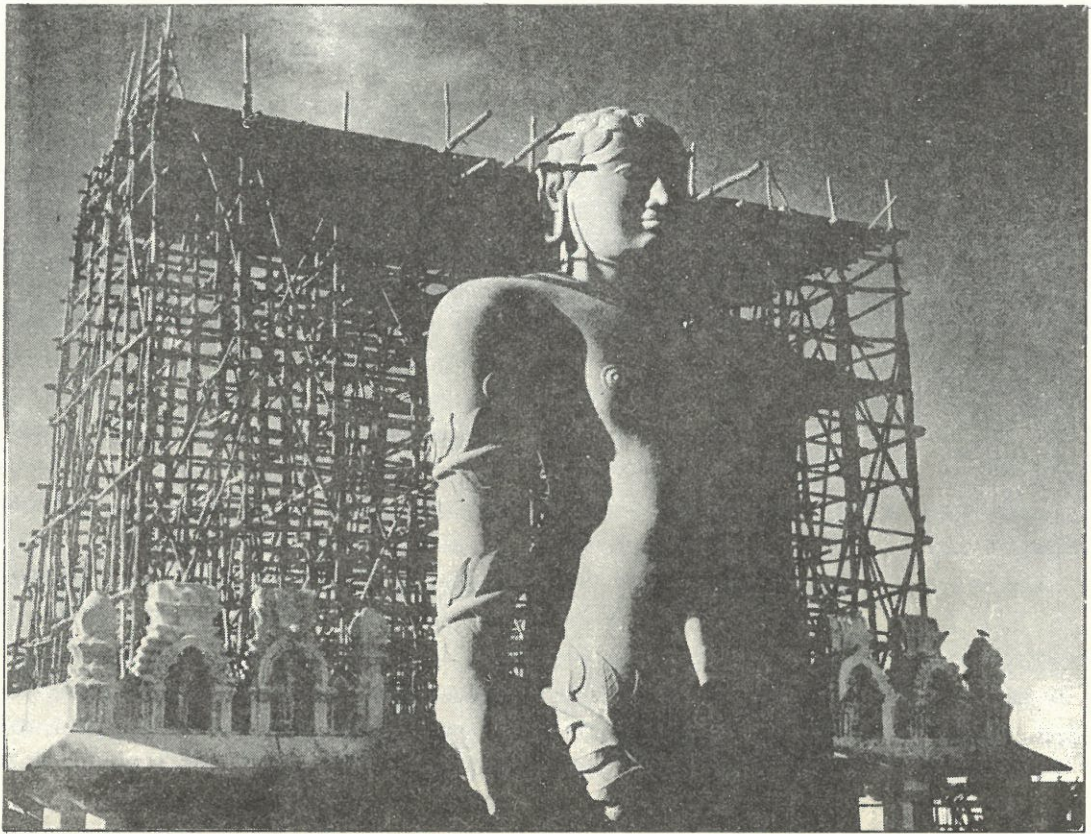


Head of the monolith (57 foot) image of the Jaina saint Gommatesvara
in Śravaṇabelgoḷa (Karnāṭaka)

middle division of the middle finger of the sculptor who makes the icon or of the patron who commissions it. By a combination of these two 'aṅgula measures' (mānāṅgula and mātrāṅgula), we have the familiar practical measure in vogue.

The major gods like Viṣṇu and Śiva are prescribed to be made in the 'superior' daśa-tāla (ten-tāla-measure), viz. 124 mātrāṅgulas in height from the top of head to the soles of the feet. Goddesses like Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Pārvatī should measure to the 'midling' daśa-tāla, viz. 120

mātrāṅgulas; as they stand they should reach up to the lower tip of the god's ear. The 'inferior' daśa-tāla is meant for minor deities like Garuḍa, Śeṣha, Skanda, and guardians of the eight quarters; the height would be 116 m. The nine-tāla measure (nava-tāla) equals 108m., and it is the measure for making the icons of the demi-god Indra and demons. There are varieties in this tāla-measure: navārdha-tāla (114 m.) for the planetary divinities; uttama-nava-tāla (112 m.) for sylvan deities (yaksha), celestial musicians



The monolith image of Gommatesvara,
(preparation for 'maha-mastakabhisheka' ceremony)

(gandharva), and dragons (uruga); and Sattryaṅgula-nava-tala (111 m.) for great human beings.

In Indian iconography, the head of the image merits the most careful attention of the sculptor, for it is the 'major limb'. In all the varieties of tāla-measure, iconometric details are minutely prescribed in the texts. The face is divided into three equal divisions, the first from the front hair line to the eye-brow-meet, the second from the eye-brow-meet to the tip of the nose, and the third from the tip of the

nose to the bottom of the chin. If we use the nine-tāla measure (108 m.) which is most often used, then height of the face would be 12 m., each division thereof being 4 m., from neck to the middle of the breast-line 12 m., from these till the navel 12 m., and so on.

Measurements vary according to the subject matter (gods, spirits, human beings, animals, etc.). And each subject matter has numerous categories. For instance, if the icon is that of a human being, five types are recognized: 'haṁsa' (superhumans,



Mukha-māna

kings, human incarnations of the divinities), 108 m.; 'bhadra' (sages, royal priests, chief ministers etc.) 106 m.; 'mālavya' (wedded wives, heavenly musicians, dragons etc.) 104 m.; and 'ruchaka' (nymphs, dancers, actresses etc) 100 m.; and 'Śaśaka' (well-known mortals) 96 m. There are also other characteristic delineations such as webbed hands and feet, a lump on the forehead, forelocks turned rightward and three lines on the palm for celebrated human beings.

Even the aniconic representations of the liṅga are subject to well-defined icono-

metric prescriptions. Liṅgas are of thirty-three kinds, grouped into three main categories according to their iconometric specifications. The 'best' liṅgas made in stone must measure nine to seven cubits (hasta) in height, the 'midling' ones six to four cubits, and the 'inferior' ones three to one. A stone liṅga which is under one foot high does not merit worship in a public place. If the liṅga is a crystal one, the 'best' may be 18" to 13" high, the 'midling' 12" to 17" and the 'inferior' 6" to one inch (Iśāna-śiva-guru-deva-paddhati, 40).

Nāradiya-saṁhitā (23, 110) recommends that an icon in stone, bronze or wood should be made in the nine-tāla measure or the ten-tāla. For the worship rituals (known as Karmārchā), the icon should be in metal, and should not be taller than twelve aṅgulas nor shorter than six.

Iconometry also figures prominently with respect to two parts of the shrine, although they are strictly not icons: kalasa (finial) and bali-pīṭha (altar). It has been mentioned that these two structures are intimately associated with the icon in the sanctum. But the measures here are in terms of 'parts' (arśa), and 'levels' (talas). For instance, the finial known as kāmākumbha is composed of six 'levels' and the total measure is 15 1/2 'parts'. The 'foot-hold' (pāda-grāhī or base) will be two parts, the 'egg' (aṇḍaka) five, the 'neck' (grīva) two, 'lotus motif' (pādma-patrikā) three, the (karṇikā) two and a half, and the top-most unit (bījapūra) one part.

The altar may be carved out of stone, made in bricks or cast in metal, according to Pādma-saṁhitā (30, 140). The height of the altar in front of the sanctum should bear a definite proportion to the height of the sanctum itself. One eighth of the sanctum is considered the best; it may also be one-seventh or one-fifth. Breadth of the altar is also determined likewise.

There is another reckoning which suggests that the height of the altar should be equal to the height of the pedestal on which the icon in the sanctum is consecrated. And accordingly, many types of altars are enumerated and named in manuals like Silpa-ratna, Pādma-saṁhitā and Vishvakṣena-tantra. Limbs or levels of the altar are also designated and the measurements given. There are several altars like the Mahā-pīṭha (21 'parts'), Śrī-bhadra (32 'parts'), Sarvato-bhadra (35 'parts') and Śrī-vijaya (37 'parts') which receive elaborate consideration in the craft manuals.

It may be noted that the altar usually consists of many mouldings, and texts like Tantra-samucchaya divide the total height of the altar into ten parts: 'foundation' (pādukā) at the bottom, 'platform' (jagatī) on top of it, and on successive tiers 'flower-pattern' (kumuda), 'flower-slab' (kumuda-patrikā) 'shoulder blade' (gala), 'neck' (kaṁbu), 'dove-row' (kapota), 'top-slab' (agra-paṭṭī), and 'lotus' (padma), which is the top-most member. The earlier tradition was to have the altar inside the sanctum itself (as, for instance recommended in Tantra-samucchaya), and not

outside in the open, as the case now is. The altar in this event would be monolithic and not consist of several mouldings.

Icons in India have been from very ancient times carved in stone, or wood, made in clay, or cast in metal. Sometimes precious stones and crystals are also used for carving small icons out of them. Ajita-gama lists gem, stone, metal, wood and clay as materials to be preferred in the order they are mentioned. Little icons are also carved out of conch-shell and elephant's tusk. Icons for permanent use and for installation in temples are usually made of stone, although the old practice was to have wooden icons in the sanctum. Icons for mobile purposes are cast in metal. Household icons are metallic (bronze, copper, silver and gold) or carved out of crystal or gem. Icons for temporary use are made in clay or variant material.

There are manuals (like Aparājita-prachhā) which provide elaborate instructions for the purpose of carving. Different icons are to be made in different kinds of stone or wood. Stones from the rocky mountains are said to be most preferable, and when they are not available, stones from ground level may be used. Stones are classified into male (puṁ-shilā, bright coloured; free from spiral grains and knots; which, during excavation, throws out splinters like sparks of fire), female (strī-shilā, light coloured, having streaks of grains, which, when struck, emit a hollow but pleasant sound), and 'neuter' (napuṁsaka-shilā, dull-coloured, hard and not producing any musical sound when struck).

'Male' stones are employed for making major icons of gods and goddesses, while the pedestal thereof is carved out of 'female' stones. However, Purushottama-saṃhitā (5,63) suggests that 'female' stones must be used for images of goddesses, while the pedestals must be carved out of 'male' stones. The 'neuter' stones are used for structures hidden under the ground (like *ratna-nyāsa*). Among the stones, the black-stone (*kṛishṇa-sīlā*), finely grained granite, is generally recommended. Early Pallavas appear to have preferred sandstone for making *liṅgas* and icons. But the manuals insist on careful examination of stone before it is selected. Steatite and marble are also employed, especially in the northern regions of the country.

The selection of wood for sculpting icons figures prominently in the early manuals, for wooden images were frequent in olden days. The most ancient images in the country are known to have been wooden; stone stepped in rather late in the history of Indian iconography. Several trees have been named as fit for icon-carving: *khadira*, *sandal*, *red sandal*, *aśoka*, *devadāru*, *bilva*, *sāla*, *kadam̐ba*, *champaka*, *bakula*, *udum̐bara*, *arjuna* and *śālmālī* are frequently mentioned.

The location and nature of trees are important considerations. Trees in burial grounds, on tank-bunds, at road-crosses, and in the close vicinity of huge ant-hills and ponds are to be avoided. Trees that have been worm-eaten, lightning - struck, and damaged by elephants are not regarded as fit. Trees that are barren, very

old and worn out, with bark peeling off, are also unfit. Trees on which birds have built nests, and which provide shade for the cattle are to be left alone, and should not be cut down for icon-making. Trees that do not have a pleasant aspect or have fallen by themselves are likewise unsuitable.

The piece of stone or the log of wood selected is treated in an elaborate manner in order to divest it of its inert nature and to infuse into it the power to contain the divine image.

An interesting procedure is given in Pādma-saṃhitā (11, 101-104, which also occurs in Purushottama-tantra, 6, 22, 27). Before the log of wood is cut off the tree, the priest- sculptor prays thus to the tree: "You have become inert and immobile owing to your past conduct. But I choose you for a meritorious condition, for carving out of you the image of Vishṇu which will confer benefits on humanity. I shall not hurt you, my friend, but I shall release you from your present inert condition By the grace of God, you shall enjoy all the worship that is done to God!"

Then he ties the consecrated thread round the tree, sets up a small sacrificial fire in front of the tree, and after oblations are offered into the fire, he cuts down the tree with an axe that has also been duly worshipped. While cutting, he stands facing East and recites prescribed hymns. The same procedure is applied to stone also.

When the peice of stone or log of wood has been cut, it is ceremoniously

brought to the sacrificial enclosure (yāga-sālā) in a procession. A consecrated 'pot' (pūrṇa-kumbha) is then installed, and the stone or wood is treated to an elaborate ritual before it is given over to the sculptor.

The carving is done, preferably in the apartment of the temple meant to be the sanctum, with doors closed, during three, five, seven or nine days. If the apartment that is designated as sanctum is not available for this work, then a pavilion is specially set apart to the south or north of the temple, covered with a decorated vitāna from which coconuts and fly-whisks hang. The stone or wood is placed in the center of this pavilion, and is worshiped with flowers, sandal-paste and other offerings. The sculptor commences his work with an initial ritual resembling aṅkura-arpaṇa ('seed-sowing' ceremony).

Different methods for preparing the clay for making the icons are given. The usual method, however, is the following. Soft-clay, red, white, black or yellow in colour, is collected from top of a hillock or from river-beds, and is thoroughly sieved. It is then kneaded well with water, cow's milk, ghee, curds, wheat-flour and triphala - powder. Sometimes, gingelly oil is also added. The mass is then kept away for a fortnight or a month before it is taken up for icon-making. After the image is made, it is dried in the sun for a month, or baked in low fire. It is suggested that some gold or gems be placed inside the clay image while worship is done. The clay icon may also be painted over.

The clay image is classed among 'temporary' or 'occasional' icons, which are not suitable for installation in temples or for permanent worship. Such icons are installed (āvāhana) just prior to the commencement of a ritual sequence, and is 'discharged' (visarjana) in water immediately after the worship is over. Besides clay, sand, cow-dung, sandal-paste, rice-flour, jaggory or butter is also used for making such icons that are not supposed to last for more than a day.

While the main icon installed in the Brahmā-position inside the sanctum is





usually carved out of stone, there will be one or more metallic images to serve various ritualistic ends. The former is said to be 'fixed on jewels' (*ratna-nyāsa*), and is therefore immobile. The latter are not fixtures, and can be taken to the spots of several rituals (*karmārchā*) such as bathing (*snāpana*), procession (*utsava*), audience (*koluvu*), and food-distribution (*bali*).

Three major metals are prescribed for the making of such icons: gold (pure, *jātarūpa* or alloy, *hātaka*), silver (pure, *rūpya*, or impure, *rajata*), and copper



(pure, *tāmra* or mixed, *miśrita*). Although the first is said to be best, the last is preferred frequently, and for obvious reasons. More usually, however, bronze (*kāṁsya*) and brass (*arakūṭa* or *paittala*) are used for portable icons. In the South, icons made of a mixture of five metals (*pañcha-loha*) are common: copper, gold, silver, brass and white lead. Iron (*ayasa*) lead (*sīśaka*) and tin (*trapu*) are used for making images of wicked and terrific aspects, employed in magical rites.

The casting of bronze icons was perfected in India even during the days of Indus civilization, as the splendid figure discovered at Harapa illustrates. We have an excellent casket-lid of the Kushāṇa period (second century) found at Shāh-jī-Dheri. The Gupta craftsmen appear to have perfected the casting technique, known as 'lost wax' or *cire perdue* (*madhū-cchishta-vidhāna*), although Tamiṇāḍu became the center of this art about the fifth century. A remarkable specimen of the Gupta style is the seven-foot Buddha icon, weighing a ton and cast in two layers in bronze and copper, found at Sultāngāñj. Nāgapattinam icons in the South date almost from the same period.

The original image is made in wax (bees' wax mixed with charcoal powder), and over this model a coat of soft clay is applied leaving an opening, and left to dry. When perfectly dry, the clay coating is heated so that the wax model within melts and comes out through the outlet, leaving the mould of the model.

Into the opening, then, the molten bronze is poured. When after some time the metal cools, the clay coating is broken open, and we have the image cast in solid bronze.

By a variance of the procedure, hollow-casting is also accomplished. This is common in the northern region, especially in Nepāl and Tibet. The purpose of making the image hollow is to insert into it a magical formula inscribed on a scroll, a piece of scriptural writing, or a precious relic of the holy teacher so as to infuse into the image an extraordinary power that otherwise it would not contain. The art-work that an icon is, becomes fit for worship only when it accommodates supernatural energy.

The importance of this casting technique, detailed in texts like *Silpa-ratnā*, consists in each classical bronze icon in India being a unique piece. The wax is lost and the clay mould is destroyed. There is thus no way of mechanically duplicating the artist's handiwork. Indian bronze icons have become most valuable on this account. It would be impossible for the same craftsman to produce two identical images in metal; it would necessarily be different each time. But the workmanship is altogether traditional and is so highly standardized that numerous icons fall into definite patterns, and look alike.

Craftsmanship involved in South Indian bronze icons has become world-renowned. The craft is highly skilled, and the art is superb. While the rules of iconometry are

scrupulously followed, each bronze reveals an individual touch that is unmistakable in a master-piece.

The craftsman here has freed himself from a natural and compelling impact of stone-sculpture, for it is the stone icons that provide models for the metallic ones. The bronze-worker feels freer to incorporate his turns of fancy within the stylized pattern, as he mainly works with wax while modelling. Finishing the bronze icon is essentially a matter of the craftsman's skill and experience; the wax model, on the other hand, is in every case a work of art.

The icon-maker enjoys a measure of freedom within the framework of canonical prescriptions. It is this utilization of freedom

that stamps the icon with an individuality that is unique. The iconometric details have of course the beauty of the figure in view; but the beauty they envisage is rigid and formal. The texts insist that the image-maker must do the work as it please him and as his fancy takes him (*yathā-ruchi*). And the art artist has to take into consideration the modes of dress and decoration that are prevalent at the time (*Brihatsamhita*).

देशानुसूपभूषणवेशालंकारमूर्तिभिः कार्या प्रतिमा ।

This gives the icon a fair degree of plasticity. This also helps to accommodate within stylized iconography numerous divinities that came to be introduced afresh from time to time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RITUALS AND SYMBOLS

The objects of worship are broadly grouped into two sorts: abstract (*nishkala*) and concrete (*sakala*). The abstract is without a material representation: it consists merely of an imagery or a thought-construct. It is unmanifest (*avyakta*), so far as the worship - situation is concerned. The concrete, on the other hand, is an icon, the handiwork of an artist-craftsman, which represents the traditional idea of a worshipful deity. It can be practically involved in the worship ritual. It is usual to have the iconic representation in imitation of the human form. *Parama-saṁhitā* (3, 5, 10) explains the anthropomorphic necessity of iconic representations:

“Worship can be done only for the deity with form, and not for an abstract idea. It is therefore that icons are made. They help concentration, contemplation, adoration and worship. The icon is a representation of the deity, and whatever is offered to the icon is really received by the deity. The devotee being human, he can communicate well with an icon with the human form. The human being therefore will reach the highest goal conceiving the really abstract Godhead in a human form, and worshipping the icon with great devotion.”

It is usual therefore for concrete objects of adoration in India to be human in aspect. Such objects have limbs and meanings (*sa-kala*). Instance are the Vishṇu images, images of Rāma and Krishna, the sportive forms of Śiva, and the icons of goddesses like Lakshmi and Durgā, as also several minor divinities. There are also several composite deities included in this group. Animal-human admixtures in the iconic representations are not unusual. Consider, as instances, Ganeśa (god with elephant's head) Nara-siṁha ('man-lion'), Hayagrīva (human form with the horse's head), Pratyāṅgirā (goddess with lion's head) and Kākamukhī (yogini with the face of a crow).

Several iconic representations involve humanization of animals: animals represented in human forms. We have the icons of Hanumān (monkey), Garuḍa (Kite), Nandi (bull), Subrahmanya (serpent), Dakṣa (ram), and incarnations of Viṣṇu such as Matsya (fish), Kūrma (tortoise), Varāha (boar), and Kalki (horse). Elemental principles have also been endowed with iconic forms: fire (Agni), air (Vayu), water (Varuṇa), Sun (Sūrya), mountains (like the Kailāsa, Meru

and Vindhya), rivers (Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Kāverī), trees and plants (like Aśvattha and Tulasī) have also their iconic representations with human involvement.

Vishnu in his twenty-four forms, according to Agni- Purāṇa is conspicuously and almost invariably represented as pleasantly human, although his worship is also conducted through the aniconic-śalagrāma stone. Śiva, on the other hand, is usually worshipped in the aniconic liṅga form, although he has twenty-five sportive forms (līlā-mūrtis) which are human in delineation. Aniconic representation comprehends both the abstract and concrete sorts; it is described as 'ubhaya' (both) or 'mīśrita' (combined). The expression 'liṅga' strictly means a sign, a symbol. The aniconic liṅga is the symbol or an index of divine presence and power. It has no readily recognizable human, animal, or composite form. It is not, in this sense, concrete. But it does have a material shape with identifiable parts (like the pīṭha, Gaurī-paṭṭa, liṅga and vajra). Sometimes a human face is projected on the liṅga part (mukha-liṅga); or Śiva is represented as coming out of the liṅga (liṅgodbhava-mūrti). Whatever the details, the liṅga is a shape that symbolizes the abstract idea of Godhead.

Icons are again divided into 'immobile' (achala) and 'mobile' (chala). The former are usually carved out of a monolith and fixed to the pedestal in the sanctum. It may be iconic like the representation of Vishṇu or Durgā; or it may be aniconic

like the liṅga of Śiva. Oftentimes, the Devī images are also represented in the form of a linga, especially in the coastal region. It is not unusual to find even Vishṇu images so represented; many Raṅganātha and Narasimha shrines in the South contain only lingas in the sanctum.

While the stationary icon in the sanctum is doubtless the main object of worship in a temple, it is not suitable for all the rituals enjoined in the texts and stylized in tradition. Portable images made in metal are, therefore, meant to officiate for the main icon in the rituals which are conducted outside the sanctum.

The mobile or portable icons are prescribed to be exact replicas in metal of the stationary stone icon in the sanctum. But when the main object of worship in the sanctum is an aniconic liṅga, its mobile counterpart will be Śiva or Devī in a human, iconic representation. It is altogether unusual to find the liṅga form among the mobile icons. The sportive forms of Śiva were first stylized in metal, and it is only later that the forms were imitated in stone. Divinities belonging to the Śiva group, viz. Durgā, Gaṇapati, Kārtikeya (known by several names such as Subrahmaṇya, Kumāra and Skanda) and Nandi are, like the Vishṇu images, human and iconic in form, both in the stationary and portable versions.

The icons in human form are further classified into three types, depending on their bodily postures: seated (āsīna), standing (sthita) and recumbent (śayana).



STHĀN AKA, (bronze, a nāyanmār)

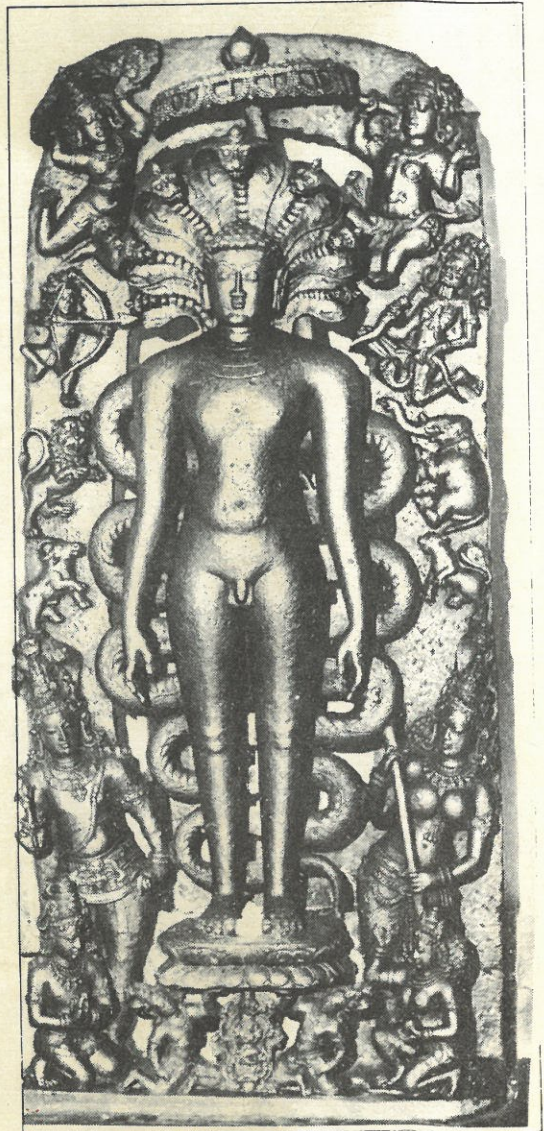


STHĀNAKA (Chālukyan sculpture)



STHĀNAKA
(bronze, Māñikka-vāchakar)

There are, however, other postures also, like dancing (Naṭarāja), measuring the heavens (Trivikrama), killing the demon (Durgā and sportive forms of Śiva in the destructive aspects, Saṁhāra-mūrtis), running (Hanumān), fighting (Vīrabhadra,



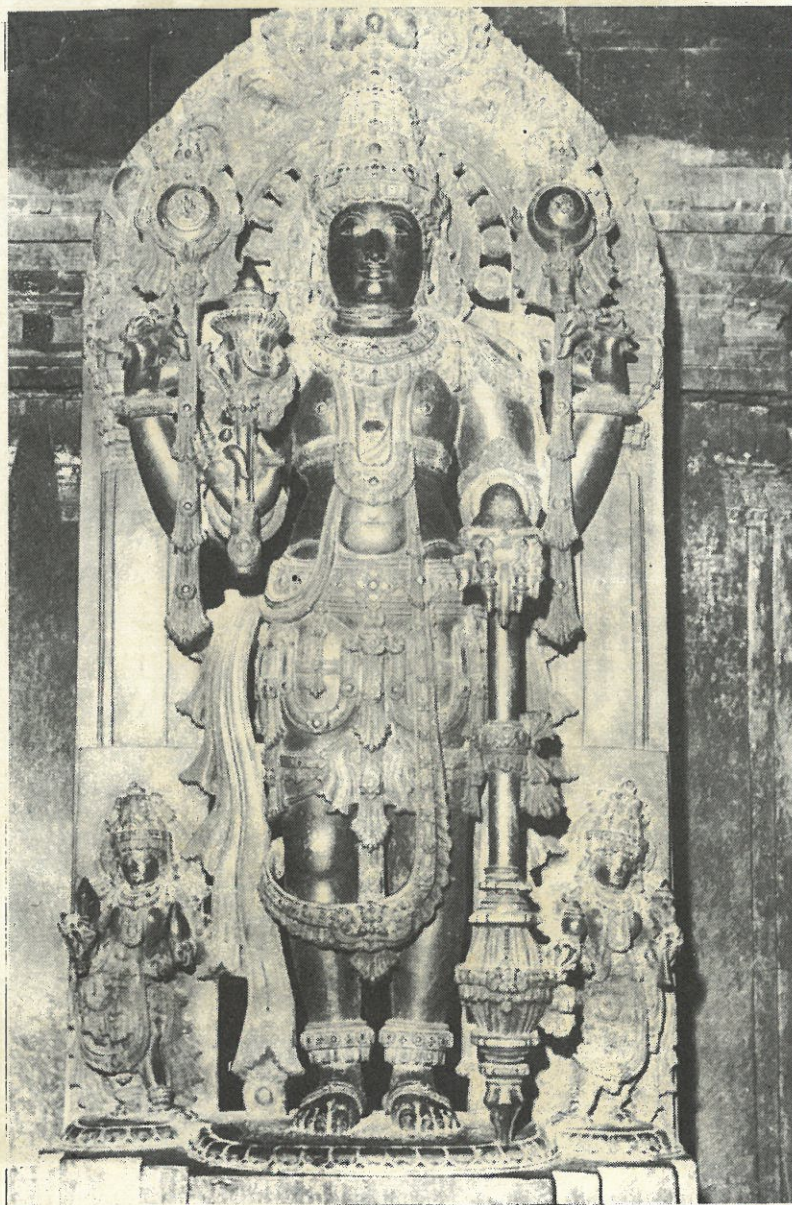
STHĀNAKA
(stone, Pārśva-nātha from Hurīcha)

Aghora) and teaching (Dakṣiṇā-mūrti, Vyāsa, images of teacher-saints).

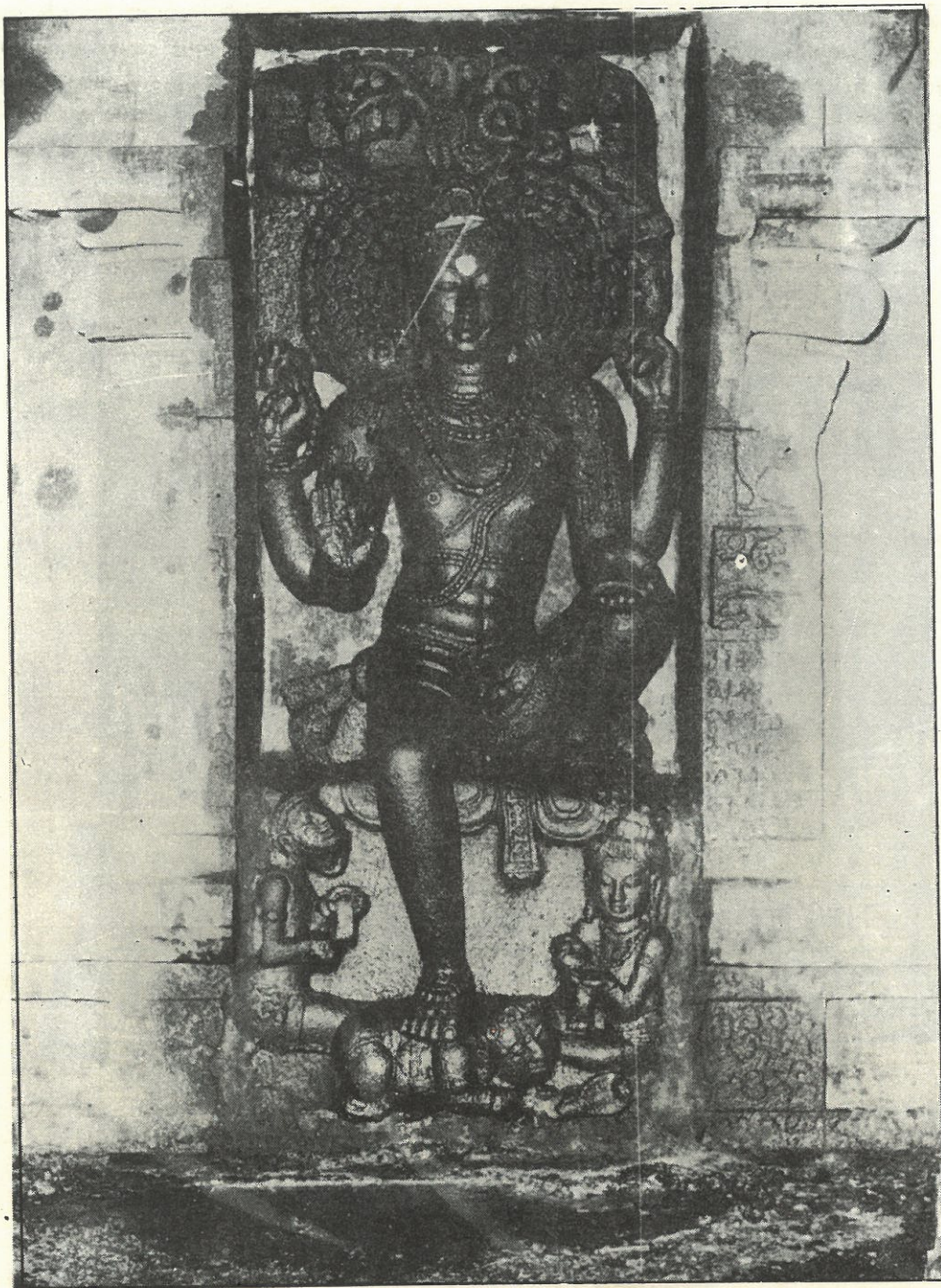
But these (with the exception of Durgā images) are not usually icons meant for main worship; they serve an occasional

or accessory function. We do not, therefore, frequently find these postures depicted in the immobile icon in the sanctum or its chief mobile representative. The main icons of worship are chiefly

standing, occasionally seated (mostly goddesses and Ganeśa) and rarely recumbent (as the Raṅganātha or Ananatasayana images). The portable icons meant for processional purposes will be as a rule in



STHĀNAKA (Stone, Vishṇu in Somanāthpur)



ĀSĪNA
(stone, Dakṣiṇā-mūrti)



ĀSĪNA
(stone, Vishṇu, in Aiholē)



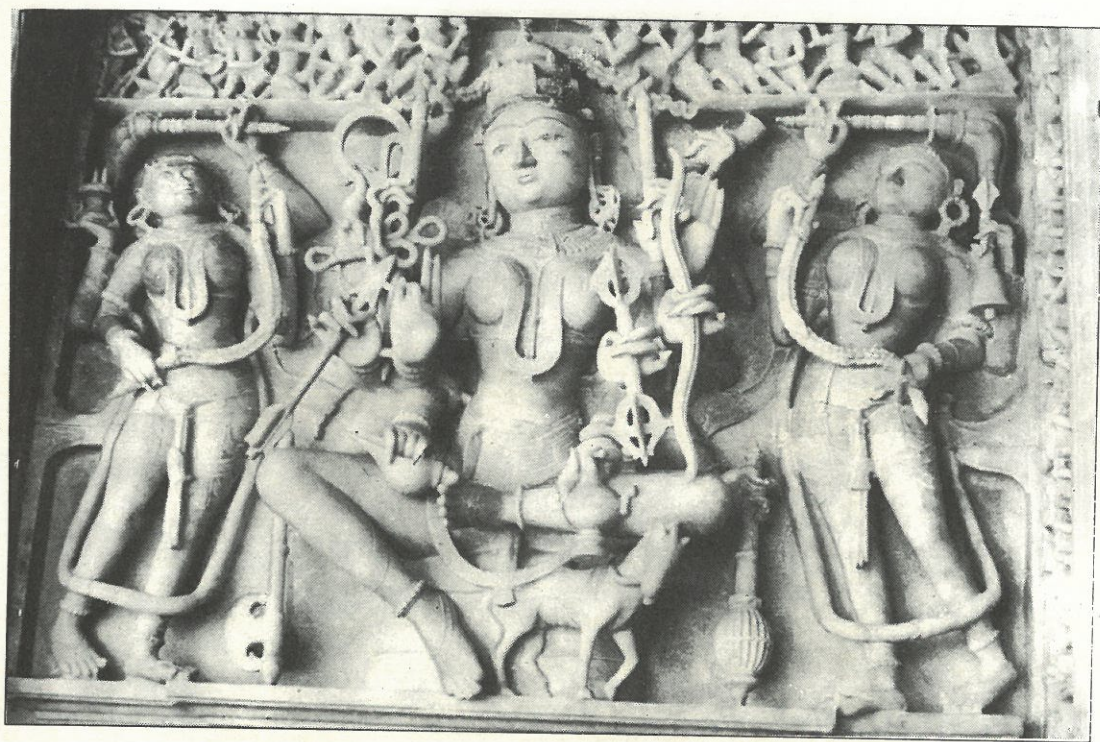
ĀSĪNA
(stone, the mātṛkā Brāhmī in Hemāvati Temple)



ASINA
(stone, Śaṁkha-nidhi, Chālukyan sculpture)



ĀSĪNA (stone, Lajjā-gaurī)



ASINA
(stone, Yakshinī, Mount Abu)

the standing posture, even when their originals in the sanctum are seated or reclining.

The ritual sequences in the temple necessitate several portable icons. In the Vishṇu temples it is a common practice to have four such images in addition to the immobile and main icon in the sanctum (*pañchabera*). The normal temple-rituals involve bathing the deity (*snapana*); making the first offering of food to it, and then in its presence to the attendant deities (*bali*); processions on the roads round the temple (*utsava*); and an assembly of devotees for several purposes in front of the deity (*koluva*,

sabhā). One can see that offering food to the attendant deities, processions and assemblies are ceremonies that have to be gone through only outside the sanctum. Even elaborate bathing is hard to be conducted within the small enclosure of the sanctum. Portable icons would naturally have to be used for these purposes.

Bathing the deity is an important ritual. In the Śiva shrines, ceremonial bath is given to the main *liṅga* in the sanctum every day (and several times during the day on occasions), and a mobile icon for this purpose is seldom used. But in many Vishṇu temples, the main icon is not given



SAYANA
(stone, Vishnu, in one of the Aihole temples)



NṚTTA
(stone, Gaṇeśa in Nuggihalli)



NRTTA
(stone, Sarasvati, Hoysala)



NRTTA
(stone, Sarasvati in Somangthpur)



NṚTTA
(stone, Sarasvati in Hosaholalu)



NRTTA
(stone, Sarasvatī in Halebīdu)

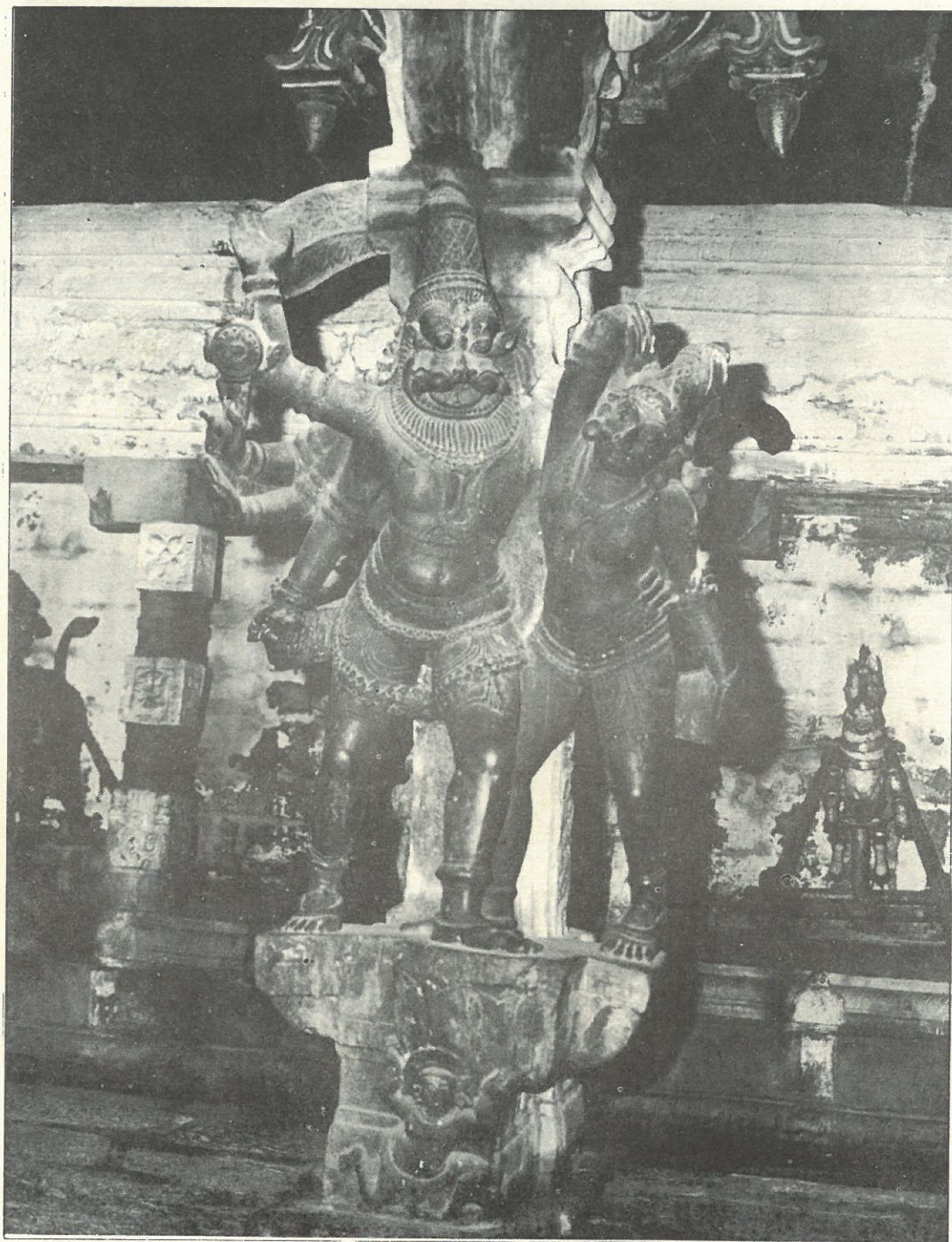


NRTTA
(stone, ceiling - Natarāja in Aralaguppe temple)

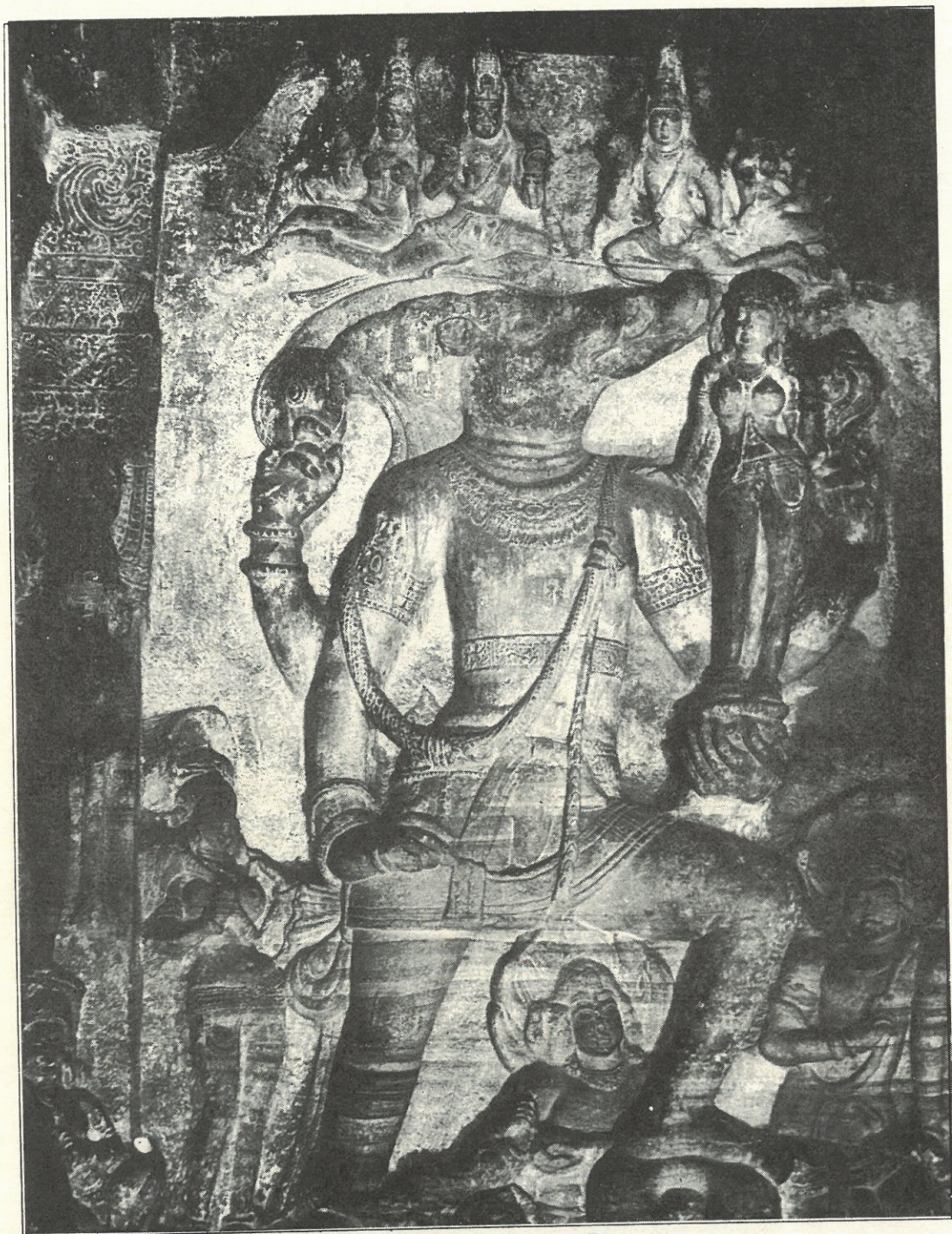
a bath every day; in the great temple at Tirumala-Tirupati, for instance, it is given once a week, on Friday.

Many early icons are not in granite or sandstone which stand frequent washing.

When the main image is wooden (as in Jagannāthapuri in Orissa or the earlier Varadarāja shrine at Kāñchīpuram, Tamil Nāḍu), daily bath is ruled out, for the wood would decay. Many of such icons are painted over and are permanently



YĀNAKA (stone, Narasimha, Dāḍikoṃbu temple)



YĀNAKA (stone, Varāha, Chālukyan)

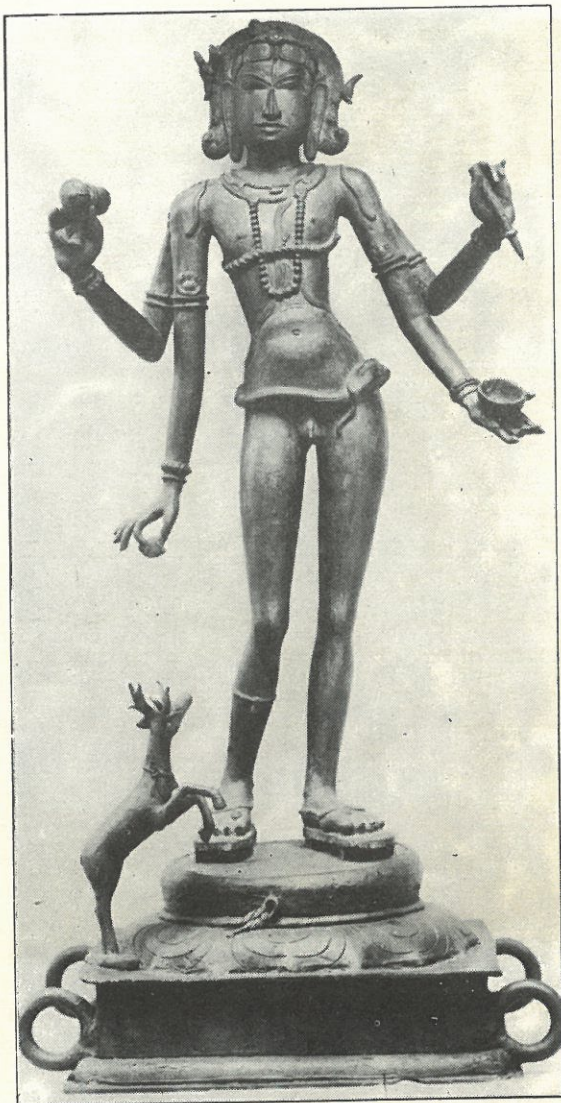


YĀNAKA

(stone, Kārtikeya in Hucchimali temple, Aihole)

decorated. Or the icon may be a stucco brick and mortar(sudhā) work, as are the main images in Śrīraṅgam (Raṅganātha) and Kāñchīpuram (Ulaṅḍa Perumāḷ), both in Tamiḷ Nāḍu. Normal bath in this case would damage the icon; special preparations (liketaila-kāppu in Śrīraṅgam) are to be made in order to preserve the icon.

Even images carved out of soft stone would wear out by frequent baths, as can be seen in Paḷani (the original icon made in nava-pāshāṇa) and Tirucchengode (Ardhanārī) in Tamiḷ Nāḍu. Marble (which is a kind of chalk, calcium carbonate) would also suffer by continuous exposure to water. It is, therefore, that a metallic image is specially assigned to receive the daily bath that is actually meant for the



YĀNAKA
(bronze, Bhikṣaṭāna Śiva)

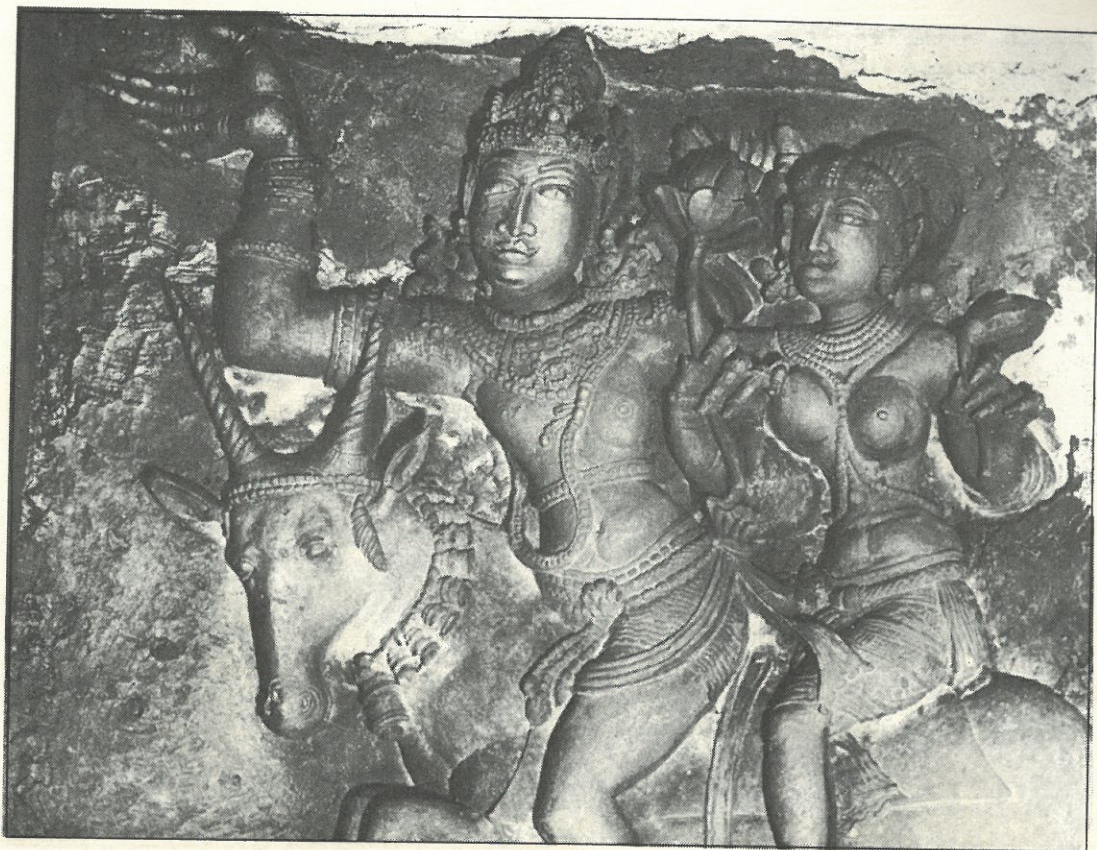
main icon in the sanctum. This icon is known as *assnapana-bera*.

After the daily food is offered to the main deity, the scriptural prescription is that other deities who are attendant (*parivāra-devatā*) and resident within the

temple enclosure, as well as spirits and goblins that hover round the shrine, must be fed. This is called '*bali-haraṇa*', or carrying the sanctified food to the attendant deities, with the permission of the main deity to whom alone all offerings are made. These attendant deities would be symbolized by the *bali-stones* (or altars) that are located in several spots within the premises of the temple, the principal one being right in front of the sanctum. The procession of priests who carry the food-offerings to these altars is led by another small metallic icon which is supposed to deputize for the main and immobile icon in the sanctum. This icon is known as *bali-bera*.

In most of the Śiva shrines, the *bali-icon* will be in the form of a trident (*tri-śūla*) or a spear (*śūla*), as also in many Devī shrines. In the Viṣṇu shrines, however, it will be a replica of the main icon, or a conventional Viṣṇu in the standing (*sthānaka*) posture. In any case, the *bali-icon* will be a small one, and is often carried about by a priest in his arms or on his head. In the more affluent temples, however, a palanquin (*śibikā*) is used for the purpose.

Processions round the town on occasions is a regular feature in all temples. And for this purpose, a specially prepared metallic icon (*utsava-bera*), richly decorated with ornaments and flowers is taken out on several stylized vehicles (*vāhanas*) such as chariot (*ratha*), horse (*aśva*), elephant (*gaja*), sun and moon, the celestial tree (*kalpa-taru*), the



YĀNAKA

(stone, Dikpalaka in Aralaguppe Temple)

bull(vṛṣabha), the sacred kite(garuḍa), and Hanumān.

Most of the celebrated South Indian bronzes belong to the variety of processional images. They will be of considerable height, although the canonical prescription is that a mobile icon should not exceed (sixteen according to a variant authority, nine) angulas in height. If an icon exceeds this limit, it should be regarded as a stationary image although metallic, and should not be carried about.

Besides these iconic and aniconic representations, several mandalas or yantras (also called chakras) are installed in many shrines for ceremonial worship. Such a device is essentially aniconic, but an intricate geometrical pattern predominates here. The basic form is a triangle, representing spiritual energy of the mother-goddess. The yantra has been characterized as symbolic of the cosmos in its entirety. The most well-known of the yantras is the śrī-yantra (or śrīchakra), which is composed of 43 triangles(trikoṇa),



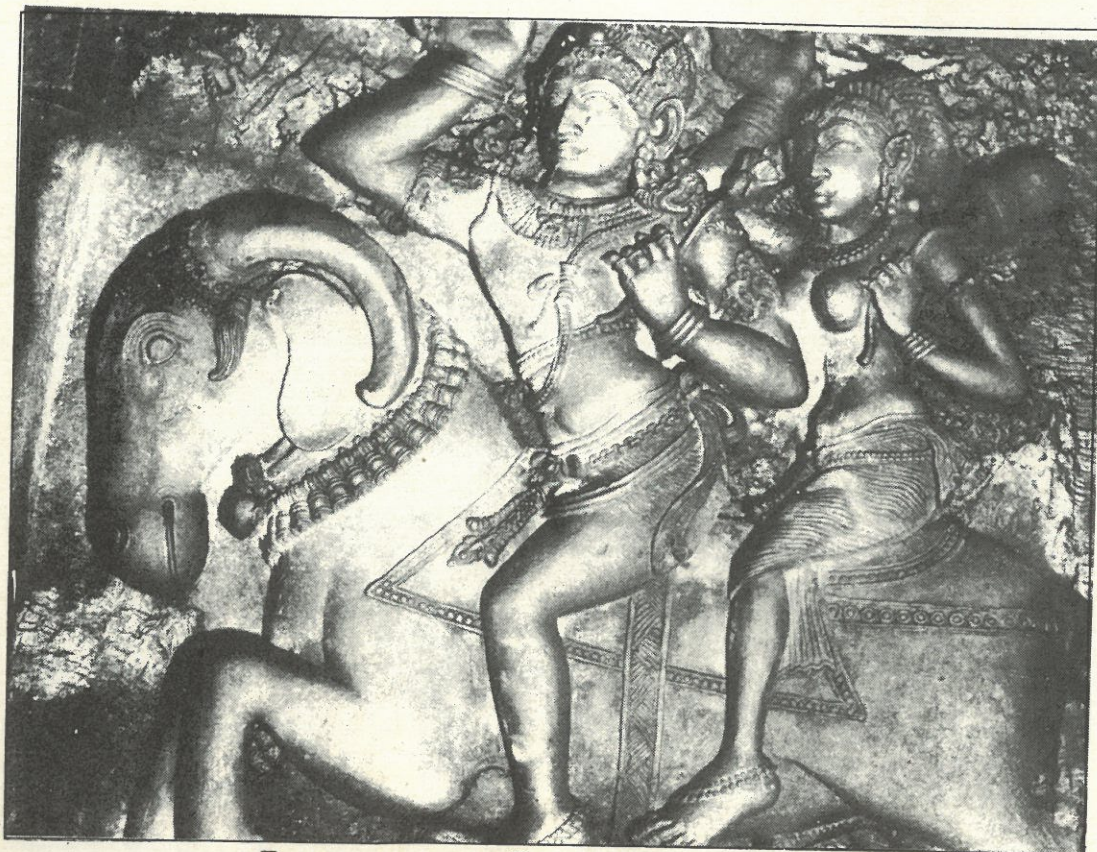
YĀNAKA

(stone, Dikpālaka in Aralaguppe Temple)

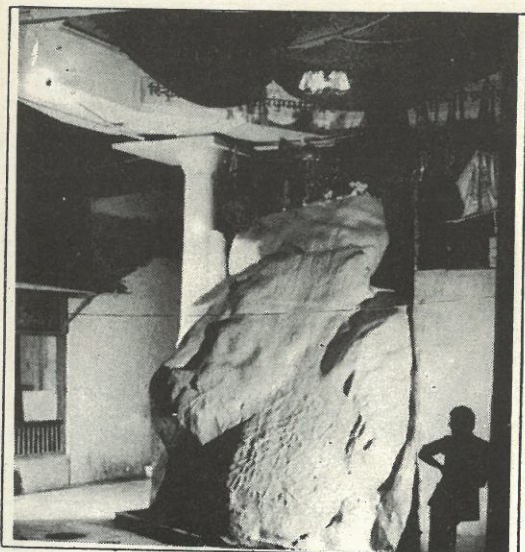
28 'secret' spots (marmā-sthāna, the meeting place of three lines), 24 'joints' (sandhi, where two lines meet). The design is an integration of nine chakras, four of Siva (the 'male' principle) and five of 'Sakti' (the 'female' principle), which are superimposed on each other to show the union of the two principles. The whole yantra is said to be a representation of the Devī, Rāja-rājesvarī. There is a corpus of Tāntrik commentarial literature explaining the significance of this yantra

and prescribing the details of ritualistic worship.

There are two types of representation of this yantra, graphic and iconic. The first type is where the yantra is inscribed (or etched) on a flat copper plate (or a gold or silver sheet). The second type is an aniconic representation like the linga, sculpted in quartz, crystal, gem or stone, or cast in metal, usually panchaloha. This second representation is called Meru as it resembles the mythical mountain of that name. There are several temples in South



YĀNAKA, (stone, Dikpālaka in Aralaguppe Temple)



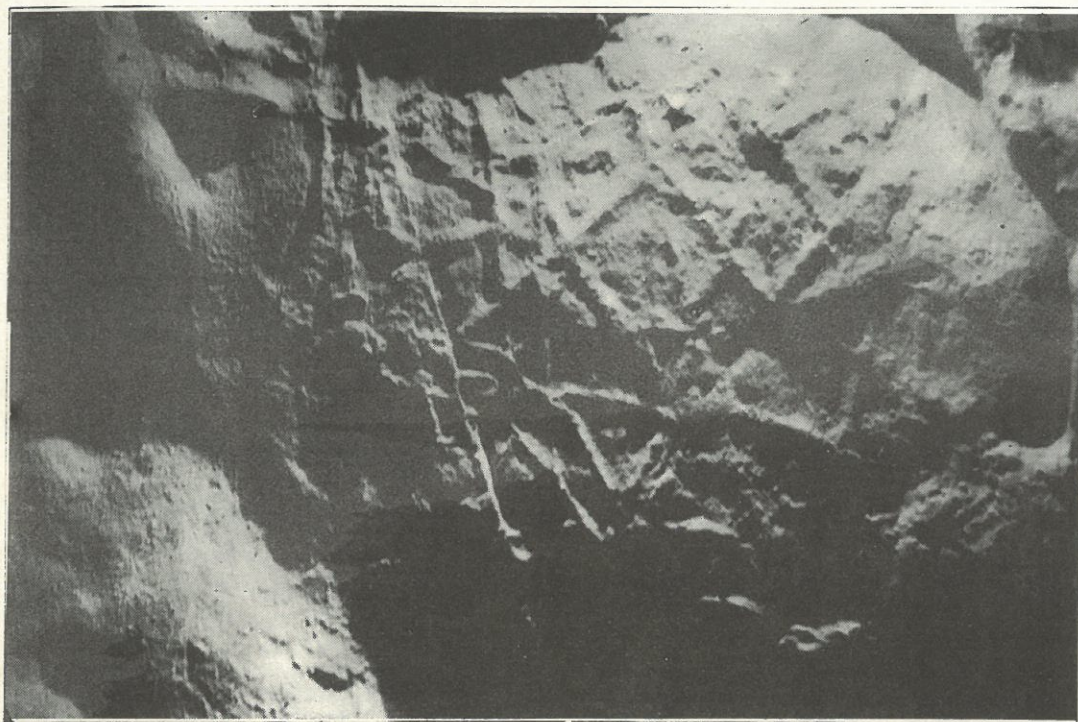
SRI-CHAKRA - Natural formation on rock in Kashmir

India where the worship of Śrīchakra figures prominently, like Kāñchipuram (Kāmakoti), Chidambaram (Sammelana-chakra), Kurtalām, Avadaiyār-Koyil, Jambukesvara (Lalitā), Sringeri (Sārāda), Kollūr (Mūkāmbikā) and Tiruvudaimudūr.

Among the aniconic Śrīchakra, the one carved in crystal or made in gold is said to be the best, after which comes the one made in silver; and next in merit is the one made in copper or alloy of five metals. There is no size restriction when it is carved in stone, crystal or gem; but



Image being carried in hand. (Mukāmbikā temple in Kollur)



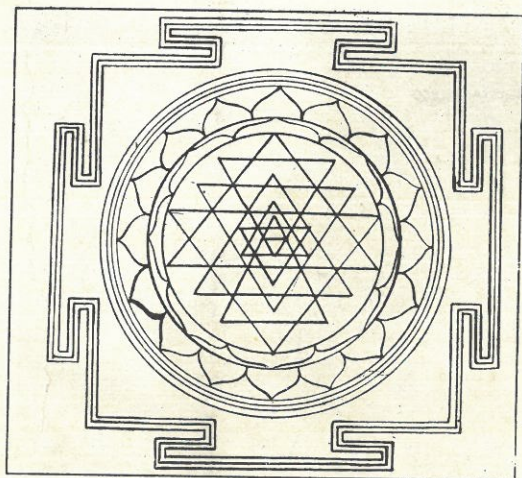
Sri-chakra formation on rock in Srinagar



Bali-haraṇa ritual (image being carried on the head in Mukāmbikā Temple, Kollūr)



ŚRĪ-CHAKRA MERU (in author's possession)

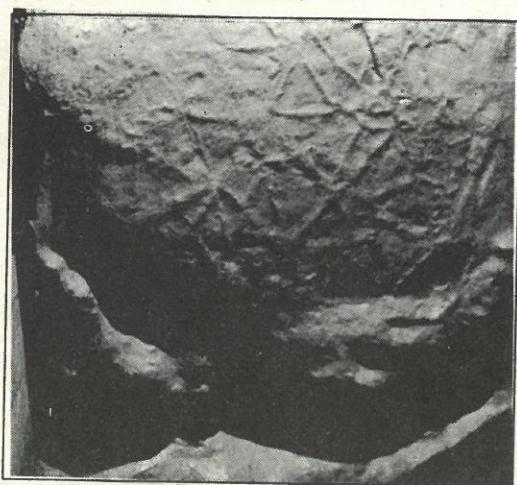


Linear representation of Śrī-chakra

when cast in metal the weight of the metal should not exceed eighttolas.

The specimens are of three types: 'mobile' (chara), which are infused with life every time they are worshipped, 'stationary' (achala or sthira), which are permanently installed at a place, and 'fit to be worn' (dhāraṇayogya), viz. which are suitable for being carried on ones body, either as a pendant in a necklace or inscribed on a ring.

The symbolism of the Indian icon extends to its postural and decorative details. Icons are classified according to the classical guṇa they signify or embody. It is well-known that the theory of three guṇas, 'sattva' (goodness, brightness, purity, wisdom), 'rajas' (activity, energy, emotion), and 'tamas' (wickedness, dullness, sloth, resistance) is an abiding contribution of the Sāṃkhya school to Indian thought. The entire universe (and every individual) is constituted of different combinations of these threeguṇas, with



one of them predominant in an object, or on an occasion.

Images that are seated having an aspect of tranquility, and showing the mudrās (hand-gestures) of boon-giving(varada) or offering protection(abhaya) are said to belong to thesāttvika group. Images that stand, or ride on a vehicle (vāhana), show themudrās of valour or challenge, and bear in hands weapons answer to therājasa description. Images that ride on a vehicle, hold in the hands terrible weapons of warfare, and have an aspect of cruelty belong to thetāmasa group. The first group is generally benign and happy(saumya), while the last is fierce and destructive (ugra or saṃhāra).

Images of Vishnu as Para-Vāsudeva, Lakshmi - Nārāyaṇa, Śiva as Sadāśiva, Somāskanda and Dakṣiṇā-mūrti, Gaṇeśa, Aiyappa Śāsta, Lakshmi, Rājārājesvari and Sarasvati are illustrations of the Sāttvika type. Maya-śāstra, an iconographic manual, describes this type as characterized by eyes looking straight



Ugra or Samhāra mūrti (stone, Narasimha)

and serene, and by a peaceful aspect ("samadristis tu śāntas cha"); it brings quiet happiness to the devotee and helps in the dawning of wisdom in him.

Images of Viṣṇu in the Sthānaka (standing) posture like Trivikrama, Rājagopala, Śrīnivāsa, Janārdana and Keśava; Śiva as Bhikṣhātana, Natarāja, Umaliṅgana and Viśahara; composite images like Hari-Hara and Ardha-nārī, images of Devī in the sthānaka posture; Gaṇeśa in a dance stance, Rāma with Sītā are illustrations of the rājasa type.

Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha, Kṛṣṇa as Kālīya-damana, Durgā riding on the lion while killing the demon Mahisha, Skanda riding on the peacock and leading the army of gods against the demons, and Vīrabhadra destroying Dakṣa's sacrifice belong to the tāmasa type.

This typology should not be taken to mean that some gods by themselves are 'good' and others 'bad'. A value judgment of this sort is not indicated. The sāttvika icon is worshipped for the final liberation of the devotee from phenomenal involvement. The rājasa, however, is worshipped for protection and prosperity, and for the fulfilment of normal desires. The tāmasa images on the other hand, are invoked in times of stress, danger and challenge.

Any god may assume any of these aspects. Viṣṇu as Yogā-narasiṃha is really benign, although his countenance is fierce. Śiva as Dakṣiṇā-mūrti is actually destructive (he stamps on the apas-mārapurusha with his right foot), although

the general aspect is calm and meditative; likewise Natarāja. Durgā riding on the lion and killing Mahisha has a calm and pleasant expression on her face. The warrior Rāma may stand in a quiet posture, like the warrior Skanda standing as an innocent boy (Kumāra or Bala-subrahmanya).

Among the Viṣṇu images, it is usual to notice four varieties (according to Marīchi-saṃhitā); yoga (meditative), bhoga (pleasant), vīra (valourous) and ābhichārika (wicked). The bodily posture, and weapons in the hands (Śaṅkha and Chakra) are the same in all varieties; even facial expression may be the same. But the image is yoga when it is meant for ascetics seeking final beatitude, bhoga when it is meant to be worshipped by common folk for the obtainment of protection and prosperity, vīra when worshipped by warriors for the conquest of enemies, and ābhichārika when magicians and sorcerers resort to it in the course of their professional pursuits. However, the manuals suggest that the yoga type of Viṣṇu images is to be installed on banks of rivers and in solitary spots; the bhoga type in the midst of human settlement; the vīra type outside the township; and the ābhichārika on hill-tops, in forts and in the forest fastness.

According to *Archana-prakāśa*, however, yoga, bhoga, and vira are three forms of energy (śakti) in any icon. The first refers to the pedestal (pīṭha or ritualistic installation of the icon), the second to the peculiar power (śakti) that

is contained in the image properly consecrated, and the third to the physical or material aspects of the image (*bāhya-lāya*). The devotee is at first in contact with the exterior form of the icon, then he becomes aware of the import of the iconic form, and finally meditates on the source of the iconic projection. The iconic form thus is a crutch for the devotee to move ahead in the path of spiritual fulfilment.

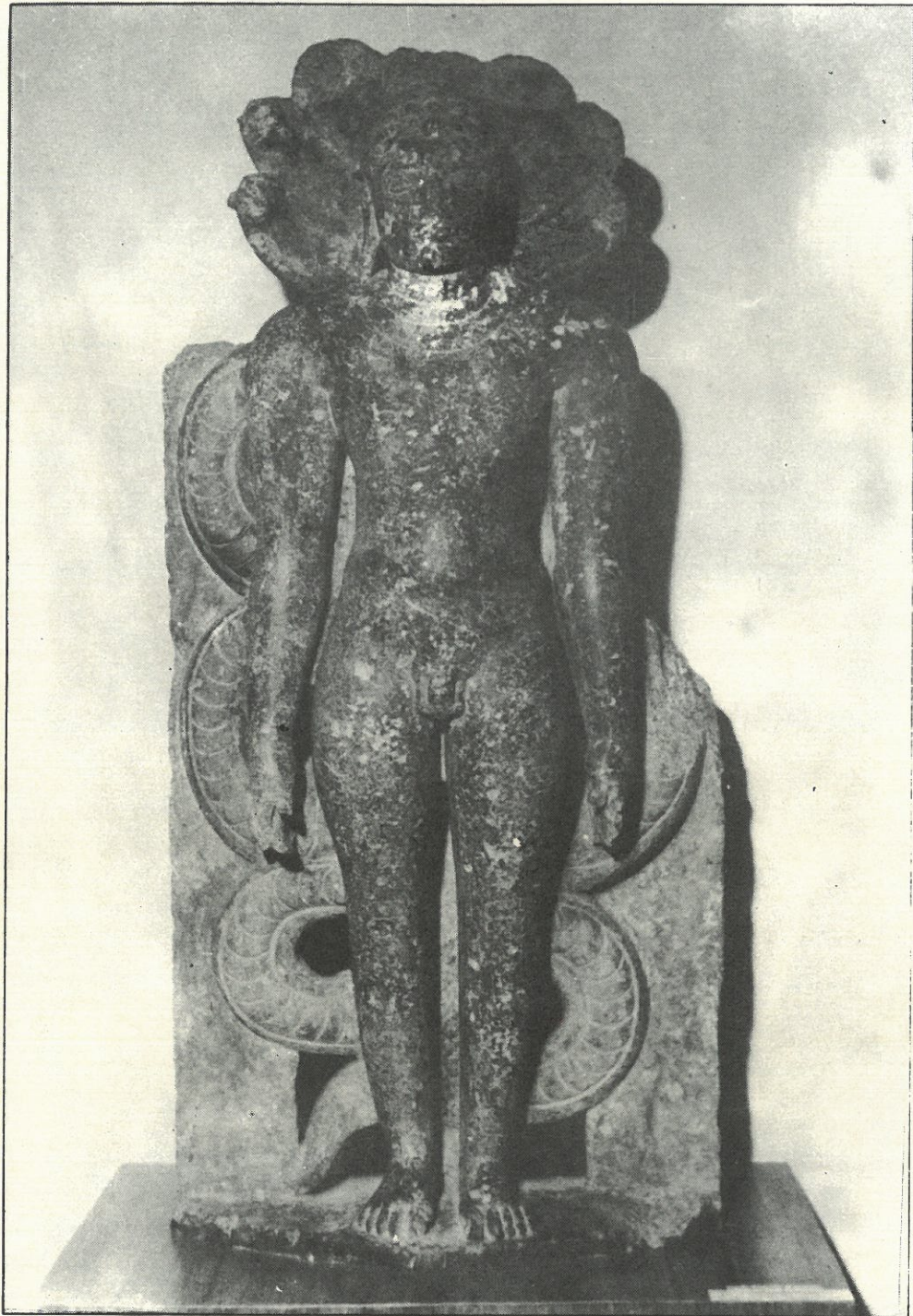
The images of the Buddha and Jina (a *tīrthankara*) are excellent illustrations of icons providing adorable models for man's spiritual aspirations. We should remember that it was the Buddha image that provided enormous encouragement to Indian iconography. In its early phase of development, Buddhist iconography was averse to delineating the supremely enlightened one as a mere human being; he was represented by a bodhi-tree, a royal insignia like the wheel or umbrella, a pair of sacred foot-prints, or a vacant diamond throne (*vajrāsana*), as illustrated by the early sculptured panels of *Sāñchi*, *Amarāvati* and *Nālandā*. It was the *Gāndhāra* style that broke this resistance, and commenced representing the Buddha like a valorous, handsome young prince or like a miserable ascetic, emaciated and moribund. The *Mathurā* style corrected this trend, and emphasized the spirit of composure and wisdom that the Buddha image symbolized.

An image of great charm and significance is that of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the goddess of transcendental wisdom, within the *Mahāyāna* framework. The image

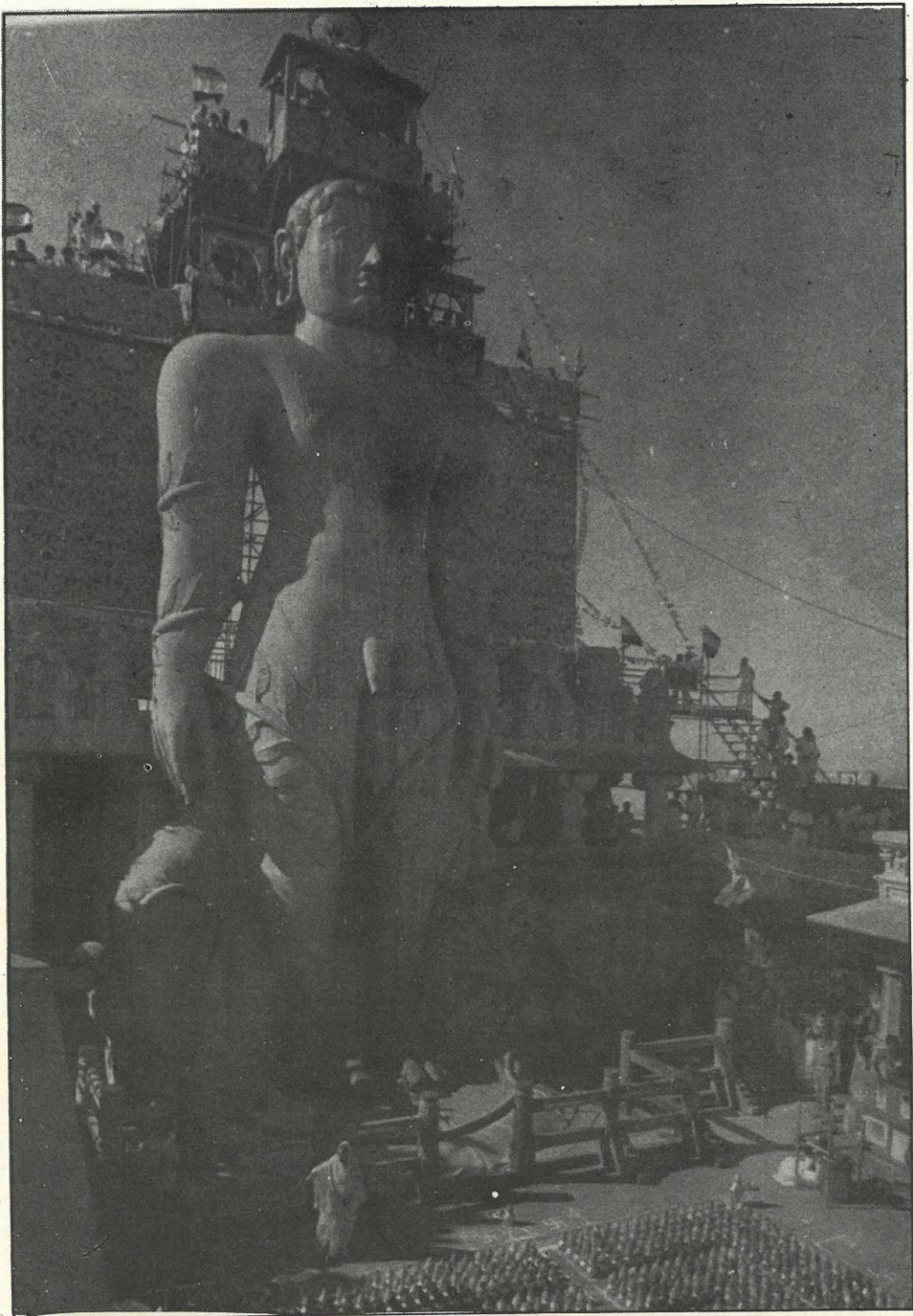
stylized with several variants owes its origin to the deification of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature around the first century after Christ. The deity became very popular around 300 A.D. and its hold on the Buddhist masses in India continued till about the eleventh century. A manual of rituals (of *Tāntrik* origin), *Sādhana-mālā*, provides not only a description of this image but an account of its symbolism. She represents the highest knowledge that enlightens and liberates.

Seated on the adamant seat (*vajrāsana*), she is in a meditative posture, holding the *Prajñāpāramitā* text and rosary in her hands, and assuming a teaching (or wheel-turning) gesture. She is the Supreme Female; and the feminine (or generative) aspect of wisdom is symbolized by the lotus, which motif is prominently involved in her icon. The graphic representation of this deity is more popular (especially in manuscripts and on banners) than the sculptured. But the magnificent stone icon from Java, sculptured about the thirteenth century and now in the Leiden Museum, is well-known.

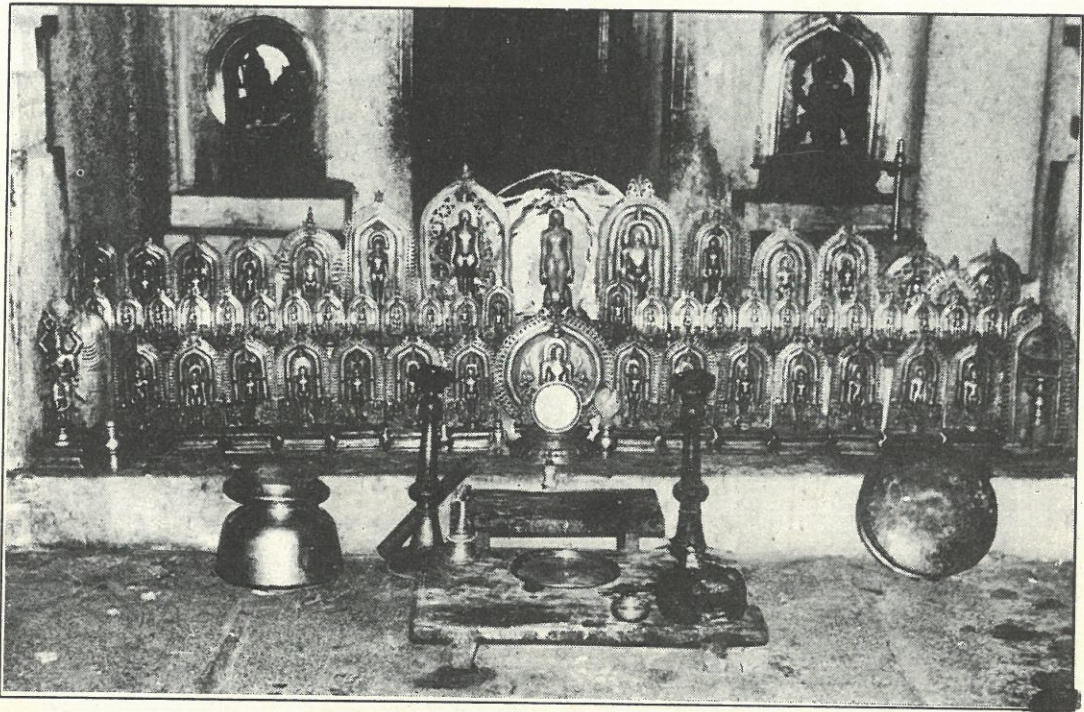
Perhaps there was an independent trend among the *Mathurā* and Gupta sculptors that crystallized the representation of the twenty-four *tīrthankara* icons, with their human individuality lost in the general portrayal of the *kāyotsarga* or *pratimā-yoga* posture but the uniqueness of a *tīrthankara* being symbolized by an emblem. The idea of the Jina, serene and untainted by worldly ills or cares, erect and nude, was also an ideal. The



Pratima-yoga (Pārśvanātha tirthaṅkara)



Kāyotsarga or pratimā-yoga (Gommatesvara in Śravaṇabelgoḷa)



Twenty-four tirthankaras (bronze icons in a Jaina maṭha)

model was followed not only for the tirthankaras but also for lesser saints like Bahubali and Bharata. The Sravaṇa-bel-goḷa colossus of Bāhubali (called here Gommatā), measuring 58 feet in height, is a well-known example of the kevalī ideal translated into a monolith. The contrasting imagery of the tirthankara as an emancipated saint and as a prince steeped in worldly riches (Jīvanta-syāmi) is a favourite theme in Jaina iconography.

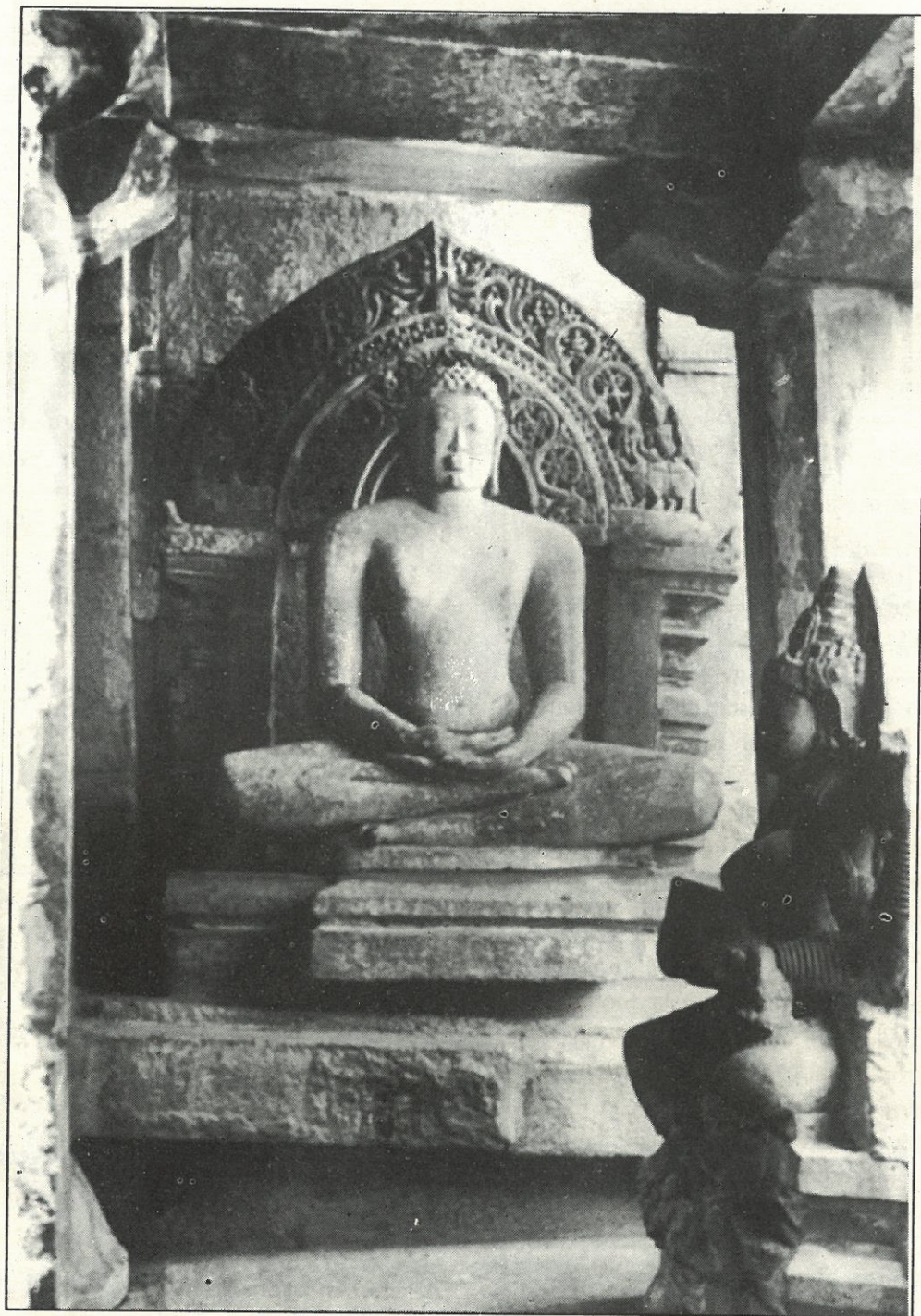
The tirthankaras are further distinguished by characteristic male and female guardian-angels (Yakshas and Yakshinīs), who also figure prominently in iconography. Many divinities of the folk religion survive in the Jaina framework, like Brahmā riding on the horse, Bhairavī the

terrible goddess, and Śruta-devatā scripture incarnated. Each of these icons represents an idea relevant to the Jaina discipline; the icon is more of a symbol than a shape. The Tāntrik prescription of Yantras is also involved in the Jaina approach to the worship of these divinities.

Among the Śiva images, the most interesting and also the most bristling with symbolism is the dancer Naṭarāja (Tāṇḍaveśvara), whose home is Chidambaram in Tamil Nāḍu. This aspect of Śiva is said to have Tillai 3000, the original capital of which was Tīruvenkāḍa (called Ādi-Tillai). The Choḷa monarch Parāntaka I (907-955 A.D.) was a great devotee of this aspect of Śiva, and he built ' the



Tirthaṅkara icons (in the Jaina maṭha of Śravaṇabelāgoḷa)



Jina icon (in Kambadahalli)

sky-hall' (dabhra- sabhā), covered with a roof of gold. It is this hall, in which Śiva is supposed to have danced, that came to be called Pon-ambalam or Chidambaram. The divine dancer whose Tamil name is Ādavallan, became the patron-god of the Chōla Kings, and under their patronage numerous metallic icons of Natarāja were made and cast in Tamil Nāḍu. The most celebrated among such images are the ones of Tiruvalaṅgāḍu, Kūram and Nallūr. All these belong to the latter half of the ninth century.

The significance of the Chidambaram shrine of Natarāja is the representation of the 108 dance-modes (karaṇas) stylized in Bharata's Nāṭya-śāstra with descriptive labels on two of the inner sides of the gateway of gopurams (East and West). We find similar plastic representations on one of the tiers of the sanctum of the Rājarāja Temple at Tañjāvūr and on the eastern gopuram of Śārnagapāṇi temple at Kumbhakoṇam. The dance is said to symbolize the five acts of God (pañcha-kṛtya): creation, preservation, destruction, embodiment and release.

Inspired by the Natarāja model, there are images of other gods also in dance postures. There is an unusual sculpture of dancing Narasimha on a pillar in the great temple on the Tirumalai hills. Kṛṣṇa is often represented as dancing on the hood of the dragon Kālīya or dancing with a ball of butter in hand. There are old sculptures of dancing Gaṇeśa also.

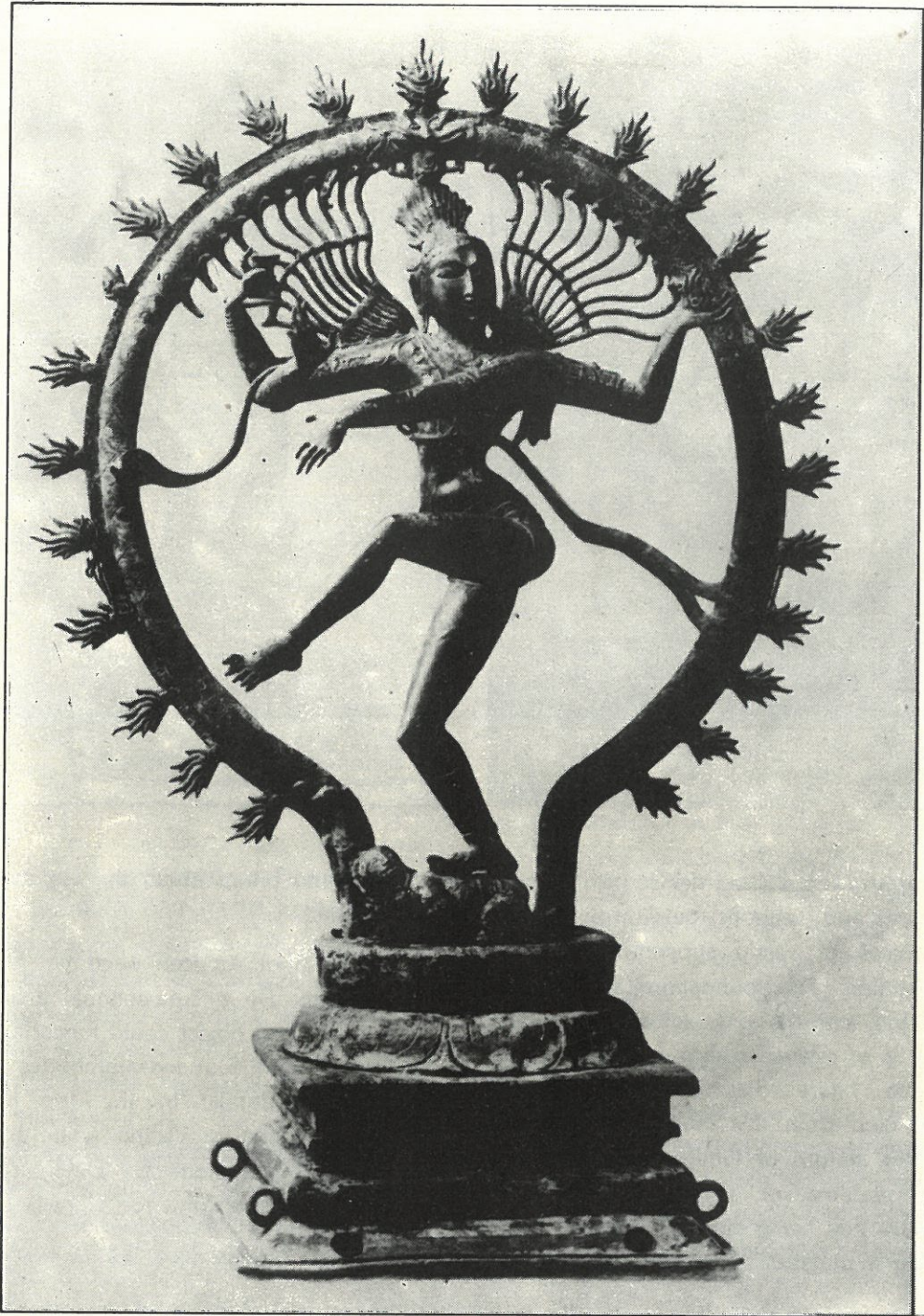
Many of the hand and finger gestures (mudrās), and bodily postures and bends

(bhaṅgis), employed in classical dance modes, are also involved in iconographic delineation, with slight variations. This renders the icons full of grace and charm. And during the ascendancy of the Chōla style, the gestures and bends became all too prominent, especially in metallic icons.

The characteristic weapons, like the discus, conch and mace for Viṣṇu; trident, hand-drum, and fire for Śiva; noose and goad for Gaṇeśa; bow and arrow for Rāma; skull-mace (khaṭvāṅga) and long spear (śūla) for Durgā; broad sword and shield of Vīrabhadra, and so on, together with the manner in which they are held, got stylized during the Chōla period of Indian iconography. The weapons have their own specific symbolisms, which contribute to the general symbolism of the entire icon. Some of the symbols have a Vedic background (wheel, fire, lotus, spear bow etc.); and some can be traced back to the Tāntric prescriptions: khaṭvāṅga, skull, bell, bijapūra, etc and some to the Purāṇic legends (antelope, conch, mace, thunder-bolt, broad-sword etc.)

Symbols assist in contemplation. An icon is worshipped in order that it can serve as an effective foundation for sustained attention on the divine nature and power.

The devotee seeks to rise from the details that symbolize to the subject that is symbolized. The artistic quality in the icon facilitates the holding of attention



Natarajā



there, and the stylized details (like posture, gestures and weapons) quicken the mental processes of ready superimposition and abstraction. The foundation (*adhishṭhāna*) viz. the icon, is only initially important; what is of relevance throughout, however, is the figure that is sought to be abstracted from this foundation (*āropya*), viz. the nature of Godhead. The expression *prati-mā* or *pratīka* for the icon signifies that being different from Godhead (being a material thing, made by man) it

indicates and brings about the experience of Godhead.

As a symbol, an icon need not be in human form. By a conventional association, any natural object could function like an aniconic icon: rounded ammonites with spirals cut naturally in the the holes (*Śalagrāma*) stand for Vishṇu, white quartz for Śiva, metallic stone for Devī, crystal for Sun, and red stone for Gaṇeśa.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SECTARIAN INTERESTS

Śiva is chiefly worshipped in the aniconic *liṅga*, although his iconic representations (*mūrti*) are popular, especially in South India. It is not accidental that the form of the *liṅga* resembles the phallus, and the word itself means 'gender', or more specifically the male generative organ. However, this detail does not dominate over the Indian imagination with regard to Śiva-*liṅga*.

The expression '*liṅga*' also means, and in a more significant manner, '*liṅg*', symbol, index: it is an image of the unmanifest but omnipresent divine principle. It is to be noted that *liṅgas* (called *bāṇaliṅga*) worshipped in homes usually take the form of unusual pebbles picked up from some sacred river (like Narmadā), and they do not in any way remind one of the phallus. Nor do the worship rituals, or the texts recited during them, contain even a remote reference to the cult of the phallus. It is a fact, however, that many purāṇic legends bring in sex to explain the origin of Śiva-*liṅga*. The folk fancy that is illustrated here has not survived in the sophisticated take-over.

A suspiciously phallic representation has been recovered from the site of the Indus

Valley civilization, and it is identified as a *liṅga*. We cannot be sure of this identification; but the sculptured *liṅgam* found at Guḍimallam (Paraśu-rāmeśvara temple) in Andhra Pradesh is unmistakably phallic in delineation. The date of this curious image carved out of a foot-thick hard stone and polished, has been given as second or first century before Christ (according to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy). The art involved in it is decidedly prior to the Kushāṇa stylization. On the front part of the shaft has been carved in bold relief a male deity with a battle-axe, a water vessel and a ram in his two hands, standing on a crouching dwarf. The five-foot tall icon is indeed remarkably realistic. It may be the earliest iconic representation of Śiva within the aniconic framework of a *liṅga*; there is neither the characteristic pedestal (*pīṭha*) nor the typical *arghya* of later *liṅgas*.

Likewise an early Śiva image (now in the Lucknow Museum) found at Bhīṭa is a composite one, aniconic as well as iconic. This image, may be said to belong to the *mukha-liṅga* variety, containing a human face in the *liṅga* framework. Here, not only the the head but the deity's



MUKHA-LINGA (in Kālahasti)

bust also is sculpted in relief, one of the hands in the abhaya gesture and the other holding a water vessel. The image has

been inscribed in Brāhmī characters which suggest an early date (about the first century before Christ). The art employed

in the icon has been described as a specimen of the Sūrga style which matured in Magadhā around the same period.

The Kūshāṇa coins (gold and copper) of the first and second centuries A.D. portray Śiva in a decidedly anthropomorphic manner. The early Ujjain coins have only the two-armed Śiva (like the Guḍimallam icon), holding a club in one hand and a water-vessel in the other; some coins make him hold a trident or a stick. Śiva is found also to be represented in these coins in a theriomorphic manner by a bull.

Paṭaṇjali (third century B.C.) is acquainted with Śiva icons, and not with the aniconic līṅga. Going back, we do not come across any reference to līṅga-worship in the Vedic literature, although Śiva (Rudra) was a recognized divinity even in Rigveda. And we have the well-known and so-called Paśupati-seal in the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization. It may indeed be a representation of Śiva.

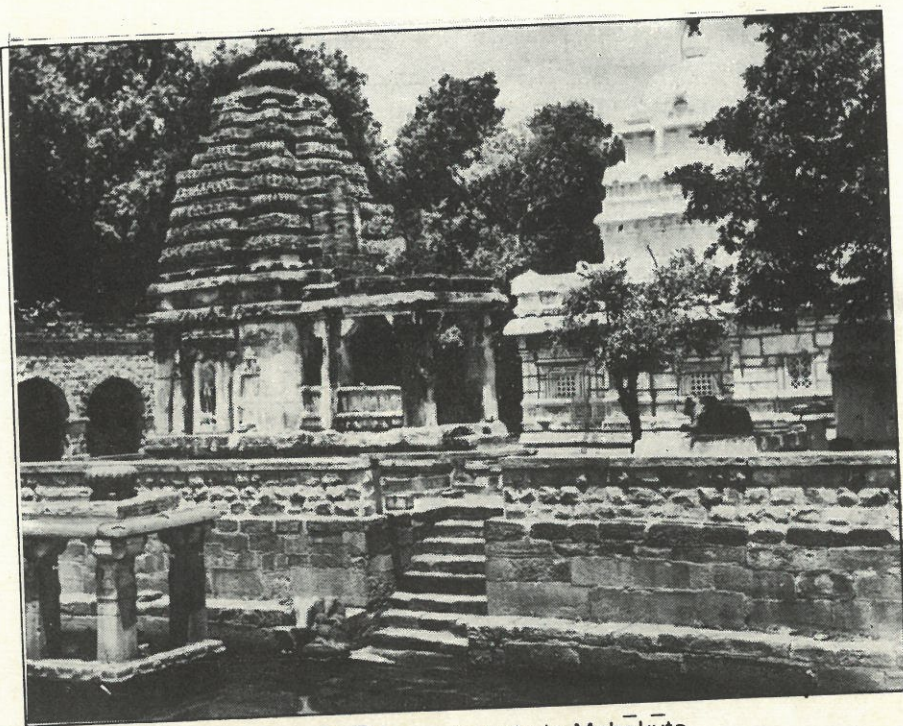


The Indus-seal representing a divinity identified frequently as Śiva-paśupati

From the available evidences, the conclusion suggested is that till about the first century A.D., Śiva was worshipped only in the anthropomorphic and iconic form. The employment of līṅga as his symbol may have come into vogue in the subsequent period.

Śiva is said to have 'manifest' (vyakta) or iconic, 'unmanifest' (avyakta) or abstract, and 'both manifest and unmanifest' or aniconic (vyaktāvyakta) forms. The līṅga illustrates the third form: it is manifest and is symbolic of divine presence, but devoid of details that could be regarded as human. However, the līṅga is further classified into nishkala (having no parts) and sakala (having identifiable parts). The former variety of līṅga is a mere monolithic shaft, from one inch to as much as 144 inches in height. The second variety consists of parts such as the līṅga proper (shaft or protuberance), a flat container (yonī or Gaūrīpaṭṭa), a pedestal (pīṭha), and sometimes a round ball on top of the līṅga (known as vajra). The scriptural prescription is that the whole piece should be monolithic, and should have no joints except for the vajra.

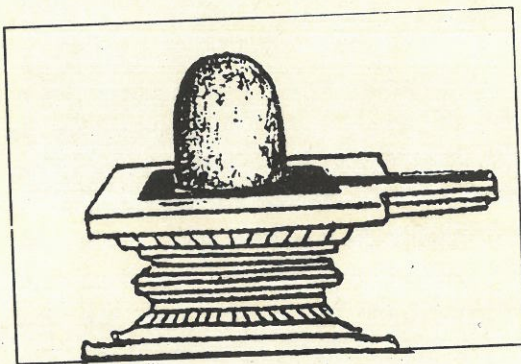
A reference in the Mahābhārata (Saup-tika parvan, 17, 13-14) gives a clue to the source of the latter variety. Śiva appeared in answer to the prayer of Asvatthāma as a golden altar (vedi) with fire emanating from it. The līṅga-shaft stands for the fire element, and the altar is the earth element (mṛ̥ṇmayam sthaṇḍi-lam, as suggested in the episode of the



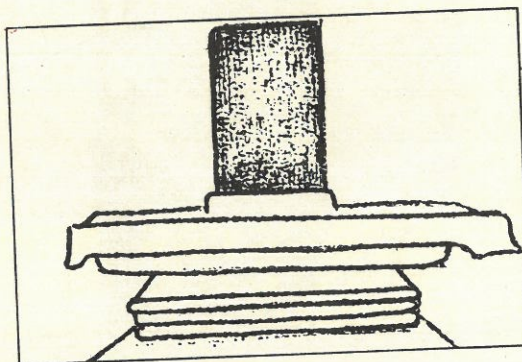
Early Chālukyan temple in Mahākūṭa

hunter and Arjuna in the 'Vanaparvan' section of the epic). An iconographic and Tāntrik text, *Ajītāgama*, describes linga as a "pillar of light" (jyotiḥ stambha), and explains it as the fire in which all beings disappear (lī) and from which all beings burst forth as sparks from fire (ga).

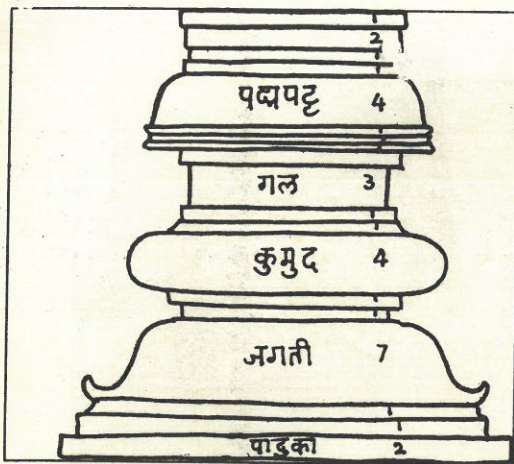
The linga has three distinct parts. The top one-third of the shaft is visible and this is the linga proper that is worshipped. It is called the Śiva-aspect (Rudra-bhāga or Pūjā-bhāga). The middle one-third of the shaft is unseen, hidden in the pedestal. While the above is looked upon as "male", this embedded detail is con-



Natural Linga fixed on a pedestal



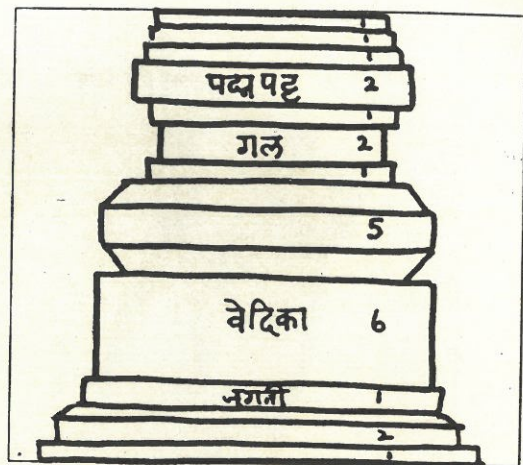
Carved Linga fixed on a pedestal



The altar belonging to the Śrī-bhadra type

sidered the 'female', although it is called the Vishṇu-aspect (Vishṇu- bhāga). The bottom one-third goes into the structure known as Nandyāvarta, accommodated inside the earth. This is the Brahmā aspect, regarded as 'neuter'. Iconographical prescription recommends the top portion to be in the round (cylindrical), the middle eight-sided, and the bottom squarish (Ajitāgama).

There are different iconometric details which are prescribed for the three parts, thus resulting in several varieties of the linga. When the three parts are equal (the proportions being 1-1-1), the linga is designated 'sarvato-bhadra'. When the Śiva and Vishṇu parts, themselves being equal, exceed the Brahmā-part, it is 'Svastika' (4.4-3). Texts like Aparājita-prichchhā mention thirty-three kinds of lingas, both 'mobile' (chala) and 'immobile' (achala), from 24 inches in height to 216 inches.

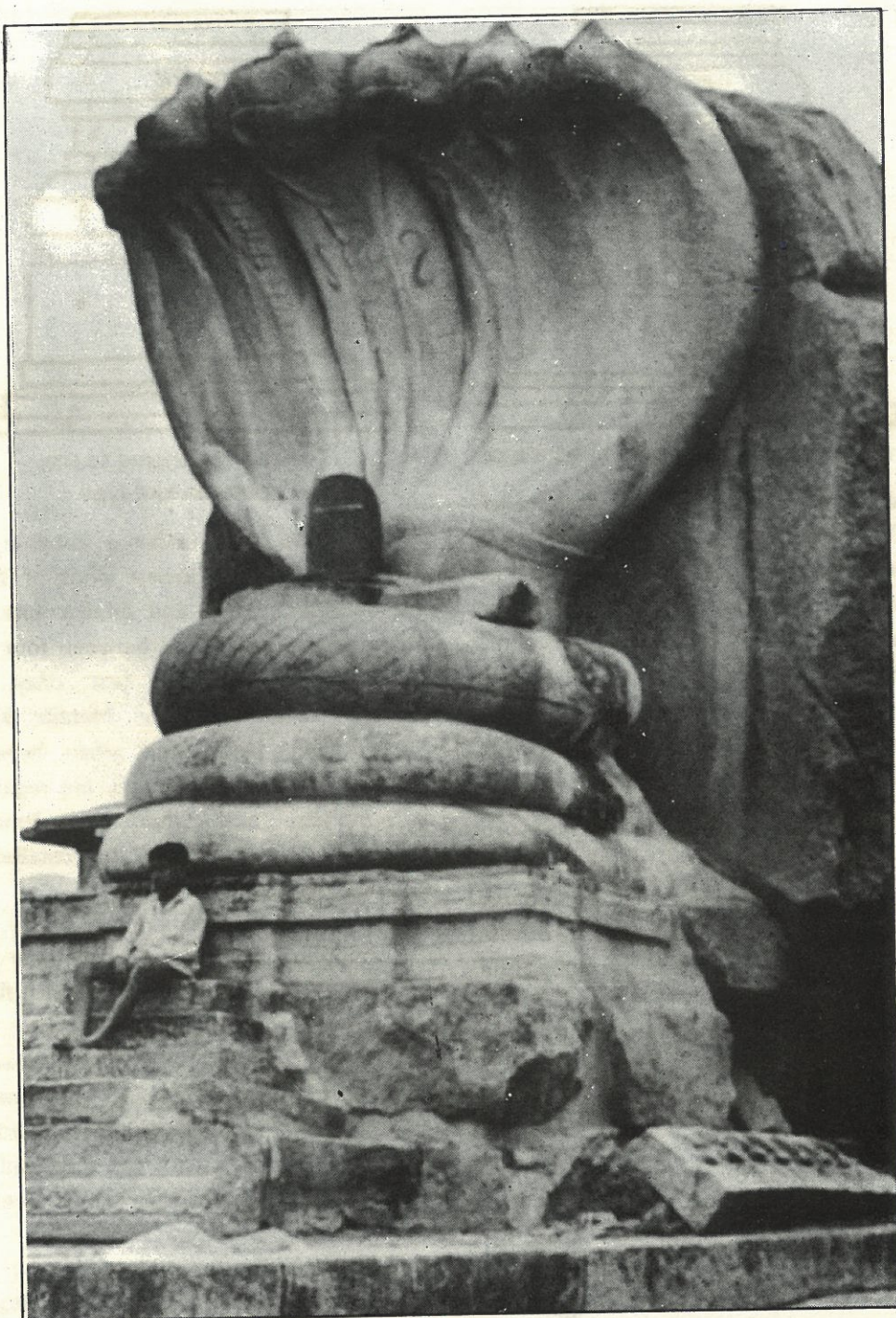


The altar belonging to the Padma-bhadra type

Making a linga under a cubit is not recommended. The lowest kinds of lingas are between a cubit and three cubits; the intermediary ones range between four and six cubits, while the best ones are between seven and nine. Metallic lingas are of eight kinds, and when between three inches and sixteen they are regarded as 'mobile', and when this limit is exceeded, the linga must be installed in a place permanently.

Temporary lingas may be made out of sand, rice-grains, cooked rice, rice-flour, clay, cow-dung, sandal-paste, jaggory, butter, tender sprouts or flowers. Twelve varieties of such lingas are enumerated, and no iconometric regulation is involved in them. They are to be dissolved in water as soon as the worship is over.

Permanent lingas made in stone are of four types, according to the variety of stone (coloured white, dark, red or yellow). The minimum height prescribed



Huge Liṅga in Lepākshi

for a stone liṅga is 24 inches, and the maximum 216 (according to Aparājita-prichhā).

Wooden liṅgas are likewise distinguished by the type of wood used, and they are of eight kinds. There is a prohibition against making an wooden linga under sixteen inches in height.

While these are man-made liṅgas, the natural lingas are said to be obtained in sacred spots like Śrī-śaila, Amara-kaṇṭaka and Narmadā river-bed. These are called 'bāṇa-liṅgas', and the prescriptions of form and size do not apply to them.

The part of the liṅga that is worshipped is the visible shaft, which in fact is called linga. The top of this portion is never flat but rounded off. But there are four main types of rounding off (śirovartana) in the manner of an egg of the hen (kukkuṭāṇḍa), a gourd (trapusha), an umbrella (chhatra) or half-moon (ardhachandra). There is a fifth kind which resembles a water-bubble (budbuda). The iconometric proportion of these types in terms of the three parts of the linga (Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahmā) are: 9-8-7 in the 'egg' type; 8 2/1- 8- 7 3/4 in the 'gourd' type; 8-8-7 in the 'umbrella' type; and 7 1/2 - 8 - 8 1/2 in the 'half-moon' type.

On the Śiva portion of the liṅga (the visible shaft) may be carved flattened vertical strips (dhārās), usually, five, seven or nine. The strips may be as many as 64. Or there may be the carving in relief of the human face on the liṅga, in which case the liṅga is called 'mukha-liṅga'. This

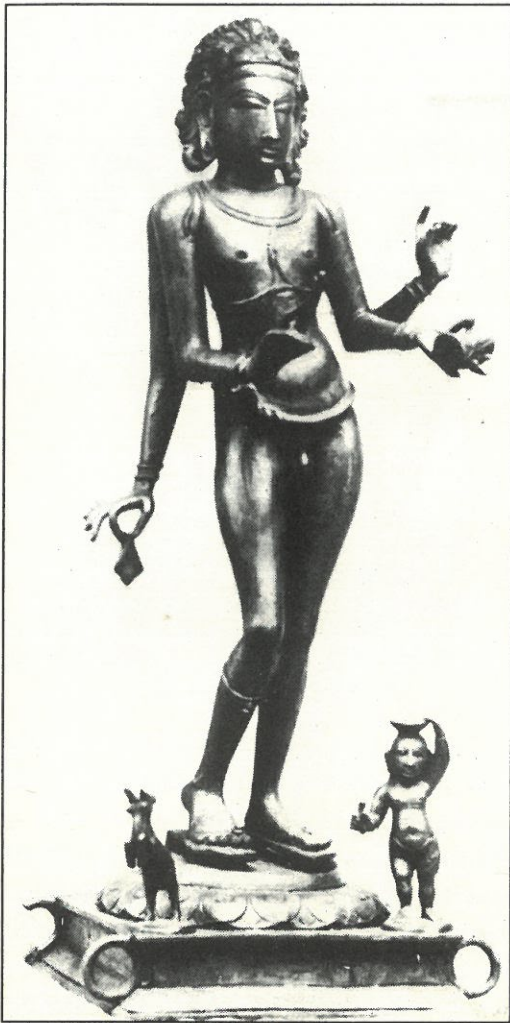
type of liṅga which is iconic-aniconic is an ancient one. The earlier practice was to have just one face, but later three, four, and even five faces became common. Two faces are never carved, except in the linga meant to be used in black magic (Īśānaśiva-gurudeva-paddhati, 2, 40). It is a rule that it is only the liṅga where the Śiva's part is in excess of the other two that the faces could be carved. The texts prescribe that the Śiva's part of the liṅga is to be divided in three equal parts, and the face should cover one and a half of these parts.

When the face is not sculpted on the linga, there may be decorative designs such as "the elephant's eyes", "cow's ear", trident, circle, bud, outline of the conch or umbrella, or paddy-grain. This marking is known as 'lakṣaṇoddhāra' or 'brahma-sūtra'. The rule is that the Śiva-part of the liṅga is divided into three parts, only the lower two parts being used for such marking.

We have mentioned earlier that despite the wide employment of the aniconic liṅga for worship of Śiva, his iconic representations are popular. Texts mention several of these stylized representations: 16 according to Kāśyapa-śilpa and 18 according to Śilpa-ratna. And these have been grouped into two main divisions: 'benevolent' (anugraha) and 'malevolent' (saṁhāra). The former is distinguished by the gentle and benign aspect and is represented as conferring boons on devotees, while the latter is fierce and



Yogalakshmi-Narasimha (Rock - sculpture from Harappi)



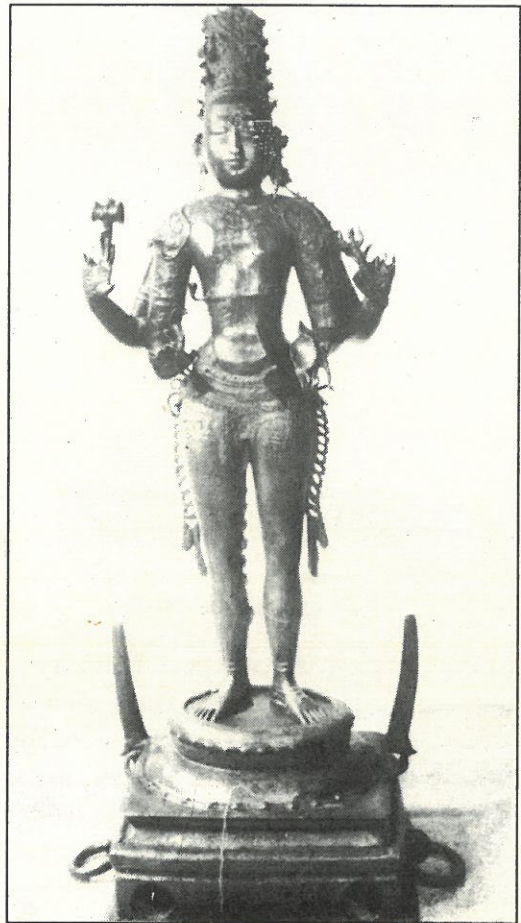
ŚIVA as Bhikṣaṭāna-mūrti

found in the act of killing or subduing the wicked.

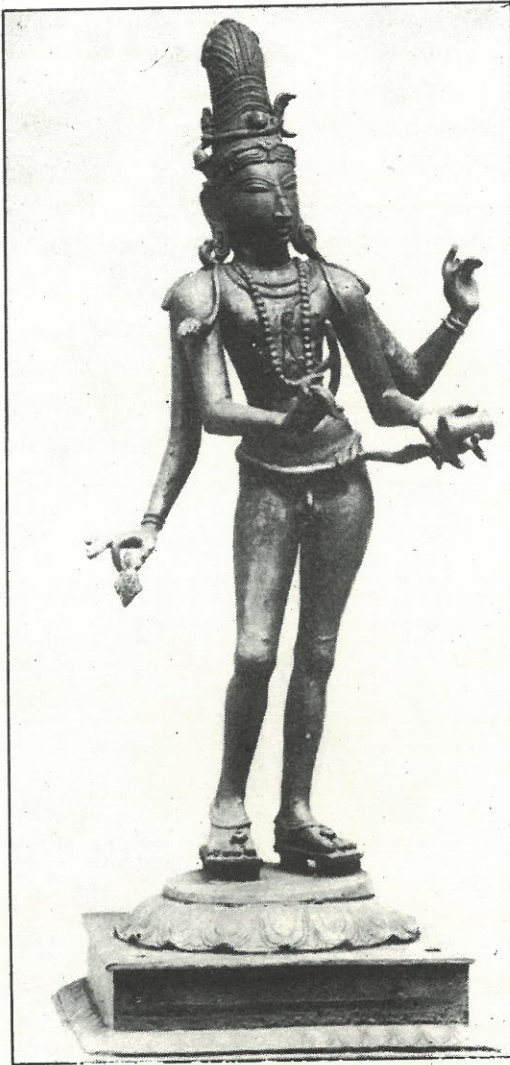
Being seated in an easy posture (Sukhāsana), donning the moon on his matted locks (Chandraśekhara), riding his bull (Vṛsha-vāhana), accommodating Gaṅgā on his head (Gaṅgādhara), teaching the great sages (Dakṣiṇā-mūrti), bestowing a boon on his attendant Chan-

deśa or on Arjuna (Vara-pradāna), and emanating with an iconic form from the aniconic liṅga (liṅgodbhava) are among the situations that inspire the 'benevolent' icons. Illustrations of the other division are subduing death (Kālārī), tearing down the demon in elephant's form (Gajāsurasamhāra), and fighting with Tripura (Tripurārī).

Interesting among the iconic representations of Śiva are Naṭarāja, Ardha-nārī (half male and half female), Hari-Hara (composite Viṣṇu-Śiva). Kalyāṇa-sundara



ŚIVA as Chandraśekhara



ŚIVA as Kañkāla-mūrti

(while wedding Pārvati) and Bhikṣhāṭana (on his begging round). Every one of these iconic representations has a Purāṇic legend in its background. South Indian temples belonging to the Chola period contain numerous metallic icons of excellent workmanship illustrating the above situations in which Śiva is glorified.



ŚIVA as Kalyāṇa-sundara

Vishṇu is a divinity of Vedic antiquity. The prevalence of the Bhāgavata cult during the centuries prior to the birth of Christ popularized his worship all over the country. We will deal with the five-fold forms of Vishṇu that developed incidental to the Vyūha theory, in a later section, when we deal with the Pāñcharātra-Āgama. Pāṇini and Patañjali (several centuries before Christ) were acquainted with iconic worship of Vāsudeva and Saṅkarshaṇa (later Balarama and in a variant form Subrahmaṇya, the Snake-deity). The heroes of the Vṛshṇi clan were being worshipped in temples (vāṭikās) and in the shape of icons (pratimā).

The iconic form appears to have been crystallized as early as the first century before Christ, for there is an inscribed

sculpture of the "four armed (chaturbhujī) Bhagavān" of that date, found in the Burhikhār village in Bilāspur (Madhya-

The worship of Viṣṇu seems to have been popular with the Hellenistic satraps and the early Gupta kings.

The iconography of Kṛiṣṇa as a variant of the Viṣṇu also dates back to a distant past. Kṛiṣṇa's relation with Indra (Vedic hero) has been mentioned even in Rigveda (8, 96, 13-5). Ghata-jātaka knows him as a prince of Mathurā. Pāṇini



ŚIVA as Anugraha-mūrti

Pradesh). The image carries discus and mace in its two extra hands. Curiously, however, the normal hands assume the añjali (supplication) posture, suggesting that the icon may be that of an attendant of Viṣṇu. It is usual for the attendant of a deity to be distinguished by the emblems and weapons of the deity itself.

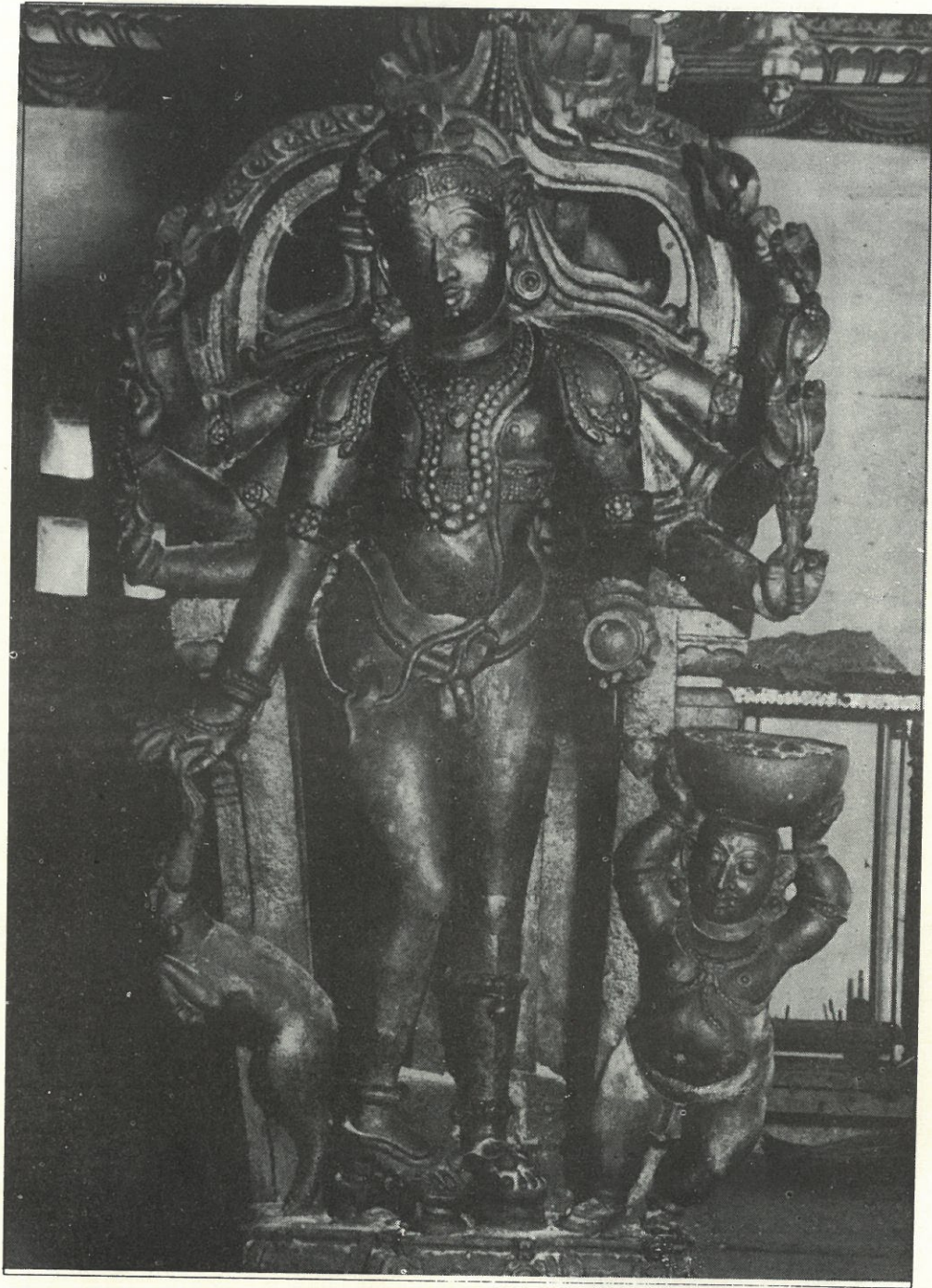


ŚIVA as Vṛsha-vahana

suggests his association with the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna. Patañjali refers to him as



ŚIVA as Natarāja (Chālukyan Sculpture)



ŚIVA as Bhikṣāṭana-mūrti (from Perūr temple)



ŚIVA as nr̥tta-mūrti (Chāḷukyan style)

'revered". Kautilya's Arthaśāstra (14, 3) recommends the worship of Kṛishṇa before collecting medicinal herbs.

Harivaṁśa makes the tribal goddess Ekānāṁśā (a prototype of the later Devī image) a sister to Kṛishṇa and Balarāma. The worship of the three (Ekānāṁśā as Subhadra) has survived to this day in the

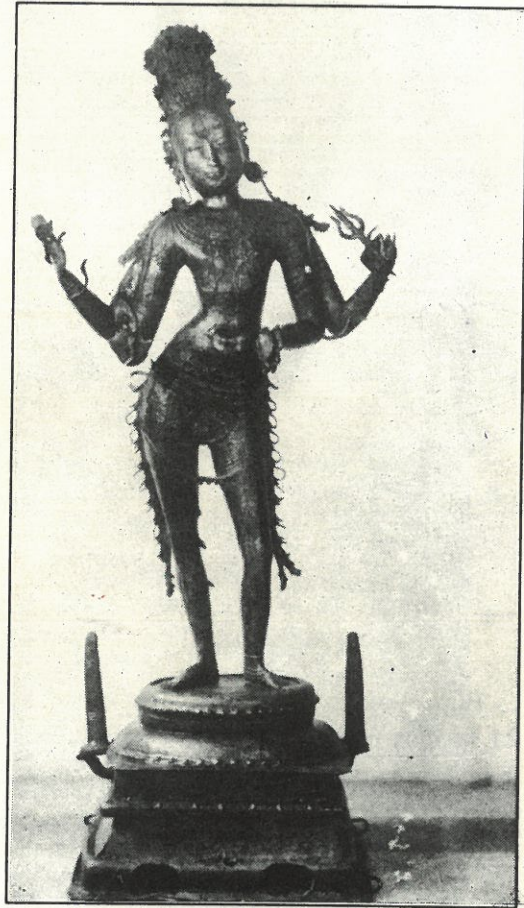
ground even in the centuries prior to the Christian era.

Apart from the inscrutable and unmanifest divine presence, there were abstract emanations from that source (vyūha) responsible for the evolution of the entire cosmos, as well as concrete incarnations (avatāra) in human and animal-human forms. The Vedic literature is acquainted with the animal incarnations of Prajāpati, which were now projected on Viṣṇu.

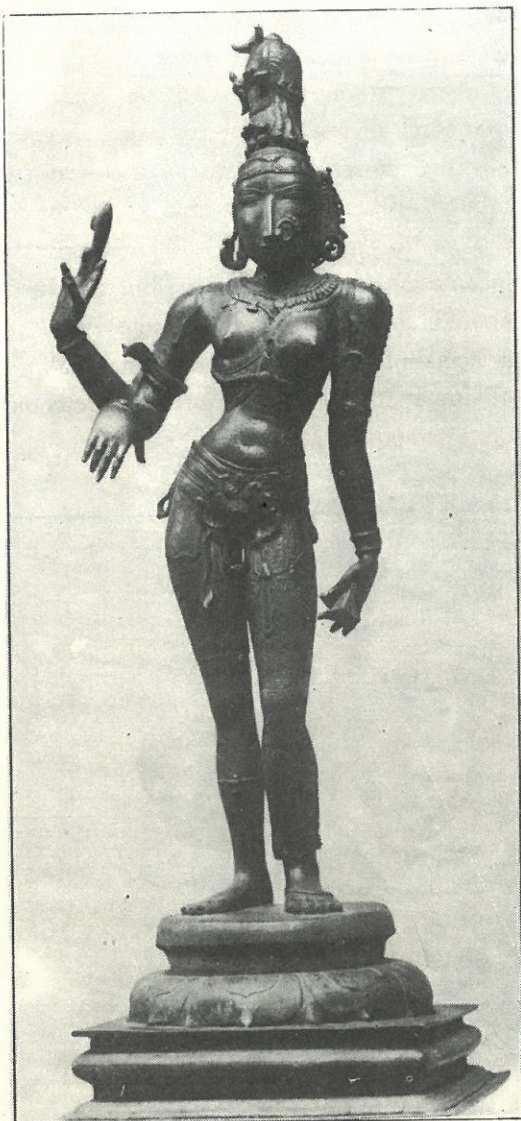


ŚIVA

famous Jagannātha temple at Puri (Orissa). The belief that all three of these deities, especially Kṛishṇa-Vāsudeva, are human incarnations of Viṣṇu had gained



ŚIVA



ŚIVA as Ardha-nārī (bronze)

Rūpamaṇḍana enumerates as many as 24 images of Viṣṇu, of which man-boar (nara-varāha) is one; all the others are completely human or celestial - Hayaśirsha-saṁhitā, however, speaks of the 'man-fish' (nṛ-matsya), 'man-tortoise' (nṛ-kūrma)



ŚIVA as Ardha-nārī (bronze)

and 'man-lion' (nṛ-siṁha) forms in addition to the emanations of Viṣṇu.

The ten popular incarnations (avatāras) frequently represented in icons presuppose specific needs of devotees, and among them Rāma, Kṛishṇa, Paraśurāma Vāmana and Buddha (or Balarāma) are entirely



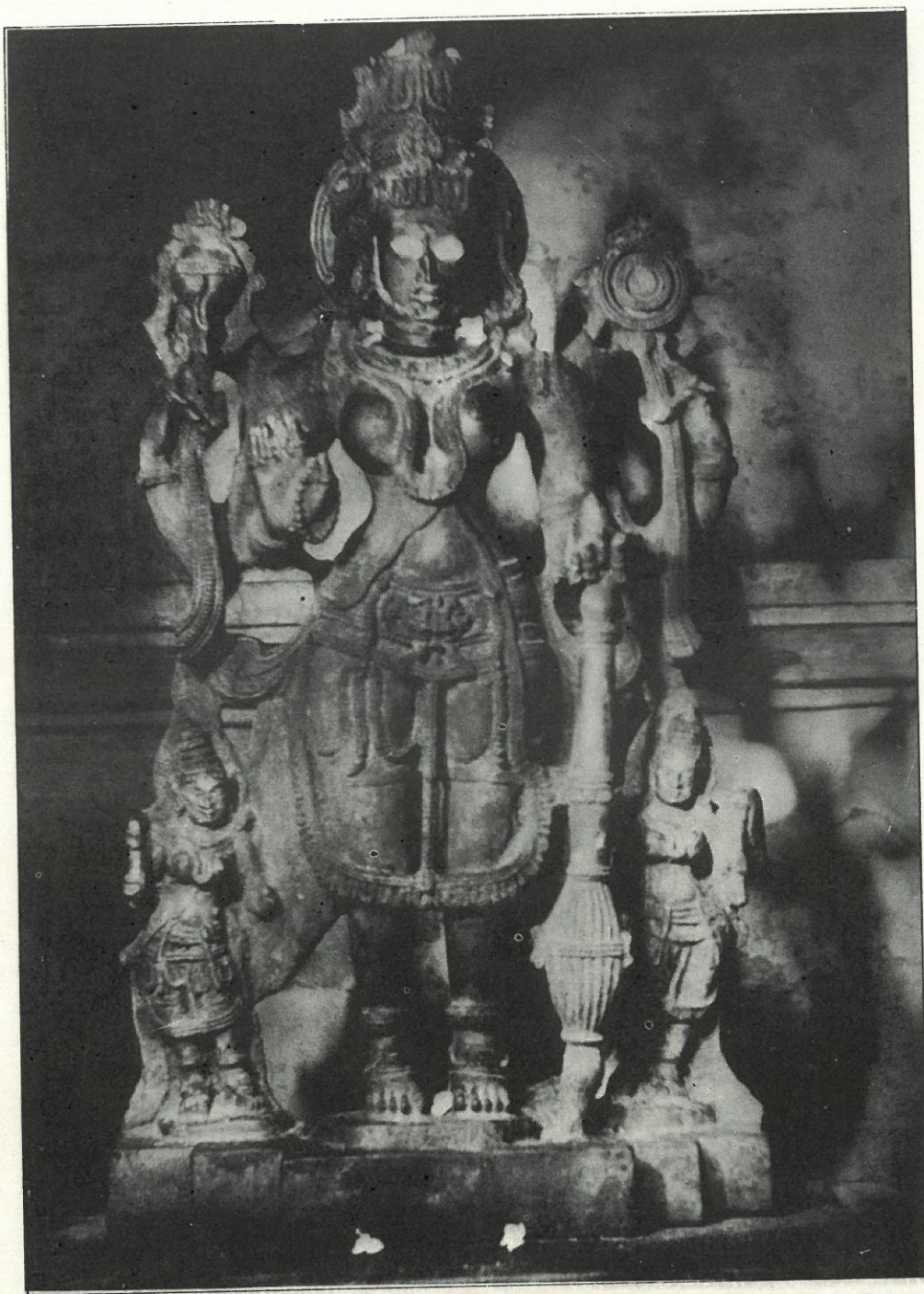
ŚIVA as Vṛsha-vāhana (Durgī-guḍī, Aiholē)



Gaṇḍa-bheruṇḍa Naraśiṃha



VISHṆU (Lakshmi-nārāyaṇa in Jāvagallu temple)



MAHĀ-LAKSHMĪ (the temple at Dodḍa-gadda-vallī)



VISHṆU as Trivikrama (Chālukya)



Dattātreya (Modern sculpture by D. Vādirāj of Bangalore)

human; Matsya (Fish), Kūrma (Tortoise), Varāha (Boar) and Simha (lion) are animal forms; and Kalki is the incarnation in future, appearing either as the hero riding on the horse or as the horse itself.

Besides these ten, Viṣṇu has other well-known iconic representations, such as

Haya-grīva (Horse-headed), Dhanvantari (The First Physician), Dattātreya (composite sage, incorporating Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva) and Vyāsa (the sage who compiled the Veda). Bhāgavata-purāṇa lists twenty-two iconic forms of Viṣṇu, while Agni-purāṇa twenty-four. And some



VISHNU



Vishṇu as Varadarāja (bronze)



back view of Vishṇu as Varadarāja

of them have several variations, like Narasimha having as many as seventy-four (according to *Vihagendra-saṁhitā*, 4, 7), Varāha five, and Kṛishṇa eight. Narasimha is an interesting icon. The occasion for this incarnation was to protect the young devotee Prahlāda, and to kill his wicked father Hiranya-kaśipu. The main aspect is therefore fierce, but there are relatively milder forms, as when he is with his consort Lakshmi (Bhogā-) or while in

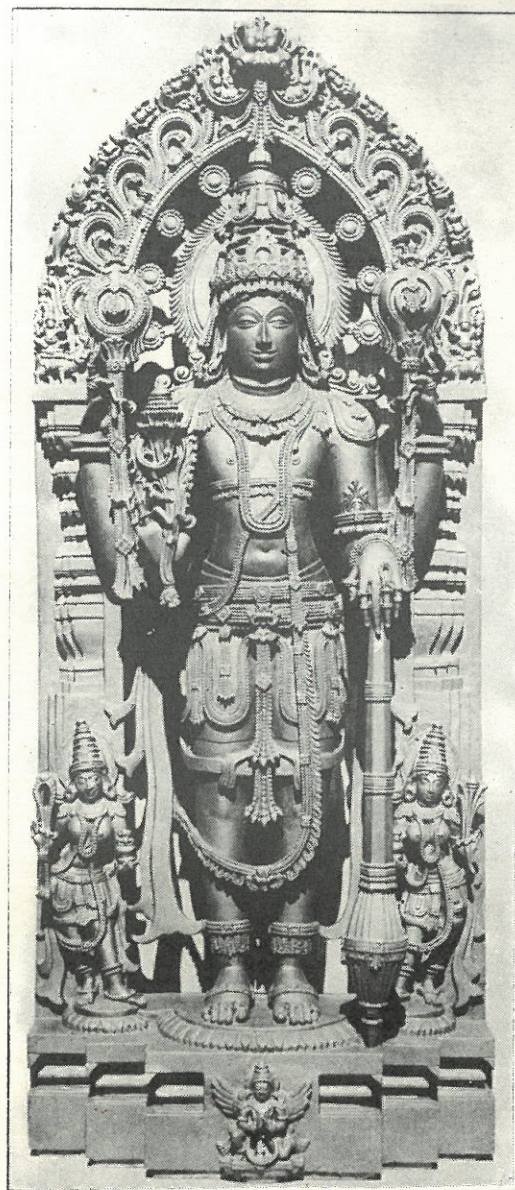
the mediative posture (Yogā-). There are fine icons in the South representing him as seated, standing (sthānaka), dancing (nṛtya), bursting forth from the pillar (sthāṇu-), ferocious and flaming (jvālā), tearing open the breast of the demon (ugra), benign (varada), alone (kevala); and having two, eight, ten, or sixteen arms. There is a curious image of five-headed Narasimha, described in *Īsvara-Saṁhitā* (4, 76), and a composite figure



Side-view of Vishṇu as Varadarāja

of Varāha-Narasimha (Parāśara-Saṁhitā, 30, 21). The iconic yantra of Viṣṇu's discus, Sudarśana, will usually have on its back an image in relief of eight or sixteen-armed Narasimha; known as Sudarśana-nārasimha. Narasimha is here regarded as located in the heart of Sudarśana (Pādma - Saṁhitā, 31, 257)

Narasimha, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, is said to have continued to be fierce,



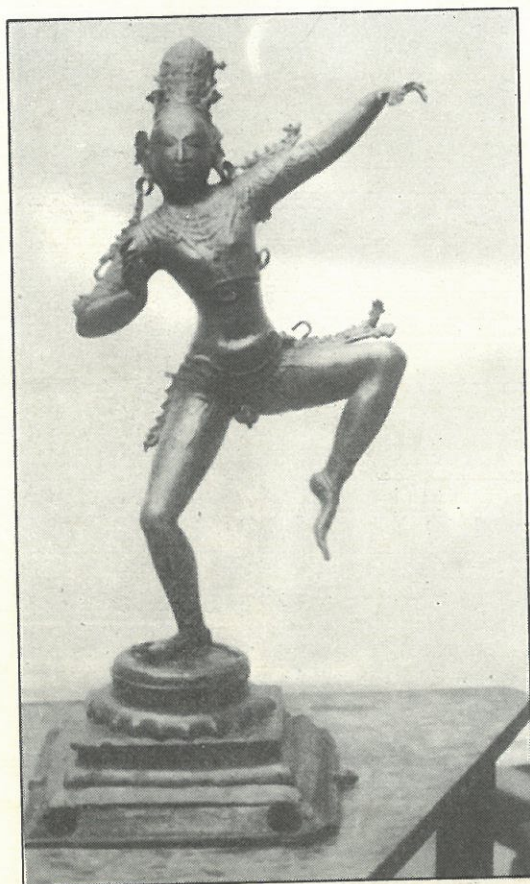
Keśava (Hoysala sculpture
copied by D. Vādiraj)

even after the demon was killed; and the gods trembled for their safety. Then Śiva is supposed to have assumed the form of the mythical animal, more ferocious



Vishṇu in the Kalyāṇa-sundara group

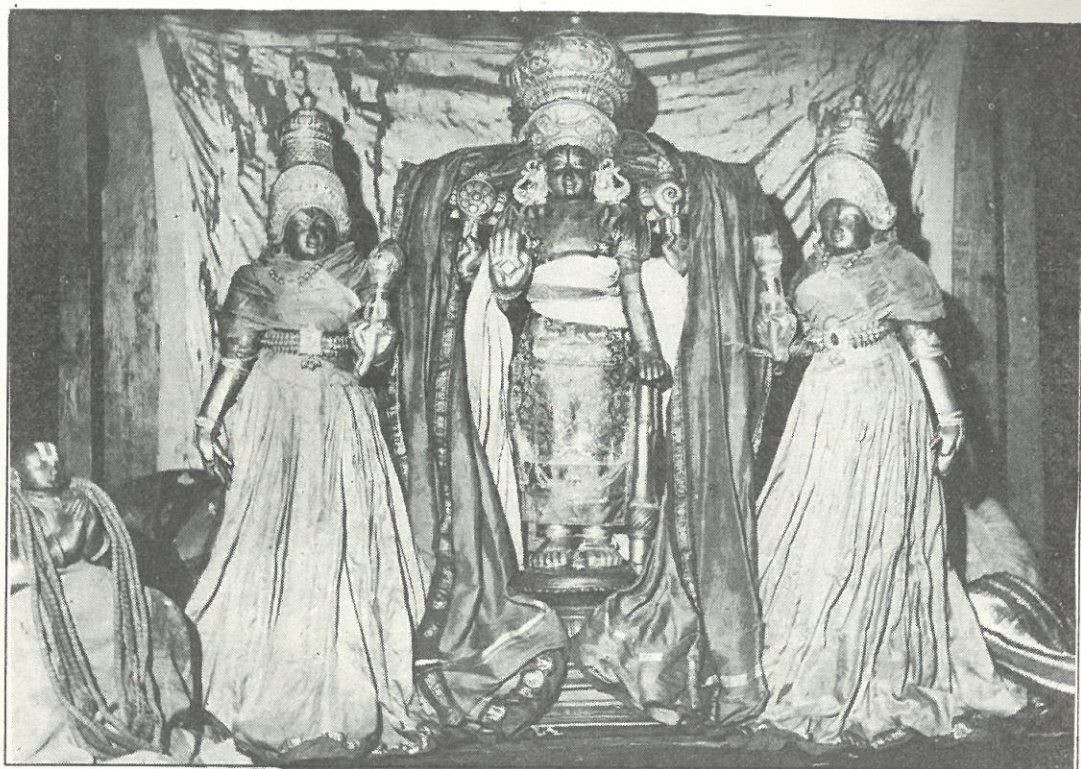
than the lion, 'Śarabha' to frighten Narasiṃha to sanity. We have icons of Śarabhesvara in the South. The story continues that Narasiṃha, instead of getting pacified, assumed a still more terrible form, a mythical bird-animal, 'Gaṇḍa-bheruṇḍa'. However, iconic illustration of these two forms are rather rare. Narasiṃ-



KṚSHṆA (nṛtta-mūrti)

ha as Gaṇḍa-bheruṇḍa is the rarer of the two, but we have a drawing of it from the Mysore Court, done over a hundred years ago.

It is usual for the Vishṇu icons to be associated with Lakshmi or her incarnation (as Sītā with Rāma, and Rukmiṇī with Kṛṣṇa). Independent representation of Lakshmi (Śrī or Sirimā-devatā) who is the Vedic goddess, can be found in the relief-sculptures of Bārhut and Sāñchi stūpas. Regarded as one of the aspects



UTSAVA-MŪRTI (In Aprameya temple at Malūr)

of Mother-goddess, she is the presiding deity over wealth, agricultural plenty, and prosperity; she is associated with beauty and lotus. There are eight iconic representations of Lakshmi with many arms, familiarly known as *aṣṭa-lakshmi*, which are independent of Vishṇu.

'Mahā-lakshmi' in particular, has Tāntrik involvements, and is closely related to Durgā. As the consort of Vishṇu she is usually represented as a two-armed goddess seated by his side or on his lap (as for instance in the Lakshmi-Narasimha, or Lakshmi-Hayagrīva icons). She is also symbolized by a triangular mole-mark

(*śrīvatsa*) on the right chest of Vishṇu when he is shown alone.

It may be recalled that in the Śivaliṅga, the middle 'Female' part (called *yoni* or *Gaurī-paṭṭa*, which receives the water poured over the liṅga in the ceremonial bath given to it) is known in texts as Vishṇu's part. We have other references that indicate the feminine role of Vishṇu (as in the story of Mohini). Iconographically, the most usual representation of Durgā with the discus and conch, which are typical emblems of Vishṇu suggests the close association of Durgā with Vishṇu. Purāṇic legends make



ŚAṆKARA-NĀRĀYAṆA (Chāḷukyan sculpture)



ŚIVA-VISHṆU (Chālukyan sculpture)



VISHNU as ANANTA-SAYANA (Painting on wall, Gopālapuram, Kerala)

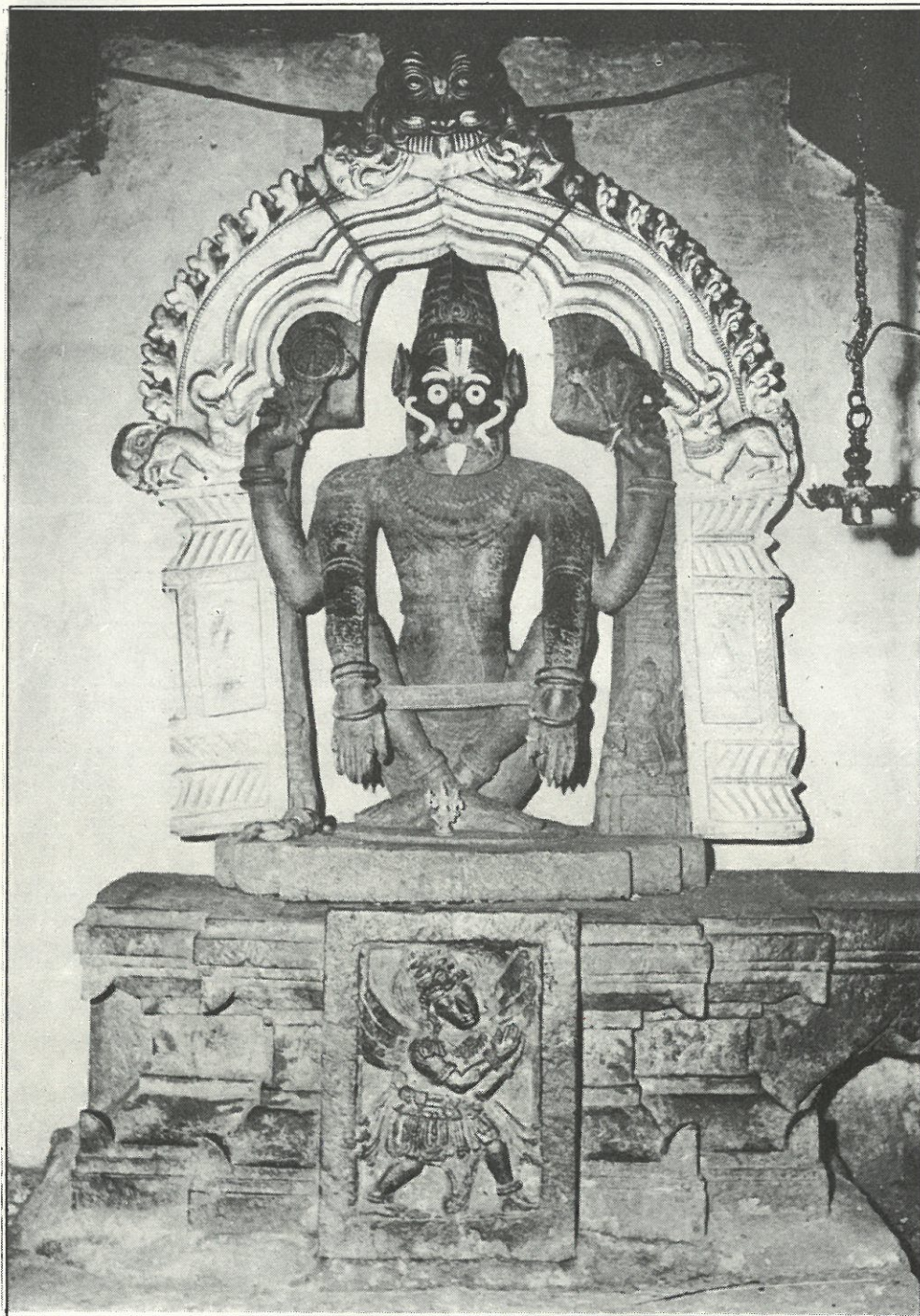
Indian Temples : Art & Architecture



NARASIMHA, Bādāmi Cave III



NARASIMHA (Chālukyan sculpture)



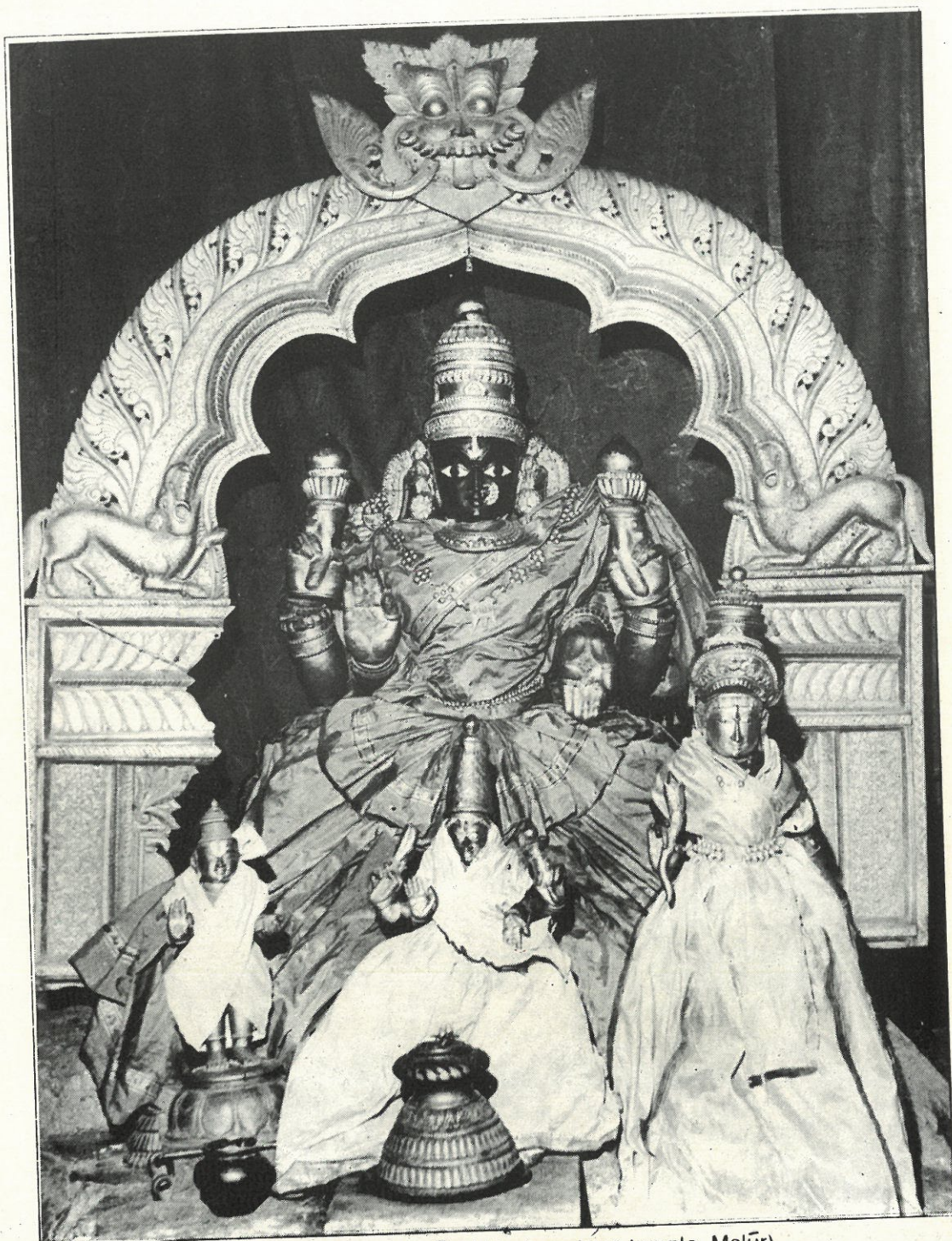
YOGĀ-NARASIṂHA in Sāligrāma



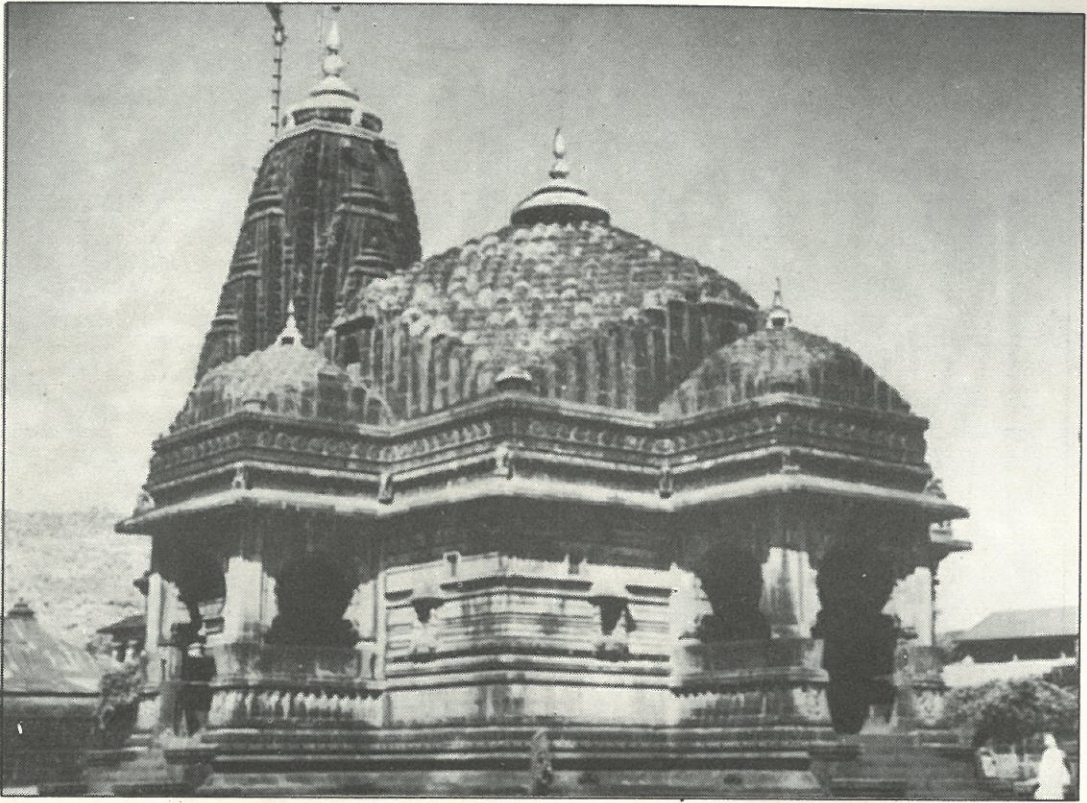
VARĀHA (Chalukyan sculpture)



VISHṆU (in Bādāmi cave III)



LAKSHMI (Aravinda-nāyaki in Aprameya temple, Maḷūr)



Jyotirlinga temple of Tryambak near Nāsik



LAKSHMĪ (as Padmāvati in Tirucchanūr

Vishṇu's sister; Kṛishṇa's association with the tribal goddess Ekānāṁśā (Bhadrā or Subhadrā) has already been mentioned.

When Devī (Bhagavatī) is worshipped, the thought that she is Śiva's spouse is vague and irrelevant. She is either a divinity in her own right or is regarded as 'Vaishṇavī-śakti', the energetic aspect of Vishṇu.



Durgā



DURGA (in Tāḍapatritemple)



KĀLI



GANGĀ



DURGĀ (in Rāvalphāḍi Cave, Aiholē)



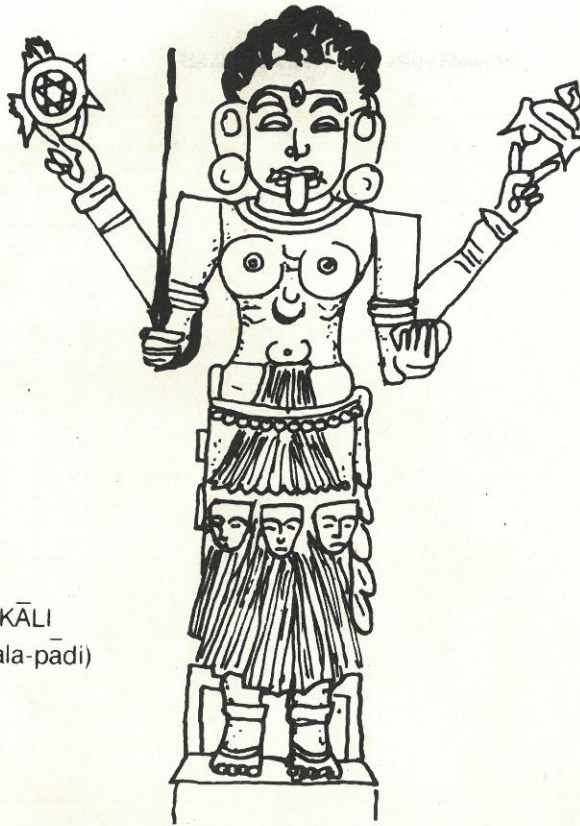
Ugra-mūrti (Stone, Durgā in Paṭṭadakallu)



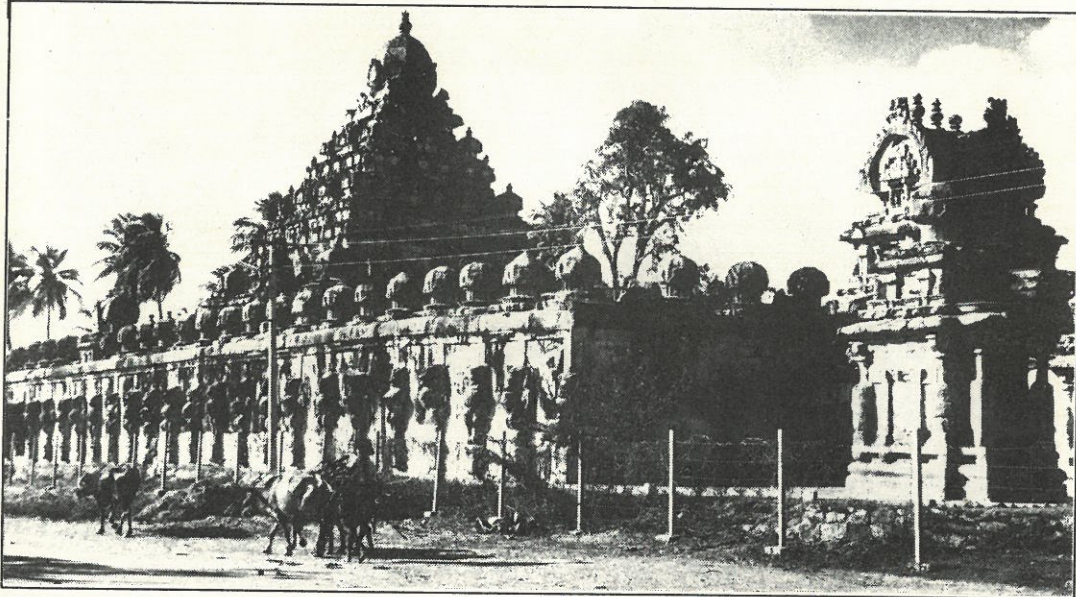
KĀLĪ (Close-up)



DURGĀ (in Chidambaram temple)



BHADRA-KĀLĪ
(Wood. Ambala-pādi)



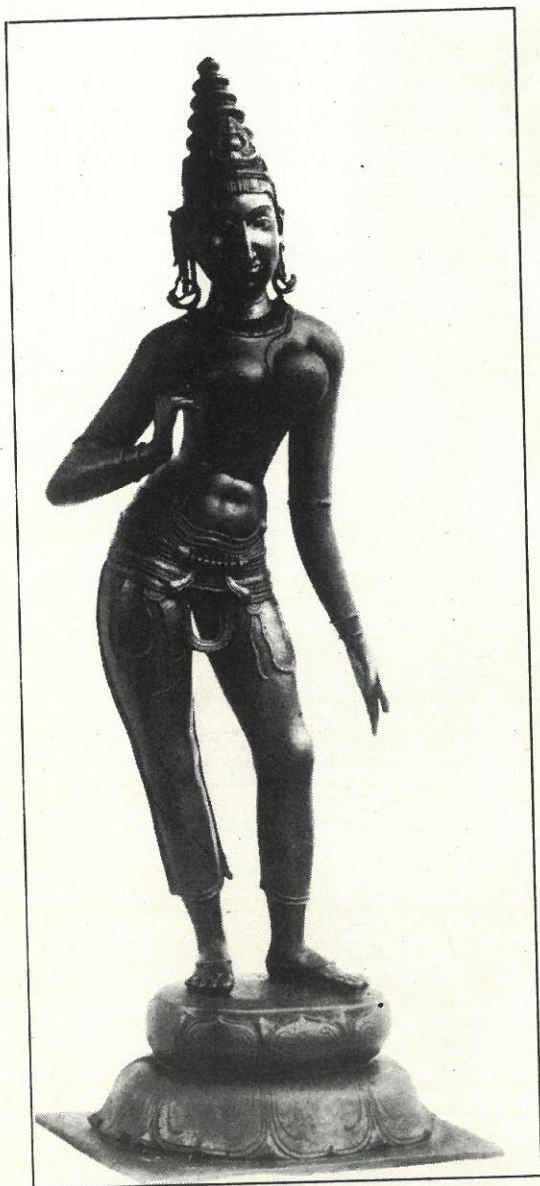
The ancient Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñchīpuram built during 695-700 A.D.



SARASVATĪ (in Agrahāra Beḷagūḷi)



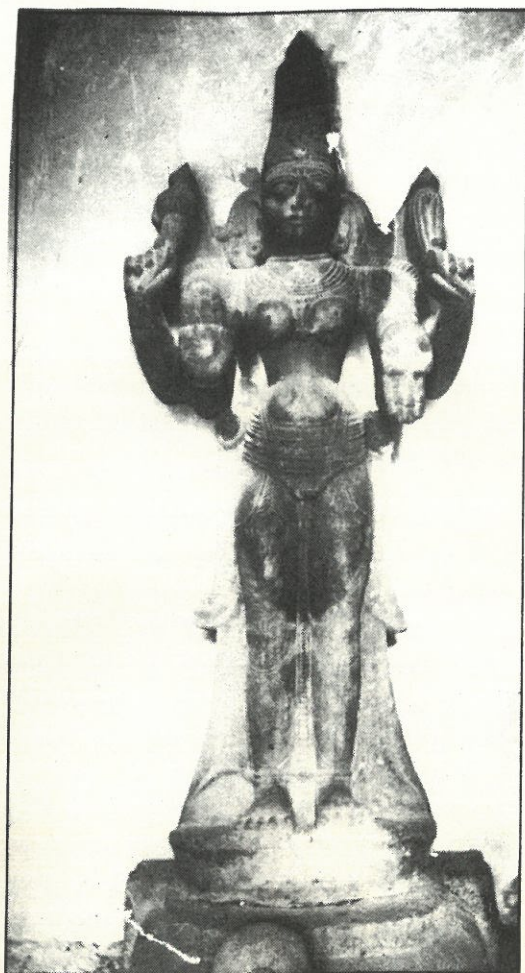
Dvāra-devatā



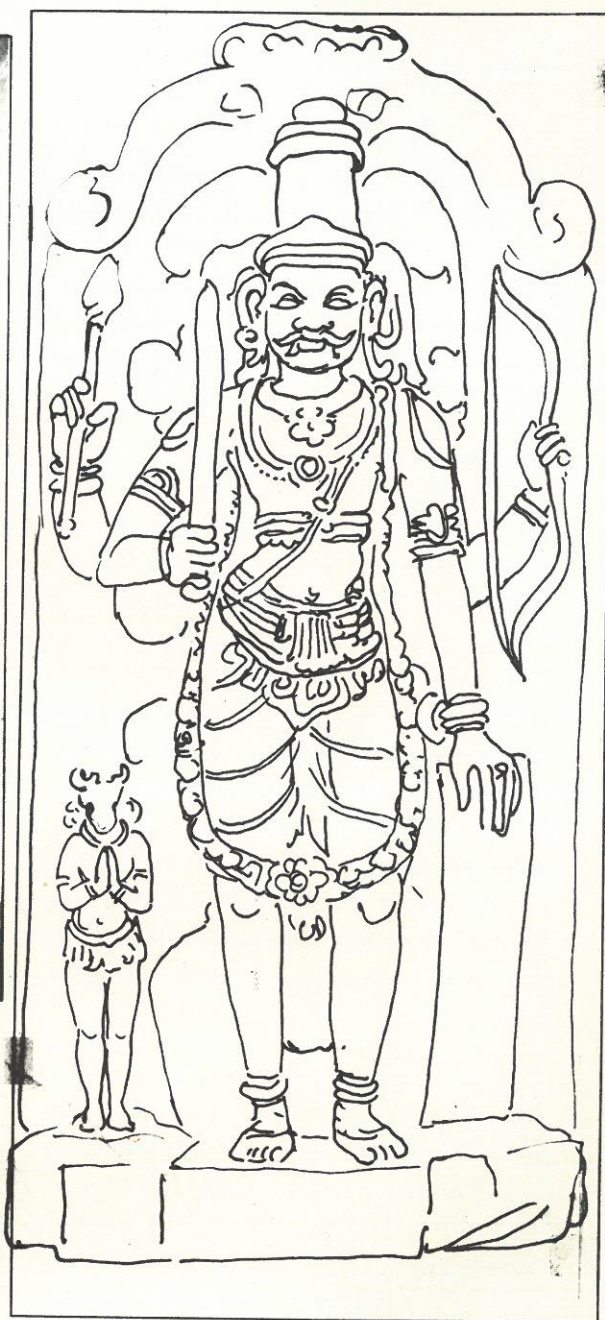
Devī as pārśva-devatā



Devī as Śivakāmī



ŚAKTI (in Uttara-merūr temple)



Folk-hero Vīrabhadra
(Hampi Museum, Kāmalāpura)

CHAPTER NINE

THE FOLK CONTEXT

India is known as the land of temples. But the world knows only its great temples, the temples that are vast complexes of stylized structures, much of which, however, appears today irrelevant or unused. They are in fact excesses of human effort, designed more for monumental effect than for utility. They are shrines to be seen and admired rather than worshipped in. They were products of political fortunes, economic affluence and technical competence. Royal patronage and craft-guilds encouraged a degree of sophistication that was not only beyond the comprehension of the lay folk but was obviously unrelated to their normal needs.

More numerous and more significant than these great temples are the mean shrines that one finds on the road-side or in remote villages. They articulate a more authentic urge and answer a more genuine need. They are not creations of artistic imagination or aristocratic fancy, but are spontaneous and natural.

They belong to small homogenous groups of uncritical people whose attachments are narrow but intense. These are the folk shrines; and they reveal a

remarkable continuity. They persist with an unusual vigour, and exhibit an unmistakable relevance.

To understand this apparent paradox, it is necessary to consider two aspects of Indian life; its character of being an ethnic and cultural mosaic, and its essentially rural slant. India presents a population that is a tangled web of racial admixture. The process of racial admixture began over seven thousand years ago and has since been a continuous one. It is thus that Indian culture has become a veritable museum of beliefs and practices, customs and codes of conduct, approaches and achievements.

In the field of religion especially, the outsider is likely to despair at the wide variety of conceptions and aspirations, and at their more varied incarnation in shrines and rituals. Rural-urban distinction has always been fundamental in India, although the trend from rural to the urban, from folk to the sophisticated, is widely in evidence all over the country. The village is functionally a small group, more homogenous than otherwise, isolated by and large, and governed by direct person-to-person relation. Rural life is ruled

by kinship ties and intimate interests and attachments.

The great temples that steal the show are characteristically urban in their emphasis; and each of them reflects a regional culture that can almost be described as unique. They are sophisticated institutions. Art, economy, industry, craft, social organization and political involvements have got mixed up here with purely religious feelings and sentiments. They reflect predominantly urban needs, regional orientations, and situational pressures.

They are creatures of time, and bear markedly the impact of the 'spirit' of the times. That is why they lose their relevance when the time passes. It is usual for them to get ruined, more by neglect than by vandalism. They thus succeed in becoming more of show-pieces than they were originally intended! They exhibit the 'syndrome of decay'.

The folk shrines, on the other hand, continue as they have always been: simple, serene, unsophisticated and intensely human. These shrines do not lose their relevance, because their folk character does not weaken. All temples, great or small, have an essential appeal to the people in whose neighbourhood the temples are located. But sophistication can wedge a gulf between the structure and its function. Great and mighty temples may be historically significant, but they are devoid of the folk content because of sophistication: they cease to be mean-

ingful to the people who live in its neighbourhood.

Sophistication has played its role at several stages of our religious evolution; but there is a persistence of the most primitive of the assumptions and aspirations beneath the veneer of sophistication. The most primitive can survive the stresses of change only when it is also the most valid in the folk context. The most modern man can survive only because the most ancient instincts are alive in him. The solution to man's problems is always archaic.

The primitive is not to be confused with the 'backward', 'savage' or 'childish'. The primitive is not even pre-literate. It is not merely a condition that is antecedent to modifications and developments. It is the condition that is natural, original and authentic. It is, for this reason, simple and devoid of later accretions and reinforcements that derive from sophistication.

What is primitive may appear irrational and uncritical. It would be more proper to describe it as arational and acritical, for it is not a matter of deficiency but it relates to the folk temperament that is unsophisticated and unanalytical. The intellect is subordinated to faith, criticism to fervour, nationalism to intensity of attachment. The folk canvas is no doubt narrow, but it is deep. It encourages participation of all members in each of its proceedings. The sophisticated facet insists on greater or lesser depersonalization, while the folk-

primitive seeks the maximization of persons and actualization of individuals.

In many of our temples, it is easy to discern the continuum that obtains between the folk and the sophisticated. For in our religion, the primitive and the advanced co-exist remarkably peacefully. No insider will ever break his neck over this paradox. The sophisticated grows out of the folk, and it is not unnatural that the mother and her child are found together. Religion as it is is stylized, systematized and institutionalized. It is the expression of sophistication. The major religions of the world as we know them today are creatures of the intellect and functions of growth. They are developmental coefficients.

But are they not all derived from, and rooted in, the basic needs and urges enshrined in human constitution. In India, the folk element in religion is ubiquitous and persistent. It is natural, therefore, that the Indian temple has a folk undercurrent despite the sophisticated superstructure. When the superstructure is immense and overpowering, it is sophisticated, whereas when the primitive is abundant and effective it is described as folk.

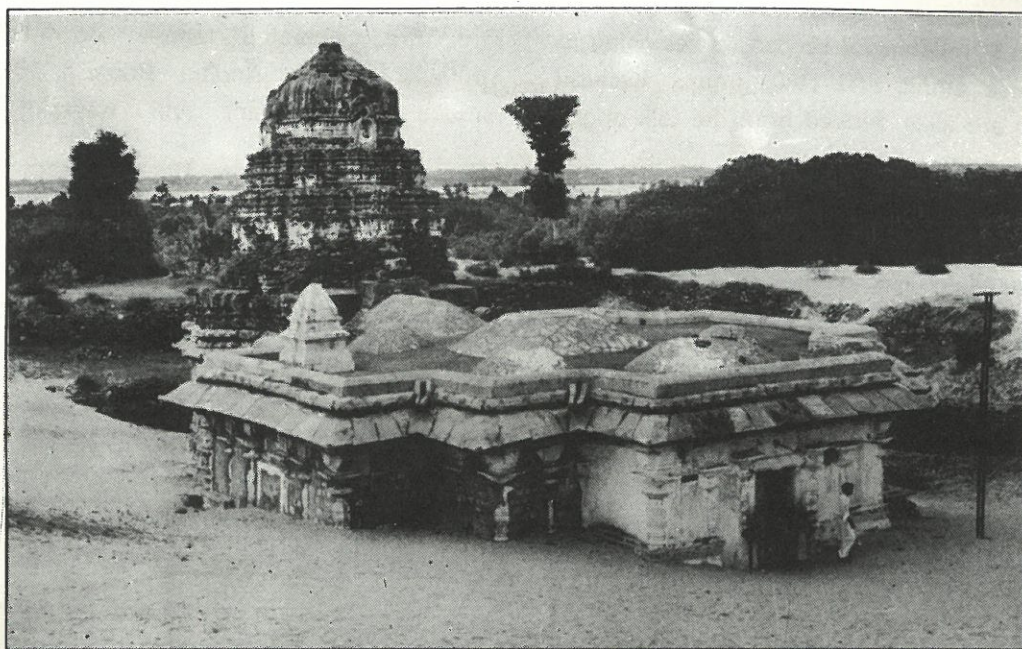
Sophistication projects differences and divisions, regional and temporal. It encourages the conscious processes of deliberate planning, rational understanding, and careful rationalizations. It seeks to introduce coherence and harmony by accommodating changes in a welter of acceptances and rejections. Sophistication

differentiates and attempts to integrate each differentiated unit.

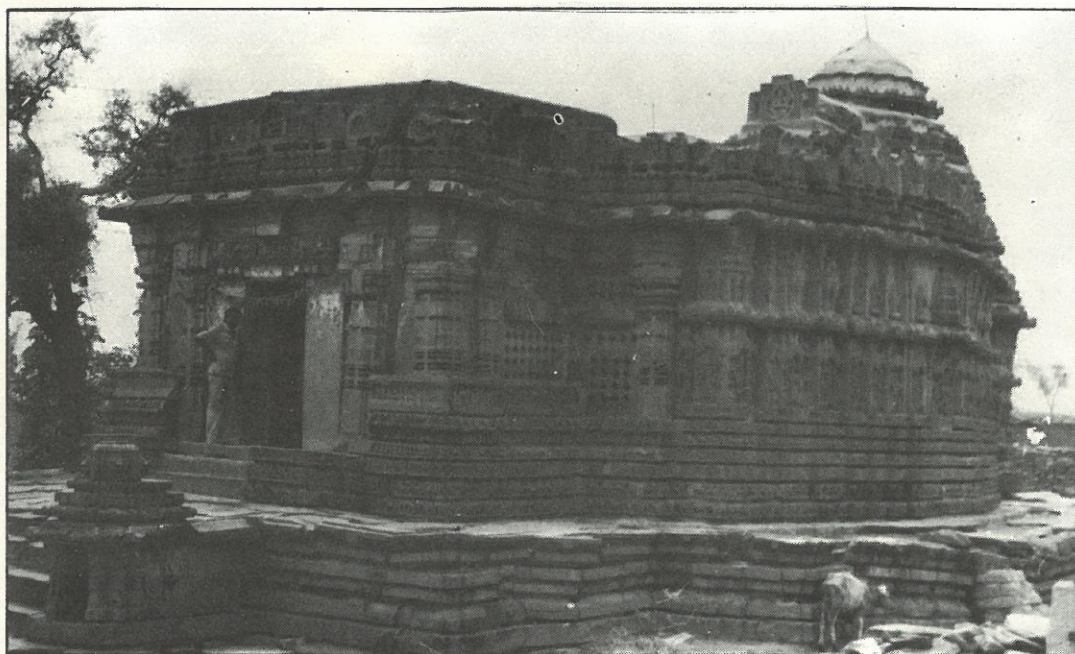
There is, nevertheless, a conscious master-plan which is sought to be actualized; individuals are moulded by conscious motives and are only loosely held together in a community or neighbourhood, also by conscious threads. The folk elements, on the other hand, are guided solely by unconscious processes. They touch the human depth, beyond the differentiations engineered by sophistication. And they invariably encounter the reality of human existence, which is one and undivided. The folk culture is what is common to all cultures, while sophistication isolates each culture and props up its separate existence.

Indian temples have their regional styles. Their structures and functions have changed in accordance with the needs of the times and with the prevailing ethos. The great temples in the far-removed regions of this sub-continent present a variety that is unmistakable. The great temple of Tanjāvūru in Tamil Nāḍu and the great temple of Bhubaneśvar in Orissa differ both in the way they look and in the manner in which they function. Each region in the country has its own characteristic temple-culture.

But it is easily seen that deep beneath this baffling variety is the common undercurrent of folk mores and ways. This is what unites and integrates what otherwise would be a "thing of shreds and patches". Indian temples can all be related with one another, and can become



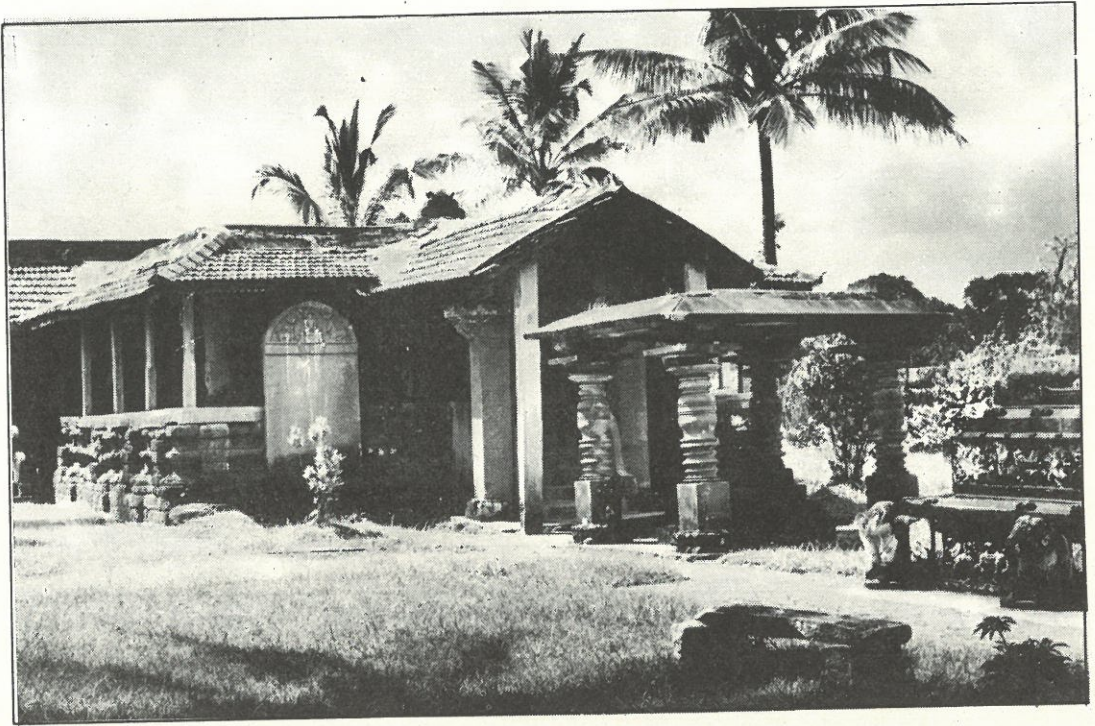
Kīrtinārāyaṇa Temple, Talakāḍu



Channa-keśava temple, Araḷaguppe

equally meaningful to people belonging to diverse ethnic and ethnic groups, because they are alike derived from the folk origin.

Puri, the celebrated temple atop the Tirumalai hills in Āndhra Pradesh, the famous Vindhyavāsini and Kāmākhyā



Jaina shrine (in Humcha)

It is this folk origin of Indian temples that gives them the vitality, the appeal and validity. To the extent that the temple is removed from its folk moonings, it increasingly loses its relevance; the more sophisticated a temple is, the less authentic it becomes and is well on the way to ruin. The ruins may be magnificent, but they are ruins nevertheless. The Indian temples that have the greatest appeal among the Indian masses are those that have retained intact their intimate contact with their folk origins. Consider, as instances, the great temple of Jagannātha at

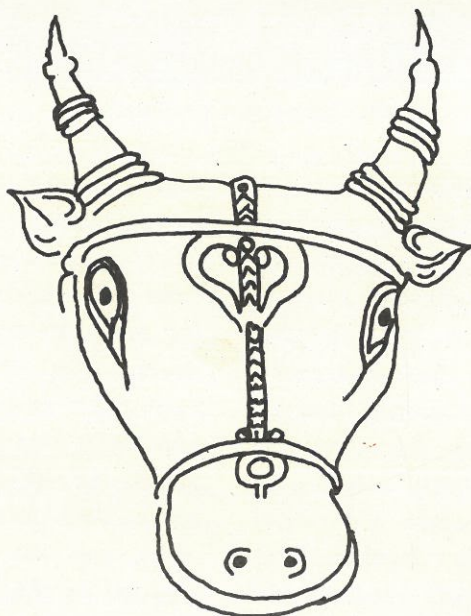
temples, the Meenākshi temple at Madurai in Tamil Nāḍu, the Kālī temple in Calcutta, and Vaishṇavī-devī shrine in Kāshmir. If we examine the cults that are peculiarly associated with these shrines and the seemingly strange practices that are prevalent in them, we would not fail to discover folk elements that are not only dominant but universal. The folk elements are dominant because they concern the basic human urges, and they are universal because of the same reason.

The various temples in India that continue to be popular (not among the

tourists but among the devotees) are like so many peaks on a mountain range. They are distinct inasmuch as they stand out separately, apart from each other in space and time; but their separate existences are made possible by the continuous folk mass that spread uniformly beneath them. This folk mass comprehends not only the unsophisticated, unanalytical bulk of our population (strewn over different geographical areas, belonging to several linguistic zones, accommodated in diverse caste groups and exhibiting different degrees of urbanization) but the so-called tribals also.

The tribal population in India today has been estimated to be about forty million; it is large, relative to Indian population. It is also diverse, about four hundred tribes inhabiting different regions and speaking different languages. It is important to note that tribals are not 'outsiders' to the general mass of our unsophisticated, unanalytical population.

They represent an earlier phase of our life that has somehow survived till our own day. We were all tribals once upon a time, but we managed to become increasingly sophisticated and leave behind our tribal stage. But some of our customs and practices today, both at home and



Mahishandāy mask



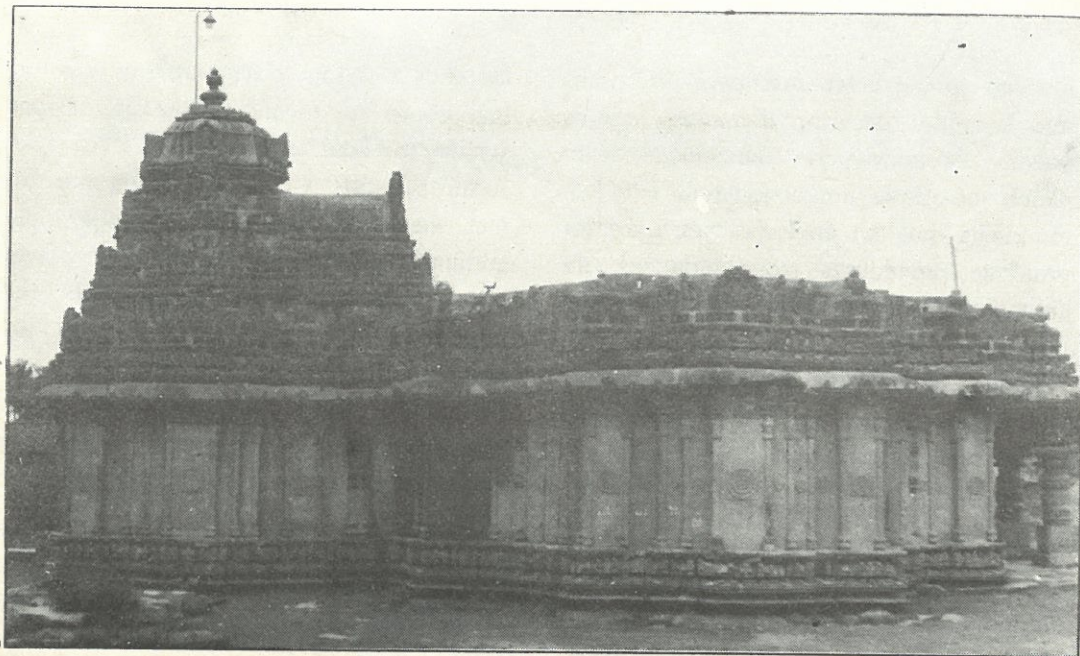
Bhūta-sthāna, Dharmasthala

in the community, distinctly reveal our tribal background; especially our religious assumptions and aspirations, however concealed by layers of modernity, hearken to the tribal moorings. In many of the great temples (such as the Jagannātha temple at Puri, Vindhyavāsini temple, Kāmākhyā temple, and the Tirumalai Temple) we find even today survivals of customs and practices which are clearly tribal; and among the devotees that throng at these shrines tribals figure prominently.

It is well-known that the present fabric of Indian population was fashioned out of the tribal-nomadic threads of Negritos (who arrived in India in a remote past from Africa through Arabia, Iran and

Baluchistan), Pro-Australoids (who migrated into India from the West), and other nomadic tribes that streamed into India and settled down here. The population that was more or less well-integrated, incorporating all these tribal hordes, has been called proto-Indic. It is this primitive population that was responsible for the genesis of what may be called Indian culture, the first historical expression of which was the Indus Valley civilization, followed by the Vedic period of reintegration and reorientation around 5000 B.C.

Indian culture is thus basically a tribal culture, individuals owing allegiance to small, close-knit and direct encounter groups. There has been an unbroken continuity of this culture all through our



Lakshmi-narasimha temple at Vighna-sante

history, despite successive spasms of sophistication. Its early phase, characterized as the 'Vrātya', was essentially folk, in its content as well as orientation. It was the pre-sophistication stage. It is interesting that in a medieval grammatical work (Bhaṭṭoji-dikshita's comm. on Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya, 5, 2, 21) we find the explanation of Vrātya as the people who preferred to lead simple lives by manual labour (*śarīrāyāsa*) rather than by the glamour of intelligence (*buddhi vaibhava*). Intelligence did introduce a major shift in emphasis in later times, and the folk character of Indian culture was successfully camouflaged by aspects of sophistication.

Temples in India began as elements of folk culture, incidental to the 'Vrātya' temperament. They were structures that

were designed to fulfil simple and direct needs of small groups of closely-knit people. They were thus no more than mean shrines, often in jungles, on the outskirts of villages, or in the centre of the tribal settlements. They were mainly enclosures facilitating periodical congregations, around a cult-object more frequently improvised for the occasion than permanently fixed. Rituals were naturally more important than the icons, although icons themselves were looked upon with especial reverence and fear.

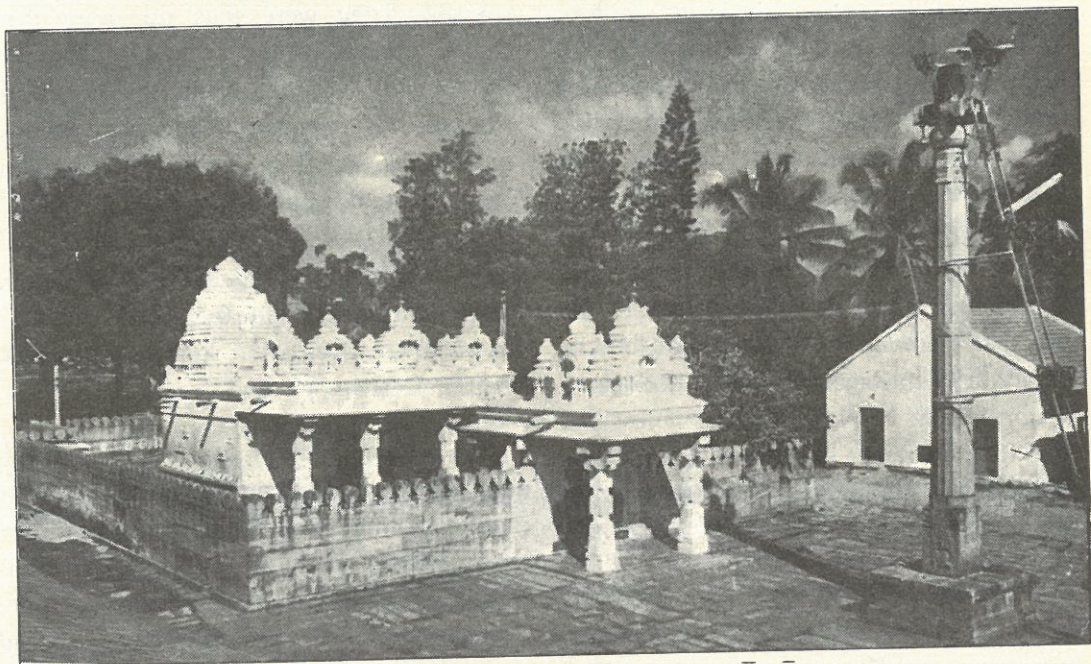
A shrine is the material basis for an unusual or supernatural presence. This presence may be spontaneous and may permanently abide in a place (*sanctum*) or in an object (*icon*). Alternately, it may be invoked on occasions by a special procedure known as ritual. The folk shrine

answers to the latter description. It comes into being as occasion demands, and its validity depends upon the efficacy with which the rituals are conducted. The folk temple is thus an enclosure set apart for ritualistic procedures (songs, dances, incantations, magical acts and so on). The enclosure itself is not regarded with religious sentiments; it acquires sanctity when it becomes the scene of rituals and ceremonial congregations.

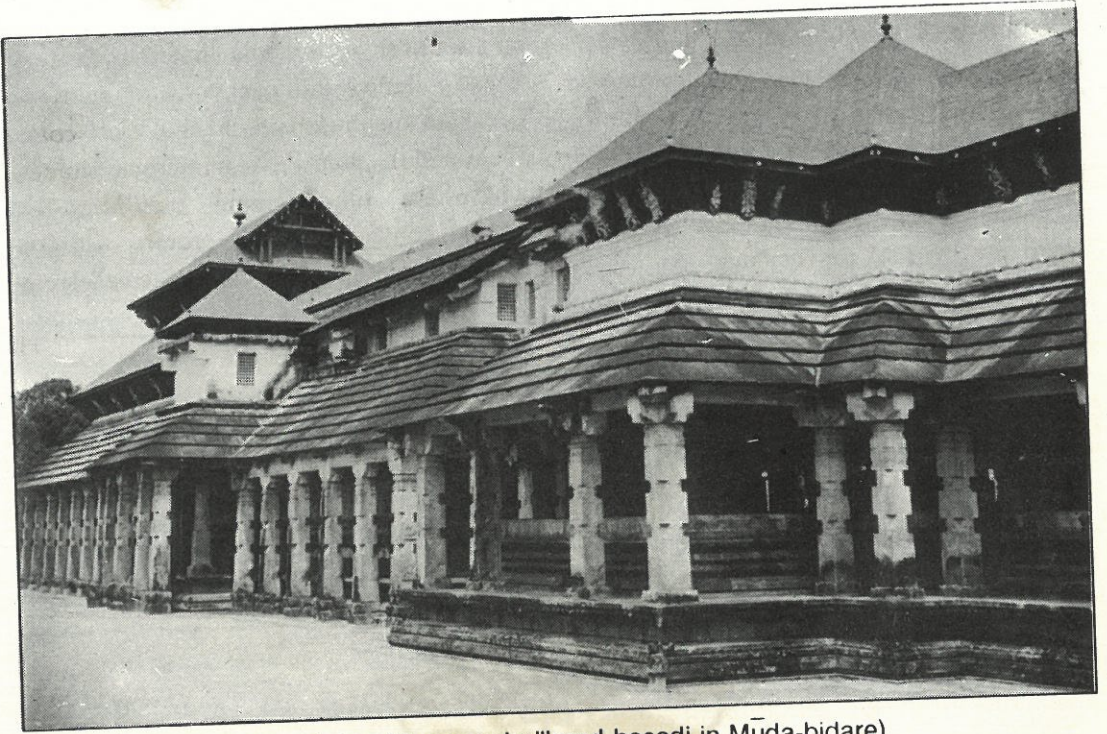
Anthropologists characterize primitive beliefs and practices as animistic, an expression that has acquired a rather unfavourable value. Animism is, as a matter of fact, a belief that all things, even the supposedly inanimate objects, are animated by life in their essential nature. Some cultures, however, identify

life with a 'living soul', and thus animism has come to mean attribution of personality or soul to all objects around us. Anthropologists are prone to ignore the fact that such attribution is not indiscriminate, unaltered or universal. It is only some objects that are selected for this attribution and the attribution is accomplished by rituals. The emphasis is not so much on the presence of the animating principle as on the manner in which it is actualized.

Malinowski hit upon a truth when he said that magic and animism go together to constitute man's response to his sense of insecurity in the world, although the famous anthropologist did not realize the full import of this clubbing of the terms together. Magic derives its rationale from



Raṅganātha temple in Raṅgāpura (Tīpaṭūr taluk)



Jaina shrine (Thousand pillared basadi in Mūḍa-bidare)

banglès, anklets etc) are kept there; it is called the 'treasure' (bhaṇḍāra) of the spirit, whom the dancer impersonates.

Such shrines were originally thatched huts (kottige or 'shed') which were more in the nature of store-houses than spots of worship. During special occasions, they would construct large and tastefully decorated pandals, not only to provide space for the dance-rituals but to accommodate large numbers of people that would gather. The old name for such assemblies was 'ayana' which later came to mean 'festival' (utsava). The place housing the thatched hut (or the brick and mortar building with a circular tiled roof, as it came to be later) and including the area necessary for the pandal to be

occasionally erected was consecrated as the shrine. It was consecrated only in the sense that it was kept apart for this purpose, and it was out of bounds for people who were unclean or outside the tribe. It was a community enclosure, not owned by any individual but belonging to the whole group or tribe. The rituals were occasions for all the members of the tribe to assemble and participate in the proceedings.

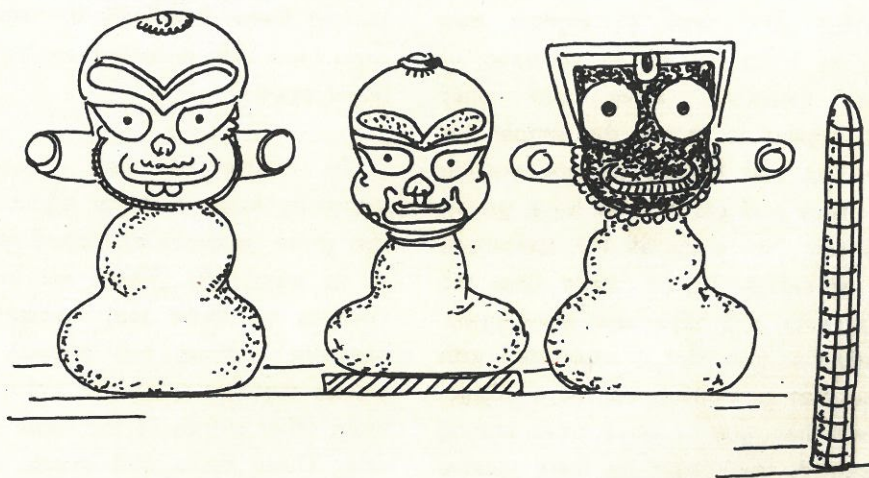
Usually the enclosure was under or near a large tree, and the tribal regard that was accorded to the enclosure was shared by the tree. Oftentimes, the enclosure was devoid of any material structure such as the shrine-hut or the fence around the enclosure: the enclosure

was an abstract entity, identified by the people solely by folk memory. In such a case, the tree associated with the enclosure would naturally assume considerable importance: it stood for the sacred enclosure, and thus partook of the sanctity of the enclosure.

The sacred enclosure would readily materialize during festivals or occasional ceremonies, and hold the attention of the people. The enclosure came to be known as 'mandapa', which means the area which constitutes the very essence of tribal existence. Decoration of the shrine, dance of the priest whom the spirit was sup-

posed to posses, oracular consultations with him, fire-walking, animal sacrifices, community feast and other tribal entertainments would highlight the occasional functions within the enclosure.

During the rest of the time, the tree would be there to remind the tribals of the sanctified enclosure. It would be there as a mute but interested witness to all the proceedings that would go on during the festive occasions inside the pandal. The tree would be a more continuous and more concrete presence. The pandal would appear and disappear; but the tree would continue for all time. The spirit



Images in Puri temple
(Balabhadra, Subhadra, Jagannātha and Sudarshana on ratna-vedi)

that would be invoked during the ritual, and that would possess the dancing priest (*pātri*) on the occasion; would otherwise reside in the tree. Thus the tree came to represent the spirit, or at any rate its natural habitat, and evoked among the unsophisticated folk feelings of awe, fear and reverence.

The spirit that resided in the tree has no form; but the form and movements of the tree would represent the presence and activities of the spirit. The spirit was the central concept in tribal life; it not only integrated the individual and protected him from dangers and death, but organized the simple society of the tribe. By an act of transference the tree became the central fact in tribal life.

Scholars who seek to explain tree worship in India by taking recourse to animistic, totemistic, erotic and other theories appear to ignore the simple but obvious fact that Indians do not worship all the trees and plants that have grown on this soil. Not even all the specimens of the so-called 'sacred' trees (like the *asvattha*, *vaṭa* and *bilva*) are worshipped. It is only the tree that is associated with a shrine that is worshipped. In a village, not more than two or three trees among the hundreds that might be there receive special attention and devotion. A tree does not become sacred merely because it is a tree: its sanctity is dependent upon its association with a sacred enclosure. We should also remember in this context that most of the famous temples in India have their own specific trees, and that

these trees are all called 'enclosure trees' (*sthala-vṛksha*). Another tree of the same species growing outside the temple enclosure will fail to receive any attention! It is the enclosure that makes all the difference.

When a mighty tree is not to be found in or around the consecrated enclosure, the place is identified by a rock that might be there, or an unusual boulder, or an odd-looking large stone. This would discharge the same function as the tree: it would be the normal habitat of the spirit, and it would be the guardian angel in the enclosure. The rock or stone represents the spirit, and merits worship. Again, not every rock or stone in the country is worshipped by Indians, notwithstanding the frequent charge of barbaric animism against them. It is only the stone that is associated with a sacred enclosure that is worshipped.

In course of time, however, the enclosure loses its tribal significance, and the stone becomes enshrined in a temple in its own right. There are innumerable temples in India that contain in their sanctum nothing but natural rocks or stones that are otherwise indistinguishable from other stones of the same shape and size. These rocks and stones, untouched by the sculptor's chisel or hammer, are regarded as icons or rather as aniconic representations of divinity. There are instances of famous temples dedicated to several sophisticated gods and goddesses (like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Durgā and Subrahmanya), which house in their

sanctums only rocks, or large or small stones: Kedāreśvara in Kedārnāth, Viśvanātha in Vārāṇasi, Kāmākhyā in Kāmarūp, Mahākālā in Ujjain, Narasiṃha in Ahobilam, Mukāmbikā in Kollūr, Gaṇapati in Kumbhāsi (Āneguḍḍe) and Maṅgalā-devi of Mangalore are among the better known of such temples.



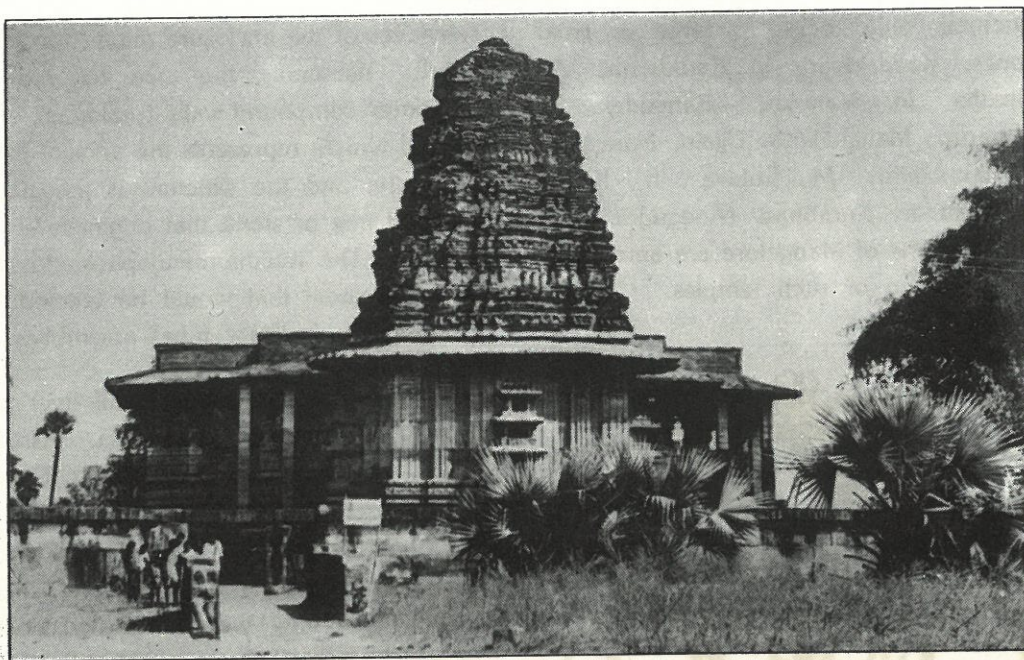
The wooden block carved as Jagannātha

Here indeed is to be found the genesis of liṅga worship in our country. We had occasion to deal with it in an earlier context. But it should be mentioned here that the oldest shrines are those that have been built over rocks and stones, and the purpose was to commemorate the tribal significance of these stones as repre-

sentatives of the enclosure meant for tribal rituals. Oftentimes, the area covered by the outer compound-walls (prākāras) of a stylized temple represents the ancient tribal enclosure; and the sanctum is associated with the tree or stone that originally stood within it. The mukha-maṇḍapa stands for the old pandal that would be erected on occasions to facilitate tribal assemblies.

There are several shrines all over the country, (especially in Orissa, Assam, Tamiḷ-nāḍu and along the West Coast) which have upright stones or wooden blocks in their central cells. Their names as well as the rituals associated with them suggest that they were originally blocks on which animals were sacrificed during tribal rituals. Such a block would be held as especially sacred during ceremonies, and on other days the block would be an object of tabu.

To enforce the tabu restrictions concerning physical contact, the block would be fenced off, thus providing the original model for the sanctum. The stone or wooden block on which the animals were sacrificed would soon be enclosed in a shrine, and the animal sacrifice would require another wooden or stone block in front of it and in the open. This latter contrivance was the prototype of the later altar (bali-pīṭha) in the stylized temple. Interesting and relevant is Āgama description of the altar as the duplicate of the sanctum. It is a custom in many temples in the South as well as the North for the devotees to break the coconut and place their offerings at the altar.



Rāmappa Temple, Palampet

The stone or wooden blocks over which shrines were later constructed came also to be carved in course of time. Early carvings were naturally minimal and suggestive; they were also symbolic. The form that the sculptor sought to give to the block depended, among other things, upon the shape and size of the block itself. This is how in many celebrated shrines, while the exterior is most exquisitely fashioned, elaborately planned and delicately carved, the icon in the sanctum is aesthetically crude, often incompletely planned and delicately carved, the icon in the sanctum is aesthetically finished. It is rarely that a grand temple also houses a fine icon in its sanctum. The reason for this anomaly is not far to seek: the block on which the icon is

carved is a tribal left-over, while the temple structures are products of sophistication. The ancient temples grew over the icons. But the modern temple will import an image into its central shrine after the temple is completed; the image in them will also be a sophisticated work of art.

The form that the sculptor gave to the wooden or stone block that survives the disappearance of the tribe follows the natural grains and the shape that it has. The sectarian prejudice plays a part in the sculptor's mission but the part is a subdued one. More often than not, no image in the sanctum in any of the ancient and celebrated temples answers accurately to Āgamic injunctions or fulfils neatly the sectarian expectations. It is a

historical fact that many temples have been appropriated by different sects successively, and the central image has had frequently to shift its sectarian affiliations. Notwithstanding the sculptor's attempt to give the stone or wooden block a form that the devotees can understand, appreciate and remember, the fact that the block itself was held sacred gave the sculptor some freedom.

Whatever the original shape or form of the block or icon in the central shrine, the custom of covering it over by a mask helped the devotee get an image of it that is stylized and familiar. The mask also is a left-over from the tribal background. Masks emerged in the context of dances and sacred dramas that were parts of the ritual conducted within the enclosure.

It may be recalled that drama as an art-form grew out of the primitive religious rituals. This is how drama in India, Greece, Japan and Europe developed. In the Dionysian cult, the main feature of the worship was a procession of dancers, intoxicated by wine and wearing animal masks. In fact, they were called goat-men. Wearing a mask symbolized that the dancer was possessed by the animal or god whose mask he was wearing; it meant that his physical frame was 'taken over' by the animal or god for the time being. This is what the Greeks called 'inspiration' (literally meaning "one who answers"); he was 'double-faced' because he invariably wore a mask (persona) that hid his real face and projected a false one.

Many ancient tribes of Africa, Australia and the Pacific Islands seek the help of mask-wearing shamans during their daily life. The tribals of New Guinea fashion their masks from human skulls. The religious dances in Tibet, Sri Lanka, British Columbia, Western and Central Africa and among the Red Indians are dominated by masks, most of which are designed to strike awe and terror in the hearts of the participant tribals. In ancient Egypt and Greece, it was a custom to bury their dead kings and queens covering their faces with golden masks.

Indian masks go back to a very distant past and have survived to our own day. The Ongs inhabiting the Andamans conceal their faces in thick paints, as also the Konds of Madhya Pradesh, and in a sophisticated and aesthetically alluring manner the Kathakali dancers of Kerala. The wooden masks of the Bhuiya, Muria and Baiga tribes are worn while hunting or while dancing in certain magical procedures like exorcism and spirit propitiation. Along the Himalayan ranges, many tribes have evolved an extensive variety of masks for different occasions. Masks are still worn in India during religious dances, and in dance-dramas with mythological themes.

Most of the religious masks are those of animals, with human attributes ascribed to them. In the regions along the West Coast (Tulu-nāḍu and Kerala), the employment of masks during religious ceremonies is universal, and many of them are animal masks: pig (Pañjurli),



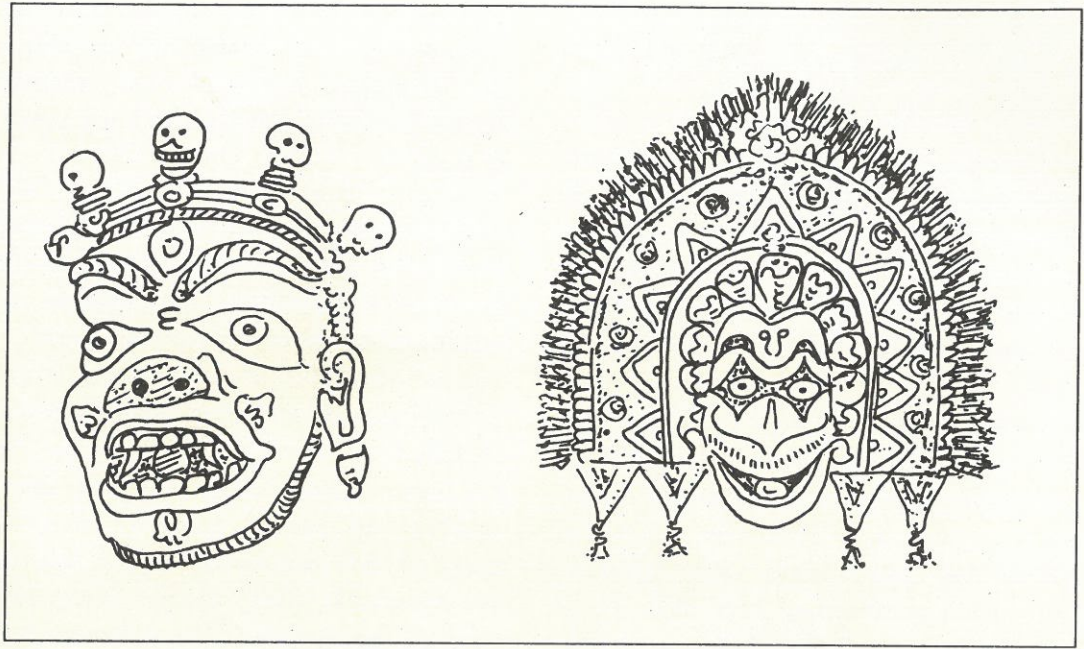
Funeral mask worn by the Mexico tribes



Funeral mask of the Ibo-tribal dancers in Nigeria



Funeral masks from West Africa



Masks

tiger (Pili- bhūta), horse (Jarandāye), bull (Nandi-goṇa), and buffalo (Mahishandaye) are well known in Tuḷu-nāḍu. Serpant (Nāga-kanye), tiger (Puli-teyyam) and monkey (Bali-teyyam) are common in North Malabār in Keraḷa. These animals are elevated to the rank of divinities and their masks are worshipped in the shrines.

The important feature to be noticed in such worship is that the masks are often represented as complete animals, effigies of which are made and installed in temples. The background belief was that the spirits, who are formless, employ these animals as their characteristic vehicles, and wander about the tribal area, guarding the devotees and warning them against misfortune. As the spirits are not visible, the forms of animals which are supposed

to carry them around are used as masks to indicate the presence of these spirits. By a natural process of extension, the animals themselves come to possess the attributes of the spirits.

But the actual animals roaming about do not receive any worship; it is only their iconic representations, effigies or masks that are considered as possessing the power and prestige of the spirits. As in the case of the sacred trees, the sacred animals are those that are involved in the rituals conducted in the sacred enclosure. Any pig that one sees is not Pañjurli, and any tiger in the jungle does not become Pili-bhūta. Pañjurli's pig is an iconic one and Pili- bhūta resides in the tiger representation, as they are made to function within the enclosure or shrine

(sāna). The pig or tiger that represents the spirit is not an ordinary one, but possesses extraordinary powers that other animals of the species do not.

It is usual, therefore to represent these extraordinary spirit-representing animals in unusual modes. The Nandi-goṇa or the Bull-spirit, for instance, may have five heads. Or the animal may be represented as part human: Pañjurli has the human body with the head of a wild pig; Hanumān-teyyam is in man's form with the monkey-head. This is the origin of composite figures of divinities like Haya-grīva, Varāha, Hanumān, Garuda Narasiṃha, and Gaṇeśa, who figure in the Indian pantheon of later days. There can be little doubt that these were only masks used by the folk dancers once upon a time, for in all these composite forms it is only the head that is animal.

There is an additional circumstance which supports the folk origin of these later and popular divinities. During the special occasions (like Kola, Nema, Ayana and Baṇḍi), when the priest impersonates the spirit (called 'bhūtada māṇi' in Kannaḍa) and dances around, long legends in the local dialect (Tuḷu) are recited, extolling the qualities of the spirit and recounting his advent and exploits. These recitations are called 'Pāḍ-dānas', which are recited during his impersonation and propitiation. This appears mainly to achieve the audio-visual fixation of the image of the spirit in the minds of the hundreds of tribal participants that would assemble on the occasion. An examination

of the content and style of some of these pāḍ-danas will clearly bring out the dominant element of folk-lore in them. Such association of folk-lore with religious dances can be found among all the tribals in India.

This seems to be an early strata of what may be described as religious literature or mythology. The Purāṇas as legendary accounts of divinities with a curious admixture of history and myth have indeed grown out of early traditions contained in the folk lore such as the Pāḍ-dana. Human beings and gods come together and transact business without a sense of the paradoxical or the fear of the improbable. They discuss, argue and conclude transactions. The dialogues that form part of the Pāḍ-danas and that are independently instituted as standard verbal exchanges (nuḍi-kattu) between the spirit and the tribal chief remind us strongly of the dialogal hymns in Rigveda.

There are about twenty such hymns incorporated in the Rig-Vedic collection. Important ones are those between Yama the god of death and his sister Yamī (10, 10) Urvaśī the celestial nymph and Purūravas the earthly monarch (10, 95), Viśvāmitra the sage and the river (3, 33), Agastya the sage and his wife Lopāmudrā (1, 179), the heavenly hound Saramā and the Paṇi marauders (10, 108). These dialogues are no doubt odd in the Vedic context, and the reason for their inclusion in this poetical corpus is uncertain. They are obviously remnants of folklore, if we trust the great Vedic commentator

Sāyaṇa, who attempts to recall and provide the legendary framework for them. Do they not suggest the existence of an immense oral literature, very much like the Tuḷu Pāḍ-danas in both structure and function, in the days much anterior to the compilation of Vedic hymns? Do

they not also indicate that the context in which these dialogal and narrative hymns were recited was the religious dance-drama in a tribal assemblage, again like the bhūta festivals in Tuḷu-naḍu or Keraḷa?



CHAPTER TEN

CULTIC INVOLVEMENTS

The early shrine was under the tree that stood within the tribal enclosure for religious rites. The celebrity of the tree was derived from its location in the sacred site, and the sanctity of the shrine from its association with the tree. The shrine in its initial phase was just a crude little hut, covering a stone or rock which represented the guardian spirit of the tribe. The rock was a miniature mountain, and the tree symbolized tribal life. The rock under the tree was the static aspect, while the tree itself was dynamic. It is not coincidence that in the tribal imagination the spirit of the dead passed into mountains and trees. The tribal shrine under the tree was also the material basis for ancestor worship. It was the abode of all the earlier heroes of the tribe.

The occasion of funeral was also part of the religious life of the primitives, as it continues to be with the sophisticated. As the corpse was carried to the tree in an improvised chariot (*ratha* or *baṇḍī*), there were dances in which masks were worn. There were also songs eulogizing the valour and victories of the dead hero, recalling his tribal loyalty and assuring him

of the tribal aid in his journey beyond death. The funeral procession would conduct the dead man to the mountain or to the tree. Later, the custom of erecting a mound over the spot where the dead one is buried, and planting a tree there continued this compulsive association of a tribal with the tree and the rock under it. The *chaitya-vṛkshas* and *sthala-vṛkshas* that abound in India are to be traced to this custom.

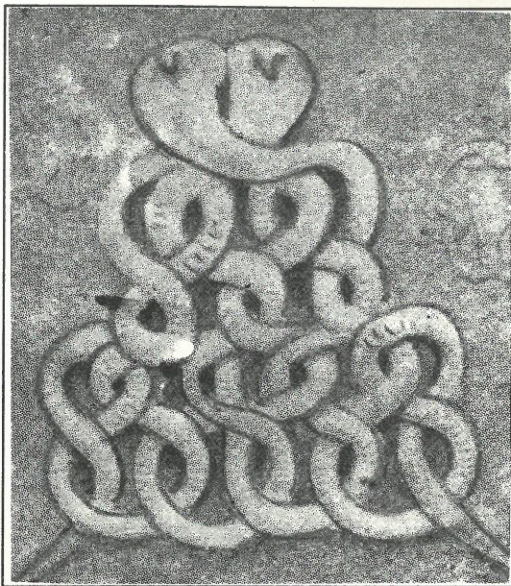
It is an ancient and universal symbolism that the tree and the serpent are twin spirits. It is also so well known that it hardly needs elaboration here. Big trees and huge ant-hills being together is common sight in India; the forest tribes are naturally impressed by the serpents that freely move around amidst the branches and foliage of giant trees. There is no doubt that serpents are symbols of fertility; but the symbolism is by no means erotic. Serpents as religious symbols have been found in India from the days of the Indus Valley civilization. The seals found in Mohenjo-dāro and Harappa depict close association of trees with serpents. Vedic hymns contain references to the dragon *Vritra* or *Ahi* who is a powerful rival to

Indra himself. The serpent lore in India is not only vast and varied, but very old and persisting.

A life-size stone sculpture of the hooded serpent was found at Chargoan and has been preserved in the Mathurā Museum. Belonging to the age of Huvishka, the Scythian monarch, it bears an inscription which tells us that the brothers Senahasti and Bhonuka got this image made as a "propitiation to the worshipful Nāga" (*priyatti bhagavā Nāgā*). This suggests the great antiquity of serpent-slabs (*nāga-silā*) as objects of worship in the country. Not only are serpent-slabs installed under trees and within temple-enclosures as votive monuments or to discharge vows, but serpent motifs are involved in decorations, ornaments, dress the embellishments in religious as well as secular contexts.



The Nāga icon in the Brahmasthāna shrine in Posrālu



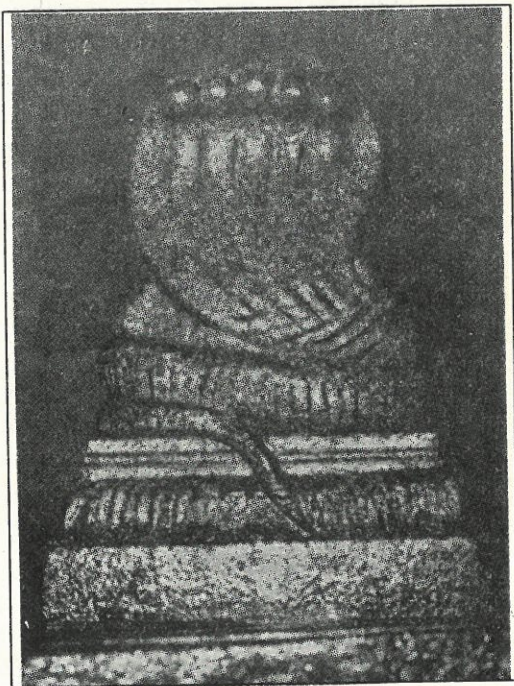
The serpent couple in the well of Mañchālanakappa in Bankapura

More interestingly, there are shrines in India, especially in the South, containing in the sanctum huge ant-hills, which are worshipped as Valmīkesvara ('The Lord of the Ant-hill'). Images of Subrahmaṇya (Skanda) are frequently found in serpentine shape, either entirely so or as half-human and half-serpent. Śiva shrines encourage installation of serpent-icons within its precincts, because Śiva is supposed to wear serpents as his ornaments. The serpent-idea enters the Viṣṇu temple, as the bed of the Lord (*Ananta-sayana*). Śakti and the serpent are intimately associated in legend and iconography. Ancient wooden images of Durgā found in Kerala and Tuḷu-nāḍu have the serpent symbol on their forehead and in their crown.

The serpents are frequently represented in stone-sculptures with five or seven hoods, and in diverse kinds of knots. It

is usual to depict two serpents in amorous embrace; it is also usual to represent serpents with human heads and torsoes. Sometimes the serpent is shown as seated in the form of a *liṅga*. Infrequently but interestingly, serpents are fancied as having the heads of cocks for their hoods; in the Jaina framework, a cock is pictured as having a serpent's head (*kakkūṭa-sarpa*). Many are the ways in which the serpent - idea is worked out in Indian art and architecture. Despite its apparently independent representation, the underlying association of the serpent-figure with the mountain-concept cannot be missed. The Sanskrit expression 'Nāga' has a dual connotation; serpent and mountain. Numerous are the literary images which

involve this association. Serpent -sculptured stone slabs are made to look like mountains installed under trees, thus recalling to our minds the old tribal situation.

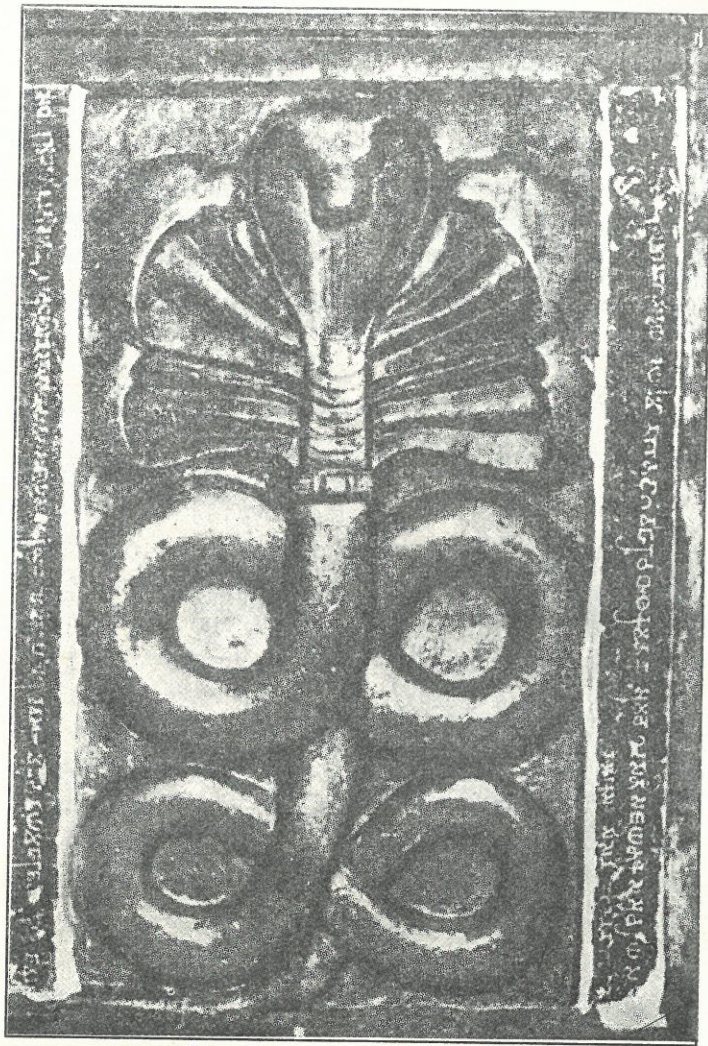


Another Nāga Image in the form of a mountain in Posrāḷu



The serpent sitting in the shape of a *liṅga*, the icon worshipped in the Subrahmaṇya temple in the coastal region of Karnaṭaka

In the coastal South, the 'serpent-dance ritual' continues to be a prestigious and compulsive procedure. It has all the old-world charm and tabu, and it is typically tribal. Known as Nāga- maṇḍala, it is performed not in an enclosed shrine but in the open yard consecrated for the purpose. The site becomes a shrine as long as the ritual lasts. It is usual to construct an inner *pandal* measuring 32'

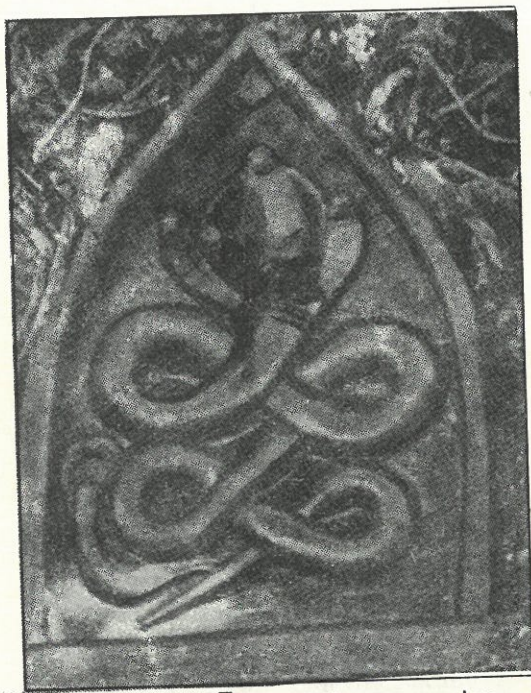


The Nāga slab from Banavāsi (Karnāṭaka)

x 14' extended on all sides by several feet to accommodate a fairly large gathering: it is a tribal affair and people from neighbouring villages stream in to participate. The pandal is exquisitely decorated, and underneath the pandal the ground is cleaned and prepared for the depiction of an exceedingly intricate, colourful and mystical serpent. The ritual

becomes simple or complex in accordance with the number of 'knots' (pavitra) which are introduced into the coiled body of the serpent. It is simple when there are only four knots in the four quarters: it is styled quarter-maṇḍala. It becomes more complicated when the number of knots increases to eight in eight directions: it is then called half-maṇḍala. Twelve knots

constitute three-quarters - maṇḍala, and sixteen the full-maṇḍala. The depiction of the maṇḍala covers a large area, usually about twelve feet on each side. In the central portion, raised on a small mound, the seven-hooded head of the serpent is painted. The entire maṇḍala is drawn in outline, filled with powdered colours (white, red, yellow, green and black) and tastefully decorated. The area covered by the maṇḍala is enclosed on all sides by heaps of areca-nut flowers (called in the Tulu dialect, hīṅāra).



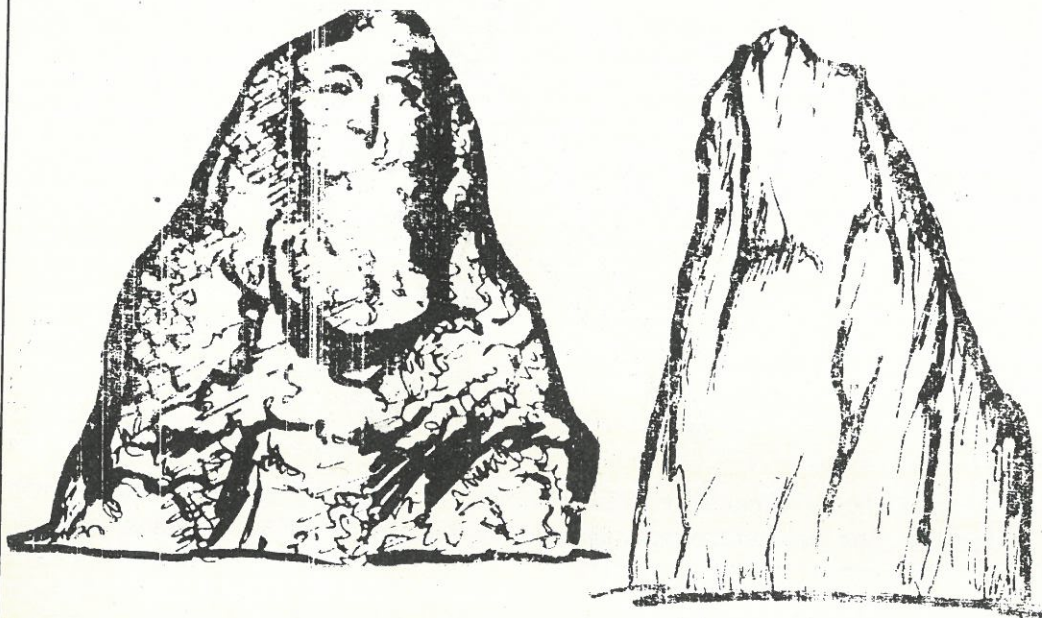
An ancient Nāga-slab from a garden dedicated to the serpents in Nandalikē

The ritual dance is conducted by a priest who gets possessed by the serpent spirit (Nāga - pātri) and two musicians (Vaidyas) who encourage and regulate his

dance by eulogies, dialogues, tauntings and narrative ballads to the accompaniment of curiously weird sounds from the percussion instrument known as ḍakke. The inspired steps of the dancer are strongly reminiscent of the movements of an excited serpent, and the marvellous sequence terminates in oracular consultations. The ritual is wholly tribal, and we see here the remarkable survival of an age-old practice.

Of interest for us in this connection is the idea of a mobile and make-shift shrine. An open shrine is constituted whenever the ritual has to be gone through, and wherever the large assembly of participants can be accommodated. It is the enclosure that is religiously relevant, and not a permanent and icon-enclosing shrine. Later, the shrine got transformed into a building, a habitat for the immobile icon; and the ritual had to be watered down and adapted to suit the limitations of such a structural shrine. The tribal emphasis was on the ritual and not on the shrine, on the function rather than on the structure.

In many a religious ceremony in Indian villages, it is usual for the priest or chieftain to carry on his head a bamboo basket or box in which an image or mask of some divinity, often a goddess, is placed. The bamboo structure is rigged up as a shrine, and the image will often be wooden, roughly carved and rudely decorated. Normally, the image or mask will be kept in the headman's house or in the priest's custody; and there it

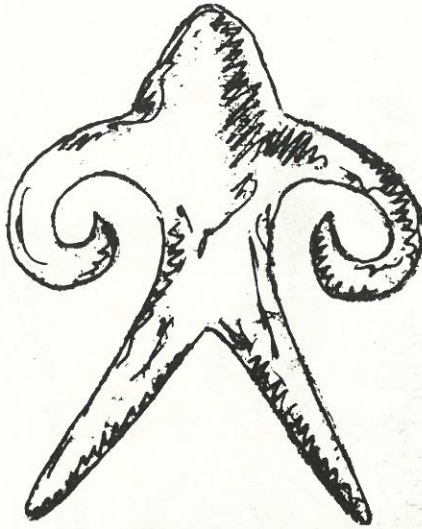


Durga devi image in the temple of Kadri. It is a boulder on which the form of the goddess is carved in rough outline.

The rock resembling an anthill, worshipped as Durga-devi in a temple in Chitrapur

receives little attention and less worship. It acquires importance only during festive occasions when it moves out into the streets to preside over the rituals. Sometimes, an image is got ready only on the eve of such celebrations, in wood, clay or cow-dung, and after the celebrations, in wood, clay or cow-dung; and after the celebrations are over it is promptly discarded. The shrine that houses this image

or mask is constructed only for the occasion. The image lodged in this makeshift and portable shrine is carried about in the village to bless the residents; it may also travel from village to village, if its sphere of influence extends to several villages. In the folk context, the notion of a structural shrine or a permanent icon was a late arrival.



An enigmatic figure fashioned in copper found in the Gaṅgetic plain. It is dated about 1000 B.C. The ideas of the mountain and the tree are cleverly incorporated here.

Despite the settled condition of village life and persistence of folk-ways, the idea of a monumental shrine did not take root till after the urban impact was felt. Serpent's mobility was the dominant image in the folk religious attitudes. The spirits that animated the otherwise uneventful life in the villages, swiftly like breeze, without a known abode or recognizable form but entering anywhere and assuming any form. The village divinities comprehend classes of spirits called yakshas, bhūtas, nāgas and gandharvas. They could be male or female, benevolent or malevolent, charming or dreadful. They could be heroes who once lived on earth or altogether unknown to earthly existence. But they are all strictly territorial in their interest; they set limits to their own



Birē-devaru, portable shrine

spheres of action. They extract obedience and reverence from, and undertake to guard the interests of, a specific tribe or group. They are intimately acquainted with every member of this group, and transact with him directly and materially. They manifest themselves in a variety of uncanny objects and events, warning the devotees or guiding them.

Paradoxically enough, mountains were regarded not only as divinities but as abodes of spirits. Looking upon hills and mountains as gods is an old faith. It was current among many ancient nations, besides India. There were gods which were mountains among the Japanese ('Kami'), Chinese (Shen), Persians (Alburz), Greeks (Olympus), Celts (Poininus), Babylonians (Enlin), Koreans and Semites. The belief was not only universal but persistent in India. The Himālaya, Vindhya, Sahya, Malaya, Kumāra and Śrī Śaila have been sacred from time immemorial. Several tribes, (like Maṇḍas, Santāls, Mihils, Koravas, Kolas, Kurumbas, Malai-pan-turans and Tōḍas) even today worship hills. It is a custom among some tribes in the South (Tōḍas, Baḍagas, Soligas and Kurumbas and others) to invoke the spirit of mountains red place within their settlements. If mountains themselves are immovable, their representative stones are mobile.

Mountains were also connected with the funeral rituals of the tribals. The dead body was dragged to the top of the mountain and left there, the background

belief being the spirit of the dead soars up and resides atop the hill. Mountains were regarded with awe and wonder: they were inscrutable, majestic spirits. If there was not a mountain in the neighbourhood, the tribe would form a mound of earth, or a heap of pebbles and regard it as the replica of the mountain-spirit. The religious ceremonies as well as the funeral rites would be performed in its presence. Every dead person would be marked in a pebble that would be added to the heap. Symbolising the deceased ancestors by stones and pebbles is current even among the sophisticated groups in India. There is also the folk practice of throwing a pebble in the direction of the mountain, after the funeral rites are over; it is symbolic of the spirit flying to the mountain, its natural habitat.

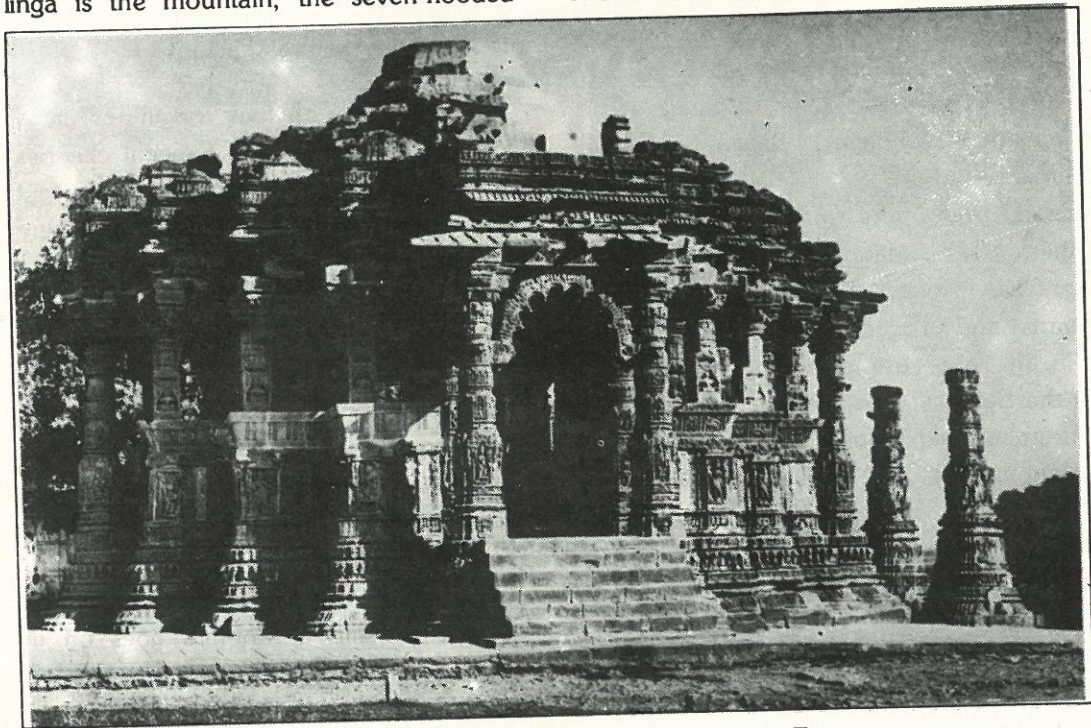
This is the obvious origin of *līṅga* worship in our country. Fanciful theories of its sexual symbolism have been put forward; but it may be mentioned here in passing that they are unwarranted so far as the genesis of *līṅga*-worship is concerned. The *līṅga* is merely the miniature mountain. A look at the ancient specimens of *līṅga* would convince anyone of the monumental significance attached to the *līṅga*-idea. Further, the ant-hill was also regarded as a mountain in miniature. The *līṅga* tended to assume the form of the ant-hill. We have already mentioned that the worship of ant-hills goes on in many shrines in South India. Consider, in this context, the association of serpents with mountains, and of spirits with serpents. Iconographically, *līṅga* and the

serpent-motif have frequently been integrated.

The shrine in the sacred enclosure is itself a symbol of the mountain. The tree and the mountain represent two directions of extension. The tree flows out and extends around; the hidden roots are below and the spreading branches are above. The mountain, on the other hand, closes in as it rises up: it is the dual representation found even in the Indus-valley seals. The sophisticated temple of later times has its *vimāna* in the nature of a mountain peak or a mound, and the *gopura* that soars up; and it has its own the mountain, and the serpent with its hood whipped up as the tree. The *linga* is the mountain, the seven-hooded

serpent that rises above it from behind is the tree.

It would seem outrageous to be told that in a large number of celebrated shrines in India, only blocks of stone or stumps of wood are worshipped. But the fact can hardly be denied. The most famous *Viṣvanātha-linga* in *Vārāṇasī* is just a stone picked up (of course in an age of untold antiquity) from the river-bed of *Narmadā*; and so is the *Mahākāla-linga* in *Ujjain*, whose glory is sung by *Kālidāsa*. The *lingas* worshipped in the great temples of *Kāñchīpuram* and *Rāmeśvaram* are hardened heaps of sand (*saikata*). The popular *Baidyanāth* shrine contains as its main image an uncarved block of granite. The *Narasimha* images in several well-



The ancient sun-temple at Madhora (Gujarāt)

known hill-temples of the South are mere rocks, sometimes with gaping slits in them, or rude pillars with marks of conch and discus on them. The Jagannatha group of images in the famous Puri Temple are wooden blocks, roughly carved. The Devi in the Kāmākhyā temple is a boulder with a crevice in it. Examples could be multiplied to show that the public relevance of a shrine depends not on its iconographic stylization but on its folk character. It is important to recognize that shrines have existed long before craftsmen learnt to build temples. Images have been worshipped even when texts were not there to prescribe their forms.

The mountain idea is also involved in another detail that we find in the present-day temples. The main image, in stone or wood, is described as 'unmoving' (achala or dhruva): it is likened to a mountain (known in Sanskrit as achala), or to the roots of a tree. It does not move out of the sanctum; it is hidden in the sanctum. For processions and for use on festive occasions, another image, usually a metallic one, is employed. This is called 'moving' (chala) or processional (utsava) image. This latter icon derives its appeal only from the 'un-moving', mountainous image in the sanctum, whose strength is due to its cultic association.

Anthropologists (like Ehrenfels) have taken pains to enumerate tribals and 'backwards' in India who are given to the cult of mother-goddesses. They do not know, however, that the cult is not confined to these groups: it is equally

prevalent and is more deep-rooted, among the sophisticated classes also. The appeal of this cult in our country has been universal and has had an unbroken career from the days of Indus Valley civilization to our own day.

There may be some truth in the claim that the cult had its origins in the primitive agricultural matriarchate, for we do find that matriarchal societies in ancient Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt encouraged this cult. It may also be true that pastoral economy tends to denigrate mother-goddesses and emphasize male divinities. But it would be wrong to assume that the cult is entirely determined by such considerations. There may be more fundamental and intensely psychological factors in the individual as well as the society in India in the background of this cult. For it has had a remarkable survival. We know for certain that numerous relics found in Mohenjodāro and Harappa suggest strongly the presence of this cult so long ago. The talk about the male-domination of the Vedic pantheon and the pastoral economy of the Vedic people cannot obscure the significant involvement in many hymns of Rig-veda of the cultic ideas relating to the mother-goddess. There can be little doubt that the cult continued vigorously during the days when the major portion of the Vedic hymns were composed.

Evidence is scanty for the distinction that is often drawn between pre-Āryan, Dravidian and Āryan, in order to emphasize that the cult of the mother-god-

ness was the contribution of the Dravidians. Indian society has always been complex, and there never was a time when the society was so neatly divided into Āryan and Dravidian groups. The distinction is more linguistic than racial or ethnic, more imagined than actual. It is not easy or correct to identify the Indus Valley people as Dravidians; nor is it safe to describe the composers and compilers of Vedic hymns as pure Āryans. It is possible to find among the Indus remains evidence for beliefs and practices that are characteristically Vedic; and the Vedic hymns contain numerous ideas that are involved in cult of the mother-goddess that the Indus people were supposed to subscribe to. In fact, it can be shown that the Vedic civilization was a normal continuation of what we know as the Indus civilization.

The cult of the mother-goddess has thus prevailed in India throughout its social and religious history, although its prevalence has been more pronounced in rural regions than in the urban in recent years. The Tāntrik complex of folk magical rites and esoteric exercises is what has given shape and life to this cult. The Tantra being folk is largely materialistic in its orientation; its expectations are concrete benefits concerning different aspects of daily life, such as health, wealth, security, safety, eminence and efficiency. However, it should not be imagined that Tantra was one homogenous or unified system, uniformly applicable to the entire population. The Tāntrik approach emphasizes tribal distinctions and group-affila-

tions. It accommodates within its fold numerous cults and regional practices. The thread that runs through all the cults and practices is the belief in the female principle as the source of energy and affluence. Call it a fertility idea, but there it is, deeply rooted in the individual consciousness as well as in the collective unconscious.

There is no denying that the Tantra involves some eroticism. All folk practices and beliefs do incorporate the mystery of the sex act. It is not only in India that it is so, for do we not hear about the Greek Bacchanalia, the Roman Saturnalia, the French Fete des Fous and the May Day Carnivals? The Tantra is realistic, and seeks not only to translate the mysterious into the factual, but idealizes the actual. The woman in the Tantra is the mother, the matrix, the embryo, the source of all things, the essence of fertility. It is the productive sex that the Tantras speak of, and not the hedonic sex.

The biological principle of reproduction is elevated into the cosmic concept of Vaginal Source (yoni). The earth, the tree, the serpent and the mountain are different expressions of this cosmic urge to reproduce. The male and the female are interchangeable concepts in this context. The mountain could be the male principle; it is symbolised in the līṅga, in the ant-hill, in the altar, in the stone block or wooden pillar in the sanctum. But it is the abode of the mother-goddess and is identified with her.

Most of the Devī shrines in India are located on mountain-tops; and even when they are located on the plains their association with the mountains is not forgotten. The word 'Durga' itself means a mountain. Mountain is a fortress: it protects the hamlet and its neighbourhood. We have numerous mother-goddess shrines which are regarded as essential for the protection of the township: Ambā of Amber, Kārnimātā of Bikāner (Rājās-thān), Sāmalesvari of Sambhalpur (Orissa), Arbud-mātā of Mt-Abu, Pātandevī of Patna and Gayesvari of Gayā (Bihar), Jwālāmukhī in Kāngrā (Panjab), Kālī of Calcutta, and Chāmundī of Mysore (Karnātake) are illustrations of this aspect of the mother-goddess. Vindhyāvasinī and Vanadurgā are characteristically mountain-deities.

In the Tāntrik symbolism, the isosceles triangle which is the linear representation of the mountain when its apex is upward and of the tree when its apex is downward, stands for the mother-goddess. The triangle as it stands on its base is male, while the triangle that hangs down from its base is female. The cultic practice is to employ in worship the two triangles as interlocked, thus signifying not so much the sex-act as the principle of impregnation, the metaphysical principle of māyā or creatrix of phenomenal reality. Māyā is another name for Durga. The two triangles interlocked stand for the union of mountain and tree, the sky and the earth (dyāvāprithivī).

The association of the mother-goddess with the tree is likewise widely known. The association stems from the earth-goddess (nude Gaurī) becoming the deity

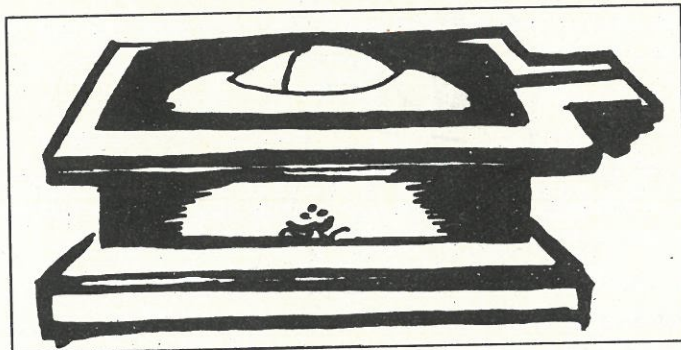


Representation of Śiva as Bhairava in the Vaitāl temple of Bhubaneswar. Bhairava in the terrible form of Śiva, frequently met with in the tribal context as a bhūta.

filled with plants (Śakambharī), symbolising harvest in the agricultural context. She is germinal, productive principle (Prakṛti), and is found represented in the Indus seals and praised in the Vedic hymns. Red is the colour associated with procreation, and the mother-goddess is conceived of as red in complexion all over. Her association with red is again an ancient one. We find among the Mohenjo-dāro relics figurines of the mother-goddess painted red. The association continues even today in many forms; blood, kumkum, red hibiscus flowers, red berries, red garments and so on are said to be dear to this goddess. She is the principle of abundant growth, proliferation and progeny. She is therefore worshipped in trees (such as Kadam̐ba, Nimbā and Aśoka), in nine plants or leaves (navapatrika, a ritual in Durgā-Pūjā), in creepers (such as aparājita), in grains (rice and barley), in an earthen pot of water covered with mango-leaves (ghaṭa or kumbha), in a coconut smeared with vermilion, or in a linear diagram (like Śrī-yantra or Sarvato-bhadra-maṇḍala).

In the folk mind, the male and female principles were distinct. The male (Śiva) is only an indication or sign (which is the actual meaning of the word liṅga) of the presence and power of the female (Śakti). The male is no doubt likened to the ploughman while the female is the field that produces. But it is also true that (male) is inertia whereas the female is energy. Tantra does not make an absolute distinction between them. Its outlook is that the female includes the male. The female is complete in herself, and projects the male whenever needed. Thus the idea of the mother-goddess does not militate against the notion of male divinities, but comprehends it. It is significant that the female principle is represented by a circle (chakra) and the male by the central point (bindu) in it. One of the finds from the Harappan excavations depicts the goddess upside down and a tree (male) issuing from her vagina.

This is how the ancient representation of the mother-goddess have also been in liṅgas, rocks, ant hills and altars. Mūkām̐bikā in Kollūr (Karnāṭaka) is a liṅga, as many other Devī shrines in India. The



Mūkām̐bikā Liṅga

Kāmākhyā shrine in Assam contains a rock which has a crevice in it (resembling the vagina or yoni), and which is smeared with red ochre. The Durgamma of Bellary is only an anthill. Shashti is worshipped in Bengal by the village folk by installing a stone under a jack-tree; they also carry cowrie-shells as amulets symbolising the mother-goddess. The Khoṇḍ temple in the Phulbani district (Orissa) has only an wooden post which is worshipped as the goddess. The Khambeśvari temple at Aska (also in Orissa) has two short wooden pillars symbolising the deity. There is a Khambeśvari post near Gandhardi (Orissa), which is an wooden pillar on which a deity is rudely carved.

The village shrines of the mother-goddess are usually small conical stones which would have turned black by a continuous application of oil. Often we find squarish stone-pillars representing mother-goddesses on a raised platform underneath a tree or in the open field; there may also be narrow enclosures, but rarely anything like a temple. If the mother goddess acquires a little celebrity, the stone pillar may be housed in a thatched shed. The village goddess Māramma, causing and curing epidemics, may be a mere stump of the margosa tree (considered especially sacred to her); the village carpenter may attempt to turn the top of the stump into a shape resembling the head. Boundary stones demarcating the village area or the tribal zone would themselves be looked upon as goddesses (Ellamma). Odd-looking stones on the tank-beds, besides the

village well, near the entrance to the village or at cross-roads would represent the village goddesses.

More usual, however, is to fashion a clay image once a year or oftener, place it under a pandal constructed for the purpose, worship it as the goddess with folk rites, and dismiss it promptly after the worship. There will be no permanent shrine in the village, but there would be an enclosure reserved for the erection of the pandal whenever occasion demands. Village goddesses in South India like Mutyālamma, Aṅkamma, Gaṅgammā, Doḍḍammā (Maheśvarī), Pūjammā and Peddammā are all made in clay, housed in temporary shrines and worshipped. Their presence and relevance are specific to the situation. Here the folk rituals are more important than the icons or the shrines. And the entire community participates in the rituals. Each village would have its own village goddess, called grāma-devatā in the South and ṭhākuraṇi in the North. Such deities would generally be housed under trees in the most frequented area of the village. It is usual to call them Ūramma (the goddess of the village).

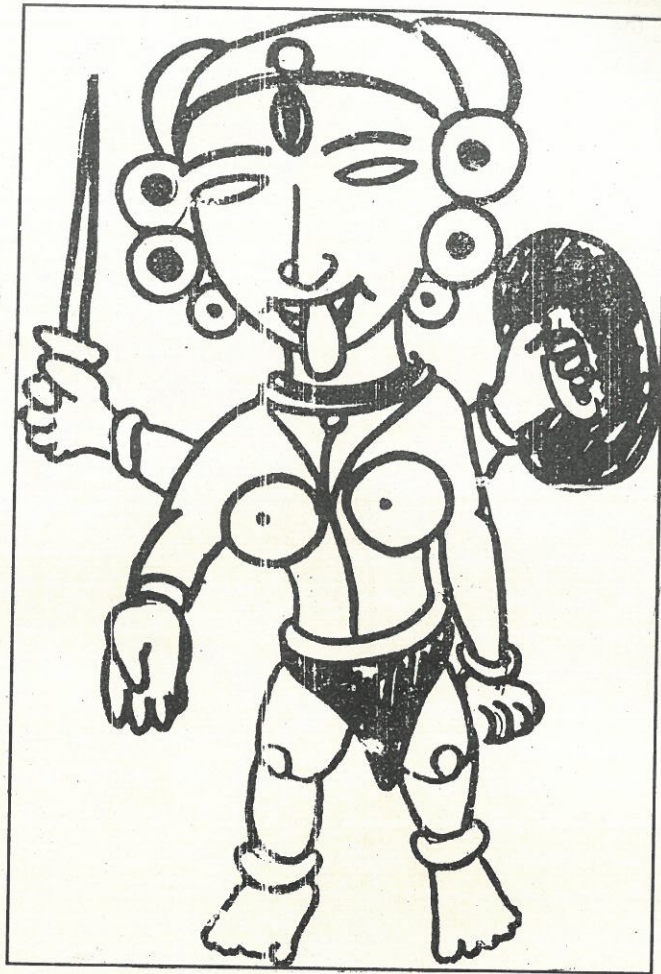
Mother-goddesses are generally associated with epidemics like Cholera (Māriamma in the South, Moti-mātā in Central India, and Māri-bhavāni), plague (Boṁbāimāyī in the Gayā district, Olai-Chaṇḍī in Bengal, Peddammā, Aṇṇammā, Nūkalammā, Marīḍiyammā and Kokkāḷammā in South India), small-pox and measles (Mutyālamma, Sukhājammā and Uddālam-



Kairābhēśvari, the pillar-deity worshipped in a shrine in Gandhardi (Orissa). It is a wooden post of great antiquity on which a folk-goddess has been carved in folk style. Perhaps it represents a sacrificial post.

ma). In their curative capacity they are collectively termed Pīḍāri ('enemies of distress'). They may also cause ailments, if not properly propitiated. Their terrible aspect as well as the fierce rituals

connected with their worship (like animal sacrifices, hook-swinging and fire-walking) may strike terror and inspire repugnance in the hearts of the sophisticated people, but the rural folk are happy with them,



A cultic Icon from North India made in clay

because they fulfil an important function in their individual and collective life.

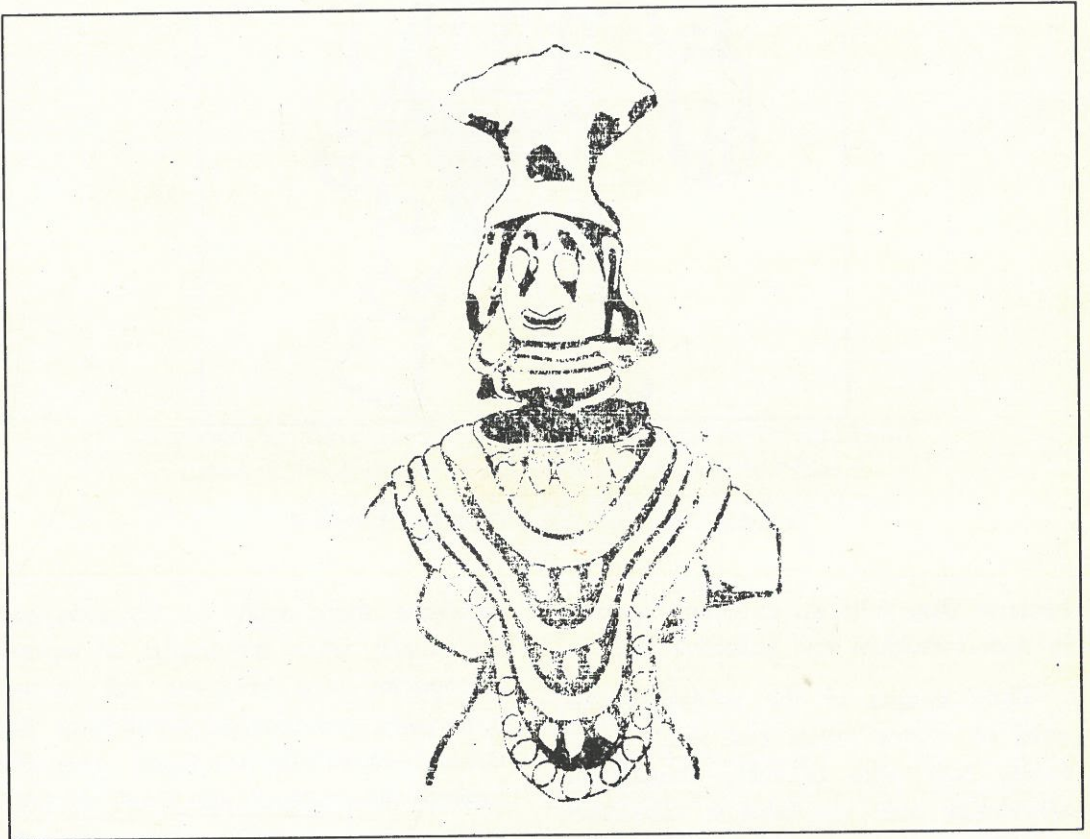
Early images of the mother-goddess were of course rough and ready. They betray bold turns of rustic imagination. Oftentimes only the head is delineated, and the torso is left merely a stump to be draped with garments and adorned by

necklaces; there would be no arms and legs. Later, when the impact of stylized iconography was felt, the full human figure was represented. Wood was the material commonly employed, and the carving was rough. It was usual for arms to be attached later. There was no distinction as yet between the permanent and fixed image in the sanctum (achala

or dhruva) and the processional image. The same image was in the sanctum and was also carried about. Sometimes huge clay images were also made and richly painted over; they were of course immovable, and small wooden replicas were used for processions.

Whatever the material the image was made of, the aspect was carefully rendered awesome and terrible. The background idea was not that she was cruel, but that she was looked upon as the protectress from all evil, ailment, danger and death. She should frighten away the

hordes of misfortune and disease, the enemies and spells of the sorcerers. She is represented as trampling over the enemy or the personified evil, and wielding a sword to subjugate the undesirable elements. She was, in the tribal context, the burning fire itself: fire-walking ceremony is a device to placate her. She rides on a lion and vanquishes the wild buffalo imagined as a demon. She brooks no slackness in the observances that the tribal law prescribes, and she can strike the erring devotee as severely as she does the offending enemy. Kālī, Karālī,



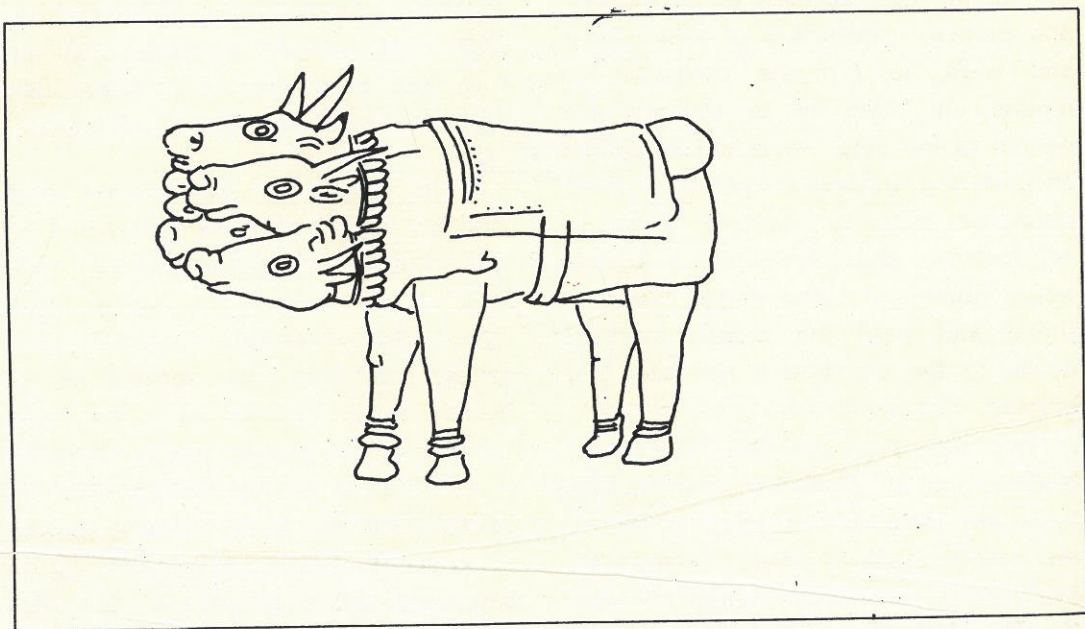
Mother goddess from Indus Valley found in Harappa

to keep them in good humour, to involve them in tribal affairs, and to placate them by periodical propitiations. They are pretas or, 'departed' spirits who nevertheless continue to interest themselves in all undertakings of the individual and the group. They are bhūtas or 'potent' spirits who have acquired power enough to help or haunt those who are living.

Later, a distinction was made between the merely 'departed' spirits who hover round the place of their burial or cremation, unable to tear themselves off their material background (the pretas), and the 'potent' spirits who by their accomplishments while living and the manner of their death can come to the aid of the living whenever invoked (the bhūtas). But the folk-mind does not make this fine distinction. Bhūta is a more generic term, comprehensive and significant. Obviously

and completely wicked and mischievous (the piśāchas in Sanskrit and kule in Tuḷu): they are vengeful and the living seek to keep them off. They are the spirits of those who lived and died violently, despised while living and dreaded when dead. They correspond to demons and devils.

The spirits that are worshipped in the folk cults are the bhūtas, and not piśāchas. Therefore, to describe the cultic worship prevalent in the Himalayan regions, and in the western coast of Southern India (Tuḷu-nāḍu and Kerala) 'devil-worship' or 'demonworship', as usually done, is altogether inappropriate. The bhūtas (also called daivas, although a subtle distinction is sometimes made between the two, are actually supernatural agents aiding the clan-members to live harmoniously, peacefully, effectively and



Pañcha-mukha Nandi-gona



Bhetāḷa (dvāra-pālaka in the Kālī shrine of Doḍḍagaddavalli)

meaningfully. They are in fact divinities with a human past and tribal interest. They guide the folk on the right path, establish social justice, and preserve the tribal sanctions with scrupulous care and strict supervision. They are sought after by the clan members and also by others who are outside the clan.

The rites in connection with their invocation and worship are not to be regarded as black magic or witchcraft. They are never invoked to do any harm, but always to help normal living. It is true that the masks and the images representing the *bhūtas* are terror-striking; the priest when possessed by the *bhūta* conducts himself in a manner that is frightening and bizarre. But the participants of the personating ritual (called *darshana* or the 'appearance' of the spirit) find the whole event meaningful and satisfying. The element of dread or violence does not enter into their transaction. It is part of their normal living.

Life has many aspects: problems, stresses, challenges, dangers, risks and pleasures. If Vedic religion personified and deified natural forces, folk religion personified and deified normal aspects of human life, both domestic and social, in the rural and tribal context. Animals play an important role in such a life, especially if the village or the tribal settlement is in the close vicinity of forests and mountains. The spirits thus come to share both human and animal traits. There are spirits that eliminate the dangers from animals such as wild buffalo (*Durgā* in her aspect

of *Mahishāsura-mardini*), tiger (*Pili-chāmundi*), snakes (*Mānasa*, *Jānguli*), and elephant (*Vināyaka*, *Bālaji* and *Ayyappan*). Some ride on animals suggesting subjugation, like *Durgā* lion, *Siva* on the wild bull, *Kutti-chāttan* on buffalo, and *Ayyappan* on tiger.

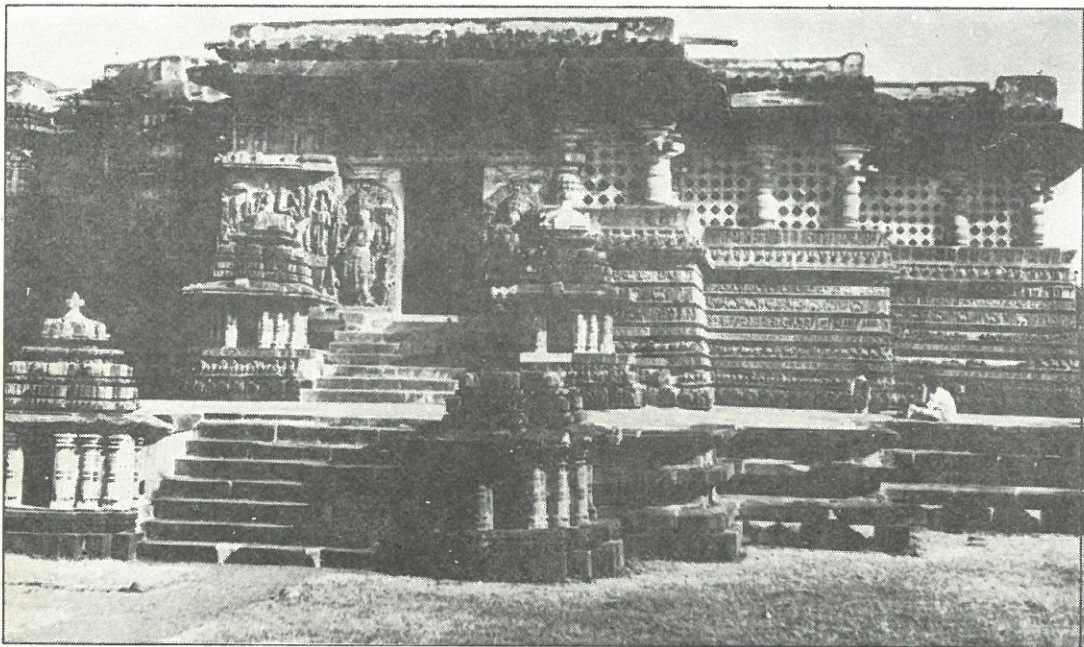
Some spirits incorporate in themselves the form of animals they eliminate or subjugate. Folk deities are mostly of this nature. *Ganesa* (the elephant-headed god), *Hanumān* (the monkey-headed demigod), *Varāha* (the boar-faced form of *Vishnu*), *Hayagrīva* (the horse-headed god, corresponding to the tribal *Jarandaye*), *Garuda* (the hawk-headed demigod), *Naga* and *Nagini* (the god or goddess having human form above with serpentine hoods and serpentine form below), *Narasimha* (the lion-faced form), and *Nandi* (the bull-headed demi-god attached to *Siva*) are illustrations of this folk phenomenon. Strangely, many of these spirits were accepted by the sophisticated religion either as divinities in their own right or attached to one the two major Gods, *Vishnu* or *Siva*, as incarnations, attendants or offsprings.

When, however, this is done, there is an elevation in their functional status, a reinterpretation of their role and nature, and a stylization of their form. At the folk level, it is a simple process of fusion of human and animal traits, and an expression of the relation between the spirit and the animal. When we see in many folk shrines animal forms in wood or metal

receiving worship, we are likely to mistake the act as zoolatry. The fact is that behind the animal-icon is the spirit-idea. It is not the animal as such that receives adoration, but the spirit that has assumed that form. The worship of Pañjurli (the pig-shaped spirit), Mahisandāye (the buffalo spirit), Jarandāye (the horse-spirit), Nandi-goṇa (the bult spirit), Puli-teyyam (the tiger-spirit), Nāga-kanye (the serpent-damsel) in the western coastal regions of South India is certainly not an instance of zoolatry;

own day. There is a very large number of these spirits that inspire reverence among the rural and tribal folk. Most of them, however, are local and have frequently been subordinated to the gods of the more sophisticated and urbanized religion.

Some among the folk spirits have retained their original and universal appeal notwithstanding their incorporation into later and sophisticated religion. Gaṇeśa is the most conspicuous example. There is

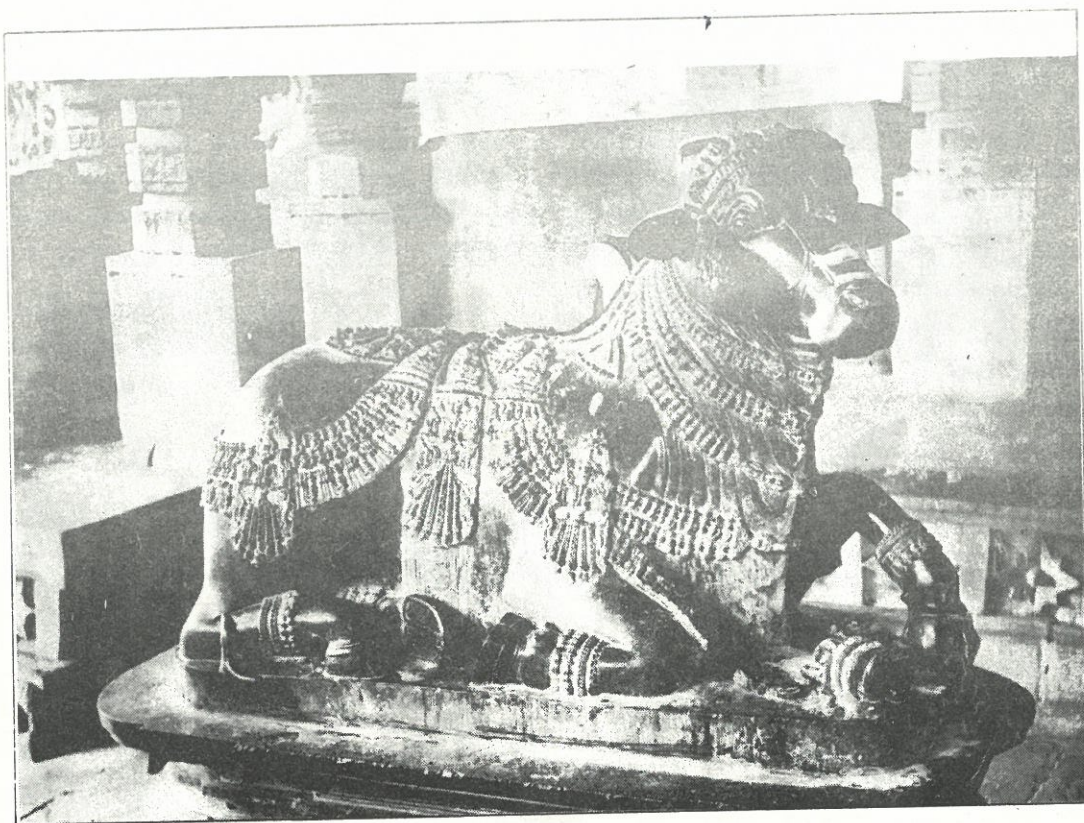


Entrance to the temple at Halebidu

nor is it a totemistic cult. It is full-fledged and mature religion at the folk level.

The worship of mountain-spirits (yakshas), sylvan spirits (nāgas), and spirits of community heroes or saviours (bhūtas) has been in India continuous from the earliest stages of Indian civilization till our

hardly any doubt that he began his career as a yaksha, and that he is essentially a folk deity, both in his form and in his function. He was later brought into the urban fold as a member of Śiva's household (as his son), but his importance has persisted without any diminution. It



NANDI (Rāmappa temple, Palempeṭa)

is probable that at one time, his relevance was local, but it has been universal in India for at least two thousand years now. It is important here to recognize the folk origin and folk nature of this god.

Gaṇeśa iconography has been more or less unalterably crystallized since the time of the Imperial Guptas; elephantine head, corpulent body, seated in a relaxed posture having eatables in his hand. He is largely represented as male, although there are specimens of his female form (Gaṇeśānī or Vaināyaki). But the early images indicate only the elephantine head, and leave the rest of the form vague.

He is crudely made, often with clay, and anointed with red ochre or vermillion. There was an insistence that the Gaṇeśa-image should be installed under trees, preferably under palm-trees, or in the town where four roads meet.

Early shrines were clearly meant to be small, flat-roofed and plain. Even when Gaṇeśa was included in the canonical texts of sculpture and architecture, his shrine was prescribed to be simple and unostentatious, his sanctum having neither doors nor a tower. In temples dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu he was to be accommodated only in a niche, or in an open



Gaṇeśa stone in a Village

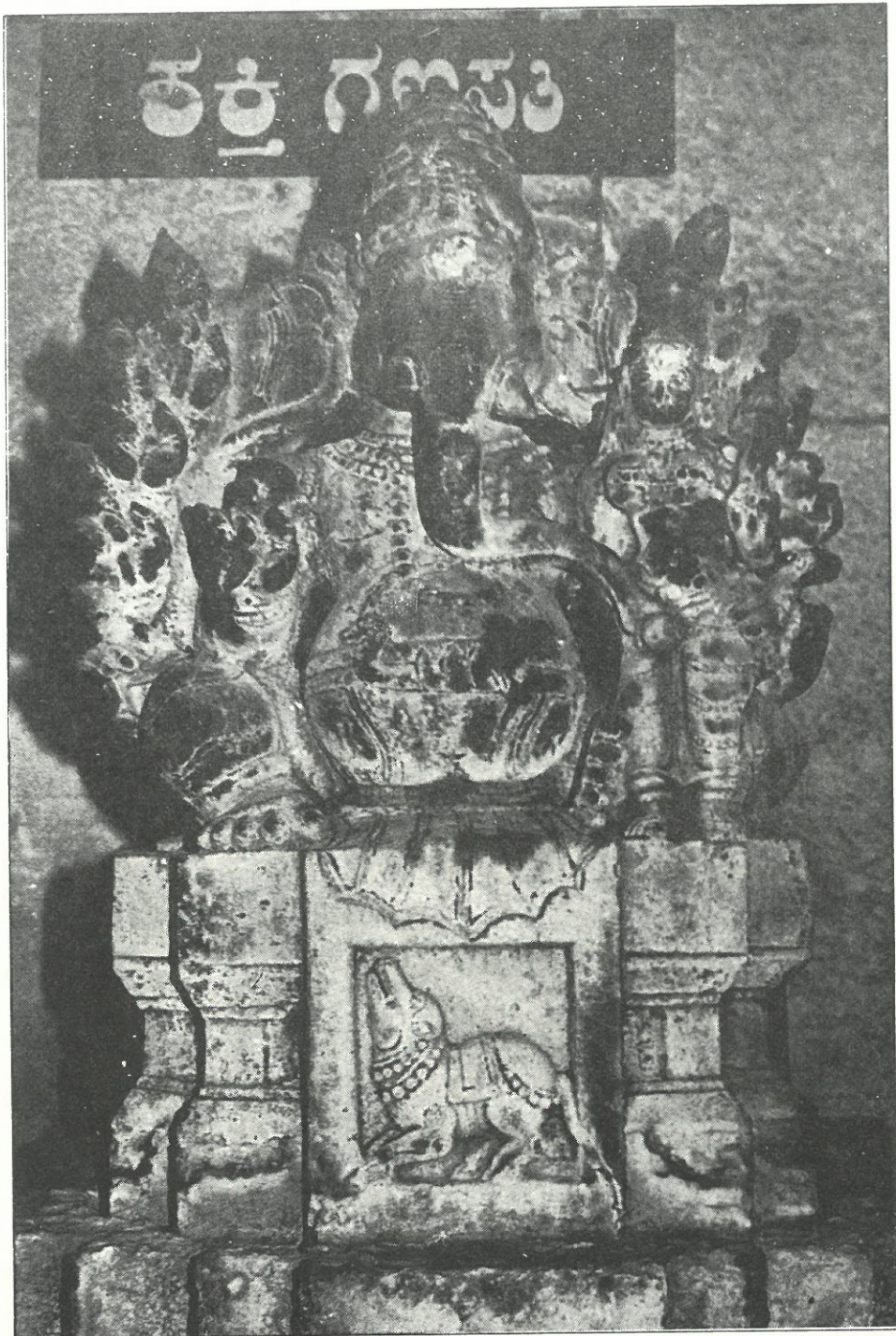
pavilion. Large and imposing structures to Gaṇeśa were unknown until very recent years; stylized shrines dedicated solely to Gaṇeśa are also relatively uncommon. His initial inclusion in the urbanized pantheon was only as an attendant god (*pārśva-devatā*), and his mention in the *Smṛiti* texts is as an uncanny spirit (*yaksha*), causing and curing malevolent influences, especially the diseases of children.

If Gaṇeśa transcended his original folk character and his tribal confinement, and carved out an independent status for himself, Hanumān, another obviously folk spirit, retained his role as a guardian spirit sub-ordinated to an urbanized divinity. Although his worship is popular in all parts of the country even to this day, the mythological element has predominated in

his featurization: he is a hero in Ramayāṇa, an able attendant of Rāma. He is mighty and valourous, and can destroy hordes of demons and evil spirits.

He guards villages against marauders, violent aggressors and wicked goblins. Every village will have a shrine to him at the very entrance. He is the patron deity of professional wrestlers who invariably invoke his aid to win their combats. He is also a favourite of the magicians and sorcerers: his name and image are frequently employed in rituals meant to secure the health and strength of children. He is also worshipped as an antidote to morbid fears and anxiety; he figures prominently in talismans and amulets worn by those who seek to become brave and confident.

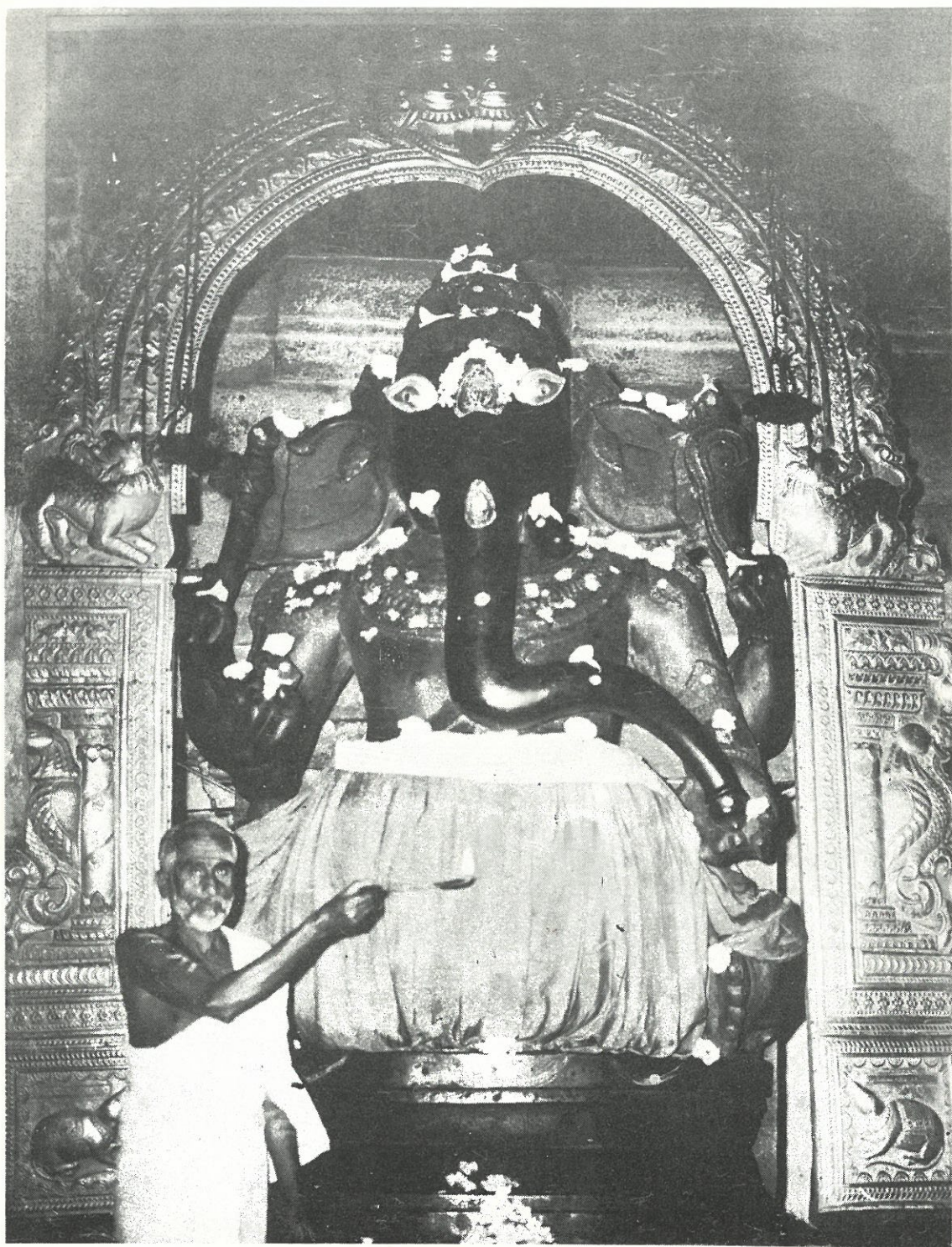
There is no doubt that he was an independent folk spirit before his involvement with Rāma began. Early images of Hanumān highlight his grotesque form. The name Hanumān is not a regular Sanskrit word: it is the Sanskritized form of a Dravidian word meaning 'male-monkey' (*āṇ-manti*). He has not only a monkey-face but also the characteristic tail: his general form and posture are those of an anthropoid ape, although his hands and feet are more human. Stylized iconography tended to humanize his image to a greater extent, but could not avoid the evident folk background. He is sometimes depicted as having five heads: those of a monkey (the main one), horse, boar, tiger (or lion) and eagle (*Garuḍa* or sometimes parrot, *śuka*). Later explanation



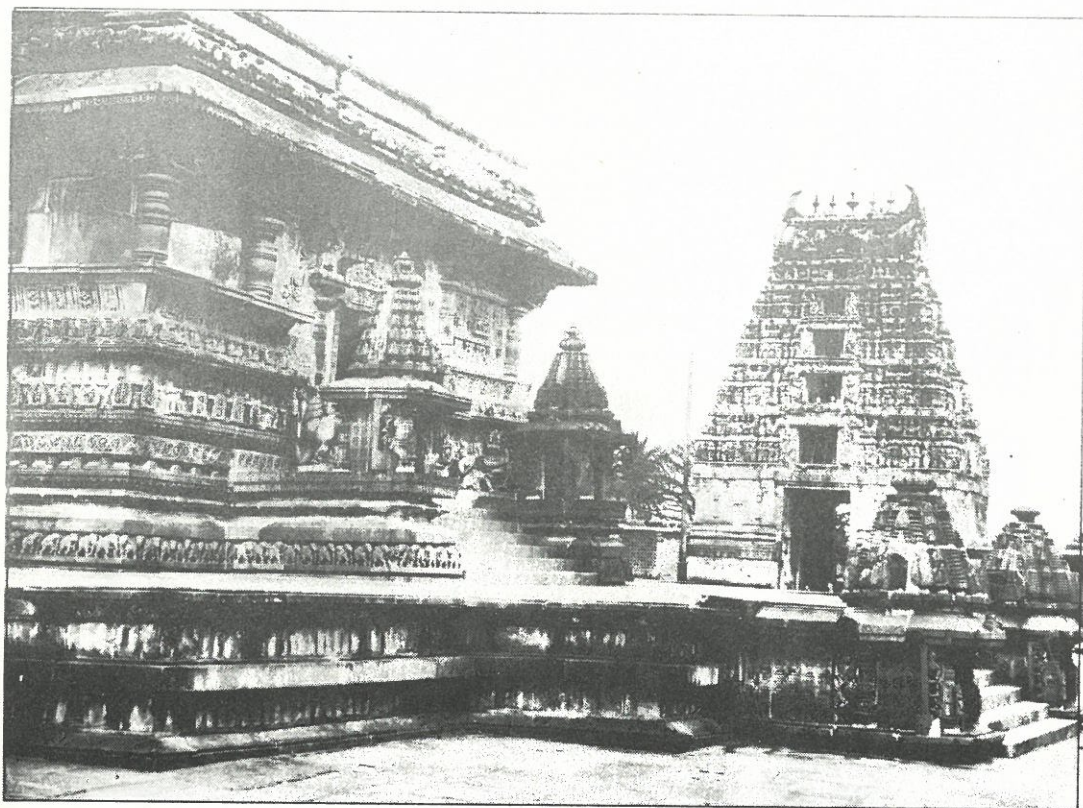
ŚAKTI - GAṆAPATI



HERAMBA-GANAPATI



GAṆEŚA (in Kurudumale)



Typical Hoysala temple

seeks to synthesize in this strange icon the images of Narasimha, Varāha, Hayagrīva and Garuda with that of Hanumān. But preoccupation with dangers from wild animals is undoubtedly the undercurrent. It is probably an attempt to arrive at a composite figure representing five different animal-headed spirits.

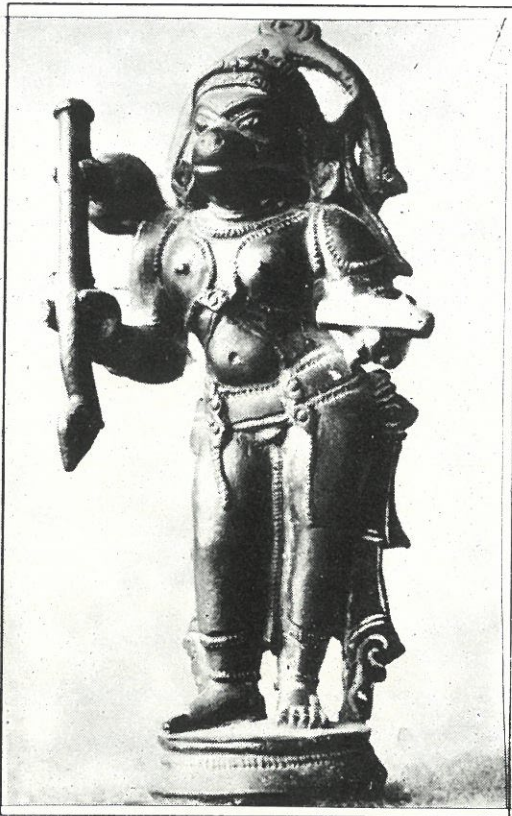
Like shrines to Gaṇeśa, shrines to Hanumān are also typically small, flat-roofed and plain. It is also common to leave the stone-icons uncovered by any structure. Huge boulders rudely carved into the form of Hanumān are commonly to be met with. In the folk context, his

shrine is always an independent one. But in later religion he is never regarded as an independent divinity: in the temples in which he figures as the main god, there is always the iconographic presence of his master Rāma. It is therefore usual to represent him as a devotee, with palms joined in prayer or supplication.

Alternately, he is shown as running, carrying a mountain on his left hand, and a mace in his right. The situational reference is to an episode in Rāmāyaṇa. Struck by a powerful weapon on the battle-field, Lakshmaṇa fainted away. The herb to revive him was on a distant



HANUMĀN (in Hampi)



HANUMĀN as VĪṆĀ-PLAYER (bronze, in author's possession)

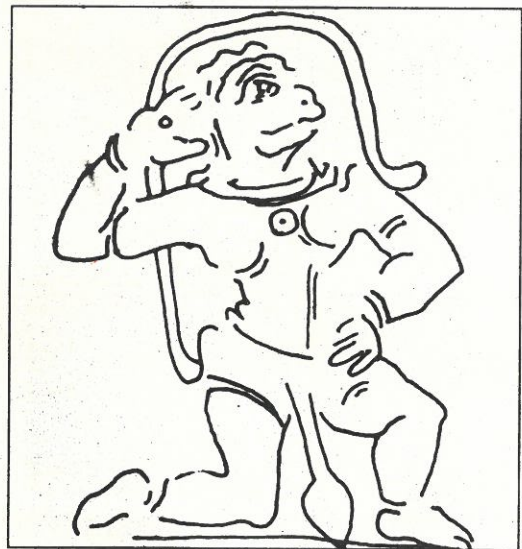
mountain. Hanumān was sent to fetch it. But unable to identify the plant, he uprooted the entire mountain and brought it to the battle-field. The physicians took the herb and saved Lakshmaṇa's life.

Hanumān is included in North India under the general nomenclature of Bālāji. Bālāji is a very popular god in the North, inspired directly by the folk idiom. The term does not refer to any particular divinity, either locally or stylistically specified. It is a generic name. It includes several mountain spirits (yakshas), local tutelary deities (devas), deified but wild



Hanuman as Bālāji from the Himalayan foothills

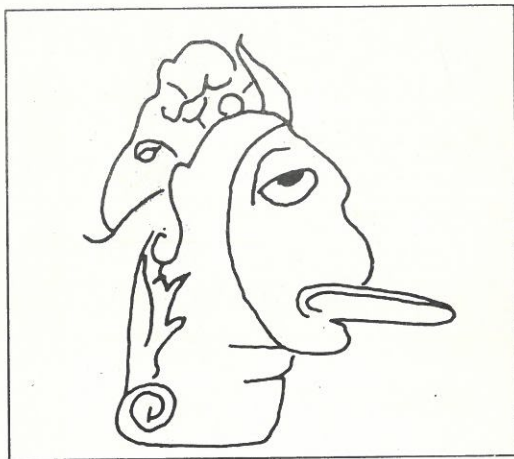
heroes (bhūtas), and abstract divinities. Supernatural power and extraordinary presence are the distinguishing features of Bālāji. And he comprehends all aspects of a normal divinity: he protects the



Hanumān as a hero from Āndhra Pradesh



Hanuman as represented in the folk painting of Mewar (Rajasthan)



Another representation of five headed Hanuman from Rajasthan

village or property, he guards against ailments and attacks, he secures health and happiness, he warns the devotee and guides him. While he is worshipped, he is feared also. He is a friend when placated, but he can be fierce when offended. Small shrines, plain and low, are erected in rural surroundings to him. It is interesting that the North Indians regard the famous deity on the Tirumalai Hills in Andhra Pradesh as Bālāji, thus emphasizing the tribal background of this shrine.

Later temples, mighty and monumental, evolved from such low beginnings. Sophistication did not wipe out the folk elements: it only provided a context for them, in keeping with the new needs of the urbanized population.



Hanuman carrying the mountain, in a painting from Himachal Pradesh



CHAPTER ELEVEN

ART OF IMAGE MAKING

Polytheism is the characteristic feature of Hinduism. But no Hindu seriously believes in a multiplicity of Gods. He is aware that each of the many gods that he worships is merely an aspect of the One God, who is also the God of other religions. Sectarian strife is thus a non-issue with the Hindu population, which is divided into an almost infinite variety of sects, creeds, castes and cults. It is not merely a question of tolerance; but a positive conviction that God is one, whatever the name or form in which he is conceived or invoked, underlies the religious life of a Hindu.

But the devotee revels in multiplying the images of the one God, who, he knows, is really beyond imagination and above all images. He invokes in a thousand names the One God whom speech cannot reach. He makes icons of the One God, who can never be adequately represented. And he houses in a temple the One God who envelops the entire universe and rises above it by 'ten inches'. The God that transacts with man intellectually and emotionally is never mistaken for the God who is the abstract

source of all existence, animate as well as inanimate.

The god that the devotee chooses to worship is an approach to the God who has need neither for worship, nor for the devotee. The god is worshipped for material gains, health, security, and happiness; the God is also worshipped to cleanse the human constitution so that the light of God may shine through it. The latter worship, of course, is the highest form of worship. But it appeals only to a few; the large section of the population is content to seek from the gods this or that benefit.

When human beings are in need of gain or comfort, they invent gods according to their own needs, and temperaments. The group-mind then stylizes the forms as well as the rituals connected with these several gods who are but creatures of human need. This is the framework of polytheism. There are gods of diverse shapes, moods and modes of appearance; they are specifically related to the variety of human needs.

The devotee knows that the image of a god is a mere artifact and toy, unless it is properly consecrated. And consecra-

tion involves the investment of the devotee's devotion and passion, and getting the devotee effectively related to the particular god invoked in the image. Rituals are naturally important for transforming an artifact into an icon. The icon is meant to accommodate the rituals, so that human devotion can flower out in the light of God that is reflected through the icon.

Rituals are acts done by the devotee's body, speech and mind. The icon is seen and handled. But it is the first step. The icon must evolve into a verbal image, a concept. This is aided by descriptive hymns, mnemonic words strung into an articulated garland or repetition of power-laden epithets of god. God as a verbal concept (mantra) is subtler than the material icon (mūrti). But subtler still is the thought-complex (yantra) in which speech is transformed into essential ideas that ultimately merge in a 'point' (bindu), where God's presence is focussed.

Thus the icon by itself is incomplete; it should be accompanied by its effective verbal counterpart (mantra) as well as the appropriate ideational representation (yantra). This is an important detail of Indian iconography that is often ignored by writers on the subject. The god suitable for worship is both iconic and graphic; what binds the two aspects is the involvement of stylized articulation.

The craftsman whose job is to fashion icons to fulfil the needs of devotees must naturally be acquainted with the relevant mantras and yantras. But more important-

ly he must be familiar with the descriptive mantras, known as dhyāna-slokas, which specify the posture, the mood, the number of hands, the weapons, decorations and other formal details of the particular icon meant for worship. Many of these mantras are mnemonic in character. The training of the traditional sculptor necessarily included committing of these dhyāna-slokas to memory, so that he would be ready to translate any stylized verbal image into an equally stylized icon in stone, metal or wood.

The ideal procedure is claimed to be this. When a sculptor is commissioned to fashion the icon of a particular deity for purposes of worship in a temple, he prepares himself elaborately and meticulously by rituals and regimen. He undertakes to give up the ordinary routine, eschew common company, and withdraw into a sort of serene isolation. He continuously contemplates on the dhyāna-sloka of the deity (the image of which he is to fashion) so as to crystallize the image in his mind. He eats his food with this preoccupation, goes to sleep with this thought, and allows no distraction to interfere with this constant and intense contemplation. When the image in the mind is perfectly and enduringly formed, he takes up his tools and gets ready to translate this image into an icon. It is only then that the icon becomes worthy of worship.

The sculptor pours into his work not only the skills of the craft he has acquired, but his spiritual fervour in a sort of

penance immediately before he undertakes the work. During this period of preparation, he is so constantly absorbed in the descriptive hymn of the deity that he begins to see the deity around him and all the time. He can vividly discern the form of the deity in the block of stone or wood that he has selected. He has only to free this form from the block by chopping off the unwanted and obscuring masses, and by chiselling the finer details. The form occurs to him as a revelation, and he is but an instrument in its hands to get itself materialized.

There are numerous texts in Sanskrit which incorporate such descriptive verses relating to several deities. The Tāntrik manuals of Vajrayāna Buddhist persuasion are especially replete with dhyāna-slokas, for they are props for visualization during sessions of contemplation. They serve the purposes of the meditator as well as the icon-maker. And, true to the intent of the verses, the meditator or icon-maker tends oftentimes to identify himself with the form that he can readily and vividly project. There is a familiar saying that the devotee who is not a deity himself must never worship the deity ('nā-sīvobhūtvā sīvām pūjayet'). This applies equally well to the icon-maker: unless he becomes one with the form of the deity, he can never fashion the form well enough.

This phenomenon explains how from some icons emanates a compelling power, even when their aesthetic quality is by no means noteworthy. There are, on the contrary, icons which are very pretty, but

they leave one altogether unimpressed. Icons acquire power to the extent their makers pour themselves into their handiwork. Texts insist that making of icons for worship must always follow a period of ritualistic preparation of the icon-maker as well as the material chosen for making the icon. Convention again insists that the icon-maker (śilpin) must be ceremoniously honoured before the worship for the icon begins, for he is in a sense "the parent of the deity."

The custom of manufacturing icons for sale is also an old one. Even in the centuries before Christ, icons were being made as commercial proposition. Pāṇini (5, 3, 96) mentions "prati-kṛti" in this sense; Patañjali, the great commentator on this remarkable grammarian, records that Mauryas (?) manufactured icons ('archā') only for procuring gold (hiraṇya) (Mahābhāṣya, 5, 3, 99). But the ancient grammarian also knew that all icons were not made for money (5, 3, 99). Some were not meant to be sold (apaṇya), but they served as a means of livelihood (jīvikārthe). Some icons that were especially well-made and contained some power, were exhibited before the devotees, who made gifts to the owners of these icons. Sometimes, the priests carried such icons from door to door, collecting fees from the householders for viewing them.

These were obviously small icons, possibly metallic ones, not designed for installation in a temple. The later expressions, used for these 'worshipful ones'

(archās), viz. 'body' (vapu, tanu, vigraha) and 'form' (rūpa) indicate that the icons were no longer regarded as just symbols or reflections (pratimā, bimba) or representations (pratīka, pratīkṛti, sandṛas'), but as divinities in their own right. A mere look at them was believed to confer great benefits. The owners of such icons would also arrange to get copies made of them, of course for a consideration.

Mathurā, which was situated on the trade routes of the country and was therefore a busy commercial metropolis, became the place where icon-makers also gathered. Traders and political agents, who belonged to different religious groups (Buddhists, Jains, the Bactrian bhāgavatas, sun worshippers, Śaivas and the followers of folk cults) visited Mathurā and dwelt there for protracted periods. Icon-makers carried on a flourishing business, catering to their religious needs. There was need to manufacture icons and ritualistic implements and utensils on mass basis.

Art, pressed for a commercial end, naturally departs from the traditional norm, and seeks to adapt to the prevalent fashion. The aesthetic quality also degenerates to an extent, when duplication becomes the frequent need. The craftsman involved in this enterprise can ill afford to devote his time for ritualistic preparations or for visualization of the dhyāna-sloka; what he made thus were no longer 'spiritual products', but pieces conforming to a dull and stereotyped convention. A large number of icons that we find now in the country belong to

this class of uninspired artefacts. And most of them are very faint and distant reflections of the relevant dhyāna-slokas, because the acquaintance of the craftsman with the textual prescriptions was meagre or second-hand.

If the craftsman was clever, and the need of the patron unusual, the craftsman would evolve his own style of making an icon, entirely outside the framework of dhyāna-slokas. And numerous minor divinities and folk-deities which became popular in course of time and in different parts of the country did not have dhyāna-slokas any way; and the craftsman had to follow his own genius and inclination. The custom of making the icons altogether independent of the dhyāna-slokas has continued to this day. The craftsmen do not feel the need to be guided by the canonical texts any more.

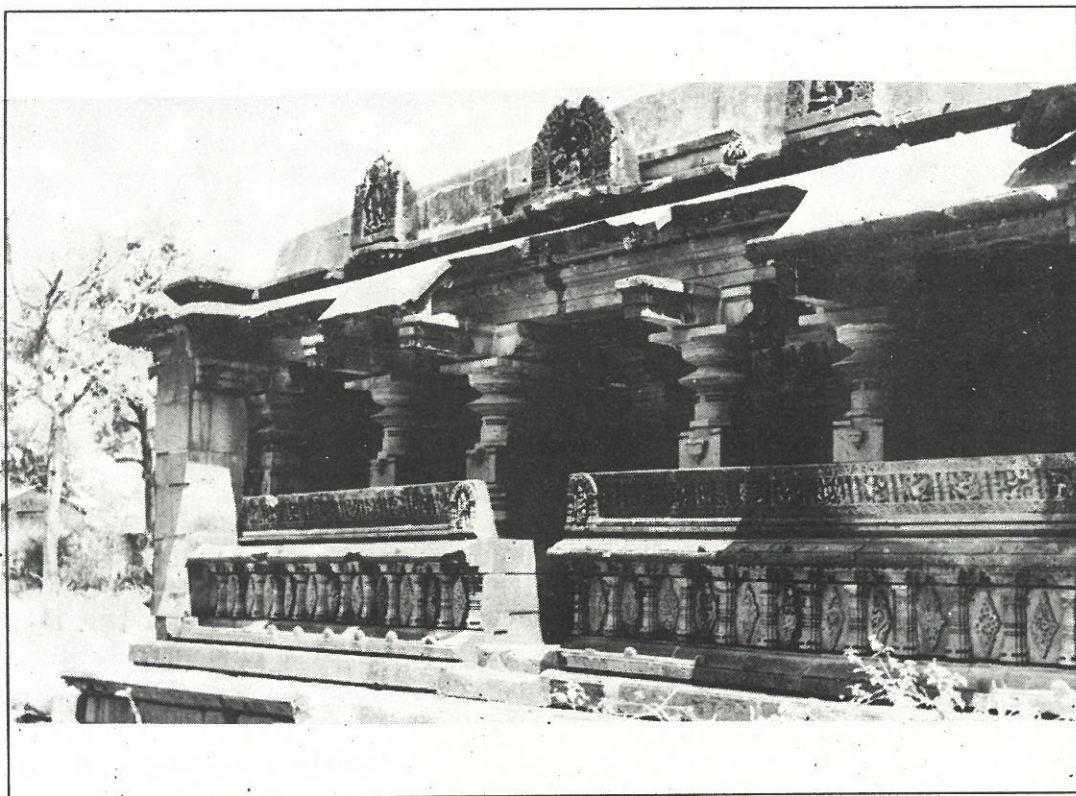
There is, however, a provision made in the texts that the icons should conform to the regional styles of dress and decoration (*Bṛiḥatsamhitā*). It is also laid down that the craftsman must bring into play his own taste and skill while making an icon, within the broad traditional framework. The dhyāna-sloka specifies the number of hands and the nature of the weapons held in them; but it leaves the artist free to mould the hands, portray the weapons and invent the manner of the hands holding the weapons, in the way he chooses. The dhyāna-sloka of a deity may indicate that the icon must be represented in a dancing posture; but it

does specify what the precise posture should be like. The artist has to decide upon the postures depending on his own familiarity with dance postures.

Simplistic stylization which obviated the necessity of dhyāna-slokas is best illustrated in the images of Buddha and the Jina. While both Buddhist and Jaina icons conform in general to the traditional framework in which the classical deities were represented, there were some unique features about them. The icons of the Buddha and the Jinās are to be found only in two postures, sitting and standing. Seated icons of both persuasions are in

the conventional lotus-posture (padmāsana). The Buddha images are shown either as engaged in contemplation (dhyāna) or as teaching (or chakra-pravartana, 'turning the wheel of dharma'), as offering comfort (abhaya), or as calling the earth below as witness for his own integrity (bhāmi-sparsa). The position of the hands vary in these situations, while rest of the body remains rigidly alike. While standing, the Buddha is represented either as preaching (vyākhyāna), or as on his begging round.

The images of Jinās are always shown as absorbed in contemplation (dhyāna),



Jain temple, Belgaum

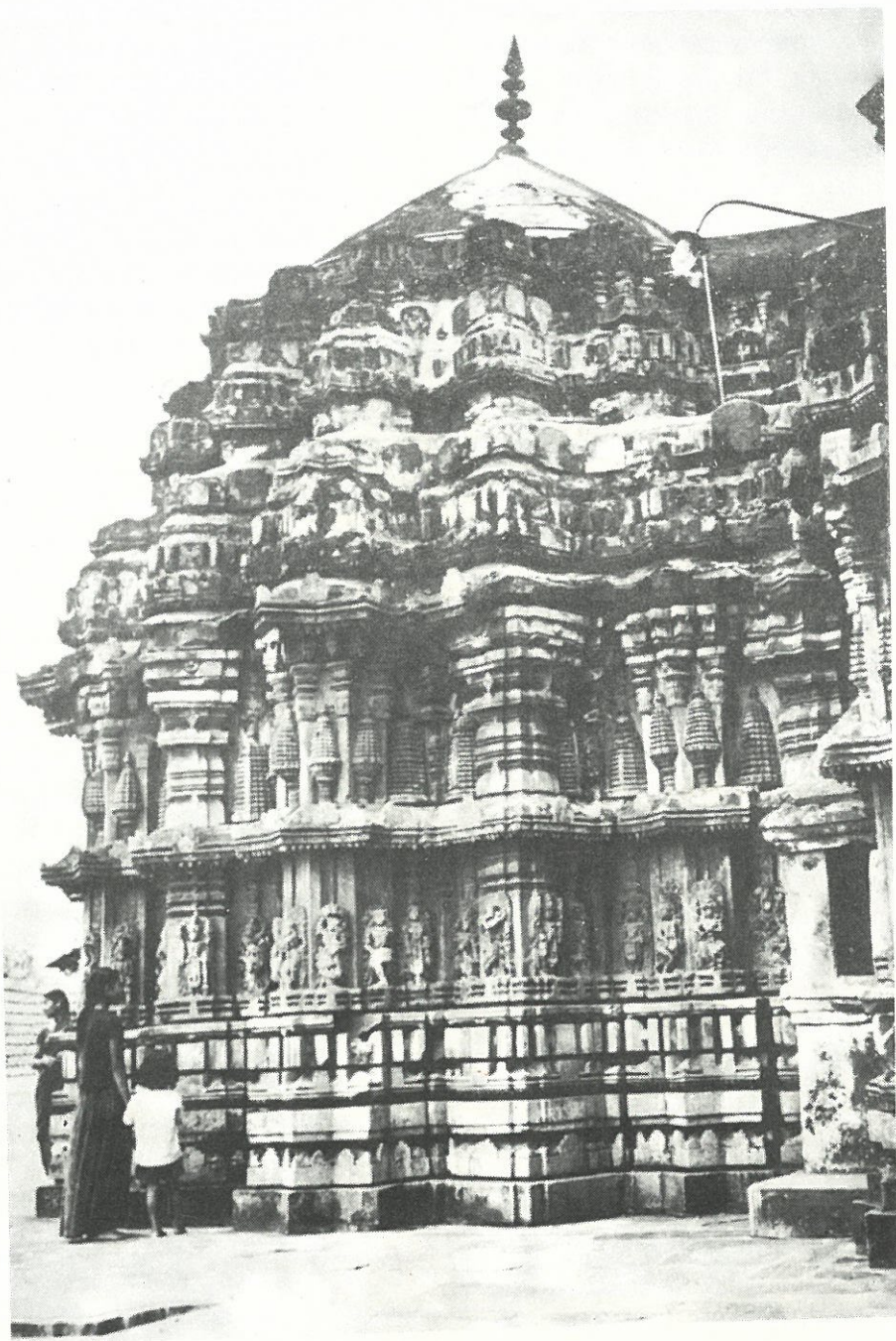
whether seated (in padmāsana) or standing in an upright posture known as khadgāsana (or the position of a drawn sword). While seated, his hands are poised on his locked legs, the right palm over the left; but while standing, his arms hang down on the sides. The standing posture is commonly known as kāyotsarga, or pratimā-yoga, which expression actually refers to a practice undertaken by the Jain ascetic for heightening the rigour of his austerities (tapovṛdhi) and for abandoning the effects of karma (nirjaraṇa).

The images of Jinas are altogether nude (although some image of the white-robed sect are shown wearing a strip of cloth covering the genitals), whereas the Buddha is invariably shown as wearing an upper cloth (saṃghāṭi) in addition to the normal under-robe. Neither the Buddha nor the Jina, however, is shown as wearing any ornaments whatever.

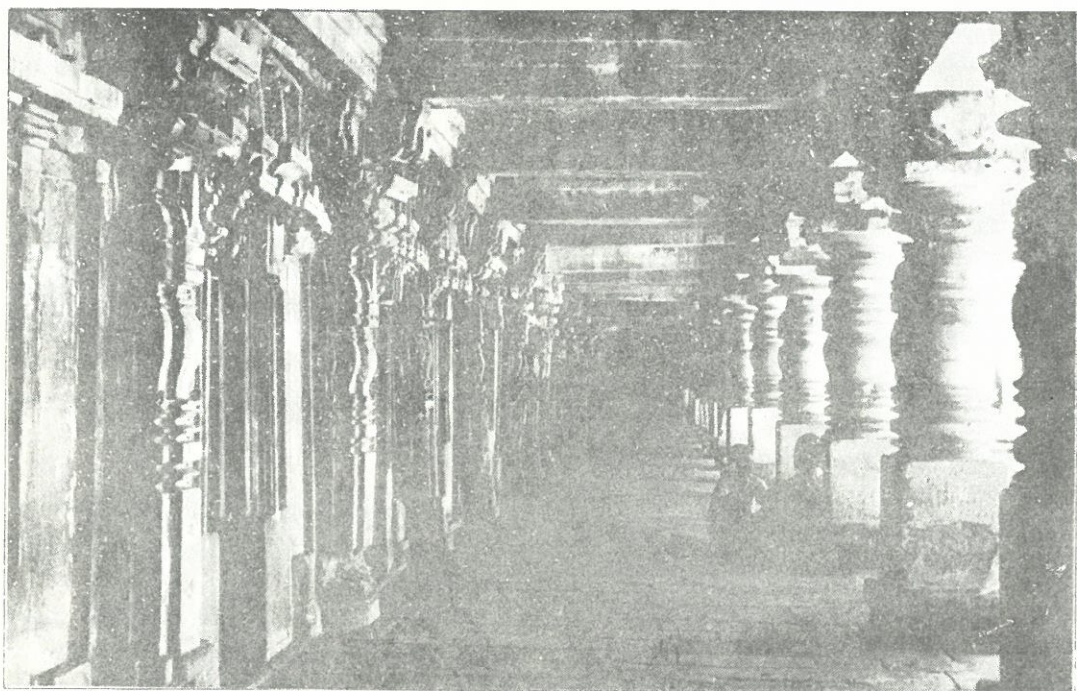
The differences among the Jina icons become important in view of the fact that twenty-four Jinas (tīrthaṅkaras) are recognized, the last of whom was Mahāvīra, contemporaneous with the Buddha. The simplistic stylization would represent all the tīrthaṅkaras as exactly alike (with the exception of Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Jina, whose head is shown as sheltered by a many-hooded serpent). But they are differentiated by the emblems appropriate to the Jinas (like bull for the first Jina, Vṛshabhanātha, conch for the 22nd Nemi-nātha, snake for the 23rd, Pārśva-nātha, and lion for the 24th, Mahāvīra), carved on the pedestal.

The Bāhubali or Gommaṭa images, which are usually huge monoliths (as the one in Śravaṇabelgoḷa in Karnāṭaka) are invariably free-standing, with no shelter over them. They are similar in posture to the standing Jina images, except of course for the emblems which are absent in the images of Gommaṭa. On the other hand, the Gommaṭa image is identified by the mādhavi-creeper that gracefully entwines the legs, thighs and arms: ant hills are also shown about the legs.

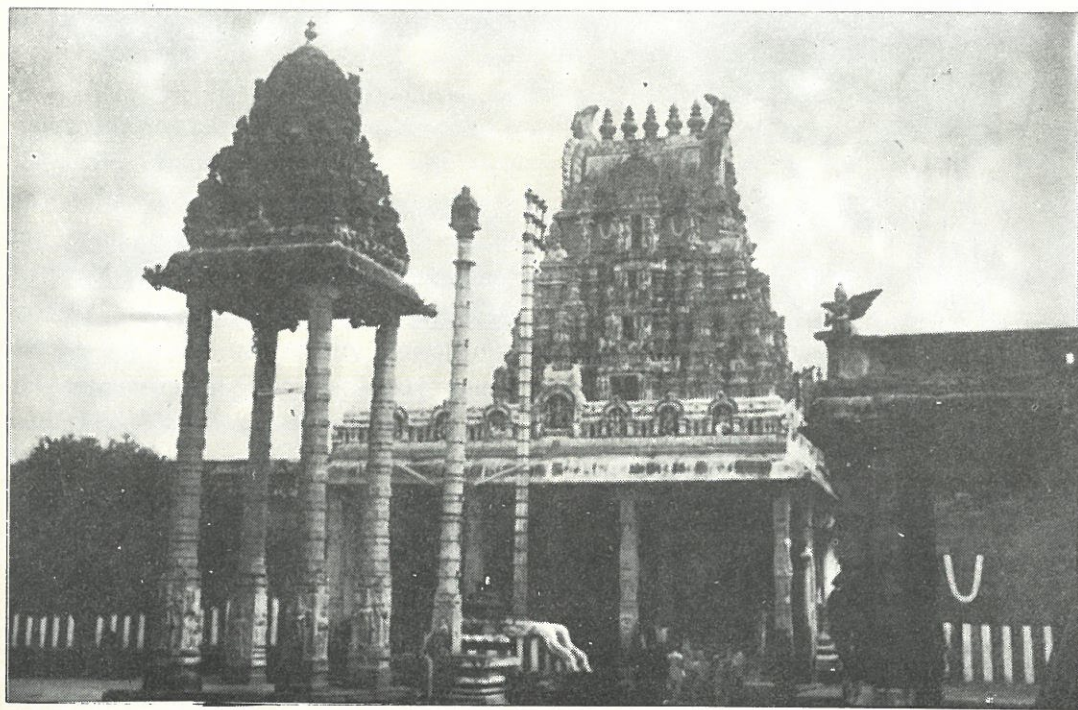
Icons to be installed in temples must invariably accord with the tālāmāna prescriptions laid down in the Āgama texts. The height of the icon must for instance must bear a definite relation to the breadth (tāra) of the temple, height of the sanctum, length of the door (dvāra-māna), measurement of the base-ment (ādhiṣṭhāna), or the height of the donor or worshipper (yaja-māna): And it must be in terms of cubit (hasta), span (tala) or finger-breadth (aṅgula). There are different measurements that are considered significant. māna (measurement of the height determined by surface of body between top of head to foot; pramāṇa (breadth, vistrīti), parimāṇa (width or circumference), lāmbamāna (measurement along the plumbline or lines drawn perpendicularly through different organs of the body), unmāna (thickness, diameter) and upamāna (interspace, as between two feet or between one plumbline and another). Corresponding to these sculptural measures we also have architectural measures like dīrgha, tāra,



Narasimha temple, Bhadrāvati



Interior of Somanathpur Temple



Entrance to Varadarāja temple, Kāñchīpuram

vistāra, visāla, vistrīti, vishkambha and so on.

Icons are classified into four general categories: painted on canvas, paper, wall or pot (chitraja), moulded in clay or any other plastic material like sandal-paste and rice-flour (lepajā, mrnmayī, or paishtī); cast in metal (pākajā, lohajā, dhātūtthā); and carved in stone, wood or precious stone (sastrotkīrnā: sailajā, dāravā, or ratnajā). Early icons were made in clay or carved in wood. And the images so prepared were covered by layers of paint, often bright and variegated. This was necessary to preserve the image for a length of time. Stone icons did not need this treatment, although instances of painted stone icons are not rare.

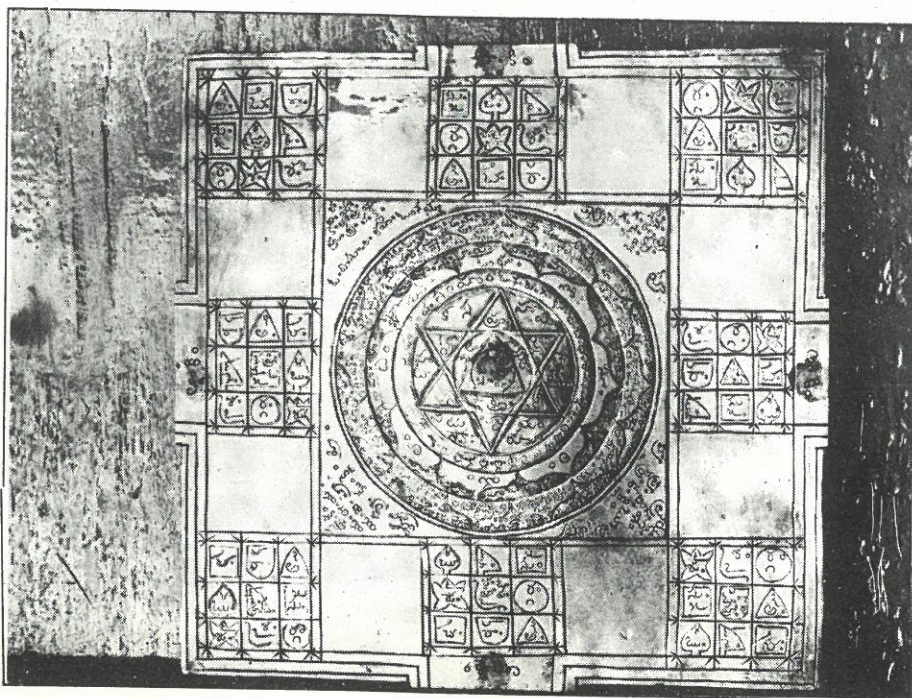


Jagannātha of Puri (Wood)

Painting is an early form of art that man mastered, and employed for religious ends. Besides the prehistoric cave-paintings, there are also the painted funerary jars, urns and pots which belong to a distant past. Iconographic elements may be traced even in these early paintings. But painted pots (ghata) and cloth or canvases (pata) are worshipped in India from very early times. It is not strange, therefore, that drawing and painting are fundamental to iconography.

The icon (pratimā) is actually described in the early texts as what is painted on a piece of cloth, on a wall, or on a vessel, clay or metallic ('pate, kudye, pātre cha chitrajā pratimā smrtā'). The expression was later extended to clay, stone or wooden icons, because painting (lepa) continued to be an important aspect of the icon installed for worship.

Several early texts on art and architecture (like Vishnu-dharmottara, Chitra-lakshana of Nagnajit which is available only in its Tibetan translation, Silpa-ratna, the 'pata-vidhāna', section of Ārya-Maṇjusrīmūla-kalpa and Hayasirsha-samhitā) contain detailed information about the painted icons. Hayasirsha-samhitā even goes to the extent of insisting that Vishnu must be worshipped only in a painting on cloth or canvas ('patasthah pūjanīyas tu devo Nārāyaṇah prabhuh'), for it is only in painting that charm (kānti), ornaments (bhūshana) and expressions (bhāva) can vividly be portrayed (sphutam); Vishnu's presence in the painting is constant ('lepye chitre harir nityam sannidhānam upaiti hi')

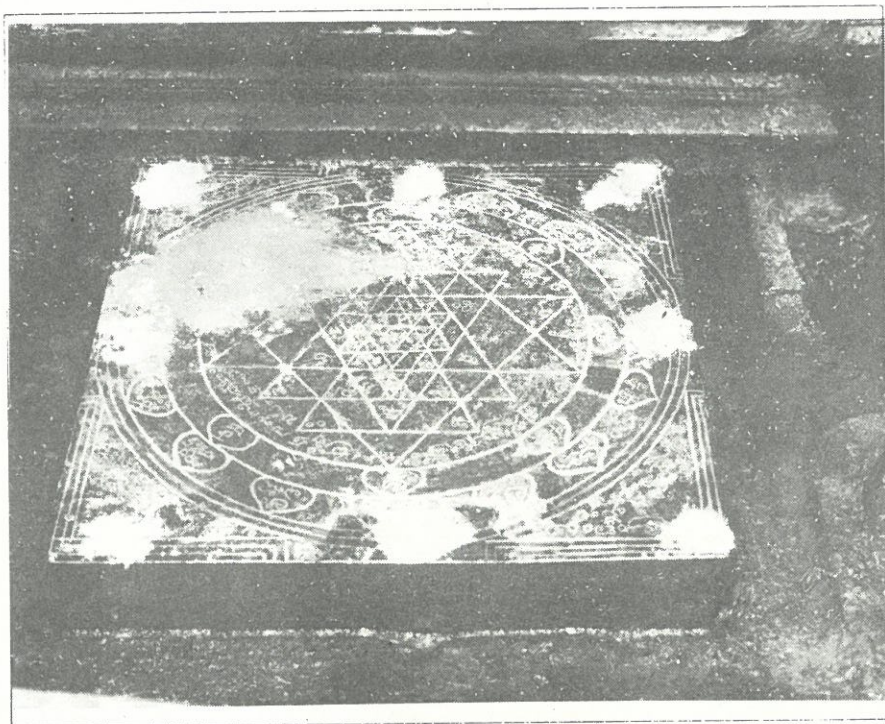


Nava-graha-mandala (in Papaghni-matha, Chikka-ballapura)

The yantras associated with icons, were always painted in bright colours, although this custom was gradually given up. It survived only where Tāntrik rituals were involved. The extensive use of colourful maṇḍalas in the Śākta cults as well as in the Vajrayāna aspect of Buddhism is well-known. When the Tāntrik hold weakened, the yantras became mainly line-drawings, and as a rule were inscribed on metallic sheets or drawn on

paper. The inner spaces of these diagrams were left unfilled so that the appropriate mantras (or seed-syllables, *bijāksharas*) could be written in them whenever desired.

Occasionally, the stone or metallic icon would be installed on such yantras, with the supposition that the icon would thus acquire greater power; and the worship rituals would involve the articulation of the relevant mantras. The three (*pratimā*,



Sri-chakra (in the Siva-temple at Siva-samudram)

yantra and mantra) together constitute the theme of Indian iconography.

Iconography strictly means "drawing" or etching of an icon. It refers to a sculptural representation only by an extension of this meaning. The earlier practice was to draw in lines, sometimes filled with colours also, the image of the deity for purposes of meditation, adoration or worship. Before sculpture in stone or wood appeared, the practice was to draw in outline or sketch on the material. Paintings and drawings to serve an icono-

graphic purpose were in the nature of natural evolutes.

There is a legend that Nārāyaṇa, the great God, drew on earth (urvī) with mango-juice the drawing of a charming feminine form, and infused life into it. Thus was the nymph 'Urvaśī' born. Then Nārāyaṇa composed texts on painting and iconography and handed them over to the celestial architect/ sculptor Viśvakarmā. Nārada-śilpa classifies painting into 'those on the ground' (bhaumika), 'those on the walls' (murals, and frescoes, bhitti), and 'portraits' (bhāva-chitra). The first two



were stationary, while the last was meant to be portable.

Portraits and wall-paintings were involved in iconography, the former being regarded as 'mobile' (chala) and the latter 'immobile' (achala). The wall-paintings were done in four stages: White washing the surface of the wall (dhauta), mouting a coat of boiled rice on it (ghaṭṭita), drawing of the outline in charcoal (lāñchhita), and finally filling in the colours (varṇa-rañjita). The same procedure was

followed when, instead of wall, cloth (paṭa) was employed as the medium. The manner in which portraits were prepared was slightly different. It was done in the following stages: initial outline drawing (rekḥāpāta), modulating the light and shade, and finalising the sketch (vāstava), arranging decorative details (alañkāra) and colouring (varṇa).

An old verse mentions that masters are attentive to drawing, experts to



modulations, women to decorative details and common people to bright colours.

रेखां प्रशंसन्त्याचार्याः वर्तनां च विचक्षणाः ।
स्त्रियो भूषणमिच्छन्ति वर्णाढ्यमितरे जनाः ॥

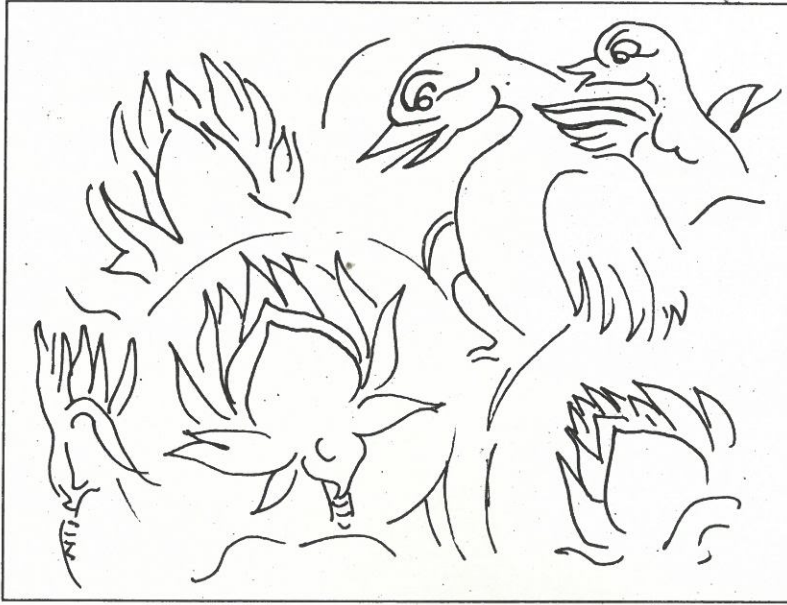
The import of this verse is that outline sketches are regarded as possessing a relatively high artistic value. Differentiation of forms (*rūpa-bheda*), accommodation of proportions (*pramāṇa*), projection of feelings and aspects of beauty (*lāvaṇya-yojanā*), bringing out the resemblance

(*sādrśya*) and putting the colours on (*varṇikā-bhaṅga*) are regarded as the 'six limbs' of drawing, according to Yashodhara's gloss on *Kāmā-sutra*.

रूपभेदाः प्रमाणानि भावलावण्ययोजना ।
सादृश्यं वर्णिकाभङ्ग इति चित्रं षडङ्गकम् ॥

Among the six details that are here enumerated, it is last one alone that makes the sketch a painting; the other five relate to drawing.

The importance of line-drawing is to be gleaned from numerous medieval



treatises on painting like Vishṇu-dharmotara, Samarāṅgaṇa-sūtra-dhāra (Bhoja), Abhilashitārtha-chintāmaṇi (Someśvara), and Hara-Vijaya (Ratnākara). And the application of this outlook is to be found in the wall-paintings of Ajaṇṭā, Bāgh, Bādāmi, Sittanavāsai, Hampi Virūpakṣa temple, the Āṅgondi palace, Lepākṣi Pāpanāśa temple and Vardhamāna temple, Tañjāvūr · Bṛhadiśvara temple, Śravaṇa-belgoḷa Jaina-maṭha and Seebi-Narasimha temple.

Mention has already been made of polytheism being an essential characteristic of Hinduism, and thus being fundamental to Indian Iconography. Innumerable are the deities that receive worship from the Indian masses, from earliest of times to the present day. In fact, the number of deities that merit adoration is increasing over years. Besides the major gods and goddesses that have scriptural sanction

and are of national status (like Vishṇu, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Durgā, Hanumān), numerous heroes, saints and benefactors of regional significance are periodically accorded divine or semi-divine status; and people look upon them as incarnations or emanations with peculiarities of their own. Cultic and folk deities form the bulk of Indian polytheism.

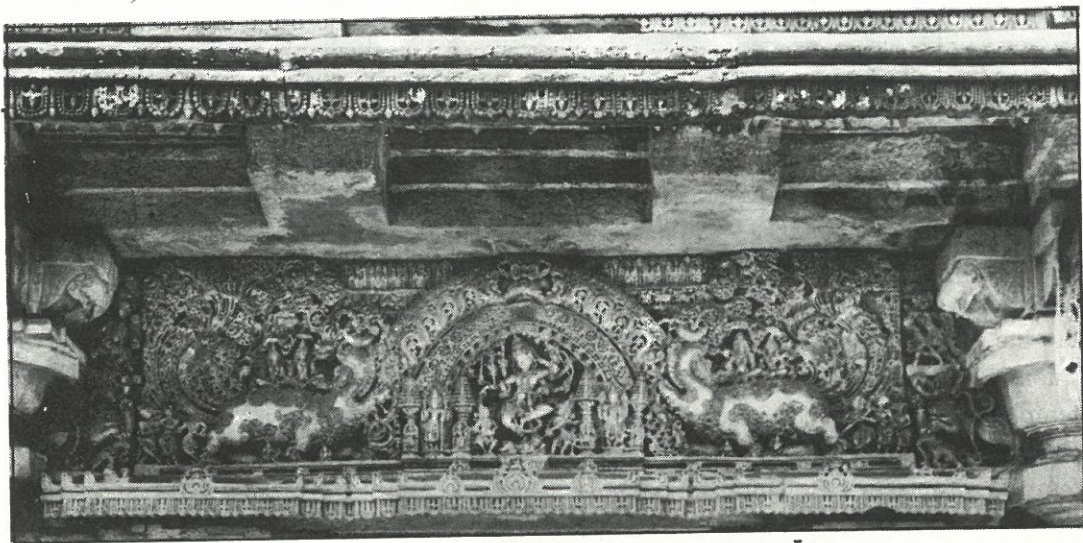
Generally, however, five deities constitute the normal or core pantheon of Hinduism: Vishṇu and Śiva (both of whom have a Vedic background), Devī (the mother-goddess who goes back to a more remote past), Gaṇeśa (the folk god of universal appeal in our country), and Sūrya (the solar divinity, whose cult has been popular all over the world at some time or other). The Sun (Sūrya) is often regarded as an aspect of Vishṇu (Sūryanārāyaṇa), and is represented by Fire (Agni), especially the sacrificial fire.

Thus, in effect, there are four major divinities.

But the custom of pentadic worship (*pañcchopāsana*) has gained currency in the country. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly this custom commenced, but we find it recommended in the *Purāṇas* and the *smṛti*-texts. *Śaṁkarāchārya* (early 7th cent) is supposed to have been responsible for its prevalence. But we find nothing about it in any of his authentic works; and from what he says about

be located the five deities. But a *Śaivite*, for instance, would place *Śiva* in the centre and the other four deities in the four corners. A *Vaiṣṇavite*, on the other hand, would make *Vishṇu* occupy the central position. There is thus a sectarian involvement in the arrangement of five deities.

The presupposition is that the central deity is in fact the only deity receiving worship, the other four being only aspects of this central deity. There is thus a

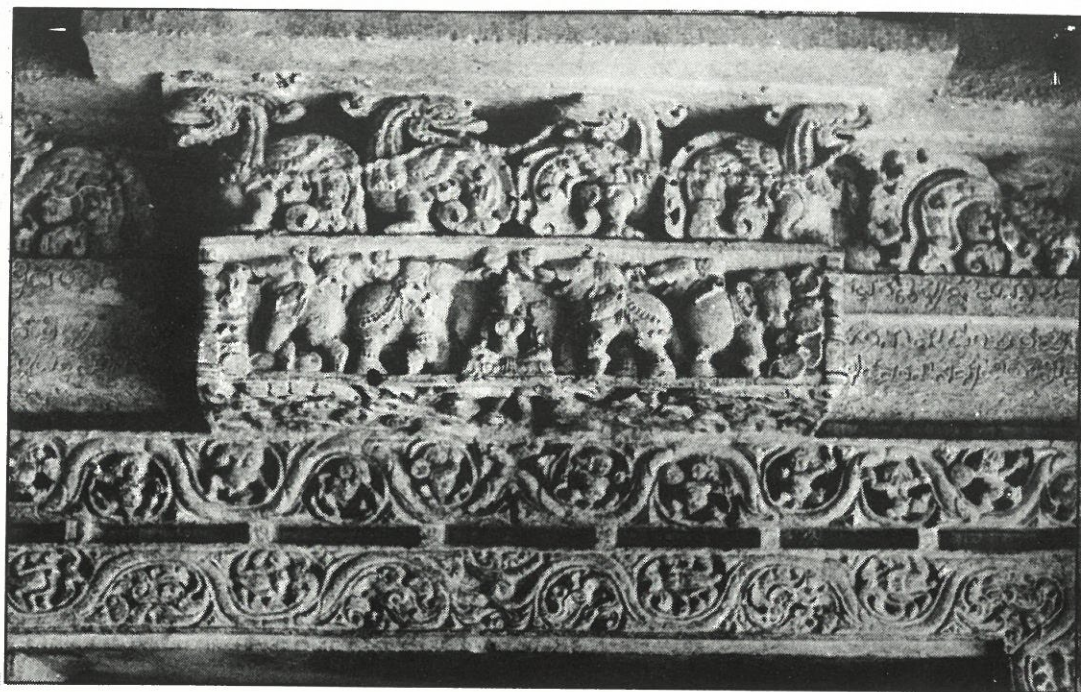


Chitra-torāṇa in the Hoysala temple at Halebīdu

worship, it appears unlikely that he encouraged this pentadic worship.

The custom is closely associated with the concept of monotheistic primacy of the deity of the devotee's choice (*ish-tadevatā*). The arrangement of the five gods on a common platform would signify their equal status. At the four corners and the centre of a square base (*vedi*) would

monotheistic tendency even in the pentadic worship. There were, during the middle ages, five sects that had become important: the *Śaivites* worshipping *Śiva*, the *Vaiṣṇavites* devoted to *Vishṇu*, the *Śāktas* given to the cult of *Devī* (*Śakti*), the *Gāṇapatyas* adoring *Gaṇapati*, and the *Sauras* worshipping the Sun. Each sect looked upon its object of adoration as



Makara - toraṇa in the basadi in Hanasoge

the God, but accepted the gods of other sects also.

The devotee given to the pentadic worship does not actually worship five gods; he worships only one God, but accepts the other gods as belonging to same family (*parivāra*). The texts explain that, in accordance with the five elements that ultimately are the stuff of which the entire universe is made, human beings are of five types: the earth type, the water type, the fire type, the air type, and the ether type. Although the elemental predominance is the distinguishing feature, no element can possibly do without the others. In due consideration of the elemental types (*'pratyeka tattva-*

prāchuryam vimṛśya vidhi-pārvakam'), the pentadic worship is instituted.

The association of the five elements with the five deities is variously given. However, the commonly accepted correspondances are: Gaṇapati earth; Śiva-water; Devi-fire; Sūrya-air; and Viṣṇu ether. There is another account where Śiva corresponds to the earth element and Gaṇapati to water. They are represented by distinctive yantras in order; square (*chaturasra*), crescent moon or hexagon (*shatkona*), triangle (*trikoṇa*), circle (*vr̥tta*) and dot (*bindu*).

The five deities are represented on the platform either by these geometrical designs, or by icons. More frequently,

however, they are represented by five natural objects: Gaṇapati by a red stone (rakta-prastara-khaṇḍa), Śiva by white quartz from rivers like Narmadā (bāṇa-liṅga), Devī by metallic stone (dhātupatra or yantra), Sūrya by crystal (sphaṭika), and Viṣṇu by ammonite from Gaṇḍakī river (śālagrāma).

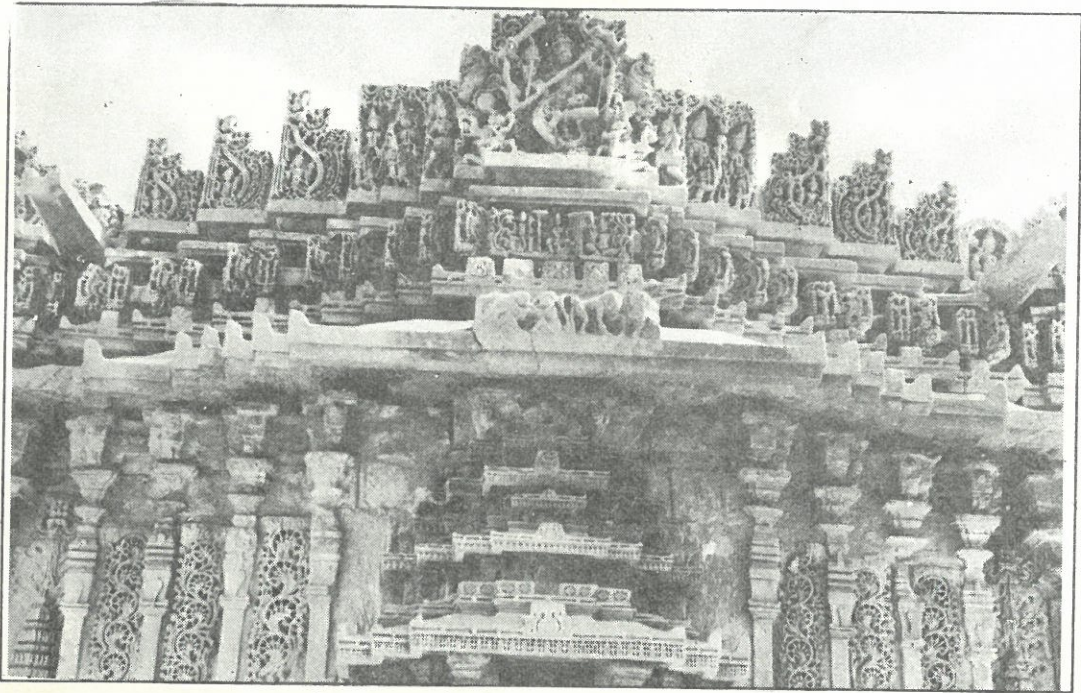
The positions of the four deities with respect to the central deity are specified in the texts. The philosophical interpretation of the pentadic worship has been given in some texts. Gaṇapati, as the lord of group of fourteen worlds, signifies the phenomenon of bondage, which obstructs the dawn of enlightenment (hence called Vighneśvara). Sūrya is the principle behind creation (from the root 'sū' to produce). Viṣṇu is responsible for the preservation of the created world, and Śiva for its destruction. Devī is the principle of the power of wisdom (jñāna-śakti) which liberates the devotee from phenomenal bondage. It is well-known that Gaṇapati is worshipped for worldly success, Sūrya for health, Viṣṇu for wealth, Śiva for dispassion, and Devī for the liberating wisdom. Further, the five elements that are represented by the five deities are translated into the five constituents of the inner constitution of man: earth:ego (ahamkāra), water:object awareness (chitta), fire:primary consciousness (buddhi), air:mind (manas), and ether:'the heart' (hṛdaya, the seat of consciousness). Thus, this mode of worship is sought to be integrated into conceptual and symbolic framework.

Each of the five deities has many iconic forms in which it is worshipped. Examples are Rāma, Kṛishṇa, Narasimha, Trivikrama and Hayagrīva, (among the forms of Viṣṇu), Vīrabhadra, Bhairava, Dakṣiṇā-mūrti and Natarāja (among the forms of Śiva), Kālī, Tripura-sundarī, Lakshmi, Mahishamardini and Kanyākumārī (among the forms of Devī), Siddhi-Vināyaka, Heramba, Śakti-Gaṇapati and Haridrā-Gaṇapati (among forms of Gaṇapati).

Sūrya, however, does not appear in many forms. Usually he is represented as standing with two hands holding lotus flowers, drawn in a chariot to which several horses are yoked and driven by Aruṇa ("the dawn"). He is often represented as the chief among the nine planets (grahas).

When the deity has iconic variants, there is usually a legend to justify the iconic details like the posture, number of hands, weapons and expressions. The Purāṇas, some of which are sectarian (like Śiva-purāṇa for Śaivas), Viṣṇu-purāṇa for Vaiṣnavas, Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa for Śāktas, Mudgala-purāṇa for the Gaṇapatyas) contain these legends. And as part of the worship, these legendary accounts are read in order to crystallize the iconic form of the deity that is worshipped.

The pentadic worship is current among the followers of the Smṛti-texts (the Smārtas), who owe allegiance to one or the other of the monastic institutions claiming to have been founded by the great Śaṅkarācārya. The Vaiṣnavas or



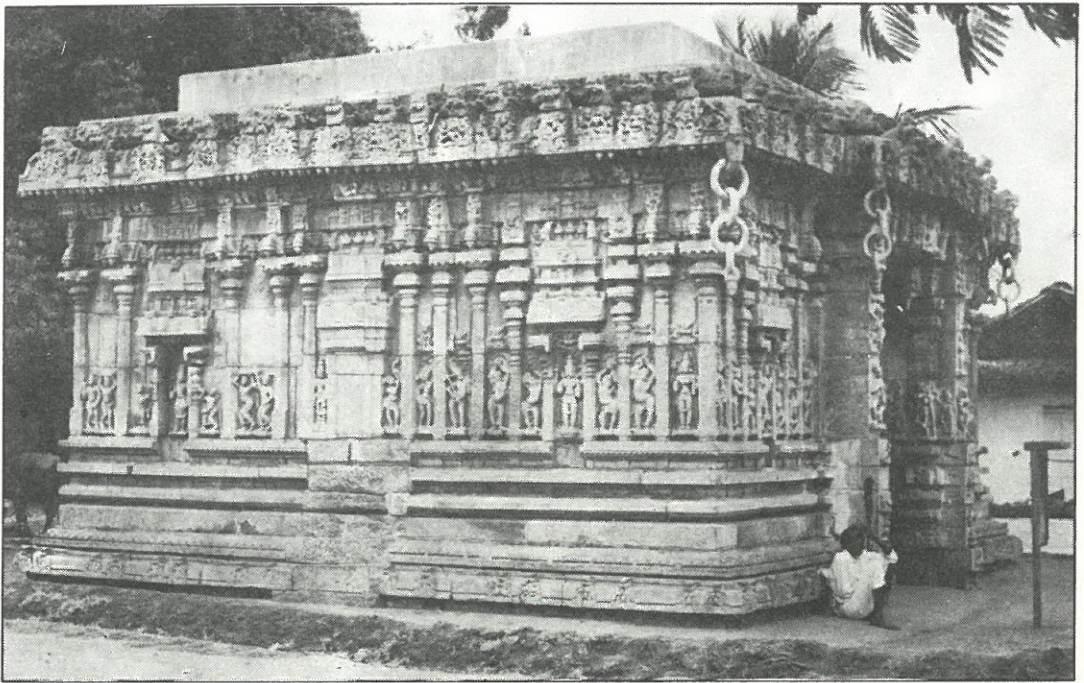
Entrance of a Hoysala temple Mosale

the Śāktas, however, do not recognise this mode of worship, although they do honour and worship the other four deities (besides their own chosen deities viz, Viṣṇu or Devī), separately and on different occasions. Their daily worship is conducted exclusively to Viṣṇu or Devī.

Whether Śaivas, or Vaiṣṇavas, the Devī is invariably worshipped along with Śiva or Viṣṇu. She becomes some form of Durgā when associated with Śiva, and of Lakṣmī when associated with Viṣṇu. Gaṇapati is also commonly worshipped, though exclusive worshippers of Gaṇapati (the Gaṇapatyas) are extremely rare now. The sun is adored during the sandhyā-ritual, but not in any iconic form except as one of the nine planets.

Iconic difference are usually indicated by the posture (bhaṅgi), the number of hands (hasta), weapons (āyudha), ornaments (bhūṣaṇa) hand gestures (mudrā) and facial expressions (bhāva). The postures can be seated, standing, reclining or mobile. Viṣṇu as Kṛiṣṇa is often shown as a child on all fours (Bāla-Kṛiṣṇa), or as an infant lying on its back on a leaf of the banyan tree (Vaṭapatra-sāyin). We find Gaṇapati also being represented as a child moving about on all fours, but rarely. No other deity is represented in this posture.

Seated and standing are common positions in which icons of all deities are represented. But there may be variations in these postures. While seated, the



Entrance to the Temple at Yeṇḍūr

posture may be easy and relaxed (mahārāja-lālā, e.g. Gaṇapati, and Para-vāsudeva), alert lotus-like (padmāsana, e.g. Mūkāmbikā, Lakshmi, Sarasvatī, Brahma, tīrthaṅkara and Buddha), riding an animal (vāhana, e.g. Gaṅga on the alligator), in a Yogic stance (yoga-patṭa, e.g. Yogā-Narasimha, Dakṣiṇāmūrti and Śāstā), or with one of the legs bent (Kuñchitapāda, e.g. Sadāśiva, Saṁhāra-Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Lakshmi-Nārāyaṇa, Lakshmi-Narasimha and Lalitā).

While seated or standing, it is usual for the Viṣṇu and Śiva images to be accompanied by their consorts in the same posture (Lakshmi and Pārvatī respectively). Rāma with Sītā, Śiva with Gaurī, Sūrya with Chhāyā, Gaṇeśa with Lakshmi,

Narasimha with Lakshmi, Naṭarāja with Śivakāmi, are common examples. There are some gods who have consorts on either side of them; Viṣṇu, for instance, with Bhū-devī (the goddess of earth) and Śrī-devī (the goddess of wealth); Subramanya with Deva-Senā (personified army of gods) and Vallī (a human spouse); Gaṇapati with Siddhi (success) and Buddhi (wisdom); and Kṛishṇa with Rukmini and Śatyabhāmā.

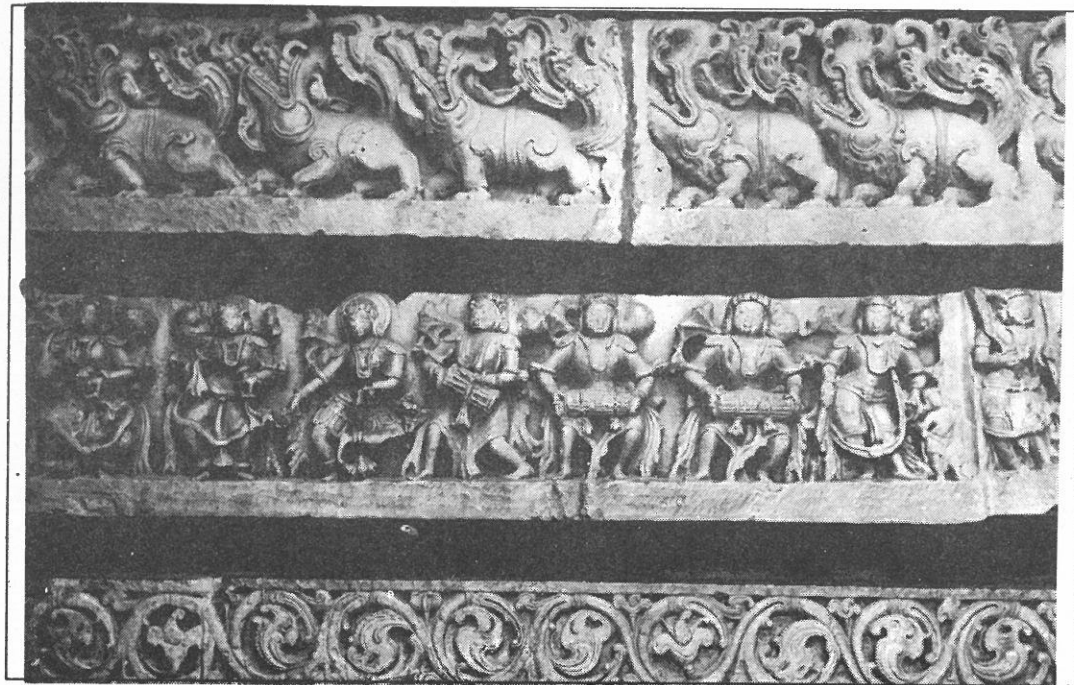
If the god is alone, it is called 'kevala'. Several Viṣṇu and Śiva icons answer to this descriptions Para-Vāsudeva, Yogā-narasimha, Bāla-Kṛishṇa, Veṇu-gopāla, Kevala-Hayagrīva, Śaṁnivāsa, Dhanvantari, Bhairava, Virabhadra, Bhikṣhātana, Dhakṣiṇāmūrti, Dattaātreya, Śāstā and

Śarabhesvara. It is usual for Gaṇeśa images to be represented alone, although in some forms (e.g. Śakti-Gaṇapati, Lakshmī-Gaṇapati and Ucchishṭa Gaṇapati) he is shown with one, two or eight consorts. Bālasubrahmanya is likewise a loner, but in some forms he has two consorts. Hanumān and Garuḍa are invariably single icons, and so is Sudarśana.

The standing posture involves the delineation of flexions or bends (bhaṅgi). When the plumbline passes through the neval (nābhi) from the tip of the crown (śikhāmaṇi) to a point between the two heels on the pedestal (pīṭha), it is 'sama-bhaṅga'; upright, symbolising perfect poise. This position is devoid of any bends, and the body is held erect, firm

and even rigid. The images of the tīrthaṅkaras in the kāyotsarga posture are excellent illustrations.

However, to heighten the aesthetic effect, bends are delicately introduced. If it is only a slight bend in both the upper and lower parts of the body, it is ābhaṅga; if the bend is conspicuous and great it is atibhaṅga. If there are three bends noticeable (the plumb-line passes through one of the sides of the chest, and then it passes through one side of the navel, right or left, and finally comes down to the heels) it is tri-bhaṅga (head, trunk and lower limbs). When the sweep of the curve in this posture is emphasized ("like a tree caught in a storm"), it becomes atibhaṅga.



Friezes in the temple at Halebidu

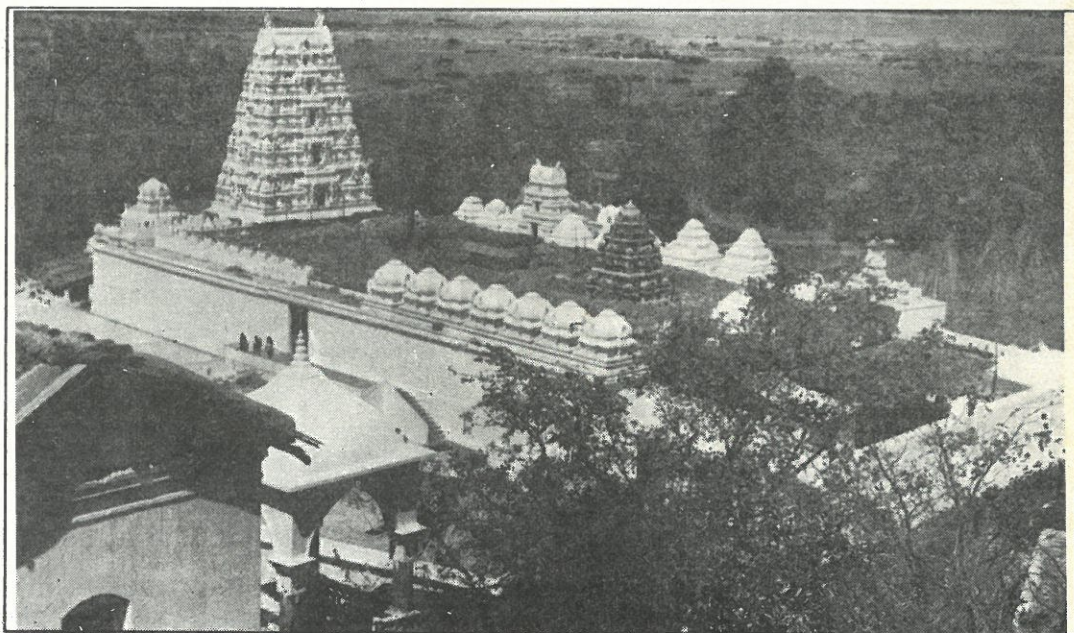
Feminine and dancing deities are shown in ābhaṅga and tribhaṅga postures. The atibhaṅga is a rare posture, especially in sculpture. But drawings of Vajrayāna divinities in Tibet frequently employ this posture, the excessive flexion being suggestive of violent passion (krodha).

Vishṇu is shown in the dance stance only as Kṛishṇa (Kāliya- Kṛishṇa, dancing on the hood of the dragon Kāliya, Navanīta- Kṛishṇa, dancing with balls of butter in one hand or in both hands). A pillar in the temple atop the Tirumalai hills shows Narasimha dancing; and this is altogether a rare depiction. Śiva as Natarāja is a celebrated image. But there are several variant postures in this, which are not so well known as the famous Tiruvalaṅgāḍu icon. Gaṇapati and Śarasvati are also shown sometimes as dancing.

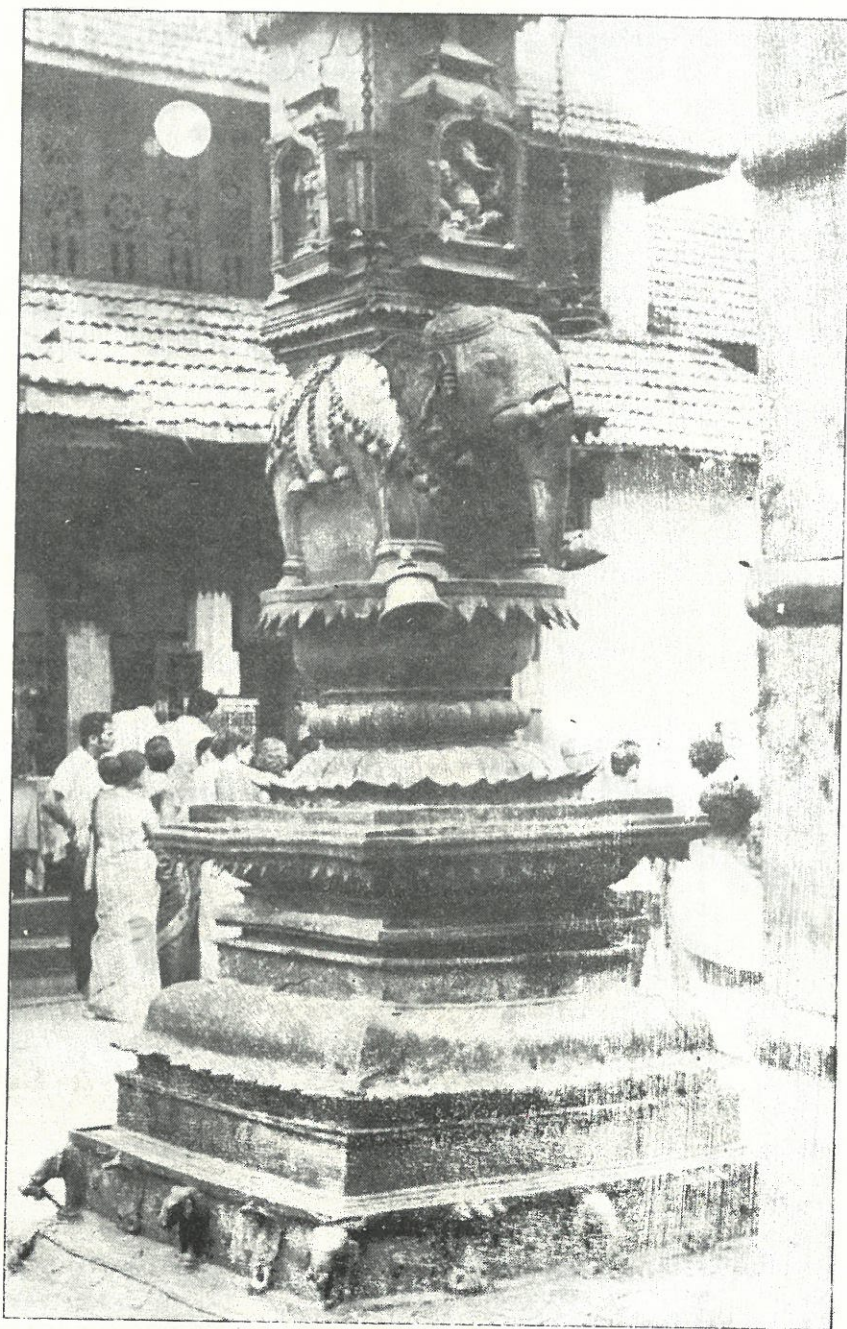
Several Devis with Tantrik background, like Kāli and Aparājītā, are also shown in dancing postures, or in semidancing (alidha) postures.

Reclining, śayana, is a posture that is almost exclusive to Viṣṇu. Raṅganātha in Śrīraṅgam, Ananta-śayana in Trivandrum, and Śeṣaśayana (terra-cotta in the 5th cent, temple at Bhitargāon and relief in stone from Deogarh, 6th cent) are familiar examples.

Rāma is occasionally depicted in this posture, with Lakshmaṇa sitting at his head and Hanumān standing at the feet as in the Vijayanagar panel. This panel may alternately be an illustration of the episode of Lakshmaṇa fainting during the great war, and Rāma deputing Hanumān to bring the sanjivani drug.



Rāma Temple, Bhadrachalam



Dhvāja stambha in front of the famous Mukāmbika shrine at Kollūr (Karnāṭaka).

Mobile postures (yānaka) include Viṣṇu as Vāraha rescuing the Earth, as Trivikrama measuring the upper regions, as Narasiṃha rushing out of the pillar to slay the demon, and as Veṇugopāla playing the flute (in a standing posture); Śiva as the conqueror of the three realms (Tripurāri), as the ascetic on his begging round (Bhikṣhāṇa), and as Vīrabhadra destroying Dakṣa's sacrifice; and Devī as Durgā setting out to kill the buffalo-demon, Mahiṣa, and as Tārā shooting arrows.

For main worship, however, the seated (āsīna) and standing (sthānaka) postures of the deities are preferred: it is usual, therefore, to find such postures in the sanctum of the temple (with some excep-

tions like Śrīraṅgam). Viṣṇu is usually represented as standing; and Śakti as seated, either on a seat (pīṭha) or lion.

For seated figures, texts like Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā, prescribe as many as eleven variant postures; lotus' (padma), 'tortoise' (kūrma), 'peacock' (mayūra), 'cock' (kukkuṭa), 'lion' (siṁha), 'heroic' (vīra), svastika, 'firm' (bhadra), 'free' (mukta), 'cowhead' (go-mukha), or in a tāntrik diagram (chakra). Usually, however, the lotus-posture is employed by sculptors.

The shrines built over standing, seated or recumbent icons are known as saṁchita (reference to height), asaṁchita (breadth) and apasaṁchita (width or length) respectively.

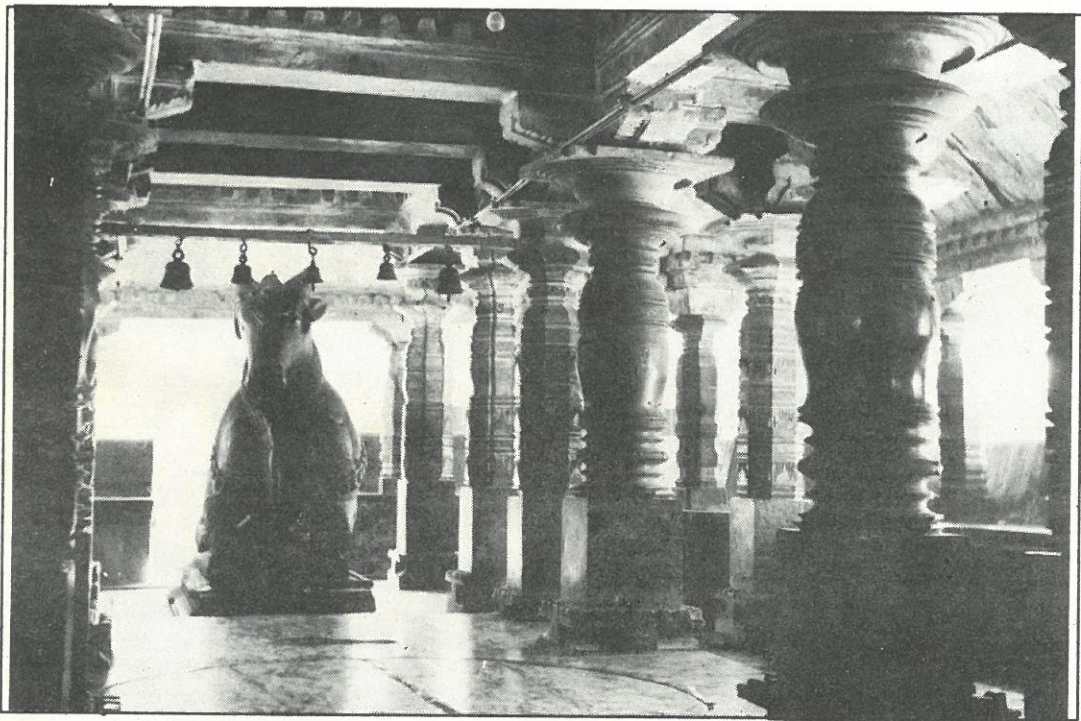


Pillars in the Vaikuntha-perumal temple in Kāñchīpuram

The seats on which the iconic representations are lodged also figure in various forms; circular (*padmāsana*), octagonal (*simhāsana*), triangular (*anantāsana*), octagonal (*yogāsana*), hexagonal (*vimalāsana*) and so on. It is also customary to use detachable seats of different forms in different stages of the worship ritual like *simhāsana* for bathing, *yogāsana* for invocation, *anantāsana* for witnessing amusements, and *vimalāsana* for receiving the offering made.

Speaking of the geometrical forms, we need to remember that all icons have

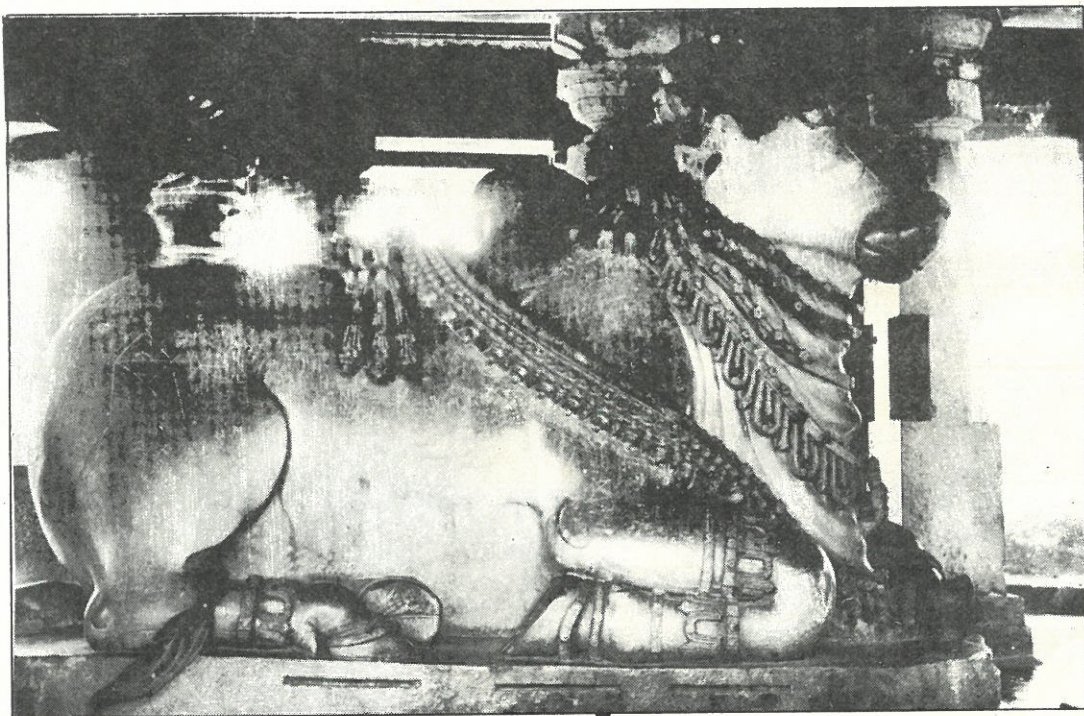
their graphic representations (*yantras*) as well as verbalizations (*mantras*). During the worship, the *yantras* are prepared and employed, and *mantras* are chanted. The *Devī* is often worshipped in the 'Śrī-chakra', either as linear diagram (*rekhā-yantra*) or as an aniconic image (*meru*). This is regarded as the most powerful of the *yantras*. It is also most intricate in its design, and the worship involves an elaborate ritual.



Nandi-mandapa in Ancient temple at Banavāsi (Karnāṭaka)



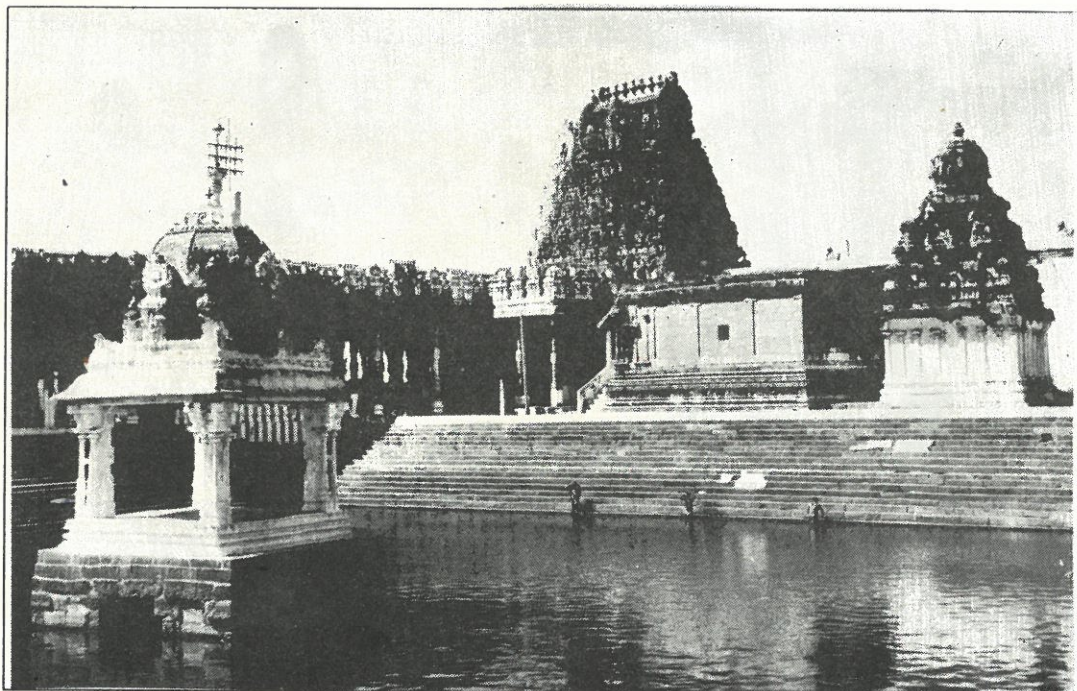
Nandi in Lepakshi



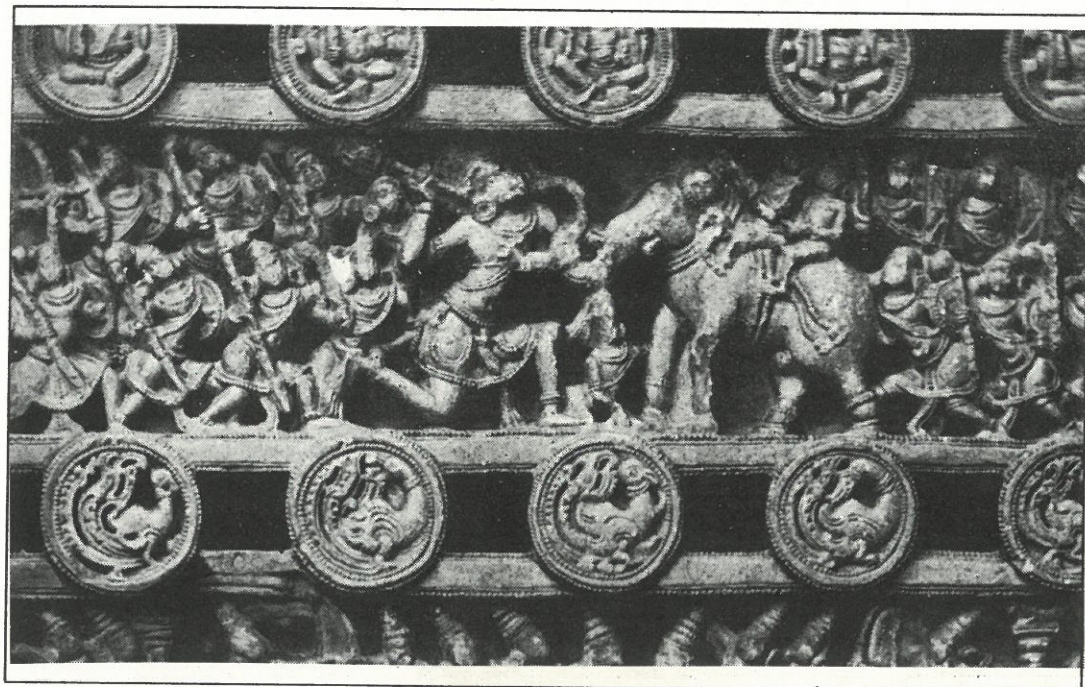
NANDI (in Halebidu)



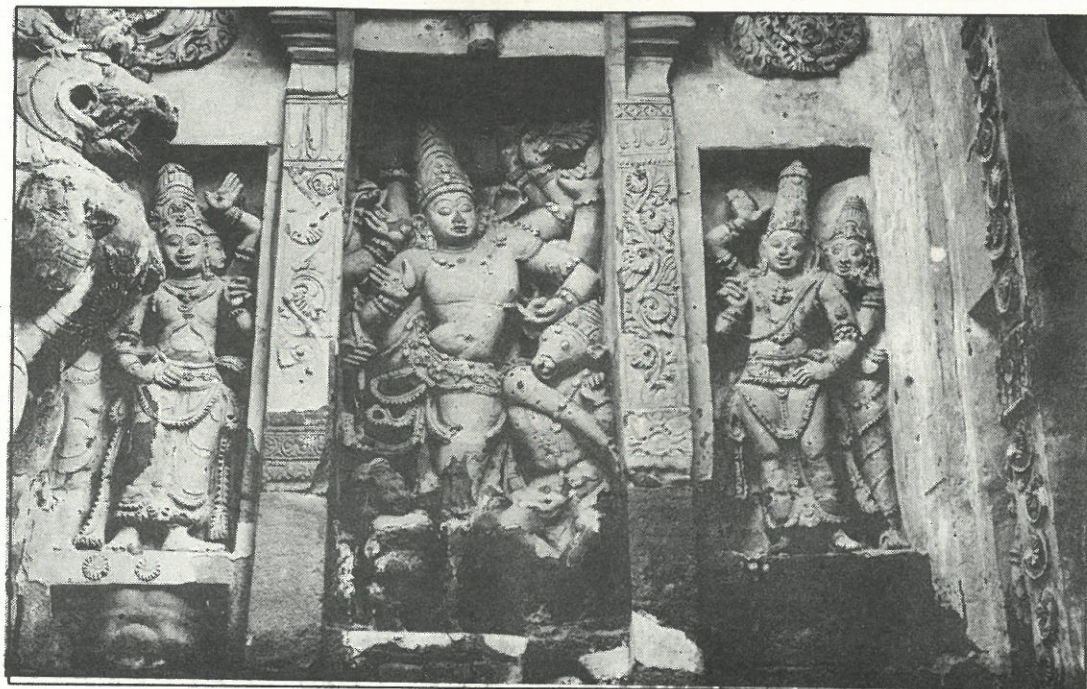
Pillars in the Alagar temple at Madurai



Ekāṃranātha temple, Kāñchipuram



Sculptured panels from the window in the temple at Bandālike (Karnāṭaka)



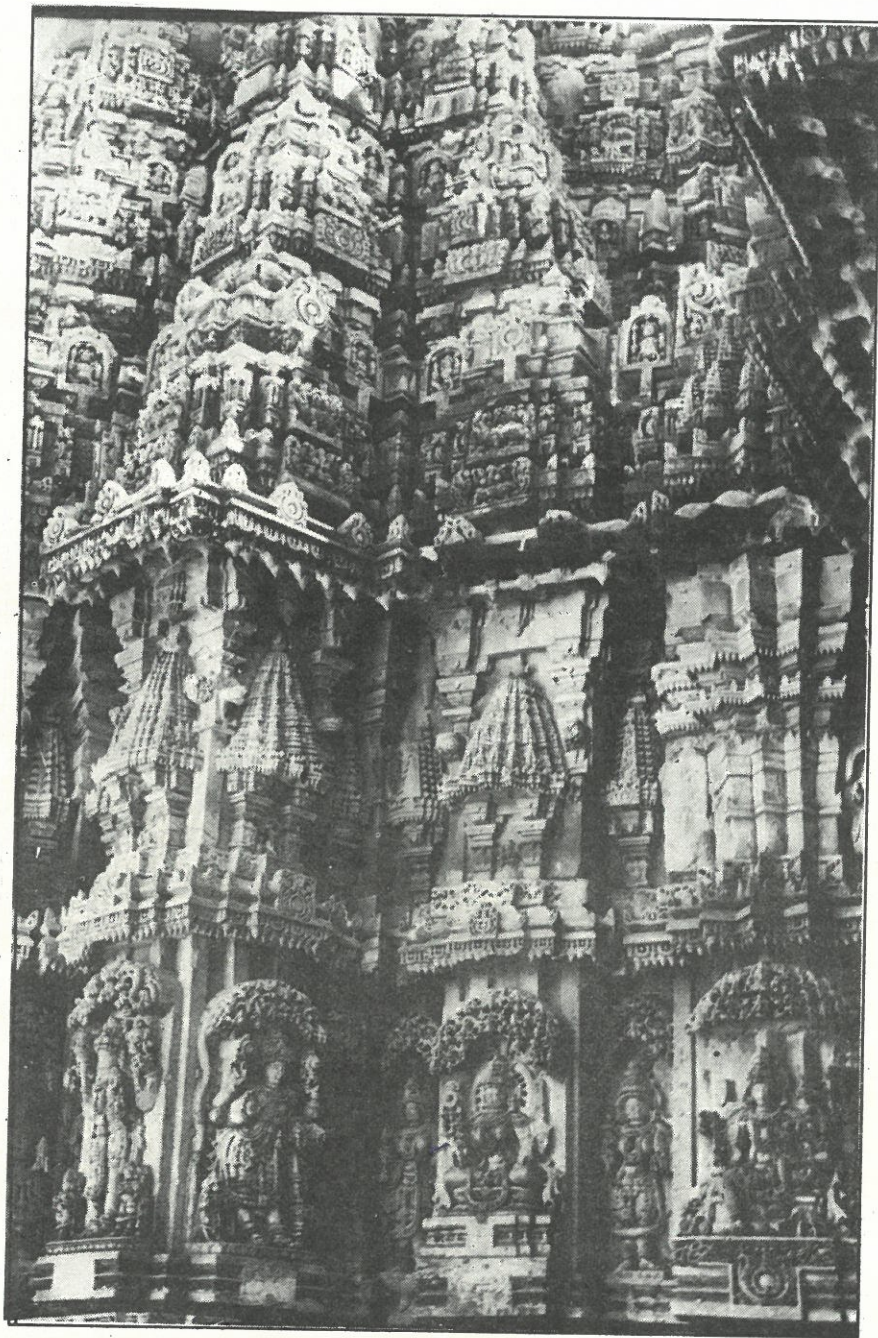
Wall figures in the ancient Kailāsanātha temple of Kāñchipuram



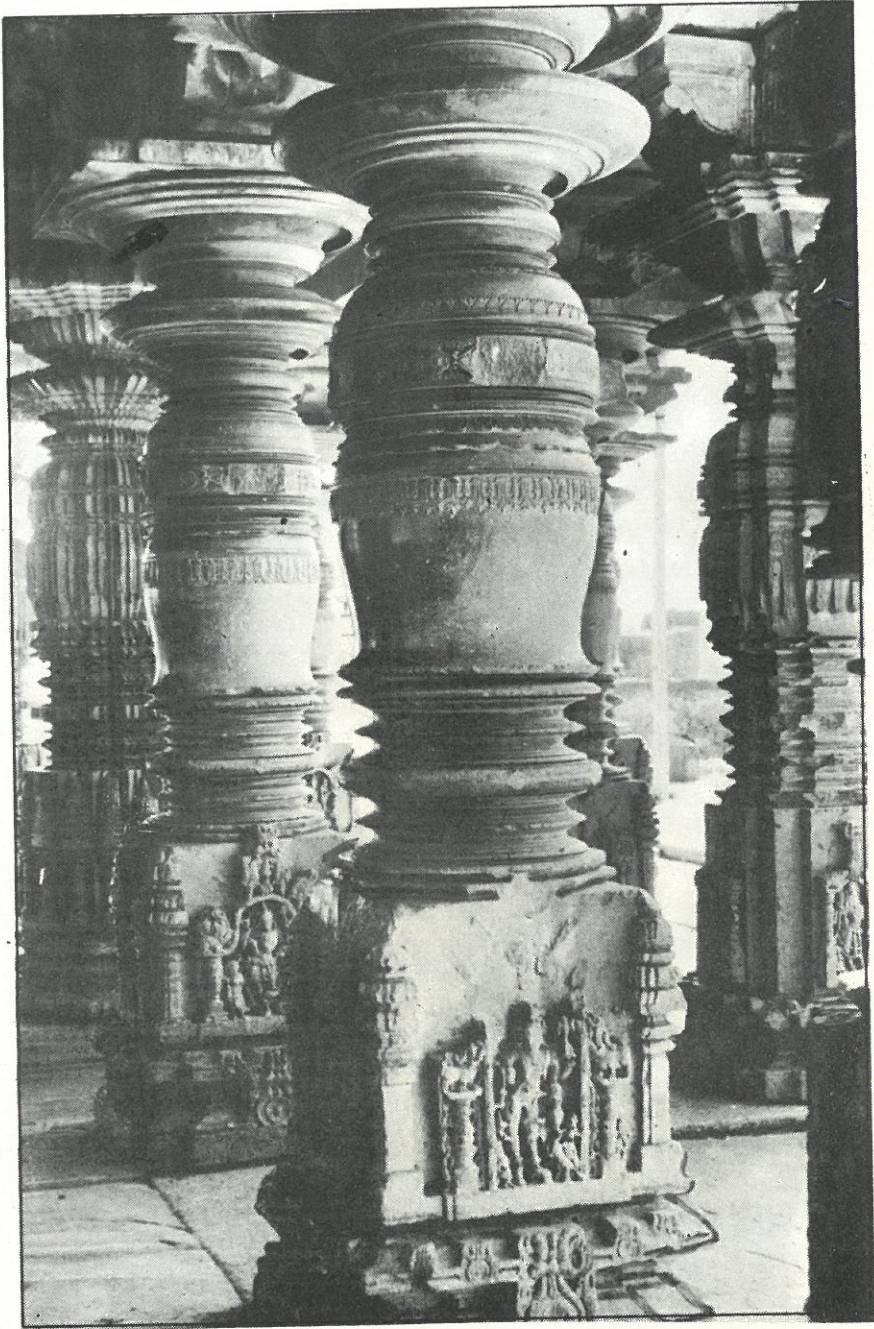
Wall sculpture in the Visvanātha temple at Vārāṇasī



Wall-friezes in the temple at Halebidu



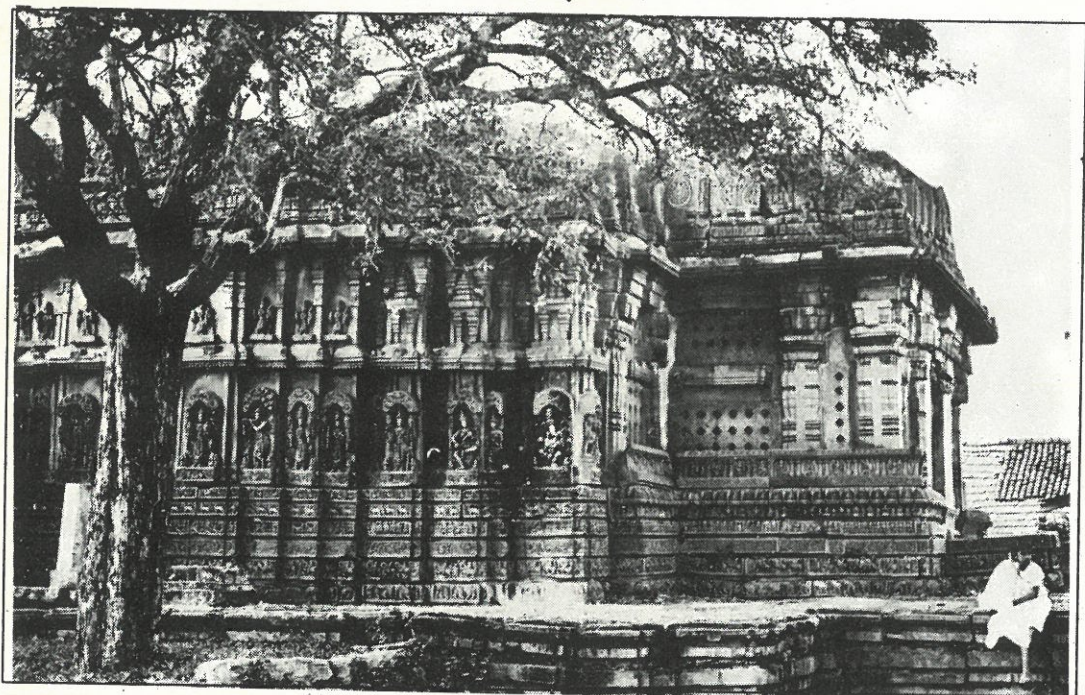
Sculptured walls of the temple at Somanāthpur



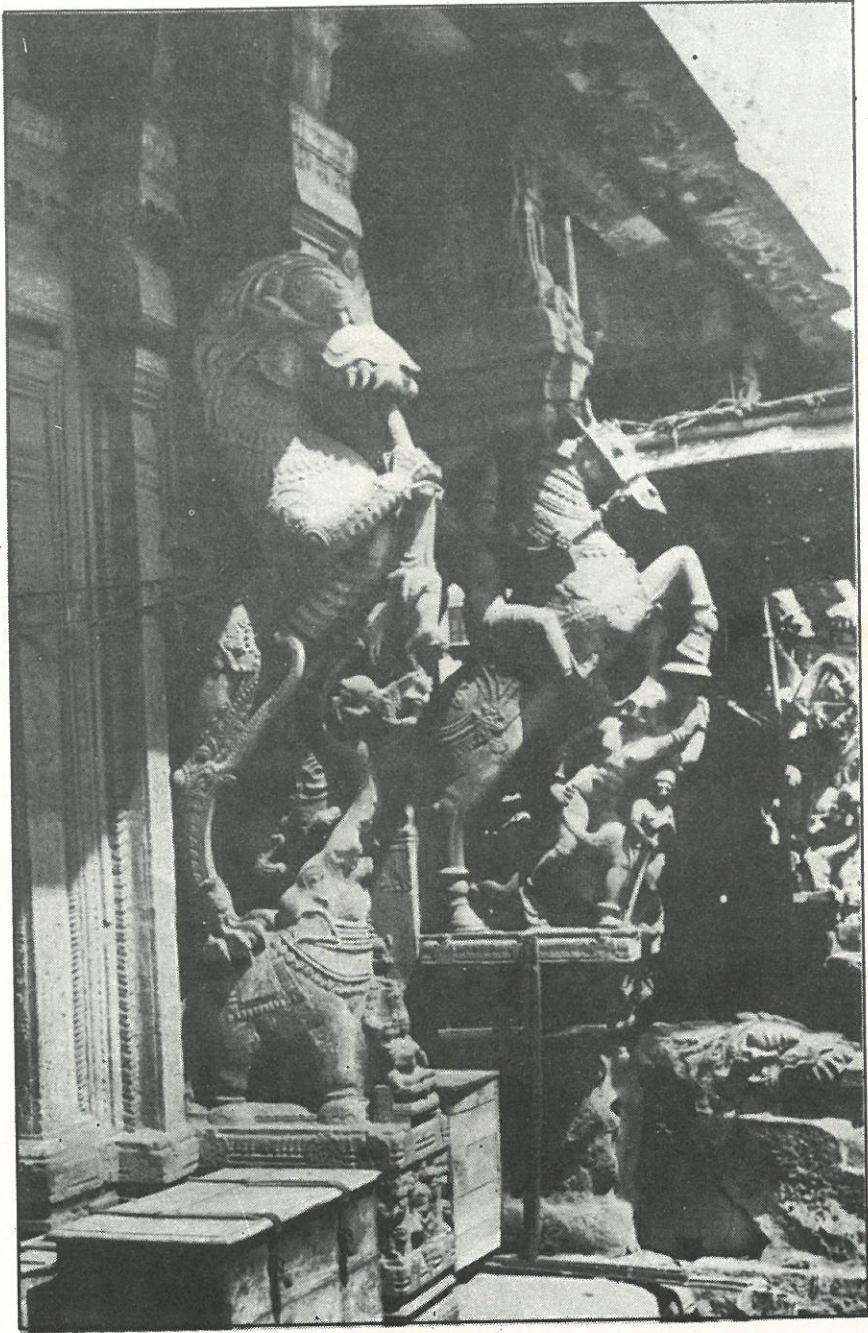
Carved pillars of the Mahadeva temple in Ittagi



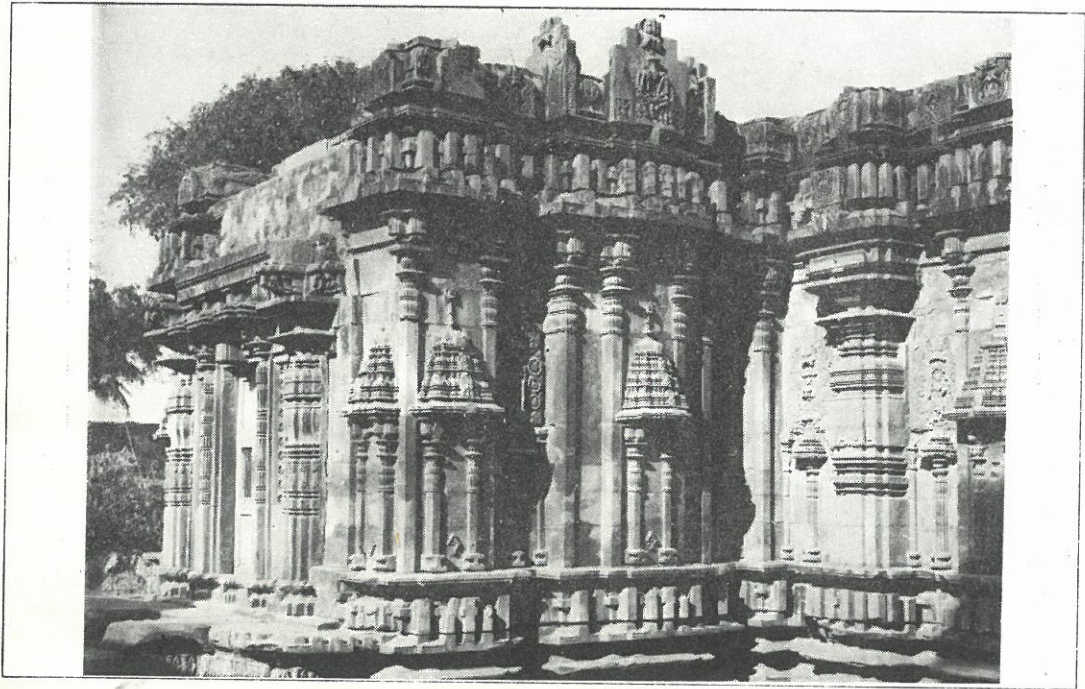
Friezes in the Hoysala temple at Belūr



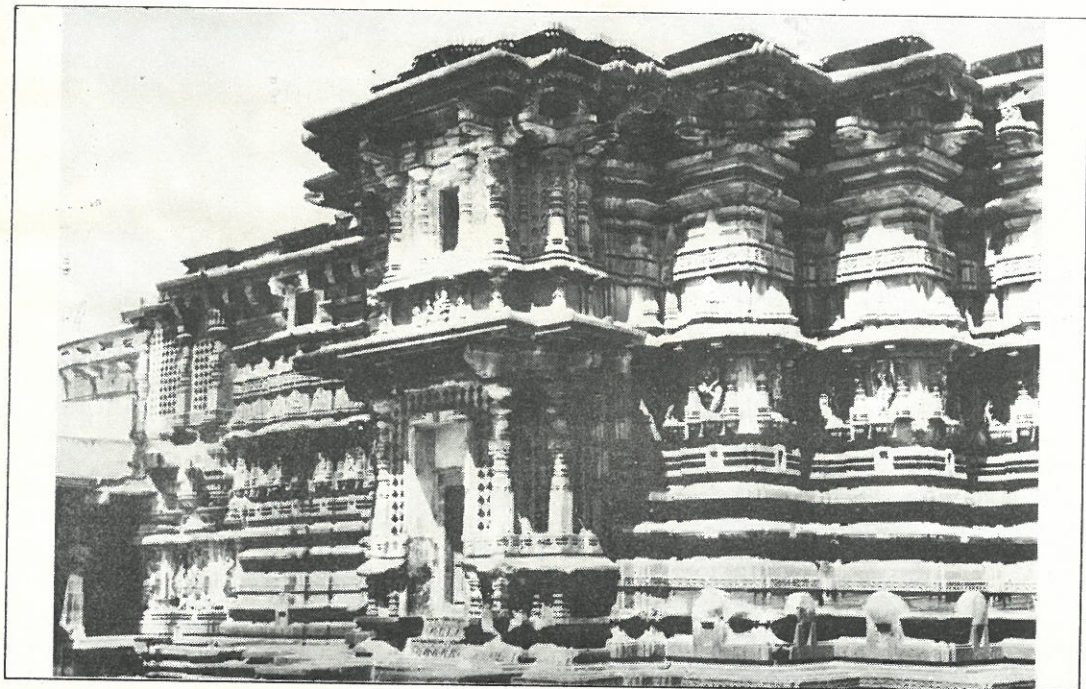
Channakesava temple at Aralaguppe



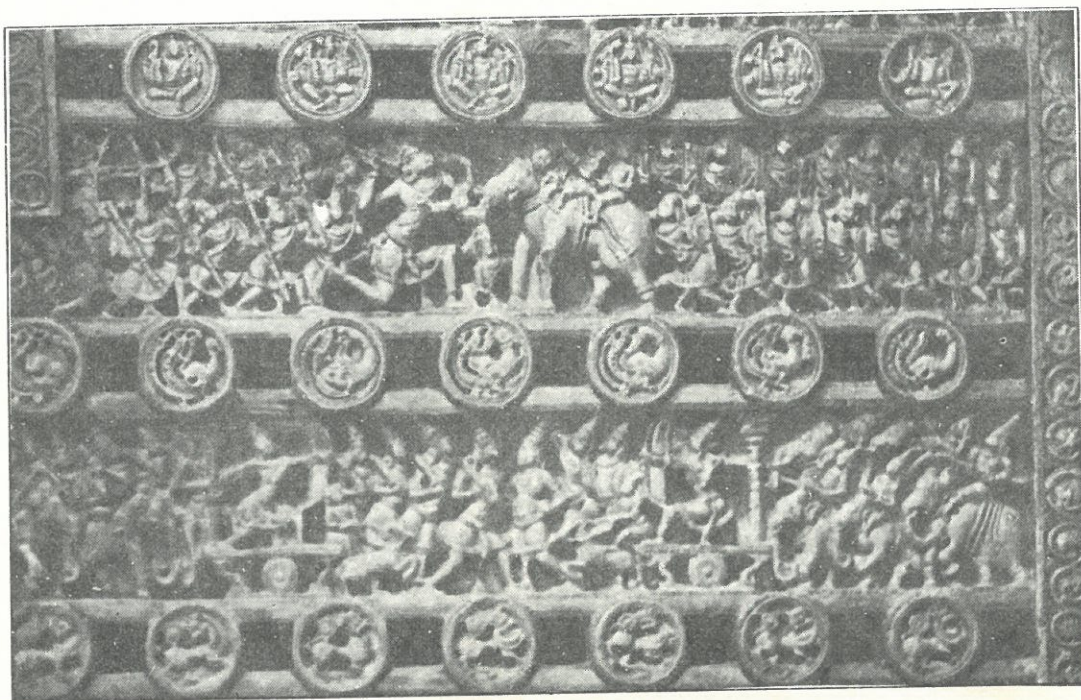
Entrance pillars in the Minākshi temple, Madurai



Chandramaulīśvara temple at Unakal near Dhārwaḍa



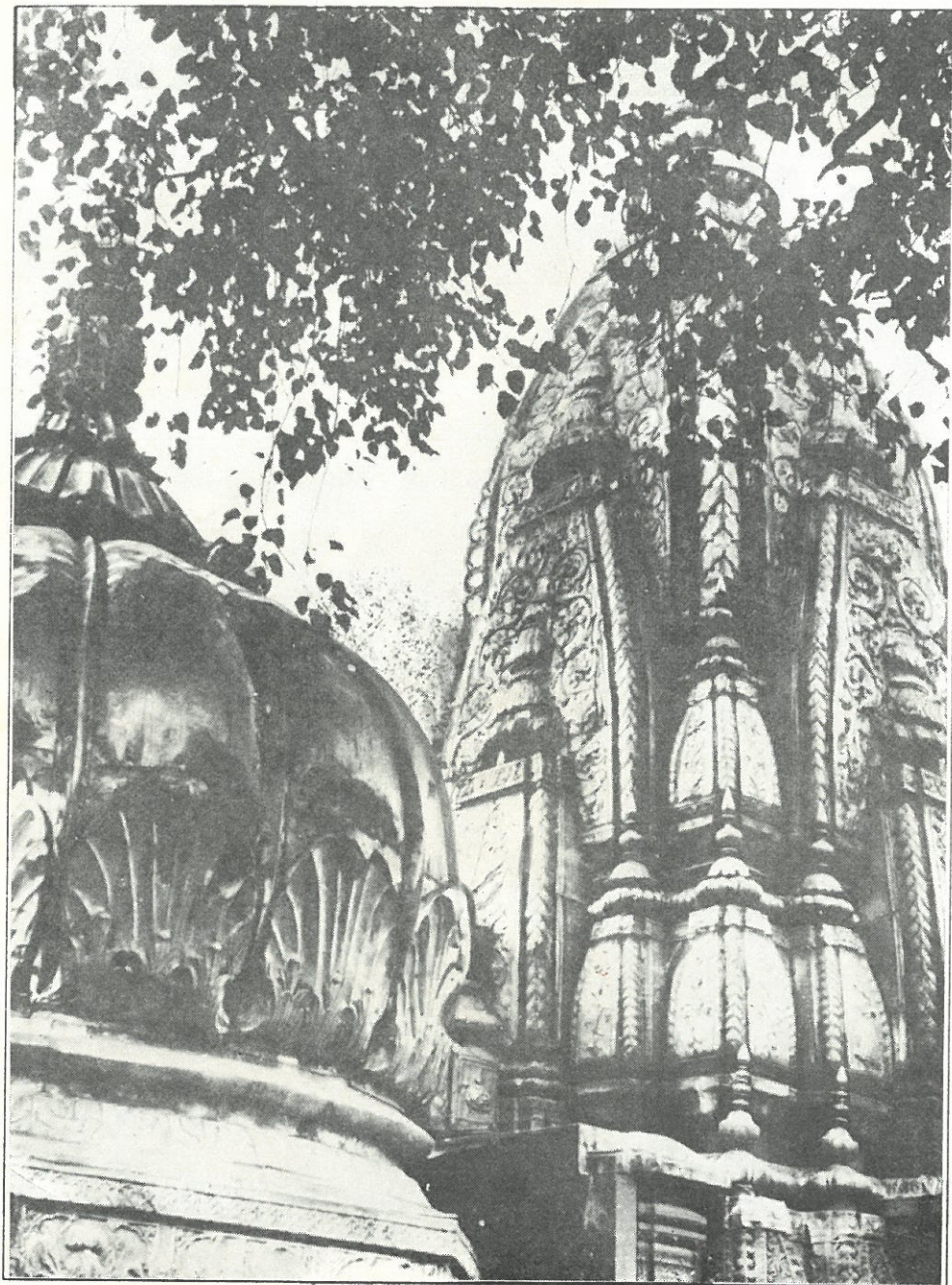
Mahālakshmi temple at Kolhāpur



Pierced windows in Someśvara temple at Bandalike



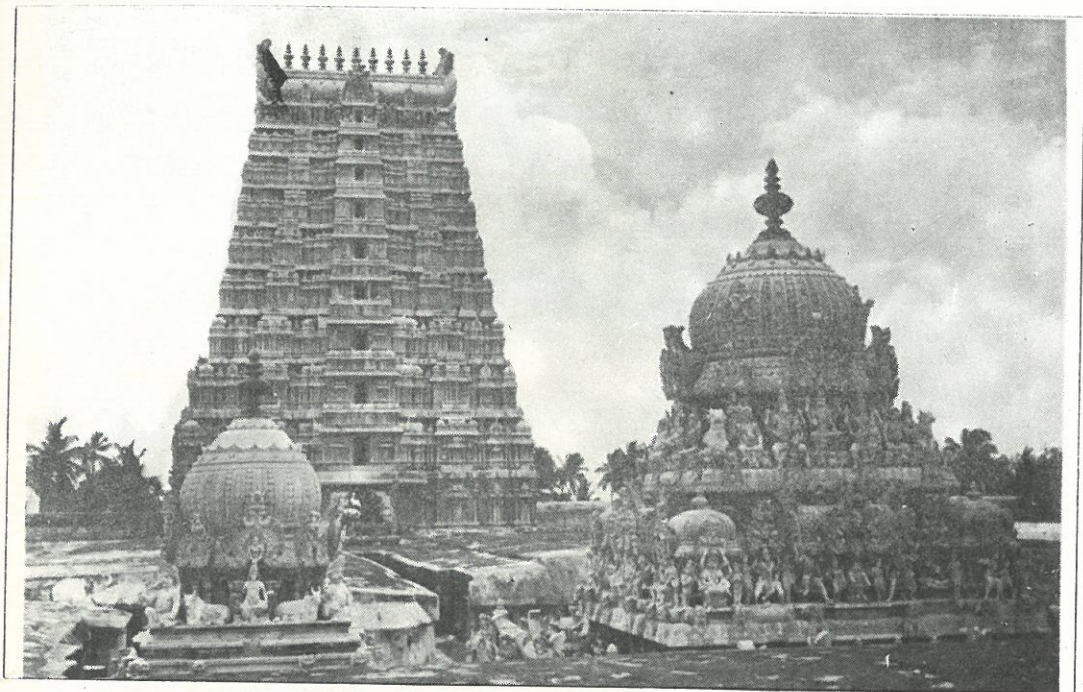
Harihareśvara temple, Harihar



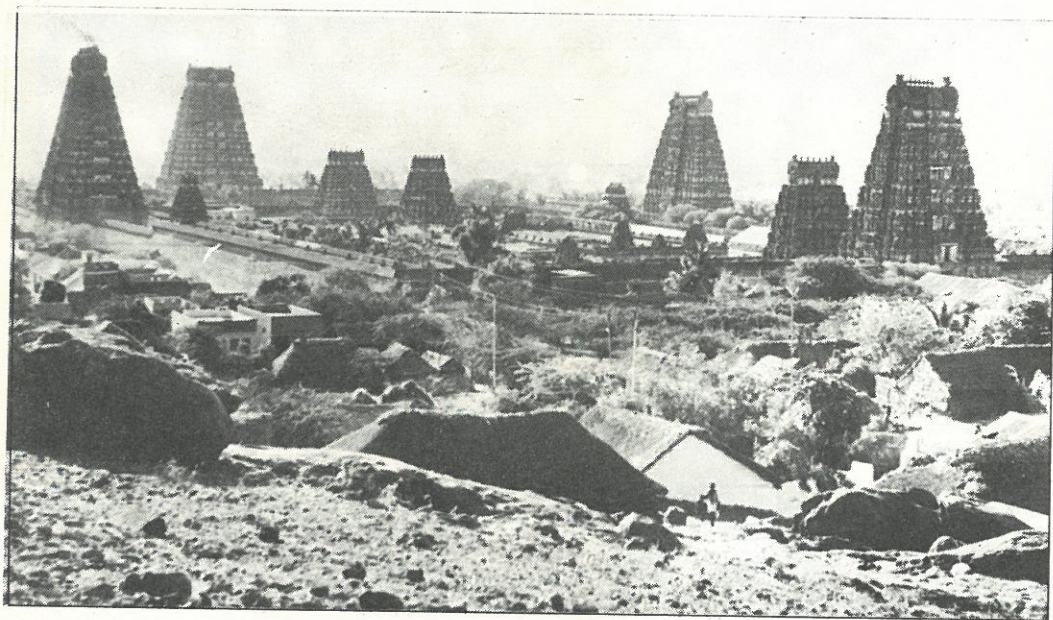
Viśvanātha temple, Vāranaśi



GAṄGĀ (in Tāḍapatri temple)



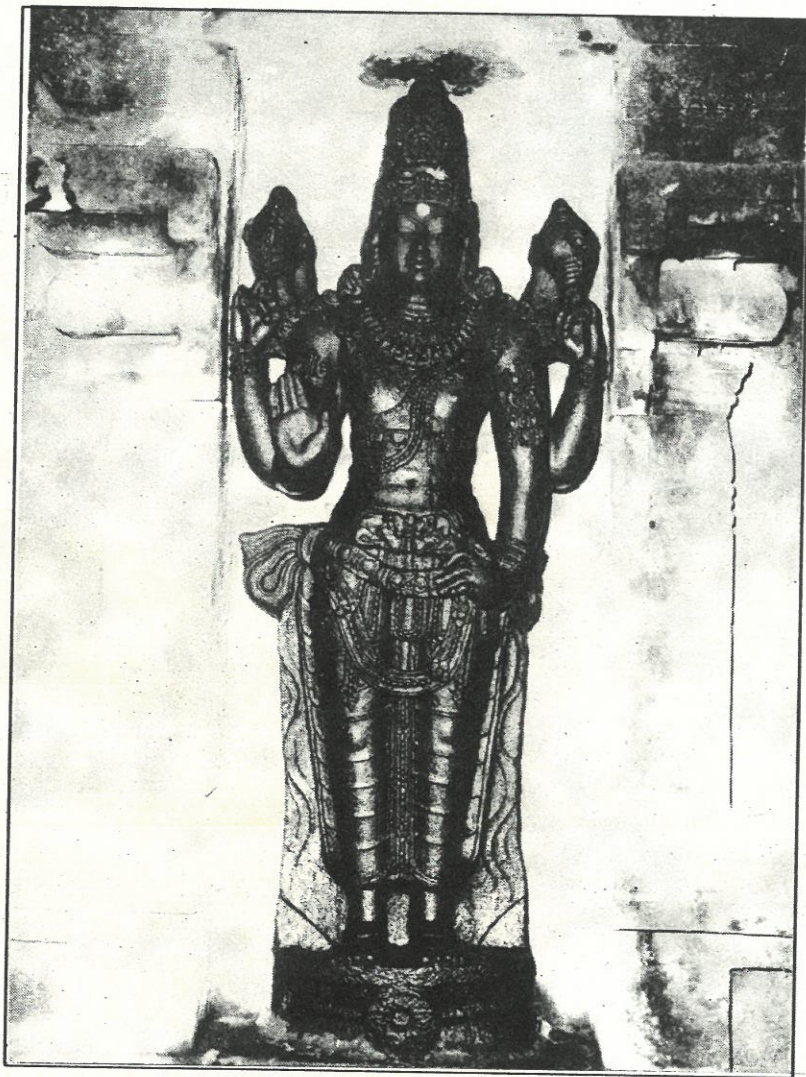
Kalaśa over Vimāna



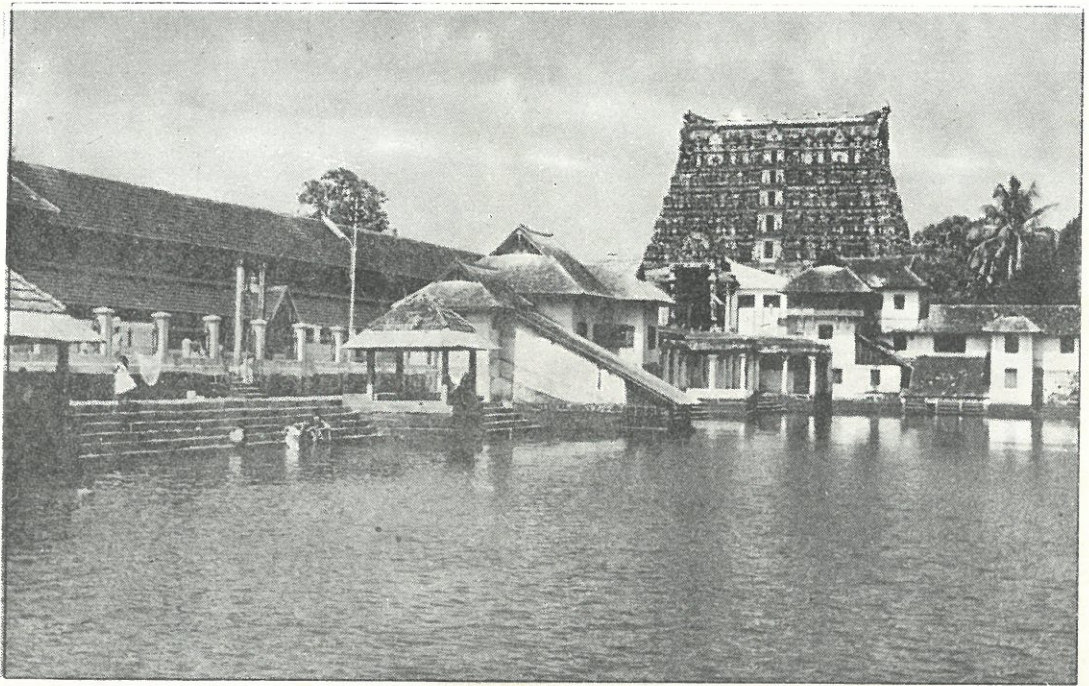
Gopuras in the Arunāchala Temple at Tiruvannamalai.



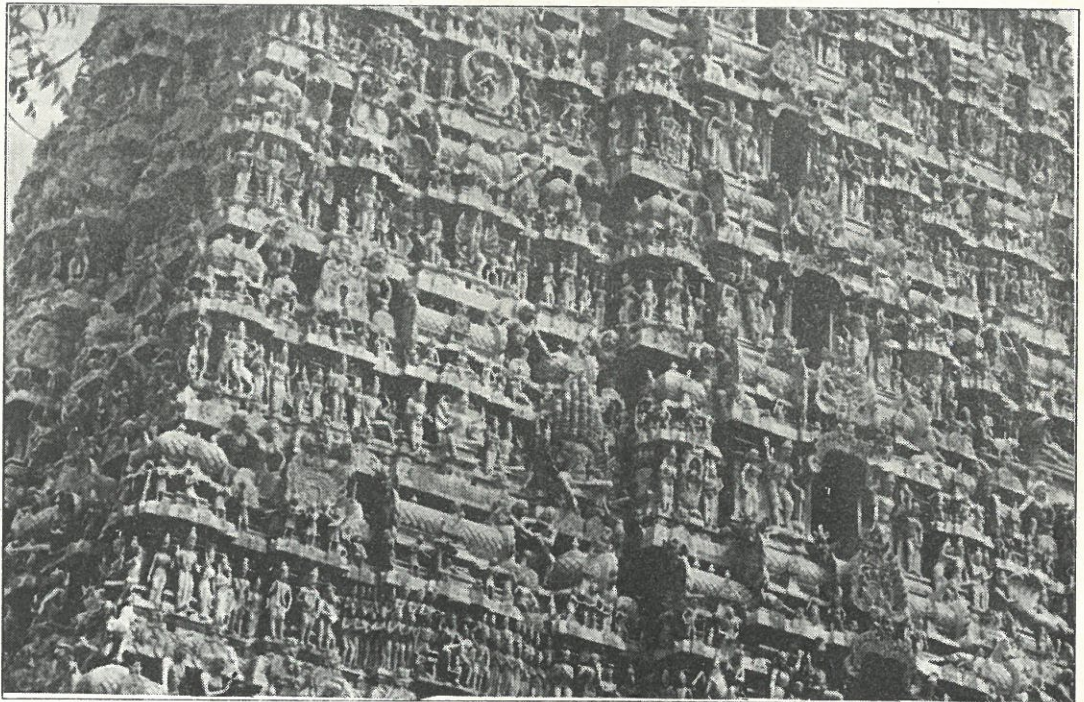
DEVI



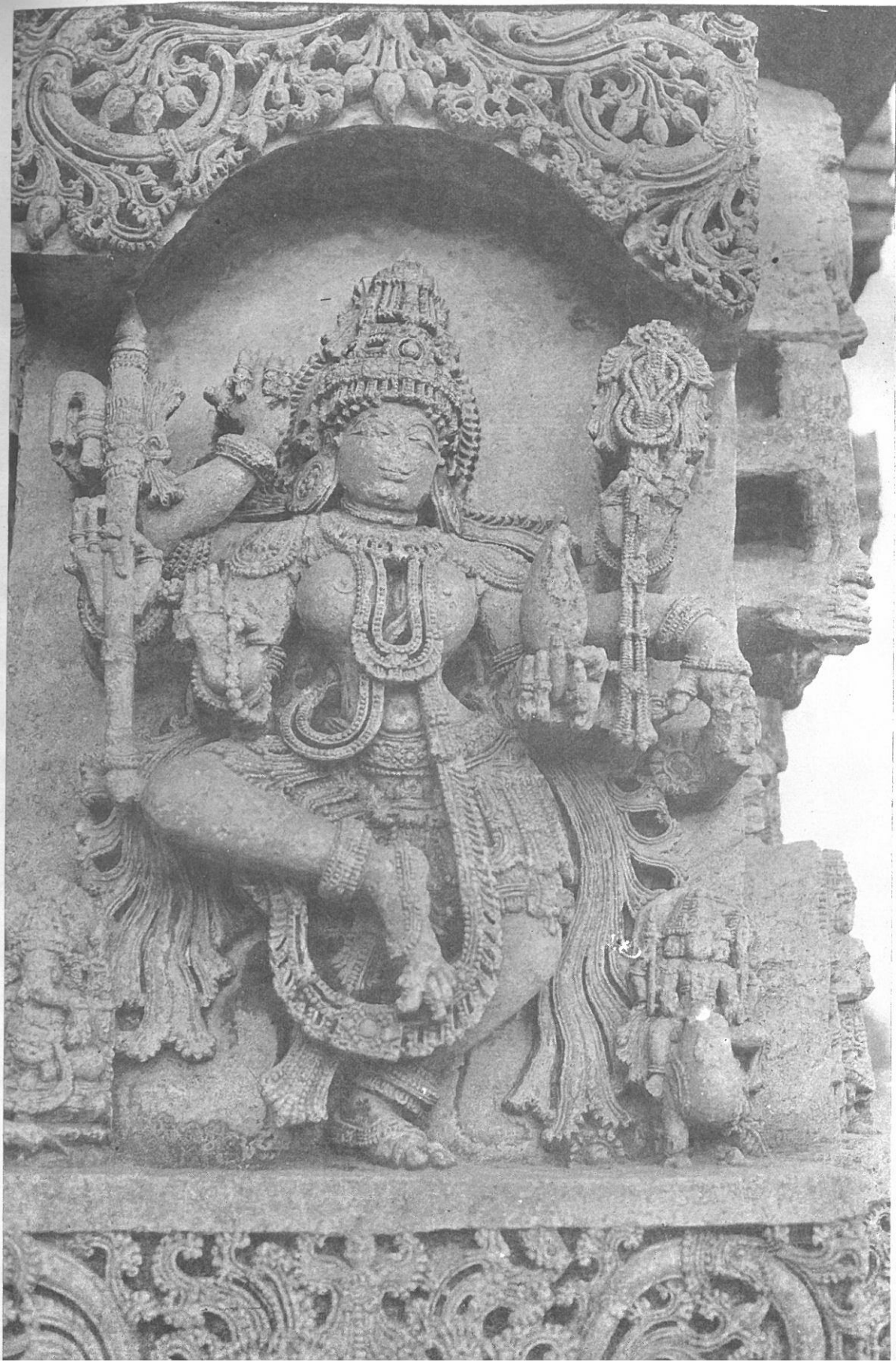
VISHNU (with Prayoga-chakra)



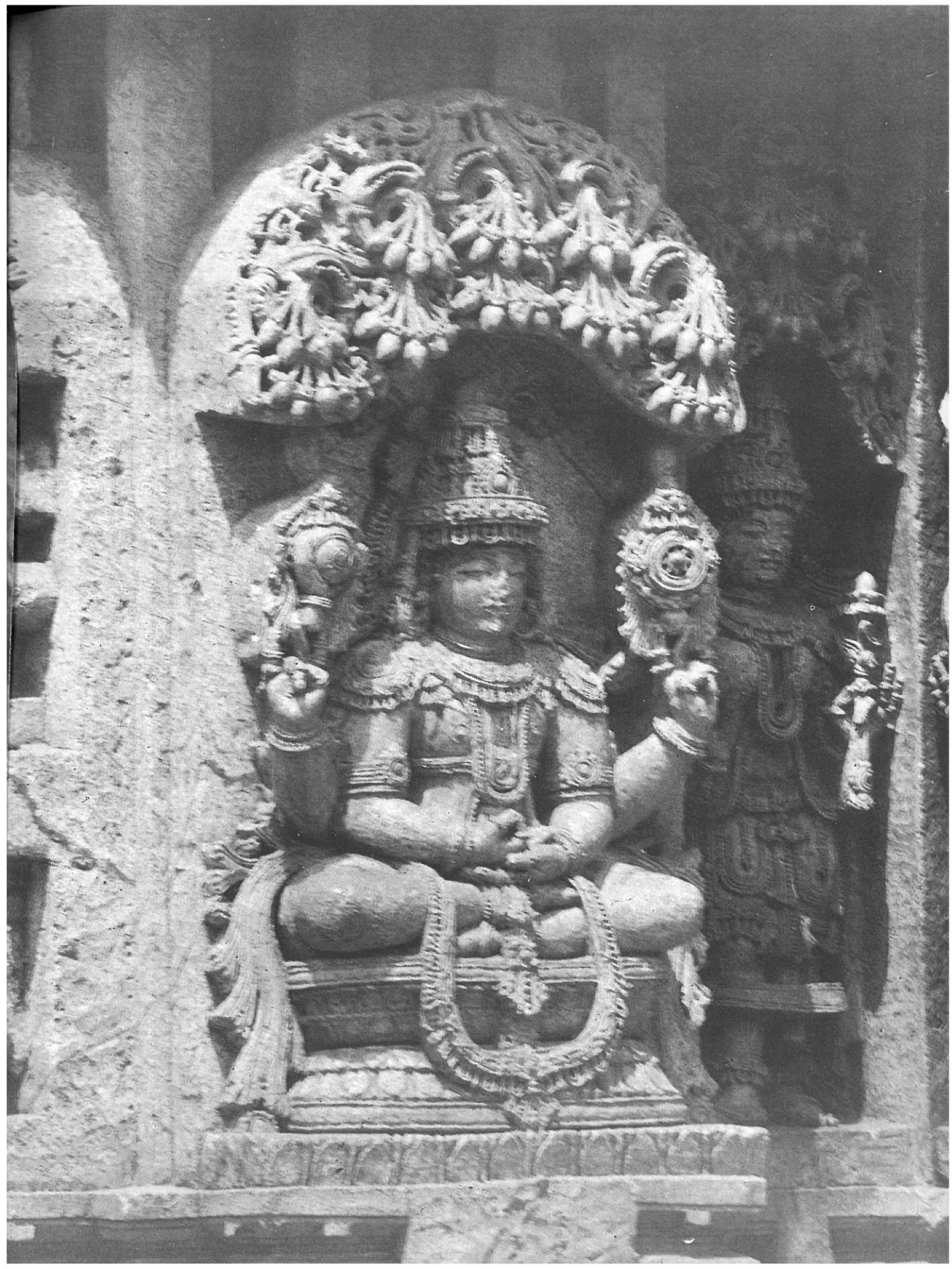
Gopuram of the Padmanābhasvāmi temple, Trivandrum

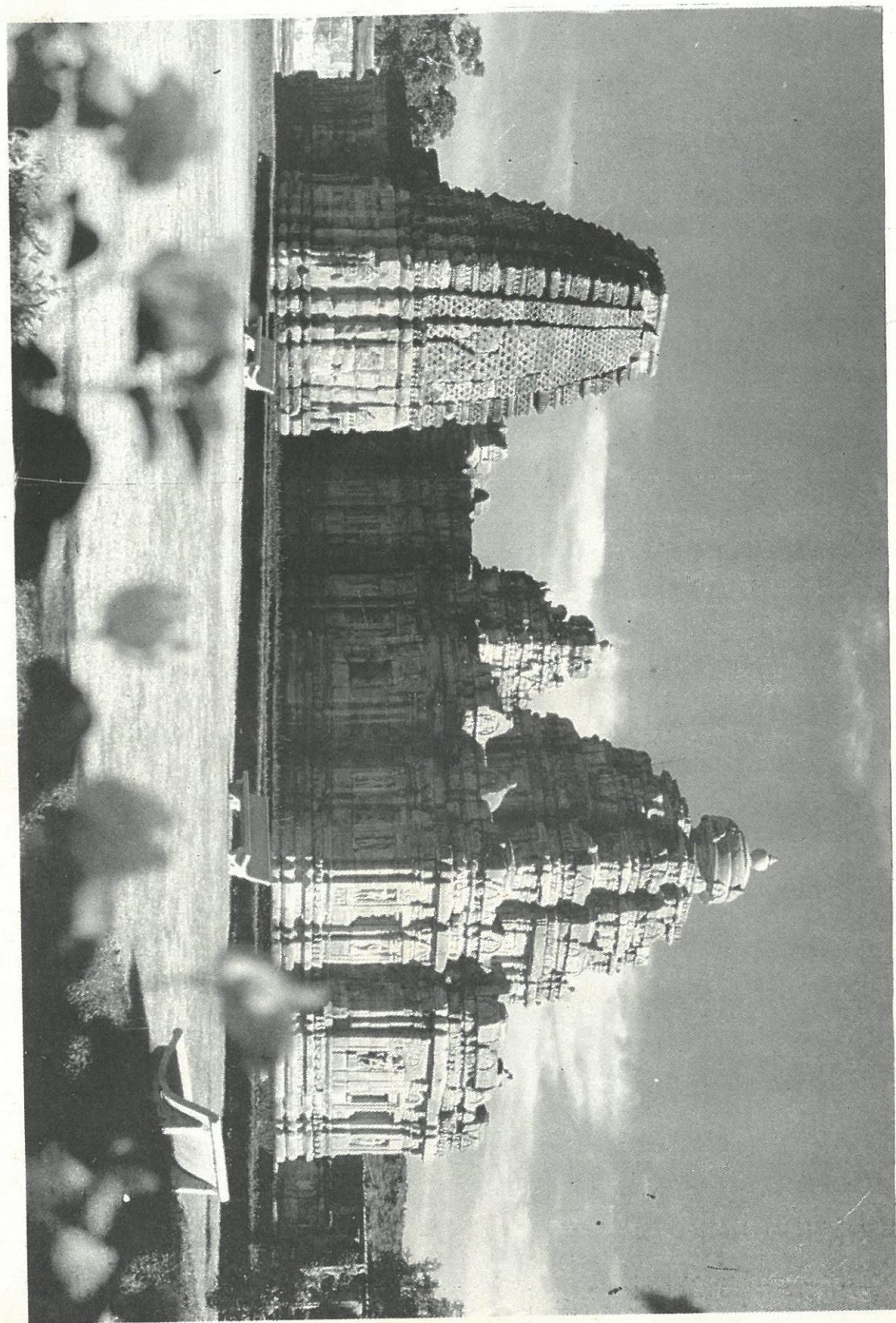


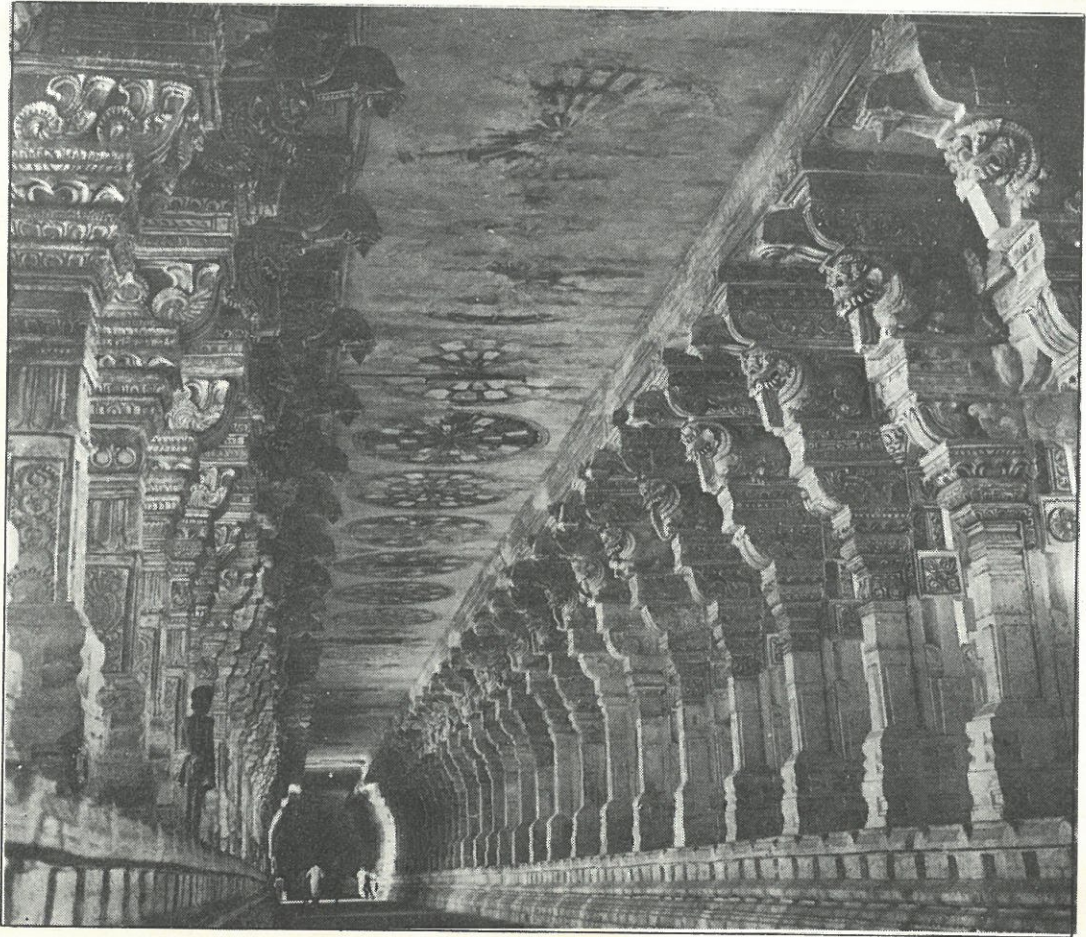
Sculptures on the gopura of Subrahmanya temple at Tirucchendur (Tamiḻ Nāḍu)



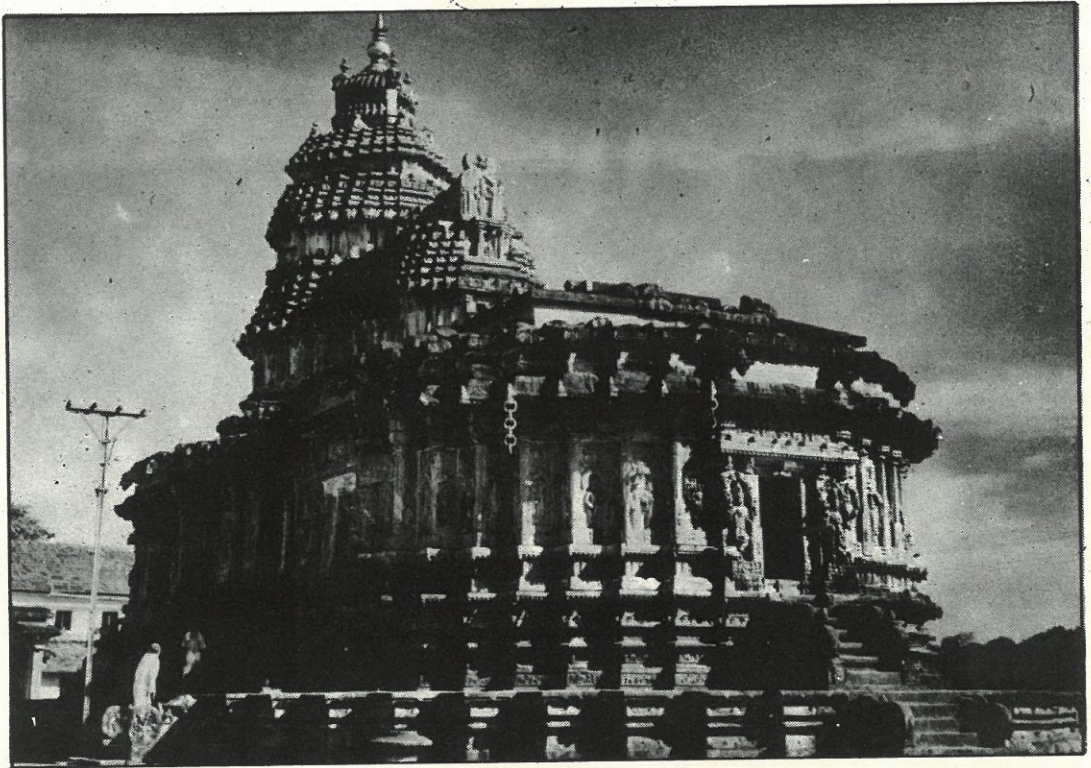




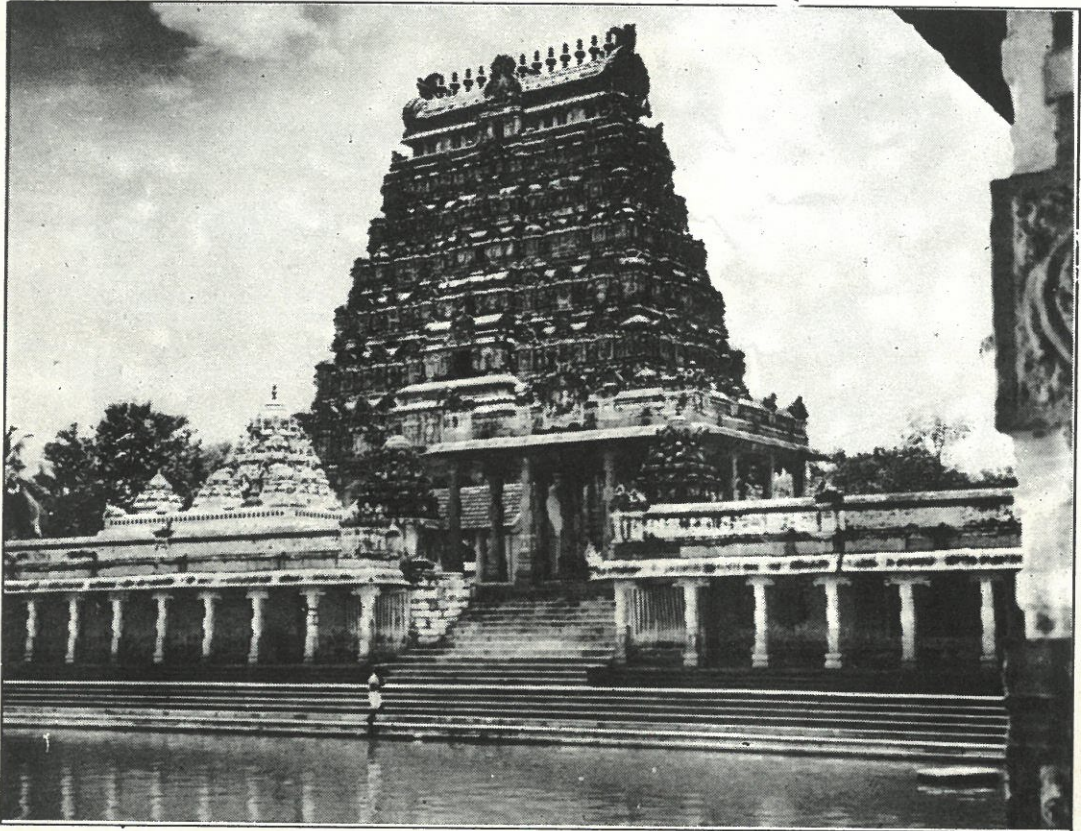




Interior of the Rāmeśvaram temple



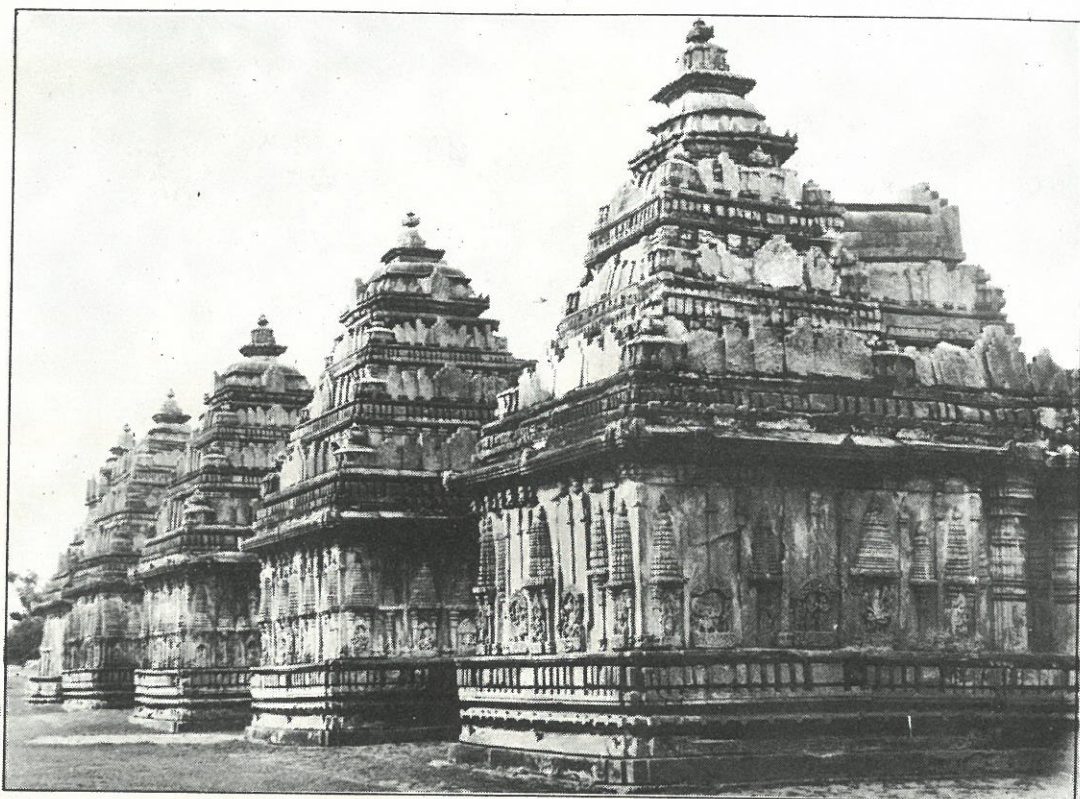
Vidyāśaṅkara Shrine at Śringēri



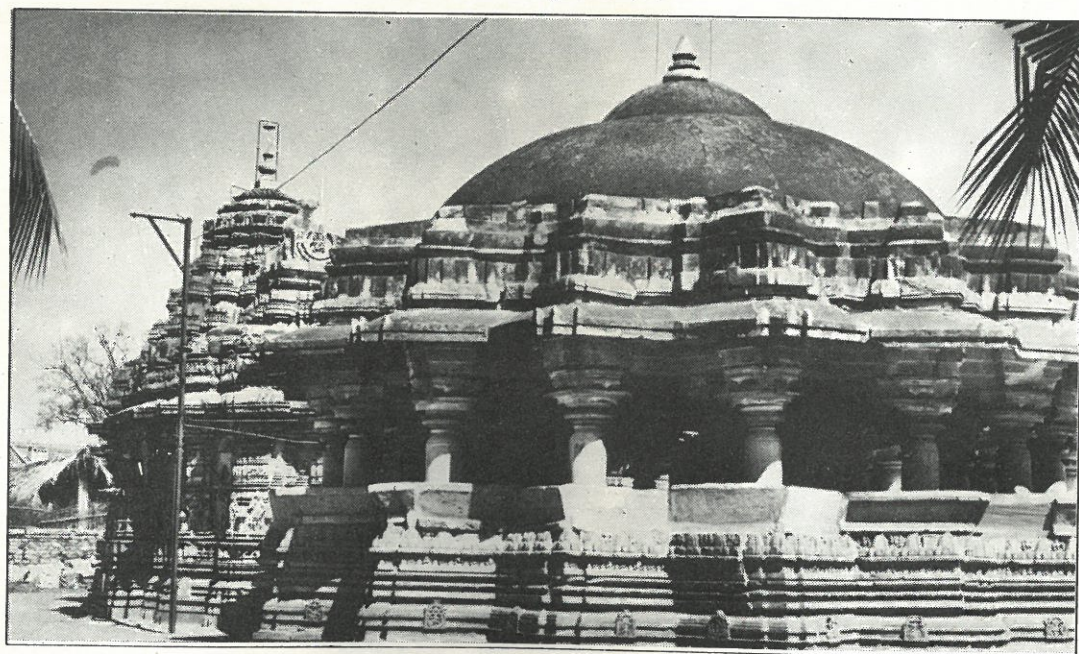
Gopura at the Natarāja temple at Chidambaram



Torana in the Dilwārā temple at Mount Abu



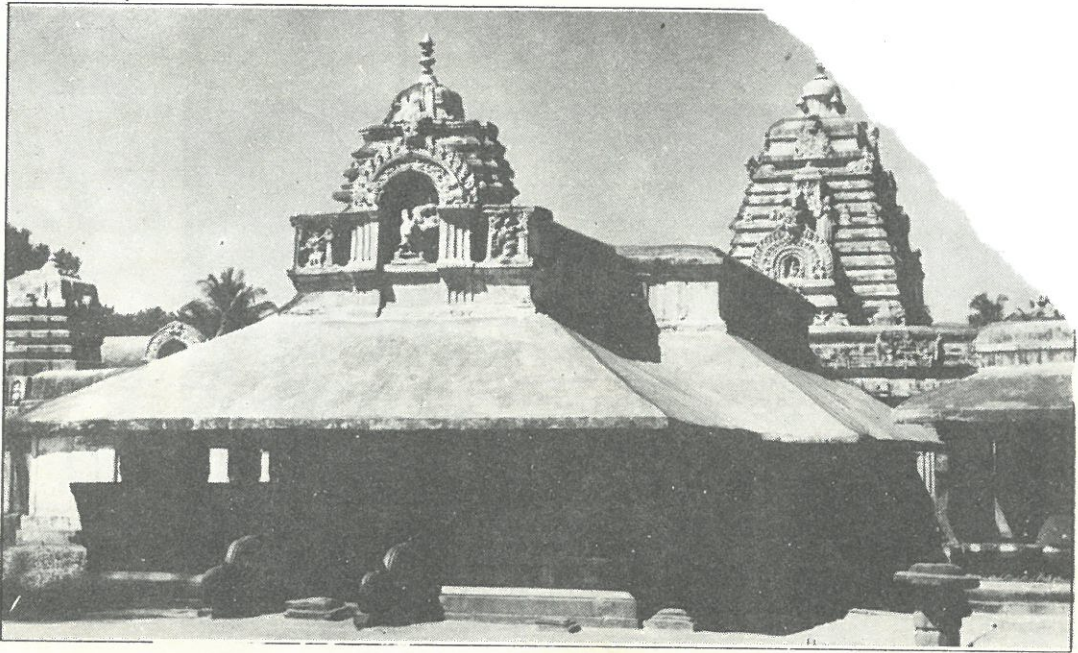
Pañchaliṅga temple



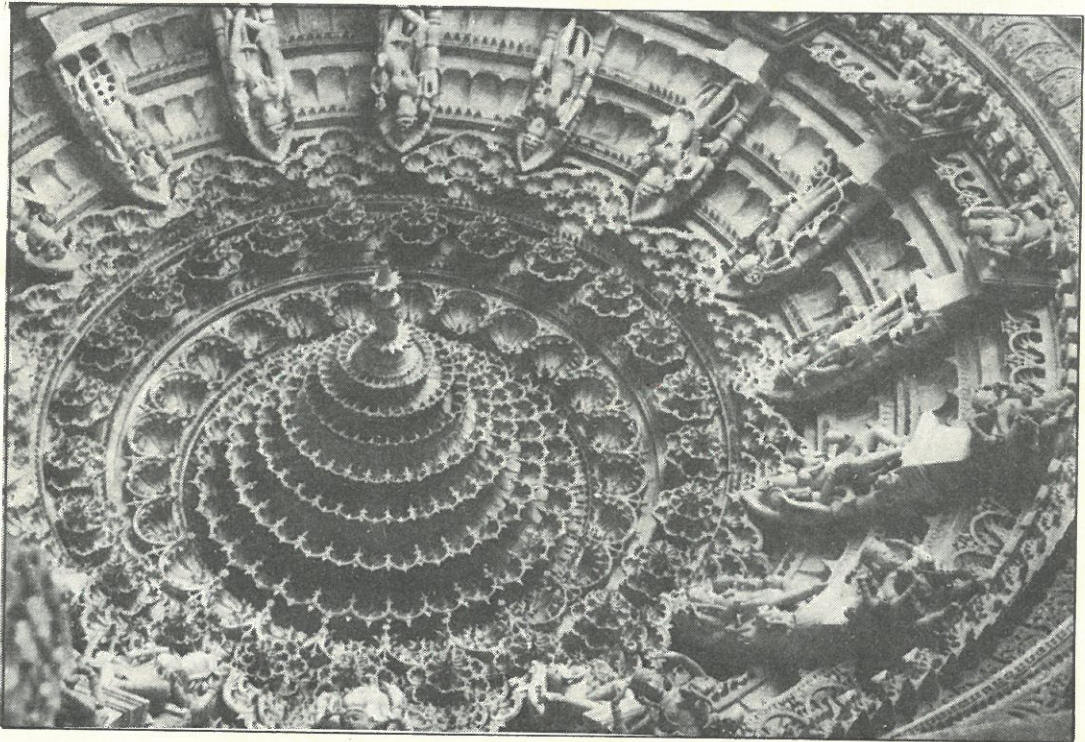
Īśvara Temple, Arasīkere



Entrance-gopura of the Raṅganātha temple at Tirumale, a village near Māgaḍi (Karnāṭaka)



Madhukēśvara shrine, Banavāsi



Ceiling in the Dilwārā temple at Mount Abu



Gopura of Śār ṅgapāṇi temple, Kumbhakoṇam