

A Historical Study of Temple Architecture and Sculptures of Early Medieval Bankura Region, Eastern India

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Abstract

This article intends to focus on the unique and diverse temple architecture and sculptures of the early medieval Bankura region, Eastern India. These are the earliest medieval temples, mostly available with sculptures. All the surviving temples are meticulously documented according to their distinct styles, providing a comprehensive understanding of the architectural diversity. Notably, the *deul* temples are built with stone, while the *panca-ratha* temples are built with bricks. The numerous iconographical figurines found in the temples and their sanctums, often depicting deities and mythological scenes of significant religious and cultural importance. The temples showed the transitional aspect of how Jainism cultural practice was influenced by the Brahmanical culture. However, Dihar and Sonotapol temples remained in Brahmanical.

Keywords: Bankura, Brahmanical, Bricks, Jain, Stone, Temple Architecture.

Introduction

This study aims to explore the temple architecture and sculptures of early medieval Bankura, located in Eastern India, through an analysis of archaeological evidence. It will also deal with the nature and pattern of the spatial distribution of the early medieval sites, especially based on empirical evidence collected by considerable explorations in the study area. A large number of archaeological reconnaissance, focusing precisely on early medieval sites and settlements of eastern India, were excavated in the last few decades (Chakrabarti 1993, Chattopadhyaya, Sanyal and Saha 2006, Chattopadhyaya 2010, Majumder 2015). In his examination of early

medieval sites in Bankura, Dilip K Chakrabarti¹ argues that the region experienced notable advancements during the protohistoric and early historic periods. He contended that the Jains made inroads into an area that retained predominantly prehistoric cultural characteristics during the early medieval era. Chakrabarti documented several archaeological sites, along with various Jaina and Brahmanical deities. In 2010, Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay² released a significant publication focusing on the archaeology of the Bankura region. The early medieval portion of this work offers a detailed examination of the region's vibrant Jaina and Brahmanical traditions, highlighting their artistic expressions, iconographic representations, and surviving architectural structures. In recent times, a number of studies have highlighted the scattered Jaina antiquities discovered along the river valleys in Bankura and Purulia districts, aiming to understand how Jainism spread into the outer regions of the Chhotanagpur plateau (Ray, Chattopadhyay & Majumder 2015: 205-36). However, some facets of the problem remain unclear.

Gaining a clear understanding of early medieval temples and sculptures is challenging due to the lack of a definitive index that could provide precise chronological markers. When examining the historical context of Bankura, there are several contradictions in both the archaeological findings and their interpretation. This region exhibits a paucity of epigraphic sources and historical records of local lineages. Historical documentation indicates that the name Bankura has undergone various spellings over different periods. The region now known as Bankura is mentioned in the Jaina *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, dating back to the 6th or 5th century BCE, with some portions likely composed around the 3rd century BCE.

The text describes Mahāvira, the 24th Jain Tirthanakara, traversing the *Subbhabhumi* and *Vajjabhumi*³ regions within the territory of the *Lādhas* (*Rādha*), which once formed part of *Dakshin Rādha/Rarh* (*Southern Rādha/Rarh*) after the geopolitical division of *Rādha* during the 9th-10th centuries CE.

The Study Area: Bankura, also referred to as Bankurah, is an ancient geographical

¹ Dilip K Chakrabarti, *Archaeology of Eastern India: Chotanagpur Plateau and West Bengal* (New Delhi, 1993). pp. 135-156.

² R.K. Chattopadhyay, *Bankura: A Study of its Archaeological Sources* (Calcutta, 2010), pp.156-176.

³The *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, a Jain canonical text, characterizes the region of *Lādha* (identified with present-day *Rādha* in West Bengal) as a remote and inaccessible land, inhabited by hostile communities who were often intolerant of ascetic practices. The text further delineates *Lādha* into two distinct sub-regions: *Vajjabhumi* and *Subbhabhumi*. *Vajjabhumi*, translated as the 'land of diamonds,' is said to have had its capital at *Panitabhumi*, also referred to as *Punyabhumi*. This geographical description likely corresponds to areas within the modern districts of *Birbhum*, *Burdwan*, *Hooghly*, and *Bankura*," (Jacobi 1884: p. 265).

region located in the southwestern part of Bengal, functioning as a district within the state of West Bengal (22°38' - 23°38' North and 86°36' - 87°46' East). The region forms a significant part of the intermediary tract between the Chhotanagpur plateau and the alluvial plains of the lower Gangetic delta, with its unique blend of geographical features and historical significance. Several rivers flow across the region, among these, the important ones are Kangsabati, Kumari, Silabati, Dwarakeswar and Damodar (Figure 1). Based on inscriptional evidence, both direct and indirect, quite well signifies the formation of local ruling polities from the post-Gupta period which eventually took the form of independent or semi-independent principalities over time. These might have gone to accelerate and intensify the cultural assimilation into the collective consciousness of *Rāḍha*.

From the 6th to 12th centuries CE, the region experienced the development of grand architecture, particularly in the form of religious structures like monasteries and temples. Additionally, there was a significant rise in sculptural art, as evidenced by reports and initial surveys conducted in the area. Like other early medieval sites, it is essential to note that many sites in this area displayed regional characteristics, such as the expansion of settlement areas and the emergence of new clusters of agro-pastoral settlements. Some sites that showcased early medieval or medieval cultural phases also had earlier phases dating as far back as the BRW-using cultural phase, based on the excavated and explored data of the area.

From the 9th century CE onwards, the *Rāḍha* region saw the emergence of stone and a few brick temples, particularly in religious establishments and sculptural art. Although historical sources are limited, the Parasuramesvara Temple in Bhubaneswar, dating to the 8th century CE, is widely regarded as one of the earliest known examples of the *śikhara*-style temple architecture in Eastern India. Similarly, the Siddhesvara Temple at Barakar in present-day West Bengal, believed to have been constructed around the 9th century CE, represents one of the earliest regional adaptations of this architectural form⁴. The construction of these temples required substantial financial support from Jain merchants, local Zamindars, wealthy families, and royal patrons.

⁴ James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. III, (Harvard University Press, 1910), pp. 240.

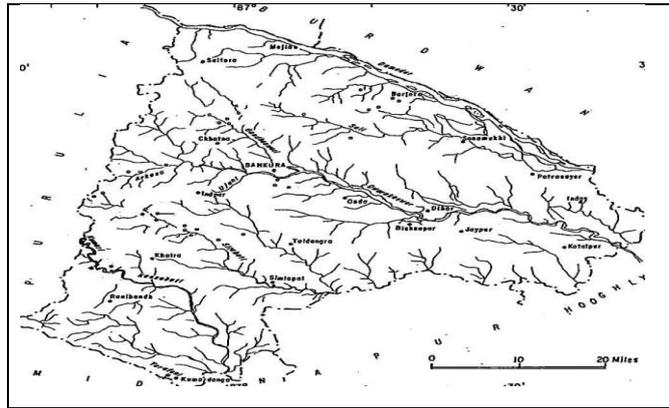


Fig. 1 Map showing the study area

Source: Dilip K Chakrabarti, *Archaeology of Eastern India: Chotanagpur Plateau and West Bengal* (New Delhi, 1993). pp. 140.

Although much of the history of these temples remains unknown, it is clear that local patronage played a significant role in the medieval period of this district. Temples were constructed in various parts of the land during the early medieval period, primarily using stone or bricks adorned with stone carvings or terracotta plaques, and they are predominantly located in and around riversides.

Apart from these remains, the Bankura region also has some structural and sculptural remains belonging to the 10th-13th century CE and can be noticed at Paresnath, Sarengarh, Sulgi, Sonamukhi, Kechanda, Junbediya, and Ambikanagar, among others. The majority consist of temple plinths, large-sized bricks, or fragments of masonry structures. It is difficult to ascribe them to particular cults or sects, given that they are in ruins. It is important to note that these are not the only examples of *rekha-deul* structures found in southwestern Bengal. The examples of Barakar, Deuliya, Telkupi, Deulghata, Pakbirra, Banda and Suissa are particularly noteworthy. Unfortunately, because of the scarcity of historical records, we do not know much about the historical patronage of these temples. What we do know, however, is that the region was on the trade route connecting Tamralipta to Pataliputra. In the 11th century CE, Anantavarman Chodaganga of the Ganga dynasty of Orissa consolidated his authority in these regions. The Suras were the most influential local chieftains in southern *Rāḍha* as subordinate kings of the Palas. The Tirumalai inscription of Tamil Nadu records the defeat of Ranasura, the chief of Garmandaran of southern *Rāḍha*, at the hands of Rajendra Chola (1024 CE). Garmandaran (now in Hooghly district) is one of the towns founded by the Suras, along with Suranagar (now in the Burdwan district) and Pradyumnapur (now in the Bankura district). Thus, the area was a stronghold of local chieftains but, at the same time, was a melting pot for multiple influences.

The early medieval temples of Bankura represent the northern architectural style and can be categorized into two main types based on the design of the roof above the sanctum⁵. They can be classified into two primary types: (i) the *bhadra* or *piḍhā* type, characterized by a roof consisting of multiple receding, tiered stages topped by the customary finial known as the *chūḍa*, which includes the *amalakā* (a disc-shaped element crowning the *śikhara*)⁶; and (ii) the *rekha* or *śikhara* type, noted for its tall, curvilinear tower called the *śukanāsāsikhara*, also capped by the typical *amalakā* and finial. The *rekha* temples follow the *nāgara* style of architecture, as elaborated in the classical *Śilpaśāstras*⁷.

In this region, temples are categorized based on the construction materials into two classes: stone and brick. Out of the eleven recorded temples, eight are made of stone. These stone temples exhibit various architectural styles, falling into four distinct classes: *Rekha-deul*, *Piḍhā-deul*, squared-shaped flat roof temples and ruined temples. The remaining three temples in the district are made of bricks and classified into three categories: *Panca-ratha*, *Deul* and ruined temples. Among the recorded eleven temples, eight are built of stone. Blocks of rocks of different sizes and shapes were used to make these temples; sometimes, only plinths were constructed with stone, and superstructures were made with brick. Morphologically, these temples are not similar; only some are stylistically distinct.

Temple 1: Ambikanagar Temple

Ambikanagar is located near the confluence of the Kangsabati and Kumari rivers, within the jurisdiction of the Ranibandh police station. The site takes its name from the goddess *Ambikā*, who is currently worshipped in a modern brick temple constructed atop the remains of an earlier stone-built shrine⁸ (Figure 2). The site's presiding deity is *Ambikā*, originally the Jaina *Śāsanadevi* of the twenty-second Tirthankara Neminatha but presently worshipped as a Brahmanical goddess.⁹ The temple is made of stone and *tri-ratha* in plan. Apart from the temple, several stone sculptures belonging to the 11th-12th century CE were also recorded. The sculptures that have been recorded consist of representations of Jaina *Tirthankara*, Jaina *Śāsanadevi*, *Gaṇeśa*, *Viṣṇu* and other sculptural fragments. This was perhaps a reasonably crucial religious centre. The site was initially explored by Debala Mitra, who identified it as a flourishing Jain center, evidenced by numerous remains

⁵ Ibid, (2010), pp. 171.

⁶ George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms*. (University of Chicago Press, 1995). pp. 112-114.

⁷ Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*. (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1976). pp.45.

⁸ Ibid, (2010), pp. 158.

⁹ Debala Mitra, Some Jaina Antiquities from Bankura, West Bengal, JAS-L, Vol. XXIV, No. 22 (West Bengal), pp.131.

associated with the Jain pantheon¹⁰. During the late 11th century CE, Ambikanagar and its adjoining regions were under the control of Anantavarman Chodganga Deva Orissan king, and he repaired several temples in these regions and also placed sculptures of Jain *Tirthankara* (mainly of Pārśvanātha and Mahāvira). The sculptures from Ambikanagar are primarily carved from chlorite stone. The image of *Ambikā* is challenging to examine thoroughly due to its near-complete coverage by modern drapery. The representation of *Viṣṇu* is found in a damaged state, measuring approximately 83 cm by 53 cm. The deity is depicted standing in the *dvibhāṅga* posture atop a fully bloomed lotus, framed by a rectangular halo (nimbus). While the figure originally had four arms, all are now broken. The iconography includes a conical crown (*kiriṭamukūṭa*), a breast ornament suspended from an elaborate necklace, a sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*), and a long garland of forest flowers (*vanamālā*) extending below the knees. The stele features intricate decorations, including a miniature temple structure crowned with a prototypical *amalakā*, and an image of *Gaṇeśa* seated on a low pedestal. Although the sculpture is not in optimal condition, stylistic analysis suggests it dates to the 11th–12th centuries CE¹¹.



Fig. 2: Goddess Ambika, Photograph by Author

Temple 2: Deulbhira Pārśvanātha Temple

Deulbhira temple is also known as Pārśvanātha temple after the Tirthankara Pārśvanātha, located along the eastern bank of the Jaypanda River, under Taldangra police station. It may be assumed that the temple was constructed around the 10th-11th century CE. No sculptural remnants are currently found at the temple site. R.D. Banerjee visited the site, and the image of Tirthankara Pārśvanātha (dated to the 10th century CE) is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. However, it

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 131-132.

¹¹ Ibid (2010). pp. 131.

remains uncertain whether the sculpture originally belonged to this temple or was relocated from another site. Constructed from laterite stone, the temple stands as an excellent example of the *rekha-deul* architectural style characteristic of Orissan temple design (Figure 3). The temple's layout follows a *tri-ratha* plan, featuring simple moldings and a stepped, vaulted roof. At the top, the shrine is crowned with an *amalakā*. The surviving niches of the temple resemble those found in other similar structures, i.e., Bahulara, Dihar and Sonotapol. Due to its dilapidated state, the richness and the decorative items around the *amalakā* and the upper part of the temple are almost unrecognizable. The *gāndi* of the temple is curvilinear, but in its lower section, the curvature remains virtually imperceptible. The *mastakā* on the underrated *gāndi* is missing. The sculpture of Pārśvanātha is believed to date back to the 10th century CE. Crafted from chlorite stone, the image measures approximately 62 x 57 centimeters. The Tīrthaṅkara is shown seated in a meditative posture, commonly associated with yogic discipline, beneath a canopy formed by seven serpent hoods an iconographic feature distinctive to Pārśvanātha. Below the lotus seat is his identifying *lāñchana*. Flanking the deity are two attendants holding fly-whisks (*cauris*), although no other Jainas appear in the composition¹².



Fig. 3 Deulbhira Parsvanatha Temple, Photograph by Author

Temple 3: Dihar Twin Siva Temple

Dihar is located along the banks of the Dwarakeswar River under the Onda police station. The temples of Dihar are known as the twin temples (temples of *Sandesvara* and *Sailesvara*) of Siva. Both the temples are *rekha-deul* type and made of laterite stone. In both temples, the *sikhara* are not more extant. A figure of *Nandi bull* stands in front of the *Sailesvara* temple. Both the temples follow a typical Orissan style (Figures 4 and 5), i.e., the plan of the *Sandesvara* temple is

¹² Majumdar, S. *Jaina Remains of Ancient Bengal: A Study in Archaeology, Art and Iconography*, pp.158.

cruciform of the *panca-ratha* style. At the same time, that of the *Sailesvara* is *triratha* style. Regarding the date of temples, R.D. Banerjee¹³ assigns them to the start of the 11th century CE. At the same time, David J McCutchion¹⁴ suggests that the twin temples were built in 1335 CE, according to royal chronicles and if so, they are the only temples known to have been built in that century.



Fig. 4 & 5: Sandesvara & Sailesvara Temples respectively,
Photograph by Author

Temple 4: Harnasra Temple

Located approximately 3 km north of the Silavati River under Indpur police jurisdiction, Harnasra hosts a notable laterite *rekha-deul* temple often referred to as the Jain Temple of Chhotanagpur which bears strong stylistic parallels to other regional shrines. In addition to the temple and previously documented sculptures, a single image of Pārśvanātha lies on an elevated tank bank. Sculptural analysis dates it to the 11th–12th centuries CE¹⁵. This finely crafted statue, considered the most artistically significant example from Bankura, is hewn from dark chlorite or similar stone and measures approximately 142 × 70 cm. It depicts the Tīrthaṅkara in *kāyotsarga* posture upon a dual-petaled lotus base, sheltered under a seven-hooded serpent canopy. The figure features curly hair with an *uṣṇīṣa*, and is flanked by two elegantly adorned attendants bearing *cauris*. Additionally, a Nāga couple, their tails entwined with the male in *namaskāra-mudrā* and the female playing a musical instrument appears alongside the attendants. Emblems (*lāñchana*) of the Jina are carved on the pedestal's front. Earlier tank excavations in the area also uncovered fragments of Brahmanical deities. One artifact was sent to the Vangīya Sahitya Parishad in Kolkata, while an image of Simhāvāhinī was deposited in the Bankura

¹³ R.D. Banerjee, *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, (New Delhi, ASI, New Imperial Series Vol. XLVII, 1998), pp. 150.

¹⁴ David J McCutchson, *Notes on some Temples in Bankura District*, (District Census Handbook Bankura, 1961), pp.156-157.

¹⁵ *Ibid* (2010). pp.160



Fig. 6 & 7: Harmasra Temple and Tirthankara Parsvanatha respectively,

Photograph by Author

Temple 5: Basuli Temple

Basuli temple is in the Atbaichandi village under the Indpur police station. The village's name is derived from that of the village deity Candi. The temple is made of stones (Figure 8) and is dedicated to Basuli (a folk deity). Presently, the temple does not contain any sculpture remains. The village includes one sculptural specimen of Candi (Figure 9). The village deity is made of a schist variety of stone and is described as *asta-bahu* (eight-armed) by the villagers, and hence the name Atbaichandi and two Siva linga have been recorded. The image of Candi, however, was originally a ten-armed goddess, *Cāmundā*.

Although in a weathered condition, the image of *Cāmundā* holds considerable iconographic and historical value. Today, it is venerated locally under the name *Caṇḍī*. The statue, carved from greyish stone and measuring approximately 95 × 55 cm, represents a ten-armed form of the goddess associated with the *Siddha-Cāmundā* tradition described in the *Agni Purāṇa*¹⁶. She is depicted in a fierce dancing posture atop a low lotus pedestal, with a smaller male figure carved just below her feet. Each of her ten hands holds a distinct attribute, consistent with descriptions found in classical iconographic texts. She wears a *jaṭāmukuṭa* adorned with a skull and displays bulging eyes and a gaunt facial expression visual features often used to convey her terrifying nature. Around her neck is a garland of skulls (*kapālamālā*), and she is adorned with earrings (*kuṇḍalas*) and other now-eroded ornaments. The stylistic features of the sculpture such as the emaciated form, skull motifs, and dynamic posture align closely with Eastern Indian representations of the goddess, particularly those from Bengal and Odisha, dated to the 10th–11th

¹⁶ Bhattacharyya, A. *Hindu Gods and Goddesses in India*. pp. 214-216.



Fig. 8 & 9: Basuli Temple and Goddess Camunda respectively,
Photograph by Author

Temple 6: Brahmandiha Temple

Brahmandiha, located about 3 km north of the Silavati River within the jurisdiction of Indpur police station, hosts a stone temple dedicated to Lord Śiva, locally referred to as *Bakulkunja*. In addition to the *Śiva liṅga* housed in the *garbhagrha*, archaeologists have recorded four stone sculptures at the site, one of which is significantly damaged. Among these are two images of *Viṣṇu* and *Kubera* embedded in the temple's front wall to the left and right of its main doorway. Excavations have also revealed architectural fragments (including a pillar and stone slab) and a collection of sculptural pieces found in a nearby heap (Figure 10). The *Viṣṇu* image, carved from dark stone, measures approximately 75 × 30 cm. This four-armed deity stands in a *dvibhāṅga* posture atop a fully bloomed lotus throne (*padmāpādapaḍa*), framed by a rectangular halo (*nimbus*). His lower right hand gestures *varada mudrā*, holding an inscribed lotus (*padma*), while a *cakra* rests vertically on another lotus. A mace (*gadā*) is depicted as a thick staff held vertically, and the lower left hand carries a conch (*śāṅkha*). Iconographic details include a conical crown (*kiriṭamukuta*), a breast ornament (*kautubha-maṇi*) hung from an intricate necklace, a sacred thread (*yajñōpavīta*), and a long floral garland (*vanamālā*) descending past the deity's knees. The figure wears a knee-length garment tied at the side, secured by a girdle from which tassels hang. Preliminary stylistic assessment suggests the sculpture dates to the 11th–12th century CE¹⁸. The god is flanked by two male attendants. They are identified as *āyudhapuruṣas* who are found in place of consorts of *Viṣṇu*, *lakṣmi* and Sarasvati or *Śri* and *Puṣṭi*.

¹⁷ Ibid (1993). pp. 77-78.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp.162

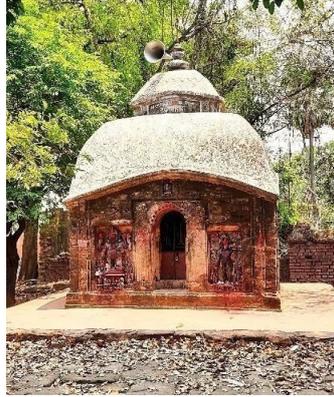


Fig. 10: Brahmandiha Temple

Photograph by Author

Temple 7: Jiorda/Bada Jorda Temple

Jorda is another village situated under the Indpur police station. The modern temple is built on the ruins of an earlier one. (Figure 11) The site has yielded some archaeological remains belonging to the early medieval period. There is a place known as Brahmasthan at the western end of the village, where we have found square-shaped large bricks, a basement of a brick structure in a ruined condition, many stone sculptural fragments and a hero stone. Some sculptural pieces are placed on the wall of a modern temple, a roofless structure constructed for the enshrinement of a *linga* over the ruins of an earlier structure. The images found at the site are a Caturmukha *Siva linga* (figure 12), two *Viṣṇu* images and an image of Tirthankara Pārśvanātha.

The only specimen of Caturmukha *Linga* has been noticed at the site of Jiorda. The base of the *linga* is carved from black stone and features only the *gauripatta*, while the upper section crafted from either chlorite or dark sandstone measures approximately 30 cm in height and 1.07 m in diameter. The cylindrically shaped body of the *linga* is carved with four faces on four sides. But the carvings are abraded. The top of the *linga* has marks of damage. The specimen is a rare occurrence of a Caturmukha *linga*. The *Viṣṇu* images are highly damaged. However, their existing forms show similarities with the other *Viṣṇu* images from the Bankura region. The image measures 77 cm x 42 cm. The other image of *Viṣṇu* is at present is placed on the wall of the modern temple. It is crown-headed and stands under a canopy of seven snake-hoods. It bears the usual ornaments. The image appears to have four arms and is flanked by two attendants.



Fig. 11: Jiorda Temple



Fig. 12: Caturmukha Siva Linga and Visnu respectively

Photograph by Author

Temple 8: Bahulara Siddhesvara Temple

Bahulara is situated on the right bank of the Dwarakeswar River, within the administrative area of the Onda police station. The temple at this site, locally referred to as the Siddhesvara temple, represents an early example of the *rekha-deul* architectural style and is constructed primarily of brick (Figure 13). It is one of the finest brick temples of Bengal in general. It establishes a close affinity with the temples of Orissa in terms of style, decoration, and other architectural designs. The temple of Bahulara is similar to the temple of Sonotapol in terms of architecture but surpasses them in the beauty and grandeur of mouldings and decorations. The temple is famous for its brick-made sikhara temple, which enshrines a Siva *linga* and the images of *Ganeśa*, *mahiṣāṣuramardini*, and *Tirthankara Pārśvanātha*. Apart from these specimens, the site contains fragmented hero stones and an abraded miniature figure under a tree. Regarding the temple date, there are differences of opinion among the scholars. Ananda Coomaraswamy¹⁹ Dated the temple in the 10th century CE while K Dikshit considered it too early. But, on grounds of architectural style, S.K. Saraswati dates back to the 11th century CE.

The sculptures of Bahulara are made of chlorite stone. The image of *mahiṣasumardini* measures 911 cm x 63 cm. It is carved on a plain stele. The upper part of the stele is either slightly broken or tapers imperfectly. This image has a double-petalled pedestal. The goddess has ten arms, for which she is known as *daśabhūjā*. The total execution of the image including the carving of the sari (cloth) shows the style of the post-Pala period. The *Ganeśa* image measures 111 cm x 66 cm. The back slab is finely decorated. Garland-bearing *Vidhyādhara*s are found at the top corners of the stele. The god is seated in the *paryāṅka* posture on a well-carved pedestal. He has four arms. His vehicle, the rat is seen below. The whole body of the deity is decorated with different ornaments. On stylistic grounds, the image may be assigned to the 10th-11th centuries CE.

¹⁹ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (London, 1965), pp. 108.

The Pārśvanātha image measures 57 cm x 40 cm and as far as the representation goes, the Jina stands in *kayotsanga* pose on a lotus under the usual canopy of a seven-hooded serpent. The lord is accompanied on both sides by *cauri*-bearers. The reverse of the slab features depictions of the seven planetary deities, likely accompanied by Gaṇeśa, arranged with four figures on each side of the Jina. The head of the Jina is surmounted by a trilinear *chhatra*. The pedestals depict the *māṅgala-kalasa* and devotees. The *cauri*-bearers on both sides of the Jina are common in all cases. The image probably belongs to the 12th century CE.



Fig. 13: Bahulara Siddhesvara Temple
Photograph by Author

Temple 9: Sonotapol Sun Temple

Sonotapol, situated on the south bank of the Dwarakeswar River, is another village under the Onda police station. The temple is also known as the Sun Temple. The temple is *rekha-deul* style and made of bricks, one of the best specimens of the temple architecture of Bankura (Figure 14). Presently, the temple contains one image of Jain Tirthankara (probably Mahāvira) plugged in the wall. It is generally dated to the 11th century CE. At the same time, Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal²⁰ suggested that it is not later than the 10th century CE because of its similarity with the Deuliya temple of the Burdwan district.



Fig. 14: Sonotapol Sun Temple
Photograph by Author

²⁰ Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, *Banglar Mandir* (Kolkata, 2012), pp. 89-93.

J.D. Beglar has given a vivid description of the temple as he witnessed it, although at that time it was almost in ruins: ‘.....a tall brick temple, solidly built of bricks measuring 12”x 8.5”’; 33 courses of bricks with the interposed mud cement make up 7 feet of height. The inside is only 12 feet square, but the height is excellent, and the brick material needs a greater thickness than the stone. The roof of the cell begins to contact by overlapping courses at a height of 18 feet. The temple stands on a high plinth, now a shapeless mound; it does not appear, from the absence of the dividing sill in the opening, that the temple had any mandapa in front, and the façade is indeed complete as it is, there is no part or line where the walls of any chamber or structure in front could touch the present façade without hiding some ornament or falling upon some moulding or ornamental sculpture’²¹.

Temple 10: Dharapat Pārśvanātha Temple

Dharapat is on the Dwarakeswar River's north bank under the Onda police station. The temple is locally known as *Nengta Thakurer Mandir* (the temple of the naked god). The name is probably derived from the images of the Tirthanakara, which are placed on the temple walls. The temple is famous for its well-known temple of the *śikhara* type (Figure 15). Presently, the site has yielded images of two Tirthankaras and an image of *Viṣṇu*, all placed on the outer wall of the Tirthankaras. Besides, a modern temple on the opposite side of the older one possesses a beautifully sculpted specimen of Pārśvanātha, though later it was transformed into that of a *Lokeśvara Viṣṇu*²². The *Viṣṇu* image is embedded on the east wall of the shrine and the image stands in an erect posture on the lotus pedestal. The image is made of blackish stone and is approximately 95 cm in height. He has four arms holding the attributes of *saṅkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *padma*, i.e., conch, wheel, mace and lotus. The image is ornamented with a crown on its head, earrings, necklace, garland, sacred thread and other usual ornaments. He is accompanied by his female attendant deities *Lakṣmi* and *Sarasvati*. Besides the above images, there is an image of Pārśvanātha which is now worshipped as *Viṣṇu* and it is in the *garbhagr̥ha* of a temple. The specimen shows the deity standing in the *kayotsanga* posture under a canopy of seven snake-hoods. Later, this image was converted to an image of *lokeśvara Viṣṇu* by carving two hands holding *saṅkha* and *gadā* on both sides of the principal deity.

²¹ J.D. Beglar, *Report of a Tour through Bengal Provinces in 1872-72* (Varanasi: R-ASI Vol. VIII, Reprinted, 1966), pp. 200.

²² *Ibid.*, (2010), pp.166.



Fig. 15: Dharapat Parsvanatha Temple,
Photograph by Author

Conclusion

The Bankura region exhibited a unique socio-cultural identity during the early medieval period, as reflected in the archaeological evidence uncovered from this area. The material culture, including temple architecture, sculptures, and settlement patterns, indicates that the society here developed along lines similar to those observed in other parts of ancient Bengal, demonstrating shared historical trajectories and cultural exchanges²³. The political developments and socio-cultural frameworks were probable catalysts for temple-building activities in the present study area. As far as architectural style is concerned, Bankura witnessed during the early medieval period the predominance of the *rekha-deul* type, most probably imported from Orissa and its adjoining regions, although *bhadra* or *pidhā*, which is a tiered type was not unknown. The *rekha-deul* model was employed in the construction of Jaina and Brahmanical temples.

This study has brought to light several new perspectives and raised questions that needs a further exploration. Many of the findings remain speculative at this stage and require more in-depth investigation to draw definitive conclusions. Detailed micro-scale case studies of early medieval settlements based on archaeological surveys and cross-references through epigraphic sources are expected to open up new areas of research. Such careful studies would allow us to fully understand the cultural landscape of the area. However, it has been possible to understand to some extent the nature and context of the sites, which probably enables us to better understand the early medieval archaeological record relating to *Dakshin Rāḍha*.

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²³ N. Sengupta, *Early Medieval Society in Eastern India*. pp. 88.

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