

Mapping the Quotidian Life of Practitioners of Various Religious Sects in Late Medieval Bengal: Portrayals on the Front Façades of the Baranagar Temple Cluster

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Abstract : Bengal has a long history (8th century A.D. onwards) of decorating the wall of brick-built temples with curved terracotta plaques on a diverse range of subjects. These could be considered as one of the most significant visual archives to understand the various facets of the then contemporary societies. The temples under focus include Char-bangla temple complex (circa 1755 A.D.), Bhavanishvara temple (circa 1755 A.D.) and the Gangeshvara Shiva Jor-bangla temple (circa 1753 A.D.), located within a part of the river Bhagirathi basin in Baranagar, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India. Though, a diverse range of subjects have been intricately carved mainly on the front façades of the Baranagar temple cluster, the study specifically concentrates on depictions related to religious and non-religious acts performed by practitioners of various religious sects of late medieval Bengal with the intention to acquire knowledge about the various facets of their life. Apart from this, the paper also mapped the spatial location of these religious performers on the temples' façades to examine if any systematic plan or arrangement had been employed for connoting a particular idea. Further, an attempt is made to provide a commentary on the attire worn by followers of various religious sects of late medieval Bengal. The primary materials for the study comprise the depictions which denote religious activities carved on the terracotta plaques. The secondary material has been collected from published and unpublished theses, journals and books. These data have been further supplemented with photographic documentation, some useful line-drawings and descriptions in table format to get a clear understanding of the concerned issues.

Keywords : attire, scheme of allocation, terracotta temple, various religious sect

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