

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

I. Gupta, B. Karmakar

**Abstract**—Bengal has a long history (8<sup>th</sup> 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 The secondary material has been collected from published and unpublished theses, journals and books.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.

## I. INTRODUCTION

EVIDENCE suggests that decorating the wall of brick-built temples with curved terracotta plaques in Bengal started from the Pala period (8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) onwards [1]. A diverse range of subjects including various religious as well as secular themes intricately carved on terracotta plaques could be understood from two different angles. On one hand, it gave a reprieve to the viewers from the flatness of the walls, and on the other hand, it can be considered as one of the most significant visual archives to understand the various facets of the then contemporary society. The trend of decorating the

façades of brick-built temples reached its peak in the late medieval period. According to David J. McCutcheon, '... temple façades of the late medieval period – underwent a radical transformation by the introduction of figures and greatly increased ornamental profusion' [2, p.14]. The decoration reflects supreme mastery in expression and dynamism in the characterization of action and movement which endows us with a complete picture of rural life in its different aspects [3]. The study is primarily focused on the depictions which denote various religious and non-religious acts performed by diverse religious groups that are carved on the front façades of Baranagar temples built during the late medieval period with the intention to arrive at an understanding about various aspects of everyday life prevailing in Bengali society at that time. Further, an attempt is made to map the spatial location of these religious performers on the temple façades to examine if any scheme had been employed for implying a particular idea. The study also provides a systematic account of the attire worn by the various religious practitioners of late medieval Bengal. 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.). All these temples are located within a part of the Bhagirathi river basin in Baranagar, a city in Murshidabad district of the state of West Bengal in India, which flourished as a great monumental expression of Hindu terracotta art during the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the passage of time, most of the temples in Baranagar are in ruins, those vestiges that remain still attract widespread attention because of their impressive façades which were decorated with a remarkable number of terracotta plaques. Regarding the decorated wall of the temples, Prodosh Dasgupta once said that '...they have a character of their own which has grown from the folk tradition, simple and unsophisticated, yet with a sense of humor' [4, p.29].

## II. METHODOLOGY

The primary materials for the study comprise the depictions which denote religious life carved on the terracotta plaques on the front façades of the Baranagar temple cluster, and these have been photographed directly from the temples. Journals, books and theses relevant to the research under investigation

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form the source of the secondary material that has been used here. The detailed critical inspection of the plaques has been complemented with literary references, drawings, etc., with the objective that these two kinds of evidences validate each other; each giving profundity and explanation to the picture which the other provides.

Though in many cases the paper referred the literary source to identify or to validate the various aspect of religious activities of society at the time, as depicted on the terracotta plaques, unfortunately in some instances, the literary sources failed to identify such things. For example, some attributes of ascetics like dirty dress or long nails, as mentioned in the literature, are not sufficient to identify a certain type of ascetic form from the depictions of the terracotta plaques which are generally monochromatic and miniature in size. In such cases, visual analysis of the plaques can act as a more credible tool in pushing towards a more credible identification of various forms that are carved out in the depictions.

### III. CHRONICLE OF THE PRACTITIONERS OF VARIOUS RELIGIOUS SECTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL BENGAL

Negotiating a diverse range of subjects, this section primarily focuses on the portrayals related to various religious groups and tries to acquire some awareness about their lifestyle, their attachment with material components, as well as determining their position in society at the time, by illustrating and analyzing their location on the temple façade. Based on these objective lenses, further discussion has been broadly categorized into three sub-sections. These are as follows:

#### *A. Diverse Groups of Religious Sects and their Various Activities Including Religious and Non-Religious Activities*

Depictions of various types of ascetics on the plaques capture the attention of researchers. These mendicants basically abandoned their family lives and their own free will and dedicated themselves to strict ways for spiritual gain. The characteristic features that can be used to identify them include their typical clothing, attributes, and postures. Some are easy to identify as they are carved with precise attributes and features that can be easily identified with the information found in the literary sources. But, in some other cases, the information, as provided by the literary source, is not sufficient to identify some particular types of ascetics. The reason might be in the simplistic attitude of the terracotta artisans in their articulation. The attributes which became quite effective to identify or separate diverse groups of ascetics are the formal structure of the body, diversity in the attire and most significantly the precise gesture and posture of depicted figure.

Representation of *naga sanyasi* (naked ascetic) is clearly identifiable from the terracotta plaques of the Baranagar temple (Fig. 1). These ascetics are carved with long *jatas* (formed when long hair remains unkempt for a long time leading to tangled bundle formation). They used to smear their body with ashes from cremation grounds, led bohemian lives and practiced a rigorous form of meditation and used to rove

the streets playing a *damaru* (a kind of small tabour shaped like an hour-glass and played by shaking it with one hand) loudly. They are popularly known as *kapalik* yogis (an ascetic worshipping the cult of Kali or Shiva) [5], [6]. They were part of the *Dasnami* sect of Saivism [7] living in different *akharas* (a place for boarding and lodging of religious renunciates). Niharranjan Roy mentioned another type of naked ascetic acknowledged as *Kshapanaka* (a Jain ascetic) [5]. But, the characteristic features that have been mentioned by the author about this group of ascetics i.e. long nails and dirty dress, are not sufficient to identify them from the single colored miniature-sized terracotta plaques. Akshay Kumar Dutta mentioned about *Dandi* ascetics [7]. They are Saiva ascetics, which are generally found holding a *danda* (a thick rod) in the hand, the chief feature that can be used to identify them (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 Naga ascetic, Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 2 Dandi, Jor-bangla temple

Vaishnava ascetics or *Gosains* were amply denoted in the terracotta plaques. Their basic features were typical attire, attributes and postures. They are generally found as wearing dhoti (a loincloth for men) and with their shoulder adorned with *uttariya* (a modesty scarf) and *rasakali* (a paste mark on the forehead), and standing with folded hands holding their *uttariya* (Fig. 3) or sometimes dressed in typical attire and standing with a rosary. In a terracotta plaque of Baranagar temple, an ascetic is carved with a shield along with a rosary, wearing a long garland of *rudraksha* (a typical garland made of seeds) around the neck. They are basically warrior ascetics.

These warrior-ascetics are identified with *Dasnami Nagas*, *Madaris* (a sect of Sufism) and other Sannyasi-fakirs of the Sannyasi rebellion [8] of 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D., wherein they participated in warfare in favour of the local zamindars or rulers against the British army (Fig. 4) [9], [10]. Other than that, based on the different types of attributes, there are various other types of ascetics that can be noted in the depictions by their typical attire, attribute, and postural variations.



Fig. 3 Gosains, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 4 Warrior ascetic, Char-bangla temple (west)

Ascetics are carved as performing religious rites according to the sects to which they belong. The poses and postures of these ascetics, as found in terracotta plaques, are observed as the major representations of the forms and rituals of the period. *Yogachar* (the practicing of yoga) or acrobatics was one of the chief concepts and practices in ancient Mahayana (a sect of Buddhism) tradition and prevalent in original Pala

Buddhism [11]. Buddhist ascetics of the Pala sect used to perform acrobatics as a part of their meditation or they meditated through yogic postures. From 8<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards the tantric deals and meditation system were introduced into *Mahayana* sect of Bengal. From 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards, the spread of *tantricism* (a type of asceticism) was widely seen in the Buddhism of Bengal. The *yogasadhana* or the acrobatic or yogic postures became the main medium of meditation among the Vajrayana, *Sahajana* (philosophy of the Buddhism), and *Kalachakrayana* variations of tantric philosophy. The yogic postures that are practiced by these tantric ascetics are known as *Hatyoga*. Infiltration of tantric philosophy was also found among the Brahmanas [5] of the Hindu religion of the same period. So, the depictions of various yogic postures on the outer façades of the Baranagar temples cluster could be inferred as a lineage of the sacred practices and their continuous impact in late medieval Bengal which started from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Depictions reveal that ascetics used to engage in the rigorous practice of meditation to acquire supernatural powers within themselves and perform miracles. The same example can also be found in a plaque of Char-bangla temple (west) where an ascetic is engraved as lifting himself above the ground while meditating (Fig. 5). The major religious activities of the ascetics depicted in the plaques include meditation, worshipping, dealing with disciples and conversion. The next part will deal with such kinds of issues.

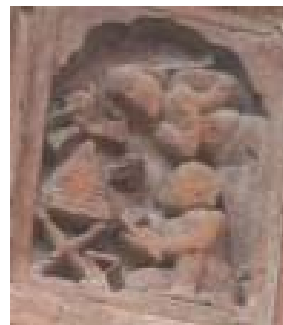


Fig. 5 Meditating Ascetics, Char-bangla temple (west)

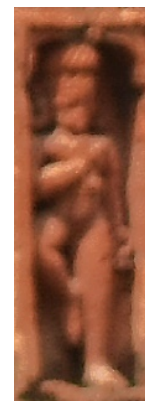


Fig. 6 *Ekapada*: In this posture, ascetics touch the ground with one foot while meditating, Char-bangla temple (west)

Figs. 6-16 show depictions of meditating ascetics with various yogic postures which have been termed on the basis of postural variations of the ascetics during the act of meditation.



Fig. 7 *Ekavahu*: In this posture, ascetics raise one hand upwards while meditating, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 8 *Padmasana* posture: In this posture, the ascetics are carved in a seated padmasana position, the hands in dhyana mudra and closed eyes, Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 9 *Vajrasana*, Char-bangla temple (north): Ascetics meditating in Vajrasana posture is also well represented in several plaques of Jor-bangla temple

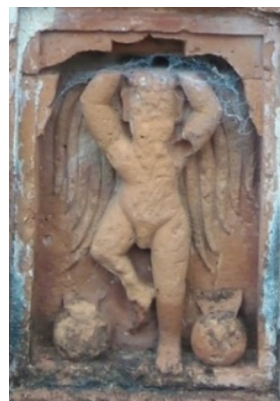


Fig. 10 Combination of *Udhavahu* with *Ekapada*: It is a combination of these two separate forms where the meditator used to stand with one leg raised and both hands lifted over the head, Char-bangla temple (west)

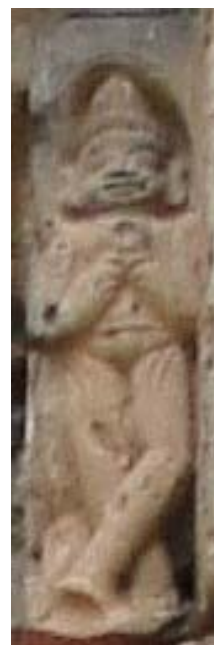


Fig. 11 Cross-legged with folded hands: Meditating in cross-legged form, placing one leg upon the other with folded hands, Jor-bangla temple

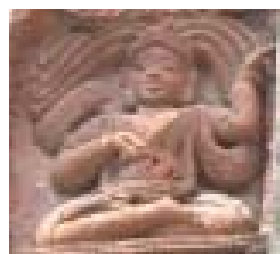


Fig. 12 Touching sacred thread: Ascetics are also found meditating by touching the sacred thread, Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 13 Cross-legged with *Ekavahu*, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 14 Combination of *Urdhavahu* with cross-legs, Bhavanishvara temple

#### 1. Certain Approaches of Worshipping

In a plaque of Jor-bangla temple, an ascetic is carved as worshipping a Shiva linga by making an offering with the right hand, which is placed on the deity, while another ascetic in the same frame is depicted as performing a ritualistic act by raising up the right hand (Fig. 17). Ascetics in a posture of offering with both hands joined together, which is a form of worship, are also noted in numerous terracotta plaques of Jor-bangla temple. In a panel of the same temple, three ascetics are observed as sitting in a queue with both hands joined together. It seems that the thin skinny figures of ascetics with long *jatas* are carved as kneeling in an offering posture (Fig. 18).



Fig. 15 Self-Inquiry or *Dhyana*: Self- inquiry is a simple but powerful method of meditation. The process allows the mind to settle naturally. Ascetics in self-inquiry posture are found on a plaque of the Jor-bangla temple where the ascetic is carved as seated under a tree with folded hands and closed eyes



Fig. 16 Self-infliction of pain: In some depictions, ascetics are found punishing themselves during meditation. In a plaque of Jor-bangla temple, a meditating ascetic is carved as held in the bend of the right leg. This type of self-torture is a form of meditation practiced by the ascetics

Worshippers depicted dancing and playing musical instruments or as musicians is also observed in several terracotta plaques where ascetics are depicted with both hands lifted overhead or playing musical instruments. These worshippers also play the role of a musician to entertain the god or goddess which is also a part of worship. In a plaque from the Char-bangla temple (north), an ascetic, with the mark of *rasakali* on his forehead, is carved holding a conch shell in both hands while being seated in *vajrasana* posture (Fig. 19). Playing of *ektara*, which is a variety of traditional single-string instruments played by Vaishnava singers and is characteristically used by the *Bauls* of Bengal as a part of their meditation through singing, is represented quite beautifully in a depiction of the Char-banglan temple (east) (Fig. 20).





Fig. 17 Ascetic worshipping Sivalinga, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 18 Ascetic in offering posture, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 19 Vajrasana posture, Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 20 Baul, Char-bangla temple (east)



Fig. 21 Playing musical instruments Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 22 Nagarsankirtan, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 23 Vaishnava ascetics, Jor-bangla temple

Worshipping deity with *ghanta*, *kanshar* (a dish of bell metal), *Kartal* (cymbal), big disc and various stringed musical instruments like *tanpura*, *vina*, *dotara* are also found on several of the plaques. An interesting plaque of a group of ascetics is found on the wall of Jor-bangla temple. Here, an ascetic with a musical instrument is surrounded by devotees. It seems that the main figure is playing a musical instrument with a devotional spirit and the surrounding figures are in the stance of offering prayers anticipating the rhythm of music (Fig. 21). In several plaques, Vaishnava ascetics are depicted as dancing while holding a *uttariya* (a type of scarf). In a plaque of Char-bangla temple (west), an ascetic in typical attire is dancing with both hands lifted above as if to the rhythm of the *dholak* (a drum) which is being played by another ascetic. This is a typical form of Vaishnava meditation (Fig. 45).

Vaishnava ascetics are depicted on plaques as moving in a procession by singing, dancing and playing musical instruments. This procession of Vaishnavas is known as *nagarsankirtan*, i.e. encircling the city in the name of god and arousing religious feelings amongst the inhabitants. They are typically represented with musical instruments known as *khol-kartal* (two-sided terracotta drum and cymbals). In these plaques they are seen wearing a *dhoti* (loincloth) or *uttariya* (a scarf like cloth from India). They can also be seen with the *rasakali mark* (made of sandalwood paste) on the forehead. Representation of *nagarsankirtan* of the Vaishnavas is seen in several of the terracotta plaques. In a terracotta panel on a column of Jor-Bangla temple, Vaishnavas are depicted as performing *Nagar-Sankirtan* which includes singing and dancing with *khol-kartal*. (Fig. 22). All the figures are carved as brimming with *bhakti* or devotion, the chief characteristic of Vaishnavism. In another type of worshipping, ascetics are found as standing or sitting in folded hands or doing

*namaskara* with closed eyes or showing respect to the overlord which is considered as a normal part of worshipping (Fig. 46). The representations of ascetics doing *nam-jap* or praying by chanting the names of the goddess are found on several terracotta plaques found at Baranagar temple. In some depictions, ascetics performing *nam-jap* are carved as meditating by placing one hand under a covering. They are basically Vaishnava ascetics and their followers are portrayed as the ones who meditate by working their hands on a rosary that is placed inside a cloth cover hanging from their neck (Fig. 23). Besides these, depictions related to the relation between guru and disciple are found on several terracotta plaques. The portrayal of such relation is found through the depictions like, disciples or followers in the company of their Guru while worshipping. Disciples can also be shown in the gesture of hands folded towards their guru in the act of prayer or devotion. They are also carved as touching the feet of their guru to receive his blessings. (Fig. 24).

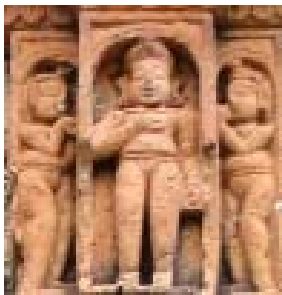


Fig. 24 Ascetic with disciples, Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 25 Preparing herbal medicine, Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 26 Ascetic with *Kumandulu* Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 27 Conversation, Jor-bangla temple

## 2. Non-Religious Activities of Various Religious Groups

Apart from the religious activities of the different sects, various non-religious activities have also been observed by studying the plaques of the temples of Baranagar. They are mainly portrayed as preparing herbal medicines, resting, making conversation and singing while begging for alms.

### a) Preparing Herbal Medicine

Representation of ascetics as crushing or grinding herbal products in a pot with a short heavy stick (*danda*) for the purposes of preparing medicines are found in the depictions at Baranagar temples. Two types of pots, the *hamandista*, which is made of iron, and the *khala* (a round narrow pot made of stone), in which ingredients are crushed with an iron stick, are commonly depicted. The Hindu ascetics prepared a medicine known as Ayurveda and the Muslim ascetics prepared the medicine called Unani; both herbal products were used to treat the ailments of the common people, for which the ascetics earned respect and reputation. This method of producing medicine was supported and patronized by the rulers of the period. A plaque of Char-bangla temple (north) depicts an ascetic preparing ingredients in a *khala* with a short iron stick (Fig. 25).

### b) Ascetics Resting and in Conversation

A scantily-dressed ascetic depicted in a seated resting *vajrasana* posture is found on a plaque from the Char-bangla temple (north). The most prominent attribute that can be noted is the depiction is holding of a *Kumandulu* (small metallic water pot used for religious purposes by Hindu ascetics) with the left hand (a gesture typical of an ascetic) (Fig. 26). In another plaque, two ascetics are depicted as engaged in deep conversation. They are seated on *Damaru* like forms, from which it may be inferred they are Saiva (worshippers of Shiva) (Fig. 27).

### c) Ascetics Singing and Begging Alms

A section depicting ascetics is carved as singing with musical instruments and begging alms. Known as mendicants, who would roam the streets singing songs in praise of their deity in exchange for alms in both money and kind by which they sustained their lifestyles. Depictions of mendicant are found on plaques from the Char-bangla temple (west) (Fig. 34). In another example from the same temple (east), two

Vaishnava ascetics are depicted walking down a street. Here the mendicant Vaishnavas are portrayed wearing typical attire of dhoti and *uttariya*, playing the *ektara* and singing (Fig. 20).

*B. Examining the Scheme or Idea behind the Spatial Location of Various Groups of Religious Performers on the Temples Façades*

This section tries to gain some knowledge by mapping the location of ascetics with regard to its spatial significance. The concept proposed by George Michell was applied to locate the position of the ascetics on the façades of the temples of Baranagar. The concept talks about the ornamental schemes of the façades. In these schemes, the front façades have been divided into eight component parts. These are: (i) Corner Elements, (ii) Wall Panels (including framing bands and pilasters), (iii) Base Friezes, (iv) Cornices, (v) Entrance Frames (including secondary cornices), (vi) Columns (also pilasters framing openings), (vii) Arches, and (viii) Panels Above Arches [12, p. 88]. Though there are three types of architectural forms (i.e. *Do-Chala*, *Char-Chala* and *Octagonal* type) could be traced, their decorative schemes are broadly comparable. The approach of applying the scheme would facilitate mapping and analysis of the location of ascetics on the temples façades in order to assess their spatial significance.

On the façades of temples, the sculptures are chiefly organized with respect to the architectural settings of the temples. The setting itself became the main tool for the artisans to allocate the subjects. It could be observed that the

allocation of some particular themes is precisely done in terms of the demand of the subjects without violating the ornamental schemes of the façades. In some instance, the same scene recurred to create a pattern, mostly notably on the wall panels (between cornices and panels above arches). The main emphasis has been given here to create a pattern rather than justify the theme. In the case of the decoration of the panels above entrance arches, artisans were found to be more specific in the selection of themes.

Regarding the carvings of terracotta temples of Bengal, Michell once raised the same issue. According to his observation [12], certain themes are reserved for specific parts of the façade. He also added that the emphasis is usually given to the panels above the arches. Subjects like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Krishna Lila* scenes create the key narrative compositions on the panels above the arches, and these provide the bases for a host of 'accessory' subjects on wall and corner panels, base and cornice friezes.

Though ascetics can be categorized as a subsidiary component of the depicted narratives, they remain a significant aspect of temple decoration. Despite the depiction of ascetics of Baranagar as a supplementary subject/theme, often they constitute the major narrative composition and find their place on a principal panel. In general, they could be found on various parts of the walls of the temples including entrance arches, corners, base friezes, wall, column panels, and especially on the corner plaques.



Fig. 28 Schematic Triple-entrance Façades

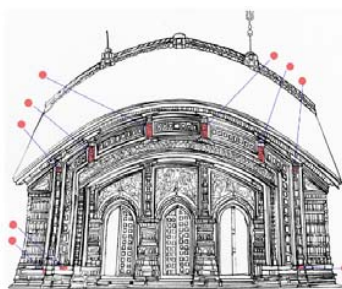


Fig. 29 (a) The Locations of Religious Performers, Char-bangla Temple (North)



Fig. 29 (b) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side wall of the Char-bangla Temple (North)



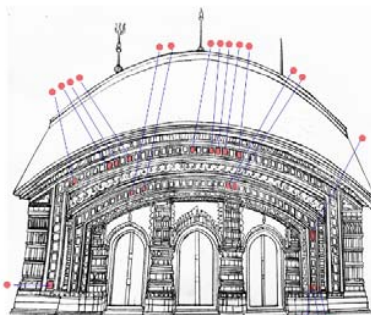


Fig. 29 (c) The Locations of Religious Performers, Char-bangla Temple (West)

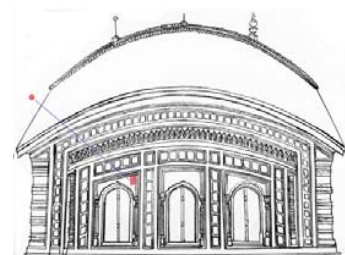


Fig. 29 (d) The Locations of Religious Performers, Char-bangla Temple (East)

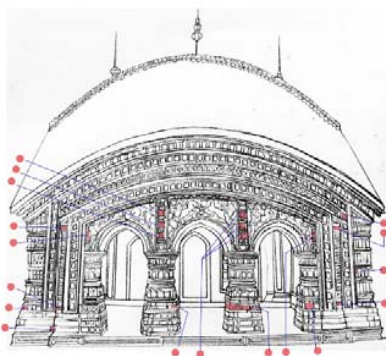


Fig. 30 The Locations of Religious Performers, Jor-bangla Temple

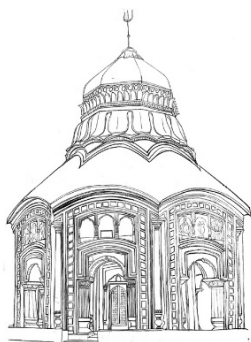


Fig. 31 (a) Bhavanishvara Temple

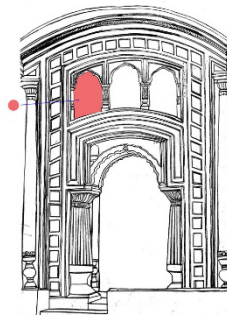


Fig. 31 (b) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side wall-1 of Bhavanishvara Temple

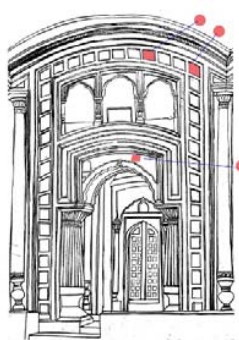


Fig. 31 (c) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side wall-2 of Bhavanishvara Temple

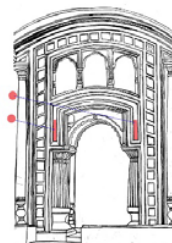


Fig. 31 (d) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side walls-3 of Bhavanishvara Temple



Fig. 31 (e) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side wall-4 of Bhavanishvara Temple



Fig. 31 (f) The Locations of Religious Performers, Side wall-5 of Bhavanishvara Temple

The ascetics were often depicted as pilasters above entrance arches or as brackets (Figs. 29-31). It is clearly apparent that their position is not fixed on the façade depictions. The randomness of their position on the temple walls closely resembles the vagabond nature of their quotidian life wherein they renounce their material and social bonding. They used to reside in multiple places, move here and there and engaged in various religious activities. This somehow gives the explanation about their varied position on temple façades and also provides a visual narrative which talks about a segment of people who have freed themselves from the social complexities.

TABLE I  
DESCRIPTIONS OF SEVERAL TYPES OF DRESS

A. Lower-Garment		
a. Long <i>Dhoti</i> and Certain Modes of Wearing		
1. The long <i>dhoti</i> was generally worn around the waist and reached down to the top end of the foot. In the depiction, the pleated end of the <i>dhoti</i> was carved in a manner that bears striking resemblance to an elephant trunk (Fig. 32).	2. A plaque from Char-Bangla temple (west) depicts an ascetic as wearing a <i>dhoti</i> which reaches below his calf. This vertically striped lower garment was worn by simply wrapping it around the waist, a little below the navel (Fig. 33).	3. In a depiction, the pleats of a <i>dhoti</i> have been carved interestingly. Hanging from the waist between the legs, long pleats curve up in the direction towards the backside before touching the ground to create a fish-tail- like shape (Fig. 34).
4. An ascetic is seen as seated on an unusual object. His lower garment seems to be a <i>dhoti</i> . Its folds are created quite systematically at regular intervals (Fig. 35).	5. In a plaque, the lower part of an ascetic is draped in a <i>dhoti</i> folded just below the navel. The borders of the <i>dhoti</i> have been created with simple lines. It sweeps smoothly and there are no hind pleats carved out from the smooth sweep. One of the lower ends comes between the legs and touches the ground just behind the ankles. The part created an extensive triangular shape which is very stiff but equally smooth. The <i>dhoti</i> is secured by a sash, consisting of three bands (Fig. 36).	6. In a particular mode of wearing a <i>dhoti</i> , it is fastened low below the navel and extends beyond the knees almost touching the ankles. The borders of the <i>dhoti</i> can also be observed from the carvings and are indicated by double lines. One of the lower ends of the <i>dhoti</i> drapes between the legs and is tucked into the backside with hind pleats (Fig. 37).
It reaches up to the middle of the thigh or in some cases reaches the knees or just below the knees.	b. Short Dhoti	
	One plaque portrays an ascetic blessing a woman. He wears a short and narrow <i>dhoti</i> which ends well above the knees. It is held tight around the waist by a decorated belt. A long dangling portion is allowed to hang in graceful pleats between the legs and reaches below the knees. The <i>dhoti</i> is shown in schematic folds on either thigh at regular intervals (Fig. 38).	
A plaque from Bhavanisvara depicts a Vaishnava in dancing posture He wear a short pant like garment ending a little above the knees. It has edges being indicated by double lines (Fig. 40).	c. Drawers	
	Another plaque from Char-bangla temple (west) depicts two ascetics. The lower garment worn by them seems to be drawers ending well above the knees. The drawers are held in position at the waist by a girdle which is made up of two bands (Fig. 41).	
A plaque shows an ascetic in a seated position with folded hands. He is wearing a lower garment extending from the waist and ending a little above the ankle, covering each leg separately. It seems he is wearing trousers which are fastened to the hip by a waistband, the long end of which hangs in front. The trousers contain vertical strips at a regular interval (Fig. 42).	d. Trouser	
	A long dangling portion is allowed to hang in graceful pleats between the legs and reaches below the knees. The <i>dhoti</i> is shown in schematic folds on either thigh at regular intervals (Fig. 38).	
Often, it has been observed that ascetics wear a short or narrow strip of cloth tucked between their legs and which covers only the private parts of body. This is known as a <i>langotior kaupina</i> , fastened to their waist perhaps by a <i>kamarbandh</i> or belt. They do not wear any type of upper garment (Figs. 43 and 44).	e. Kaupina/ Langoti	
	The <i>dhoti</i> strengthened by a simple or decorated band or girdle around the waist which is known as <i>Kamarabandha</i> . This type of sash or girdle can be distinguished from the upper scarf and the lower <i>dhoti</i> . The girdles sometimes consisted of one or two bands with a floral clasp in the center. In some cases, the girdles were highly ornamented. The belt is generally knotted in the center at the front and its two usual ends which are allowed to dangle over the front pleats (Fig. 45).	
The <i>dhoti</i> strengthened by a simple or decorated band or girdle around the waist which is known as <i>Kamarabandha</i> . This type of sash or girdle can be distinguished from the upper scarf and the lower <i>dhoti</i> . The girdles sometimes consisted of one or two bands with a floral clasp in the center. In some cases, the girdles were highly ornamented. The belt is generally knotted in the center at the front and its two usual ends which are allowed to dangle over the front pleats (Fig. 45).	B. Upper-Garment	
	a. Uttariya/ Scarf and Modes of Wearing	
1. It is basically a piece of cloth used to cover the upper part of the body. Available in variable lengths, it was worn around the waist or the neck or over the shoulders or arms.	2. A style of draping the scarf across the body and over one shoulder (example) Please revise (Fig. 46).	3. In another style, the <i>dupatta</i> (scarf) is draped like a garland with one end carved in a freely fluttering manner. (Fig. 47).
4. Often, it has been seen that the <i>uttariya</i> is worn covering the nape of neck from behind and both ends suspended in the front (Fig. 36).	5. Abrahmana is illustrated in the plaque wearing a bordered scarf which is positioned over the shoulders. The two ends of the scarf are positioned just below the hip and form a rectangular shape (Fig. 48).	6. In another depiction of dress style, the scarf was worn on right shoulder leaving left shoulder bare. There are many examples of this style of dress as depicted on the plaques (Fig. 49).
Sometimes religious performer is seen as wearing the sewn garments like ‘kurta’ (Fig. 45).	b. Sewn Garments	
	c. Turban	
It is basically a head dress consisting of a long scarf fastened around the head in many elaborated patterns (Figs. 50 and 51).		

*C. An Account on the Attire Worn by the Followers of Various Religious Sects of Late Medieval Bengal*

To get a complete picture of the social and religious life of these religious groups, it is also very much essential to know their attachment with physical components. In this regard, the type of attire they used to wear plays an important role. The present section throws some light on the dress worn by the religious practitioners in Late Medieval Bengal. It is quite apparent that the pattern of dress and its decoration is the distinguishing feature which receives the attention of onlookers and worshippers and differentiates followers of one religious sect from another.

The purpose of this section is to present a comprehensive picture of the pattern of dress worn by the members of various religious groups as has been depicted on the front walls of the Baranagar temple cluster. Those belonging to a particular group can be broadly recognized by the unique way in which they clothed themselves. It seems that the choice in making a selection for wrapping up a particular portion of the body has been driven by the particular religious beliefs of the followers of a sect. Religious sects and schools of thought advise precisely about the attire and other differentiating symbols to be used by their members [13]. The classification in Table I includes some useful line-drawings and description in table format to show a concrete representation of several types of dress.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the depictions which have been found on the carved terracotta plaques of the temples of Baranagar, it could be inferred that these religious groups used to engage in various types of religious and non-religious activities and that these could be considered as a routine course of events for the then society. Common people and artisans were closely associated with such charismatic ritualistic performance and their associated attributes. They could be traced on various parts of the façades as a tramp, a mendicant, a free bird which somehow could be correlated with their philosophy of life where they used to leave their domestic lives and of their own free will devoted themselves to strict ways for spiritual gains. The depictions on the main façades of the temples of Baranagar also provides an illuminating commentary on the attire worn by various religious groups. Observers are drawn to the significant detail in the costumes of the ascetics. It can be easily surmised that their garments had clear distinguishing features. Ascetics were often depicted wearing two pieces of cloth to cover their body; one for lower part of the body i.e. long dhoti, short dhoti, long narrow dhoti, *languties*, trousers and shorts. The other for the upper part of the body i.e. dupatta or scarfs (*uttariya*), which seem to have been worn more for decorative purposes than for simply covering the body. In some cases, only a single piece of cloth wrapped around waist is worn. It can be assumed that the *dhoti* was the very popular garment worn by religious practitioners of various faiths or sects. Certain modes of wearing it are also noted. The lower garments were usually worn below the navel and held in

position or secured at the waist by another piece of simple or decorated cloth known as a *kamarabandha* or girdle-belt or waist-band, which appears to be knotted at the front. The girdles sometimes consisted of one or two bands with a floral clasp in the center. In some cases, the girdles were highly ornamented. In some cases, ascetics were depicted wearing turbans which were fastened in many elaborated patterns.

Two unusual observations have been made from the depictions of Baranagar temples. One observation is that these depictions mainly projected the ascetics only as religious performers. While the religious aspect of their lives was substantively portrayed, other aspects of their life such as terrorizing common people or engaging in sexual relationships with humans and animals, which has the potential of lowering their esteem are excluded from the depictions. This feature of Baranagar temples was in stark contrast to the terracotta temples of other parts of Bengal which were built during the same time period. Secondly, the period of establishment of the temples in late medieval Bengal was concurrent with the Mughal era, especially during the time when the East-India company was continuously enhancing its authoritative power.

As a result, depictions of Muslim worshippers and Christian Missionaries are commonly found themes interspersed among the Hindu religious themes of these late medieval temples. But, the depiction of Baranagar temples which were also built at the same time show a different attitude where representations of such subjects are hardly noted. It may reflect the patron's conservativeness and preferred religious orientation. The observations and insights provided by this research paper can be pursued more intensively providing viable scope for future studies in the given research area.

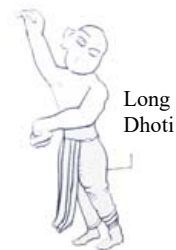


Fig. 32 Jor-bangla temple



Fig. 33 Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 34 Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 35 Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 36 Bhavanishvara temple



Fig. 37 Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 38 Bhavanishvara temple

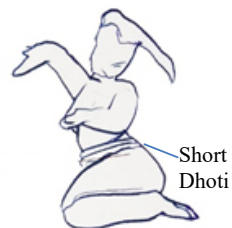


Fig. 39 Jor-bangla temple

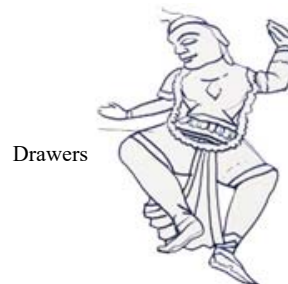


Fig. 40 Bhavanishvara temple

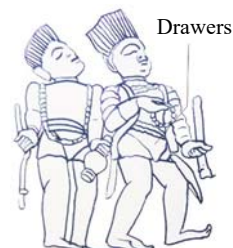


Fig. 41 Char-bangla temple (west)



Fig. 42 Char-bangla temple (north)



Fig. 43 Jor-bangla temple





Langoti

Fig. 44 Char-bangla temple (north)

Kamarabandha



Fig. 45 Char-bangla temple (west)



Scarf

Fig. 46 Jor-bangla temple



Scarf

Fig. 47 Jor-bangla temple



Scarf

Fig. 48 Char-bangla temple (north)



Scarf

Fig. 49 Char-bangla temple (west)



Turban

Fig. 50 Char-bangla temple (north)



Turban

Fig. 51 Jor-bangla temple

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