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*Founder-Editor : Late Dr. V. S. Agrawala*

# Temples of Tripura

*Dr. Kalyan Das  
Singla, 1968*

*by*

**Adris Banerji**

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*M. K. Mahajan Rao  
Seinla, 1968*

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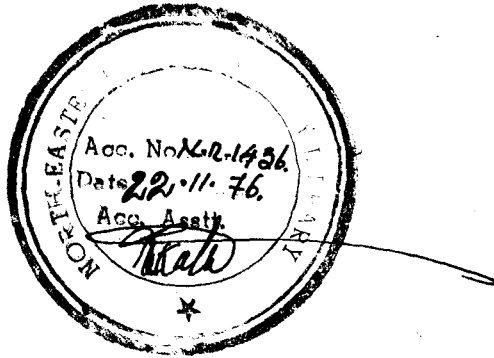
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*Dedicated*  
*To The Memory of*  
**Late Dr. V. S. Agrawala**  
*A Friend, Philosopher And Guide.*

## PREFACE

The author owes an apology why these rural shrines evidently lacking the traditional aesthetics of Indian temple architecture should call for notice. In the first place, it is due to the inspiration of the late Dr V. S. Agrawala. When I first met him soon after his appointment as Curator, Provincial Museum, Lucknow in 1940, he advised me not to follow the fashionable method of theorising along familiar and well-trodden paths; but, to seek out the forgotten and neglected monuments and sculptures. It was he and the late K. N. Dikshit who suggested to the author the investigation of the Varanasi School of Sculpture, whose origins, development and decay required clarifications. When I have returned in the evening of my life to Varanasi, the scene of my earlier activities in humbler spheres, I miss the lean, tall and scholarly personality a great deal. Unknown to many locals, Uttara Pradesh has the unique distinction of having two international plastic activities running parallel and contemporaneously : Mathura and Varanasi.

As far as the temples dealt with in the present study are concerned, Prof. S.K. Saraswati told me that when he wrote on the temples of Burma (*Journal of the Greater India Society*, Vols. 9 and 10 ) the existence of these were not known to scholars. This I felt was sufficient justification to moot them before the public. My attention to the rock-cut sculptures at Unakoti and these temples was drawn by a delegate to the Republican Day celebrations of 1954 from Tripura, when I was in the National Museum.

The second great importance of these temples is not merely the diffusion of *Chala* type of temples but contribution of a new style of temple architecture

unrivalled in India : a happy and affectionate combination of Brahmanical and Buddhist idioms of expressions in religious architecture. In Bihar, Orissa and Assam, the parallel development of *Eka-chura* or *Ratna* type of temples over *Chala* and *Char-chala* roofs has already been noted. But in Tripura votive stupas were used over hutshaped type of roofs, and not *Chura* or *Ratnas*. From the point of view of design they were not at all unsuccessful. Over a rectangular room made by four walls of the sanctum, the predominant cubism was counteracted first by four cylindrical buttresses with *kalasa* finials. These met the curved edges of the convex *Char-chala* roofs, to harmonize with which circular stupas with conventionalised *harmika* and *chhatravali* were added in place of a lofty tower (*ekandaka*) or a cluster of miniature towers around a main *sikhara* (*aneka-andaka*) trying to pierce the blue Indian sky. The idea was not only novel but shows a catholicity of spirit and concord.

In conclusion, I have to thank Sri G. S. Telang of the American Academy of Benares for preparing the revised plans, the Archaeological Survey of India for permitting me to reproduce some of their photographs. Lastly, I am indebted to the publishers and editor of the Series for their interest in its early printing.

137/138 New Colony,

Author.

Bhelupura, Varanasi,

Sivaratri, The 26th February 1968.

**Frontispiece**



Two **do-chala** (Jor-bangla) temples on a Sunga pillar .  
Now in Archaeological Museum, Sarnath. C.150 B.C.  
Copyright : ASI.

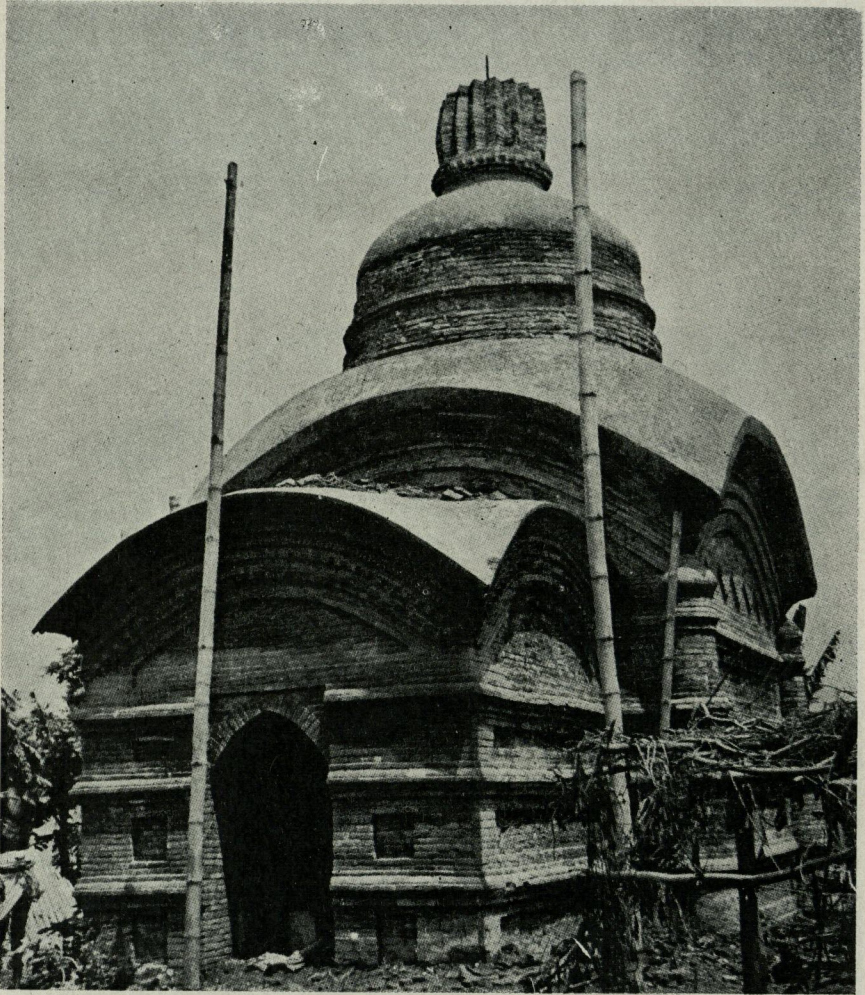
## Temples of Tripura

From time immemorial, the Indian mind has shown a traditional creative faculty, in the visual arts. But, due to vastness of its area, differences in materials, climate, inaccessibility of one area from another and ethnic basis, it became divided into regional schools. The Indian mind has repeatedly demonstrated an elasticity in absorbing alien traditions, which it assimilated and harmonized with its political, social, economic organizations and aesthetics. At the same time, it formed the sad habit of remaining tradition-bound. This brings us to the art of the former state of Tripura, known in British days as 'Hill Tiperrah', due not merely to its geographical conditions, but also to distinguish it, from the district of Tipperah, which now forms a part of East Pakistan. This area originally was included in the state but due to encroachments of the Turco-Afghans and Mughals, passed finally to the E. I. Company on the assumption of the Diwani. The princely family driven to this hilly region was able to maintain its autonomy between the two millstones of the Ahoms of Assam and the Nawabs of Bengal.

The centrally administered area of modern Tripura is therefore located between 22°59' and 21°31' N latitude and 91°12' and 92°24' E longitude. It is possibly bounded on the south by the districts of Noakhali and Tipperah of E. Pakistan, being the last surviving relic of Muslim advance on the east and west, by Lushai and the Chittagong hill tracts and on the north by Sylhet district. The topography is hilly, covered with bamboo jungles, five or six parallel ranges of hills with fairly fertile valleys between them gradually increasing in elevation towards the east. Along the

## NOTES

1. For Kiratas and their country *cf.* the writer's "Lingams of Jalpaiguri", *Our Heritage*, Calcutta, Vol. XIV. 1965, Pt. 1, pp. 13-22.
2. Silua ( Noakhali district ) image inscription, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1930-34, Pt. I. pp. 38-39.
3. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI. p. 40.
4. *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, ( New Series ), Vol. XIX. pp. 375 ff. ; *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII, pp. 357 ff.
5. *Ep. Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 301 ff ; and *IHQ*. Vol. XXIII. pp. 221-41.
6. *Varendra Research Society Monograph No. 8 : "Rajshahi"*. ( 1950 ), pp. 104-05 ; *IHQ*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 55-57; *Ep. Ind.* Vol. II, pp. 347 ff.
7. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. VI, p. 271 ff; *EL*, Vol. XVII, p. 349 ff. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1960, pp. 36 ff. and *EL*, Vol. XXII, pp. 108-09.
8. The whole question has been discussed by me elsewhere.
9. A. B. Griswold, C. Kim and R. H. Pott, *Burma, Korea and Tibet ( Art of the World Series )*, 1964, pp. 13 ff. Figs. 7-9., 11, 14-15 and Plates 1 and 2 facing p. 22.
10. *Ibid.* Fig. 14; *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1908-09, p. 31; H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, Vol. II, Plate 472.
11. Photographs of some of these folios taken by Dr. P. Pal. are in the Archives of the American Academy of Benares.



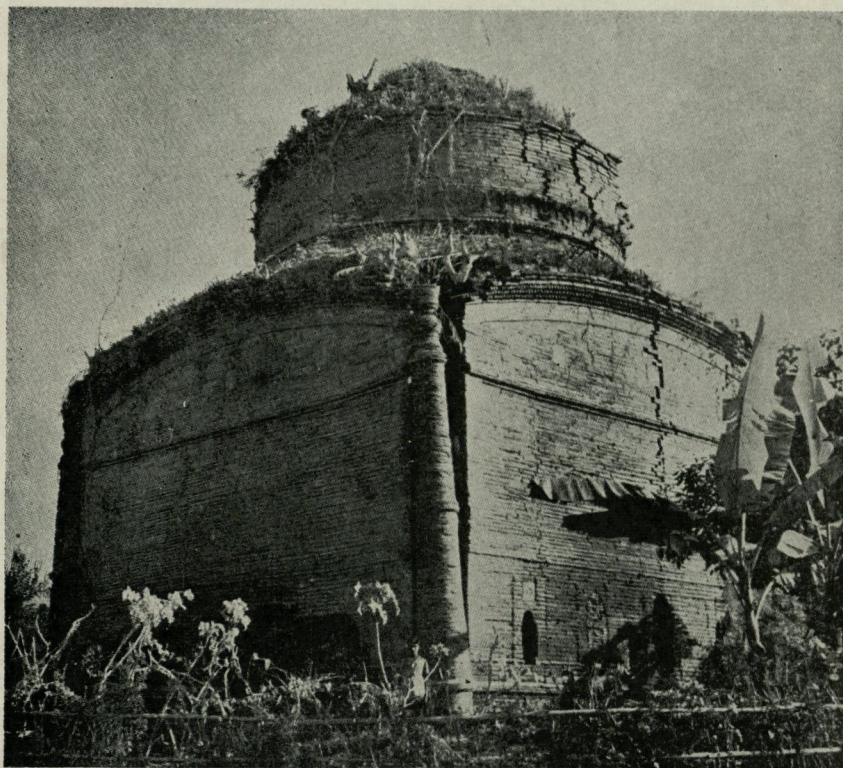
II. Gunavati temple. C. 1668 A.D. Udaipur. Tripura.  
Copyright : ASI.



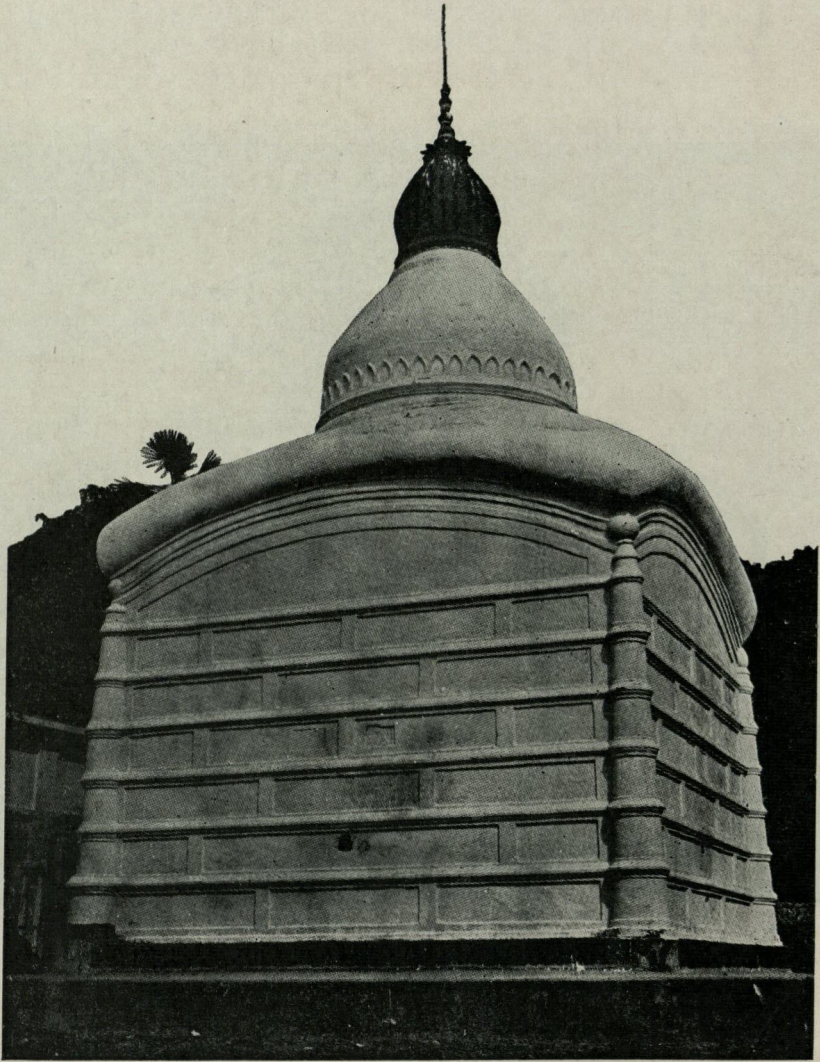
III. Lakshmi-Narayan Temple. Udaipur. Tripura.  
Copyright : ASI.



● IV. Hari Mandir, from south-west. Udaipur. Tripura.  
Copyright : ASI.



V. Jagannatha Temple. Udaipur. Tripura. Backview.  
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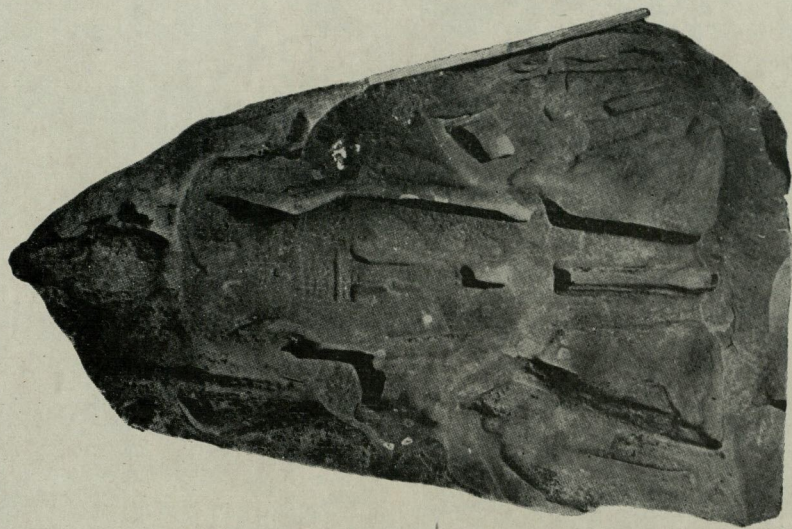


VI. Renovated Tripura-sundari Temple. Udaipur. Tripura.  
Copyright : Author.



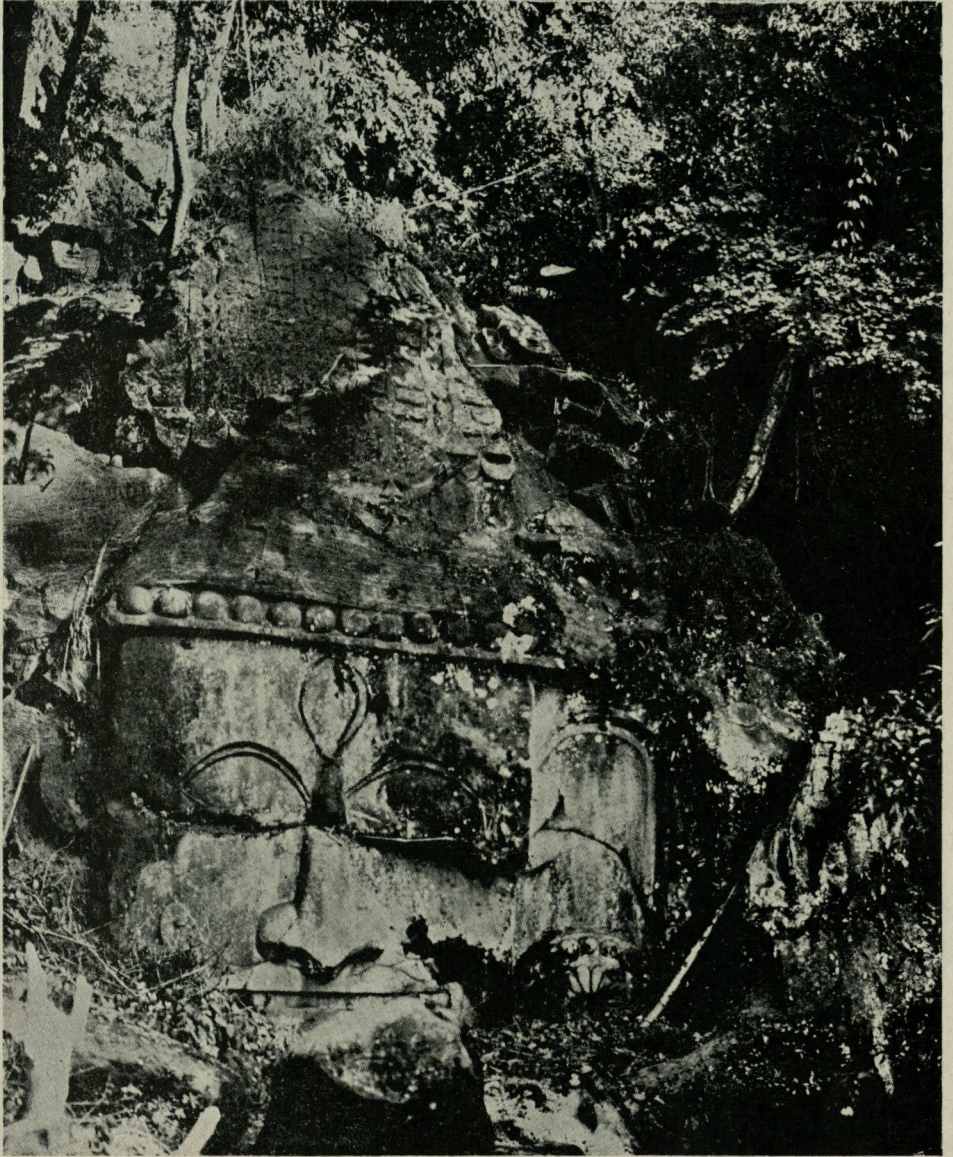
VII. (a) Chaturmukha - lingam.

Both from Unakoti, Tripura.



(b) Vishnu standing.

Copyright : ASI



VIII. Rock-cut colossal head of Siva. Unakoti. Tripura.  
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## GLOSSARY

- Amalaka**—the member immediately below *Kalasa* on a temple, shaped or formed as a *Phyllanthus Emblica*.
- Anda**—the cylindrical or hemispherical portion of a *stupa* or votive *stupa*.
- Anekandaka**—multi-towered temples.
- Antarala**—the passage between the porch and the sanctum of a temple.
- Bangla = Chala**—gabled roof houses of brick or mud. The former was used in early British days.
- Chandra-vamsa**—Lunar family.
- Chala**—roof of a thatched hut. One side of a gabled roof.
- Char bangla = Char chala**—the tangential roofs on four sides of a hut bungalow or temple.
- Char chala**—the same as Char Bangla.
- Chhatravalis**—stylised or conventionalised series of umbrellas on a votive *stupa*. Also called *Hti*.
- Chaturmukha**—a phallus having four faces.
- Do-chala**—the two sides of a gabled roof.
- Eka chuda (chura)**—One tower or a single spire. Also called *ratna*.
- Ekandaka**—a temple having one tower,
- Garbhagriha**—sanctum.
- Griva**—neck of a temple; immediately below *amalaka*
- Harmika**—the rectangular finial of an early *stupa*.
- Hti**—series of umbrellas. The same as *Chhatravalis*.
- Jagati stylobate**.
- Kalasa**—a jar like finial of a temple.
- Mandapa**—porch of a temple.
- Mastak**—the portion of a temple consisting of *griva*, *amalaka* and *Kalasa*.
- Misra**—mixed.
- Ratna**—synonymous with Chura.
- Sikhara**—tower.
- Sirsha**—top of roof. The same as *mastaka* in north Indian temples.
- Torana**—the main gate.