Chapter III

Art and Architecture of the Pala Period

The architectural and plastic remains, like sculpture and paintings, particularly the buildings belonging to this period, are relatively meagre. The contemporary epigraphic and literary records containing descriptions of the magnificent temples and monasteries in different parts of Bengal and Bihar bear, however, an eloquent testimony to the architectural activities of the Pala period. Thus the Nāmācharita of Sandhyākaranandī describes Rāmāvati, the capital of Rāmapūla, as the city of deities with a number of lofty temples erected in their honour. Unfortunately, however, these shrines have not survived on account of the erosion of soil, humidity of climate and the onslaughts of the Muslim invaders. Some monuments of mediaeval Bengal such as Adina Masjid built by Sikandar Shah (1338-89 A.D.) at Pandua in the Maldab district or the tomb of Jafar Khan Gaji at Tribeni in the Hooghly district exhibit the evidence of the iconoclastic hands of the Muslims in the use of the remains of the Hindu temples and panels containing images of Hindu deities. Similarly, some illustrated manuscripts have survived, though presumably a large

number of them have been lost in the wake of the destruc-
tion of the libraries housing them. Yet, the art-
remains that has come down to us enables us to obtain
a fair idea of the plastic activities of the Bengalees
of the Pāla period and the nature and extent of the
impetus of Buddhism underlying them.

Art flourishing during the reigns of the Pāla
kings gives evidence of two idioms: idioms of the schools
of Bengal and Magadha. Collectively these two schools are
known as the Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Art.

Architecture

Stupa: The stupa architecture of the period is repre-
sented by several votive stupas, discovered in Bihar and
Bengal. Such stupas have been scarcely found in Bengal.
They are made of either bronze, or stone and brick. The
bronze variety is illustrated by the specimens coming
from Ashrafpur (Dacca), Pabarpur and Žhewari2 (Chittagong).
The 7th-century Ashrafpur votive stupa consists of a cylin-
drical drum and a hemispherical dome standing on a lotus
over a high and slightly sloping square basement, the
latter has an offset projection on each face. The dome
bulges a little towards the top. At the centre of the
square hārmikā rises the shaft of c̣hhatrāvalī, only one

2. HBR, pp.483-84.
of its discs now surviving. The unique feature of this specimen lies in the square turret of the harmika which has each of its sides adorned with a figure of the Buddha. Each of the other two stupas from Paharpur and Jhewari consists of a bulging dome on a cruciform basement, as in the mediaeval stone examples from Bihar. The Paharpur stupa is endowed with four concentric rings just below the dome in the section usually occupied by the drum (reminiscent of three similar rings in the stupas of Ceylon). The shaft of the chhatra exhibits streamers in ornamental design. Relief representations of stupas of exactly similar design are met with in the stele of Buddhist images found in Bengal, as for instance, the image of Tara from Dherai.

While examples of votive stupas in brick are adequate, there is only one specimen of a similar stupa which has been found at Jogi-gupha. Most of the brick stupas are found in their lofty basements (e.g., those discovered at Paharpur and Babulara, the latter in the Bankura district). They are cruciform in plan, formed by one, two or three offset projections on each side of the square, and only a few are either square or circular. The basements consist of successive tiers of elaborate mouldings and probably they were sometimes

3. Ibid., Pl.LXVII, fig.160.
decorated with Buddha figures. Of them there is one—a very novel design. Found at Paharpur, this stupa consists of a circular base over which rises a high plinth with sixteen projected angles (and sixteen corresponding recessed angles); each projection just touching the outline of the circular base. Seen from the top, the whole structure looks like a sixteen-sided star evenly arranged inside a circle. This novel plan and arrangement of the basement suggest a novel shape and appearances of the superstructure, but the upper members are unfortunately lost. The Jogi-gupha is without the basement at present; each of its drum and dome represents a high cylinder, and its harmikā is not circular but square and ripped on edge, just like the śālaśākā-silā of a temple; this is a peculiar feature; the discs of the chhatrāvall are gradually diminishing in size.

Some idea of stupa-structure in ancient Bengal may also be obtained from its representation in the illustrations in manuscripts. The earliest of them, the Mrigasthāpana-stupa in Varendra, is illustrated in the Cambridge University manuscript of the Ashtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (No. Add. 1643). It shows a low circular drum over a basement consisting of six terraces, each of which is in the

5. Ibid., pp. 484-85.
form of a lotus. The semi-circular dome is endowed with four niches on four sides, each containing a Buddha figure; the dome is decorated with garlands at the top and surmounted by a square harmika; above it rises a tapering row of chhatras, the topmost one of which is adorned by streamers. The same manuscript bears the representations of two more stūpas. One of them, labelled as Tulākṣetṛe Vardhamāna-stūpa, exhibits two stupas of exactly similar design and elevation, placed side by side: a square basement, with one projection on each side, consists of four elaborately carved stages separated by recessed mouldings, and a drum in the shape of a double-petaled lotus is surmounted by a dome but without the niches, along with its usual upper component members. The other stūpa has a basement with a double row of petals separated by two plain mouldings; it supports a square terrace with two rectangular niches on each side; over the drum, which is in the shape of lotus, rises an almost cylindrical dome with a niche on each side and the harmika above has the usual chhatrāvati with streamers attached to its shaft.

From an examination of extant specimens it appears that plainly square or circular stūpas were not usually favoured. The prevailing style shows a high...
square basement, with one, two or three projections on each face, variegated with still more numerous lines of horizontal mouldings. The number and depth of the projections as well as of the mouldings offer a rough standard in stylistic evolution. The prevalence of an elongated type of stūpa is represented by the stone specimen of Jogi-gupha.

All these above-noted examples, actual or illustrated in manuscripts, cannot be assigned definitely to the reign-period of any particular ruler, except the Ashrafpur bronze stūpa which belongs to the Khādgā period. It is, however, reasonable to believe that the stūpa architecture being characteristically affiliated to Buddhism, it received impetus from the Buddhist rulers of the Pāla as well as the pre-Pāla periods.

Monastery:

In general the plan of the Buddhist monastery during this period consisted of four rows of small rooms round the four sides of a courtyard, a running verandah along the cells giving access to each cell through a door. Initially, the material used for construction of such building was mainly wood and partly stone or brick, but this was changed subsequently. Brick-built buildings and structures replaced the wooden structures in order
to accommodate large building-complex.

The famous vihara at Paharpur (ancient Somapura, supposed to be built by Dharmapāla, see App. I) had the same plan, but it was of a large dimension with a colossal temple in the centre of the courtyard (for temple, infra). The quadrangle measured more than 900 feet externally on each side with high enclosing walls (from 12' to 15' in height, the thickness being about 16 feet). The main gateway was in the north where a staircase gave access to a spacious pillared hall, enclosed by walls on the three sides. A single door on the southern side of the hall led to another pillared hall of smaller dimension, with an opening on the south. Through this opening, across a verandah, there was a flight of steps leading to the courtyard exactly in front of the colossal temple at the centre. The top of this flight of steps was on the level of the rows of cells of monks on four sides, each cell measuring approximately 14' x 13'6" in area. All these cells were connected by a spacious verandah (8' x 9') running continuously all around and could be approached from the inner courtyard by flights of steps provided in the middle of each of the four sides. There are 45 cells

on the north and 44 in each of the four sides, the total number thus being 177. Each of the four sides is divided into two parts by means of a special block placed in the middle; the central block in each of the three sides is marked by a projection in the exterior wall and contains a cell (the number thus being three) and a passage around it, while in the north there stands a commodious hall, which has already been referred to above. Thus the total number of cells becomes 180. What strikes the visitor is that as many as 92 rooms contain ornamental pedestals occupying the central position. As the original purpose of these cells was to accommodate the monks attached to the vihara, the reason for the presence of pedestals in such a large number of rooms remains obscure. It has been suggested that these structures with pedestals belong to the later period, as no such arrangement was found in the original one as is clear from the excavation of the original floors of the rooms whenever it was possible.

Besides the rows of cells and the central temple remains of several shrines and votive stupas and other structures have been encountered with in the enclosed courtyard. Probably they served as offices or strong rooms, refractory kitchen, bathing platform etc. The drainage system consisted of outlets from the cells and connected with a channel which ran along with the
foundation of the wall on the eastern side and which probably met the river Padma.

That the Paharpur monastery represents the culmination of an architectural type, characteristic of North and East Bengal, has been attested by recent excavations at Mainamati. Probably at Mahasthan also monasteries were built on the plan of Mainamati and Paharpur. The two monasteries of the Paharpur type, recently brought to light, belong, however, to a later date. The Mainamati monument is supposed to have been built about half a century earlier than the Paharpur.9

Excavations since 1955 onwards at the Salbanpur, Vihara, Kotila Mura and Charpatra Mura have revealed remains of Buddhist monasteries along with other antiquities of bygone days10.

The Salban monastery, 550 feet square, was built around a spacious courtyard with a cruciform shrine in the centre (as in the Paharpur). It was approached from the north by a road (174' long and 3½' wide), across a 74 feet wide gateway through 32 x 23 feet Entrance Hall. From this Hall a flight of steps led to the inside of the monastery courtyard. The Hall is flanked by two guard rooms(?) followed by the uniform monastic cells, numbering 115 in total. The boundary walls of the monastery

10. Ibid.
(still 6' high and 16\(\frac{1}{2}\)' thick) also served the purpose of the back walls of the cells. Cell No. 29, which has been left exposed after full excavations, shows that its inside wall was relieved by corbeled niches which were used for keeping images, books, oil lamps and other small but essential articles of daily use. Brick altars intended for installation of images (as in Pabarpur) have been discovered in some cells. Deep excavations both inside and outside the cells have revealed the entire plan of the monastery with its four major rebuilding phases. As in the Pabarpur, in the Salban Vihāra too, some subsidiary structures in its courtyard have been met with. As regards the Kotila Mura monastery, the entire establishment was enclosed by a massive boundary wall with recessed panel ornamentation and provided, on the east, with three grand staircases. In the inner area three brick-built stupa have been found, in a row, representing possibly, the Buddhist Jewels, viz., the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. They are erected in the traditional square ground plan, low circular drum and hemispherical dome. The third and the last monument, Charpatra Mura, consists of a rectangular Buddhist shrine, 105 feet long from east to west and 55 feet wide from north to south. It is in a bad state of preservation. The main cells of the shrine was in the west, approached from the spacious hall in the east through a covered passage. The roof of the hall was supported by four
massive brick pillars and was connected by a brick paved path with the main gateway in the east.

In course of Excavations carried out by the department of Archaeology of Bangladesh in 1973-74 at Dhasku-Vihar (Po-shi-po of Yuan Chwang's 'Travels') at Mahasthan (8 miles due north of the Bogra town), have laid bare the remains of two comparatively small monasteries and a semi-cruiform temple. Statigraphically, they have been assigned to the 10-11th century A.D. 11. The smaller of the two monasteries is built on a rectangular plan (162' x 152') and accommodates 26 uniform living cells (11' x 12') for the monks, disposed in four wings. The entrance gateway (25'6" east-west and 75' north-south) is at the centre of the eastern wing. The gateway leads to an outer pillared hall (measuring 24' x 20') flanked by two square antechambers or vestibules, with 10 feet sides, which provides access to an inner entrance hall (measuring 18' x 14'); both halls are connected by a 6'6" wide and 8'6" long doorway passage. This is the only entrance to the monastery and its general plan closely resembles the Paharpur, except that the central inner courtyard is not dominated by a shrine as in the case of the latter monument. A dilapidated staircase, built in the south-east corner cell

of the monastery probably went up to the roof or the upper storey of the building. Another well-preserved flight of steps, leading down to the paved courtyard, is visible. The outer wall of the monastery is solid and monotonously plain. The second monastery of slightly larger dimension and rectangular in plan (185'-6" x 161'-6") is located 75 feet away from the first on the northern side of the site. Only the southern and western wings of the monument have so far been brought to light and in general appearance it seems to be identical with the other. The southern and western wings accommodate 8 and 9 living cells of same size respectively in regular rows. The entrance gateway, not yet exposed, was probably located at the centre of eastern wing.

As the major portion of modern Bihar was included in the Pala empire, a reference to the famous Nalanda and Vikramasila monasteries should be made here. The site of the latter is not yet definitely known. As regards the former it belongs to the architectural conception of the Paharpur (for details, see App.I).

Temples

Extant temples of the Pala age are few and far between. Remains of foundation of some of these temples
belong to an earlier period, such as the large temple at Chandraketugarh (Beraclampa, 24-Pargana) of the Gupta period and of a Panchayatana temple-complex at Rajbadidanga (Murshidabad district).

Remains of the most spectacular temple of the Pāla period are witnessed in the ruins of the colossal temple of the Somapura Vihāra at Paharpur (supra). This imposing edifice occupies the centre of the vast quadrangle of the monastery, covering an area of about 356 feet long and 314 feet wide. The ground-plan seems to consist of a gigantic square cross with angle of projection between the arms. The temple rose in several terraces, of which only two terraces survive; each of the terraces has a circumambulatory gallery, enclosed on the outer side by a parapet wall around the monument. The terraces can be approached by the staircase provided on the north.

When the temple is viewed from the top downward, the complex plan of the structure appears to be simple. A centrally placed hollow square pile, shooting high up above the terraces, is the pivot round which the entire plan of this monument was conceived. The walls of this lofty central unit, form a sharp square and

12. For further details, see MASI, Vol.55, and HBR, pp. 506ff.
provision made in the second upper terrace for a projection, consisting of a chamber and an ante-room, on each face, leaving out a portion of the whole length of the square at either corner. This arrangement resulted in a cruciform-shape with one projecting angle between the arms of the cross. The circumambulatory passage with the parapet wall was made to run parallel to the outline of this plan. A similar rectangular projection on each side was also added on the first, i.e., the next lower, terrace thus variegating the plan still more. The basement conformed to the alignment of the first terrace and an enclosure wall, strictly conforming to the basement plan, with only a slight deviation near the main staircase, runs round the monument.

As to the plan of the temple it has been suggested that a four-faced (chaturmukha, chaumuka) Jain temple¹³ which existed very likely at the site, might have furnished the barest model of the present structure. It has also been suggested that the Paharpur monument approximates in general to the sarvatobhadra type of building as described in Indian texts on architecture¹⁴. As the temple has been recovered in a deplorable state, the form

of the superstructure, the method of roofing and other
details are wanting. It has been assumed by some that
the temple was a hollow pagoda\textsuperscript{15} or hollow-roofed chamber\textsuperscript{16},
but others infer that it was capped by some sort of super-
structure with elaborate covering or roof\textsuperscript{17}. According
to Dikshit, the main shrine of this colossal edifice was
situated at the top, i.e., on the third terrace, and
consisted of a square cella with a circumambulatory veran-
dah all round\textsuperscript{18}. S.K.Saraswati\textsuperscript{19} disfavours his view on
the ground that 'if such had been the case, the grand
staircase on the north ought to have extended beyond the
second terrace to reach the third'. Saraswati further
points out that there are definite indications that it
had terminated with the second terrace and no access to
the third terrace, if any, had been provided for in the
original monument. The paved platform in the centre of
the hollow square, which is seen 'roughly at the level'
of the second terrace, with its projected ante-chambers,
does not appear to have served any function. Thus the
sanctuary could have neither been situated at the top nor
inside the central square pile.

\begin{itemize}
\item[16.] R.D.Banerji in \textit{ASI}, 1925-26, p.113.
\item[17.] S.K.Saraswati, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.506-7.
\end{itemize}
The walls of the temple were made of well-burnt bricks and their plainness is relieved on the outer face by projecting cornices of ornamented bricks and bands of terracotta plaques, set in recessed panels. The lower part of the basement is embellished with a number of stone sculptures in high relief, which are, however, almost wholly Brahmanical in theme and character.

The main fabric of the temple belongs to a single period of construction, most likely to the time of Dharmapāla. The importance of the architectural type represented by this temple lies in the profound influence which it exercised on the architectural efforts of Southeast Asia, notably Burma and Java. In spite of some differences, some temples at Pagan, particularly the Ananda, in Burma, are closely reminiscent of the Paharpur temple. In the case of Javanese monuments like the Chandi Loro Jongrang and Chandi Sewa of a later date, the Indian influence is marked and unmistakable. The characteristics of the Paharpur temple such as angular projections, truncated pyramidal shape and horizontal lines of decoration are seen in the Chandi Loro Jongrang; similarly, there is a resemblance between the main temple of the Chandi Sewa and the second terrace of the Paharpur temple in respect of plan. It stands to reason, therefore, that the Indian monument served as the prototype of these two Javanese ones.
Reference has already been made to the recent discovery of the central shrine of the monastery of Salban at Mainamati, which is believed to have been built about half a century earlier. Though less ambitious in proportions, this shrine, like the one at Paharpur, is cruciform and multiangular and has recessed corners and terracotta panel decorations. There is, however, an important difference between the two monuments: the central shrine of the Salban Vihara has not gone up in terraces like that of the Paharpur monastery. In any case, there is no doubt about the fact that the Salban shrine belongs to the architectural conception of the Paharpur temple and foreshadows the culmination of the architectural type represented by the latter.

Excavation at Bhasu Vihar at Mahasthan has revealed a semi-cruciform shrine with three terraced ambulatory passages. The building is 125 feet by 87 feet oblong with entrance on north and a 15 feet square mandapa occupying the centre. Lower basement walls of the shrine are beautifully decorated with terracotta plaques in continuous frieze like Paharpur and Mainamati.

20. Alam, Mainamati, p.36.
monuments and artistic excellence of the Phasu Vihara shrine is reportedly better than the last-named ones.

Barring the remains of the famous Buddhist shrine at Paharpur, no actual example of any temple in Bengal, whether Buddhist or Hindu, before the 8th century is known. We may, however, obtain an idea of the different temple-styles from the representations of shrines in illustrated manuscripts as well as from the replicas of shrines within which the divine images are depicted in several sculptures. Thus the Cambridge University Manuscript of the Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita (No. Add. 1643) of the Newar Samvat 135 (=1015 A.D.) furnish us with a fair number of representations of shrines in which images of deities like Tārā, Vasudhārā and Loka-nātha have been shown. The accompanying labels not only contain the names of the deities, but also the places where their shrines were located.

These shrines stretched in outline as they would have looked like from front, have been divided by S.K. Saraswati into three groups22: (1) shrine with a superstructure of a number of receding stages rising up in tiers and surmounted by an āmalaka or a finial (sometimes the āmalaka is capped by miniature replica of a stūpa); (11) stūpa-girsha bhadra, that is, a shrine with

a superstructure of a number of receding stages rising up in tiers and surmounted by a complete stupa, and (iii) śikhara-śūraha bhadra, that is, a shrine with a superstructure of a number of receding stages rising up in tiers and surmounted by a curvilinear tower (śikhara) complete with āmala (some times the āmala is capped by miniature replica of a stupa as final). Reasonably, all these three groups of temples, as seen in these illustrations, were in existence during the 11th century, the period when the said manuscript was copied.

Of these three groups, temples of the first were common and widespread in distribution. The manuscript in question bears as many as fourteen miniatures with the names of the deities and their installation places in the accompanying labels. Of the fourteen shrines of this group, six were located in Eastern India (three in Bihar and three in Bengal), others in the territory south of the Vindhyas and outside India. The second and third types of shrines of our manuscript illustrations, which are but elaborations of the first, appear to have been exclusively affiliated to Buddhism; in each case in them the stūpa or the śikhara is a part of the elevation of the structure itself, not merely the ornamental final. The second type is unknown from the contemporary sculpture, nor does any structure analogue of it exist anywhere in
India. It is interesting to note in this context that a few temples at Pagan in Burma, as instanced by the Abeyadana and Patothamya, belong to the concept of our second group. In other words, these Burmese shrines may be regarded as the structural counterparts of the shrines of second group sketched in the manuscript illustrations. Further elaboration of the second type is encountered in the Chandi Pavon in Java, again a fact of interest and importance. That Buddhist shrines of the third group appear to have found favour in Eastern India is also apparent from a number of contemporary stone sculptures from different parts of Eastern India. An architectural fragment now in the Dacca Museum, figures of Buddha from Mahakali and Jibhâti (the former in the Dacca Museum) and an image of Buddha from Tetrawan in Bihar (now in the Indian Museum), among others, may be cited as illustrations on the point. Several terracotta votive tablets from Pagan and a stone sculpture from Hmawa (old Prome) bear relief representations which illustrate our third type. The ruins of the Buddhist complexes at Paharpur and Salban Vihara probably supply, according to Saraswati, structural analogues of the present type, i.e., sikhara-sirsha Bhadra. The second and third types of shrines, as seen in the illustrations of the Cambridge University

23. Ibid., p.8.
manuscript in question, furnish us with a somewhat unusual design and conception and were perhaps associated with Tantrayāna Buddhism which had its active centres in Bengal and Bihar.

Sculpture

Specimens of sculptural art up to the sixth century A.D. found in Bengal and Bihar demonstrate that artists of Eastern India were following the traditions of the great art centres of India, namely, Mathura school in the Kushāna period and the Gupta school of Sarnath in its eastern version in the Gupta. With the decline of and exhaustion of the Classical Gupta school in the seventh century A.D. local traditions and ideas began to assert themselves and paved the way for the rise of what may be described as the Bengal, or for that matter, Eastern Indian school of art. As this Eastern Indian school of art emerged and developed during the long reign-period of the Pāla rulers, it is also known as the Pāla school of art (and sometimes as the Pāla-Sena school in its eastern version). This school was the outcome of the fusion of indigenous art of Bengal and the Gupta art in its eastern version.

24. For details of the pre-Pāla sculptures, see S.K. Sarasswati, Early Sculpture of Bengal, Calcutta, 1962.
It is interesting to take note in this context of an interesting information left by Taranatha. The Tibetan historian refers to two artists of the reigns of Dharmapala and Devapala: Dhiman and Bitpalo, the former being the father of the latter. Hailing from Varendra, they worked in metal casting and painting. The son initiated the eastern style in metal sculpture and the father founded the eastern school in painting.

Countless images testifying to the artistic activity in the early Pala period have been discovered at various places of Bengal and Bihar, Mahasthan, Mainamati, Paharpur, Jhewari and Vikrampur in Bengal and Nalanda, Kurkihar and Bodhgaya have turned out to be some notable art centres during this period. By and large, most of these images are Buddhist in subject. They are mostly carved either in black stone or in metal and sometimes the stone icons appear to be the imitations of metal-work.

Recent excavations at Mainamati and Mahasthan (at Bhasu Vihara) have brought to light several sculptures, in relief as well as in the round. The earliest of them

25. The variety is kashiti-pather or black stone quarried in the Rajmahal hills in the Santal Parganas of Bihar.
26. Metal sculptures were usually cast in brass or octo-alloy (ahtaadhuth, i.e., a mixture of eight metals like copper, tin, lead, zinc etc.). A few gold and silver images are also known.
27. Bangladesh Lalit Kala, Vol.I, Pl.IX, fig.9.
belonging to the 6th-7th century are carved in soft grey stone and in relief (mostly damaged). In subject-matter they are entirely Buddhist, the Buddha or Bodhisattva being the dominant central figure in the panels. The classical Gupta tradition which persisted in Eastern India till the 7th century is also apparent in the delicacy of the limbs, the roundness of the forms and the refined expressions of these Buddha-Bodhisattva figures. An elegant image of Buddha found at Mahasthan may be furnished as a representative example of the perpetuation of Gupta idiom. Yet these earliest Mainamati stone sculptures articulate an idiom of their own: they exhibit a harmonious blending of physical charm with spiritual vision and experience as well as a spontaneity in expression, and in this respect they appear to have been approaching the Mainamati terracottas of a later date in style and conception.27a. What is true of these Mainamati pieces is generally true of sculptures found in other regions of Bengal and Bihar: they carry on, with varying degrees, the classical norm, though compared to them the Mainamati reliefs are marked by a greater freedom and individuality.

Aesthetically speaking, the few sculptures (e.g., the stone images from Barakar, West Bengal\(^{28}\) and Syama Tara from Sukhavaspur, Dacca\(^{29}\)), which are assigned to the 8th century, still exhibit the soft modelling of the bodily forms characteristic of the last phase of Gupta sculpture, though this modelling tends to become compressed into a thin surface. From about 800 A.D. a few dated images are available and they have helped us to trace the uninterrupted evolution of the Pāla art. Numerous images assignable to the period from the beginning of the 9th century to the end of the age of the Pālas (about the middle of the 12th century), Buddhist as well as Brahmanical, constitute a rich corpus of this art. Icons of the Avalokiteśvara group\(^{30}\) or an image of Viṣṇu\(^{31}\), of the first half of the century, are suggestive of the soft texture of flesh and skin, indicating an inheritance of the Gupta period; yet they have become fuller and more earth-bound, their sensuousness vibrating in their glances and in their limbs. Such figures are identically treated regardless of the religions they are affiliated with. Towards the middle of the century the petrifying tendency increases and at

\(^{28}\) French, J.C. The Art of the Pāla Empire of Bengal, Pls. VI and VII.

\(^{29}\) IBBSDM, Pl.XX.


\(^{31}\) Ibid., Pl.X.
the end of the century it ebbs down into mere extensiveness without zest and vigour. Though the stone images of the century, particularly of its beginning, do not reach the high qualitative level of the metal images, their kinship with the latter is undeniable. Viewed as a whole, the modelling in both stone and metal sculptures suggests a contented and calm sensuousness. The metal images from Nalanda and Kurkihar 32 as well as a few stone specimens (e.g., an image of Avalokitesvara from Nalanda 33) are the representative illustrations of the plastic vision and idiom of the 9th century.

The tendency to express soft fleshiness of the body in definite outlines becomes more marked in the next century: a powerful bodily form is modelled with a disciplined vigour and suggests a conscious strength that seems to transcend the outline from within; the Ujani Buddha (now in the Dacca Museum) exemplifies this new sculptural vision and expression 34. Though in some instances the discipline goes to the extent of desiccation of the flesh (e.g., a figure of Pāśvanatha from Kantabena 35), in most cases this discipline is tender and

32. HCIP, Vol.V, Pl.XLV, fig.94.
33. Ibid., fig.93.
34. IBPSISM, Pl.VIII.
35. HCIP, Vol.V, Pl.XLVI, fig.95.
the vigour transforms the softness of the fleshy form into majestic roundness. Almost all specimens are carved in high relief and the trunk limbs are endowed with the subdued vigour and robustness. This sculptural quality is almost uniformly visible though in other respects the tenth century perpetuates in general the norm of the ninth. The eleventh century inherits from the tenth the broad vision, but it makes this vision somewhat shallow and circumscribed, turning out the physiognomical form consciously elegant. The legs have stiffened to a large extent and all elasticity is on the wane. The strength of the bodily form gives way to gracefulness and a slender bodily type becomes the plastic ideal. In the succeeding century this slender body-type is retained, but the modelling becomes petrified and the warmth of the facial expression is replaced by a desiccated heaviness; the legs appear like columns without any elasticity. The relief usually treated in three planes, gets increasingly crowded with accessory figures, decorative elements and lavish ornaments; and neither the accompanying figures nor the ornaments and embellishments are organically connected with the central figures. Flexions (bhaṅgas) and bends of the body are shown as much as possible.

36. E.g., the Sankarbandha (Dacca) and Palgiri (Comilla) Śiva-Nātarāja figures.
Despite luscious lips and doubly curved eye-brows of female figures facial features become rigid, boiling down to almost a triangular configuration, bereft of any deep spiritual experience. In this way the Pāla art merges into that of the period of the Sena. The Sena art gives occasional evidence of a new artistic inspiration and creativeness, but it hardly found a chance to articulate itself properly due to the onrush of Islam.

By and large Pāla sculptures centre round the human figure which combines in itself both spiritual and mundane suggestiveness. Even gods and goddesses of the canonical texts have been humanized as far as possible. Thus the typical feature of the Pāla sculpture is the union of abstraction and realism with its religious and sensuous suggestiveness. Aesthetically, sculptures of the Pāla age are marked by an overemphasis on the masculinity of the male figures and femininity of female figures. Though the male figure is endowed with a sort of feminine grace, his shoulder and waist are ideally masculine, the former comparable to that of an elephant or a bull, and the latter to that of a lion. Similarly, the female figure with an almost palseolithic beauty

37. Devi figure from Jaynagar, North Bihar (now in the British Museum), SE, Pl.XLVI, fig.100.
of motherhood is depicted with fully rounded bosoms and heavy and bulging hips. Pala sculptures are thus earth-bound in their fleshy plasticity, poses and attitudes and have suggestion of sensuousness.

Apart from the aesthetic considerations of the products of the Pala school spread over nearly four centuries for tracing their stylistic development, they can also be tectonically viewed for determining their chronology. The works of the early Pala age, the second half of the eighth century, are dominated by the steleine carved in relief. Gradually the stele loses its importance and the relief becomes more and more independent from the stele background, so much so that sometimes a single metal figure modelled in the round is connected only by struts with the backslab and in stone stele the back slab is cut along the edges of the central figure in order to give it an appearance in the round. In spite of its relative independence from the background, the figure yet remains flat and compressed in the surface, which provides a sort of two-dimensional effect. This feature continued till the eleventh century. Works of three-dimensional effect were produced mainly in the twelfth century when they became 'fully in the round and self-assuring in character'.
A perusal of images of relevant Buddha and Buddhist divinities tends to show that iconographically the Pāla period is divisible into two phases: The first phase, extending from the middle of the 9th to the end of the 9th century, was dominated by the cult of Loka-nātha or Lokesvara, attested by the discovery of greater numbers of images of this god and lesser number of effigies of Śakti deities from noted centres of Bodhgaya, Kurkībar and Mālande. Practically no image assignable to this period has been found which may be delegated to the Tantrika forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism like Mantrayāna, and Kālachakrayāna. In other words, Tantrika Buddhism was not much popular during this phase and Tantrika deities appear to have seldom found in the places of public worship like Buddhist shrines or renowned sacred places. It is during the second phase covering the 10th-12th centuries that Tantrika Buddhism attained popularity. This is attested by the discovery of a large number of images of deities like Tārā (in her various forms), MārTchi, Heruka, Hevajra etc. This, however, does not mean that images of Lokesvara were not fashioned during this phase. In fact, such images were continued to be made along with icons of Tantrika deities. It is to be noted here that some exquisite specimens of Tantrika Buddhist art of India belong to this phase of Buddhism of the 10th-12th centuries.
As in the case of architecture, the Pāla school made an impact on the sculptural art of Nepal, Tibet, Ceylon and South-east Asian countries. The Pāla idiom while changed the colour and character of the art of these countries which was already in existence, was itself reoriented to a large extent. So the art school which developed in these countries, cannot be called a duplication of the Pāla school. The artistic heritage of the Pāla age acted as a seed only. When this seed was sown in the fertile and prepared soil of new countries, the seedling of new art-form sprouted up in spite of the resemblance with the parent school, in an indigenous fashion.

Taranātha says that the art of Nepal was greatly influenced by the works of the artists of Bengal and Magadha belonging to the reign period of Devapāla. The Nepalese art even during modern times betrays the deep influence of the art-tradition of Pāla Age. Like Nepal, Java in ancient and early mediaeval period also underwent the influence of the Pāla school in respect of its plastic art. As regards Javanese bronzes, Kempers

observes: "the Hindu-Javanese bronzes in general have not developed from Pāla art, but the Pāla images have enriched the art of Java with a number of motifs and types. Besides, many bronzes from Mālandā appear to have been exported for dedication not only in Java, but also in other South-east Asian countries. Similarly, some influence of the Pāla style of sculpture is discernible even in the Chinese Buddhistic images of the contemporary Tang period; the resemblance is sometimes so strong as to justify the idea that the Chinese is a copy of Indian works. The Tibetan sculptural style was also largely derived from the Pāla art. As illustrations on the point may be cited the seated figures both in metal and colour reproduced in the monograph by J.C. French. No doubt the strong influence of Tantric element within the fold Tibetan Buddhism kindled the imagination of the Tibetan artists and it originated from the Pāla Bengal.

42. See W. Oswald Siren's work on Chinese Buddhist Sculpture, Pl. 374E in which the pose and drapery are Indian. The torso and rigidly straight legs in Pls. 375, 376E, 377 and 639 of this book are derived from Pāla statues. Other examples of the influence of Indian art on Chinese sculptures is provided by Pls. 409E, 419C and 542.

43. Op. cit., pls. XII, fig. 2 and XIII, fig. 1.
Paintings

Though any specimen of painting belonging to pre-Pāla period of Bengal is yet unknown, we are told by Fa-Hien* that the pictorial art flourished well in Bengal, particularly in Tārālapīti during the beginning of the 5th century A.D. It is quite probable that the age-old folk art of patachitra, abhūli-chitra etc., was not unknown in Bengal and that the monasteries in Bengal were embellished with paintings.

The only surviving documents of the Pāla school of painting are furnished by illustrated manuscripts; mostly Buddhist, they are now lying deposited in different private and institutional collections. The major corpus of these manuscripts belongs to the 11th and 12th century. Depicted in narrow spaces of the manuscripts, these illustrations have perforce taken the character of miniature paintings and they express an idiom which is different from those of earlier schools of paintings.

The important illustrated manuscripts of Pāla period are mentioned hereunder in a chronological order. Most of them bear dates in the regnal years of the Pāla kings of Bengal and Magadha.

* Legge (tr.), p.1000; Fa-Hien stayed at Tārālapīti along with errands for drawing pictures of images.
1. Ashtasahasrika Prapannamitā: (a) dated 5th regnal year of Mahāpāla, most probably Mahāpāla I (Cambridge Add.1464)\(^4\), contains fifteen illustrations and painted covers; (b) belongs to the 6th year of Mahāpāla's reign, (ASE, No.1,4713), contains twelve illustrations and illustrated covers; (c) written in year 7 of Mahāpāla with fortytwo illustrations\(^4\); (d) copied during the 15th regnal year of Rāmapāla, written at Bālaniś, eighteen illustrations and painted covers\(^4\); (e) belongs to the 18th year of reign of Rāmapāla, consists of illustrated folios and painted covers\(^4\); (f) written in Year 36 of the reign of Rāmapāla, number of illustration is not known\(^5\); (g) copied in the 39th regnal year of Rāmapāla; number of illustrations is not known\(^5\); (h) belongs to the 4th year of Gopāla III's reign, consists of eighteen illustrations and painted covers\(^5\); (i) written at

\(^{45}\) Poucher, Icon, p.31, pl.X, figs. 1, 3-5; Bendall Catalogue p.100-101.

\(^{46}\) ASE, 1899, p.69.

\(^{47}\) S.K.Saraswatī in Chhati (Bharat Kala Bhavan, Golden jubilee Volume), p.244.

\(^{48}\) Bodleian Library, Oxford, No.WS Sanskrit, a7(5); Oriental Art, Vol.I, No.1, pp.5-12.

\(^{49}\) Collection of Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck, New York, Arts of India and Nepal, p.106.

\(^{50}\) Collection of formerly Vredenburg, Calcutta, parts at present in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museum, Nos.1 and 2.


Vikramśilā in the Year 15 of the reign of Gopāla III; copied in the 18th regnal year of Govindaśāla, found only last leaf only, contains three illustrations.

2. Pañcharakṣaka: (i) It was copied in the year 14 of the reign of Nayapāla. It bears copious illustrations of the figures of Buddhas, divinities and chaityas and also thirty-six miniatures and patterns at the end of the chapters. (ii) It was copied in the 9th regnal year of Rāmapāla and it contains twenty illustrations. (iii) It was copied in the 22nd year of Govindaśāla's reign and it carries six illustrations.

3. Manuscript of a sacred text: It belongs to 27th year of the reign of Mahipāla. It is also profusely illustrated.

4. A Dhāraṇī manuscript: It was copied in the 14th year of the reign of Nayapāla. Number of illustrations are not known.

56. Collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares.
58. Collection of Radhakrishna Jalan, Patna, ibid., p.244.
5. **Pañcavimsatiasahasrika Prajñāpāramitā:** It was copied during the 8th regnal year of Harivarman, contains twenty-one illustrations.

6. **A Tantrik Buddhist manuscript:** It belongs to year 19 of the reign of Harivarman, details are not available.

The above list shows that **Ashtaśaḥasrika Prajñāpāramitā** and **Pañccharakshā** were the two popular Buddhist texts which were copied throughout the whole period. Chronologically also this style of illustration of manuscripts remained in vogue and evenly distributed over the whole period. The date which is given at the end of the manuscript indicates usually the date of copying of the same, similar to the present-day practice of mentioning the date of publication of a book on the title-page. The regnal year was counted from the date of accession of the king. All these manuscripts contain the name of the donors and the scribe.

We learn from the colophons of the two of the manuscripts that one was copied at Nālandā monastery and another at Vikramālī monastery. This reveals that

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61. Collection of the Varendra Research Society, Bangladesh; *Chhavi*, p. 245.
Buddhist establishments were principal centres of copying and illuminating Buddhist canonical texts. However, it is difficult to determine the total number of such manuscripts copied and illustrated during this period. Though a large number of illustrated manuscripts have been recovered in a good condition, it is presumable in view of the fragile nature of the material like palm-leaf and paper that a greater number of such manuscripts have not survived.

The manuscripts are written in fine and careful hand writing in narrow areas and oblong space is left on each page for illuminations or paintings by the artists. Generally the size of each of the paintings is about 2.5 by 3 inches. It seems that the practice was to hand over the manuscripts after the completion of scribing to the artists for the filling up the blank spaces left in the pages with paintings and to decorate the covers in the same way. Though we get the names of the donors and the scribes in these manuscripts, the artists who enriched these manuscripts with ingenious artistic skill remain anonymous. Traditionally certain Dhīmān and Bītpalo (father and son) are credited with the foundation of Eastern school of Paintings and Sculpture in the reigns of Dharmapāla and Devapāla, but unfortunately not a single specimen of manuscript illumination
or any other type of paintings assignable to the period before the reign of Mahipala I has yet been discovered. All the known manuscript paintings belong to the 10th-12th century A.D. It may be reasonably assumed that the artists of the later generation of the Pala age inherited artistic gift and style from the artists of the earlier generation who reared up well-defined tradition of painting style within the fold of the Pala School of Art.

Regarding the technique and characteristics of these manuscript paintings, M. Foucher describes them as extremely dull. This has been challenged by modern critics according to whom the charge of extreme dullness brought against these miniatures is not right. Iconographic requirements make such repetition unavoidable. The treatment and the technique in the miniature painting reveal, on the contrary, that adequate justice has been done to the subject within the limitation of restricted surface allotted for the illumination. The subject of the compositions in the miniatures is not restricted to subject-matter of the text but the artists who were invited for filling the spaces left, drew the subjects of illustrations from different happenings or miracles in the life of Buddha and also from the canonical des-

62. Foucher, Icon, pp.36-37.
63. Moti Chandra, Jaina Miniature Paintings from Western India, p.15.
criptions of different deities belonging to Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna Buddhism. These deviations from the textual content may be looked as deliberate embellishments. But in real sense the manuscript paintings of the Pāla age and their Nepalese counterparts reveal the attitude of this period towards different doctrinal aspects of Buddhism. It proves that reverence for Prajñāpāramitā and Tantra went hand in hand as Pāla kings patronised both these Buddhist philosophical concepts. This led to the development of full-fledged esoteric cult within Buddhism. According to Edward Conze, "the ideas represented in these illustrations have grown out of the teachings of the Prajñāpāramitā itself; at least they emanate from the spirit behind it".

These Buddhist texts being recited and worshipped for the attainment of transcendental wisdom and some of the manuscripts recommend the same, a sort of magical power is invested in it. The sentiment of donors reflecting in a way the attitude of the contemporary people, is expressed in dedicatory writings in the manuscript-texts. This may be instanced by a couplet of a manuscript of the Asiatic Society (No.G.4203). The Mahayanic faith was reinforced by the esoteric idea.

Tantrism and as a result the multitude of deities, all imaginary, could be conceived in visible form with the help of certain sounds named bija-mantras (soma-mantras). These illuminations of different incidents in the life of Buddha and the countless Buddhist divinities were made in the manuscripts and were severally repeated with the sole object to providing 'supports for a meditation which aimed ultimately at the full enlightenment of a Buddha'. This explains the reason of disregarding the themes of the texts at the time of illustrating manuscripts, since the aim of the artists of these works was to conjure up these divinities in order to help the worshipper in identifying himself with them.

These miniatures are in no way comparable with the style of Book illustrations as we find in the history of art in Persia, China, mediaeval West or mediaeval India which constitute most significant epoch of painting tradition of these places. In fact, these Pāla miniatures are the counterpart of mural paintings in reduced dimension. Though the records of the trend and style of early two centuries of the Pāla age, i.e., the reigns of Dharmapāla and Devapāla are lacking, the available mass of materials indicate that these miniatures are but the pictorial representations of the contemporary Pāla stone and metal sculptures. If so, in early Pāla sculptures may be conjecturally traced the contemporary
pictorial idiom. This is more evidenced from the fact that the themes of the paintings mostly dwell on the gods and goddesses belonging to different temples and monastic establishments of this period, unrelated to the subject-matter of the manuscripts and as such no attempts were made by the artists to illustrate or illuminate the thematic contents of the texts concerned.

As regards the technique of the manuscript illuminations it is calligraphic. The draughtsmanship is usually strong and in view of the fragile nature of the material on which the drawing is made, the beauty and colour cannot but evoke our admiration. The outline of the figures is first drawn (this job is known as rekhā-karma in Indian script texts) and afterwards colours are applied in it (likewise known as varṇa-karma). The drawing of the figures indicates disregard of the scale. In order to emphasise the downcast look, the device of downward painting angle in the middle of the upper eyelid is employed in the faces of several figures. The decorative paintings which accompany the miniatures exhibit architectural designs such as trefoil arch, geometric and animal motifs. In this respect the settings of lotus rineaux deserve mention. The picture of the contemporary life and manners is revealed from the settings of the scene and costumes in these paintings. Their execution is as admirable as the draughtsmanship.

The palette of the Pāla artists was limited to orpiment yellow, white, indigo-blue, Indian ink-black, cinnabar red and green which was drawn during mediaeval period from minerals, ochres and few other substances. Though the nature of actual ingredients of pigments used needs proper scientific analysis and investigation, it seems that the last colour is obtained by mixing orpiment and indigo. The green of the Pāla miniature is different from the green of the Ajanta. These primary and mixed colours of Pāla painting are used in different shades. The white is used as primer, body colours and for highlights. Ultra-marine blue or lapis lazuli, as used in Ajanta for murals for bringing sparkling effect, does not come to our notice in Pāla manuscript paintings. Similarly, Indian red or any ochres also does not seem to have been employed in them. As a whole, the colour scheme in the Pāla school of painting is based on complexions of the divinities of the Buddhist pantheon to accommodate iconographical requirements. Tonality of colours is more or less lacking.

Nepalese manuscript paintings substantially help us to formulate our idea about the above-mentioned characteristic feature and chronological sequence of production of the Pāla school of painting. Stylistically and technically, the Nepalese illustrated manuscripts are closest to Pāla miniatures, or for that matter,
belong to the same form-complex. Indeed, a Nepalese illumination appears as a 'mere shadow' of Pāla paintings. Though Nepalese manuscript paintings in certain respect lack in stylistic quality and differ in the treatment of the subject in relation to parent school, they may be taken as the evidence of extension of the Pāla style of manuscript painting. The epoch of the Pāla school of painting untimely ended by the Muslim invasion but the style evolved in this school continued in Nepal in full virility for a much longer time as evidenced from the surviving records of Nepalese illustrated manuscripts. The dated Nepalese manuscripts have also occasionally helped us to settle the chronology of Pāla paintings.

To spotlight the stylistic execution of some of the miniature paintings, we find two manuscripts of Ashtasārika Prajñāpāramitā, bearing the regnal year of Mahāpāla. The first one is in the possession of the Asiatic Society No.6.4713. The characteristic of the paintings in this manuscript is "flowing and sinuous lines, a charming sense modelling and plasticity in line as well as in colour, soft and subtle tonalities". These qualities are nearer to the classical tradition of Indian paintings as found in the Ajanta murals. The subject-matter of the illumination is the story of the Buddha's birth. This specimen of miniature painting exhibits that
artists in order to bring the desired effect have utilised both modeling in colour and the modeling capacity of flowing and sinuous lines. The thickness of the lines is increased or decreased according to the demand of the roundness of the contour or surging outlines. This is exemplified by the left arm of the Māyādevī's sister or the lower abdomen of both Māyādevī and her sister in the painting concerned. While her face shows the modeling in colour with highlights which is distributed in a summary manner as found applied in the same way in the places of the body. These highlights are common features in Indian painting and are attained by applying on white in various shades of colour. The similar effect is to be found in the modeling itself in the plastic versions. The somewhat rigid treatment is found in this miniature, but subtler transitions of modeling, as in the case of face and torso of Māyādevī is also noticeable. In contrast the face of Māyādevī's sister lacks the warmth as a result of linearised and mechanical treatment of the facial features. These contrasting treatments in the modeling of Māyādevī and her sister's faces, inter alia, have been compared with the two different schools of Indian painting, as one witnessed in the wall paintings of Ajanta and another in the Ellora. Māyādevī's face stands closer to the type of modeling of Ajanta at its height, whereas that of
her sister's face is nearer to the stagnating treatment which is noticeable specially in Ellora.

It has been noted that the stagnating treatment is the beginning of the mediaeval school of Indian painting. In case of the second manuscript of the same text, which is preserved at Cambridge University Library (Add., 1464), the miniatures exhibit different treatment than the former. The modelling capacity of the line and the colour as seen in the above-noted Asiatic Society manuscript is completely absent in the miniatures of this manuscript. The work is stereotyped, faint colour treatment, the harsh and angular lines, linearized treatment of the face, the concave curve of the torso in the three-quarter profile, the sickle shape of the body of the standing figure. Thus the Cambridge manuscript illuminations provide a contrast to those of the Asiatic Society manuscript. The miniatures of these two sets of manuscripts reveal two different painting-trends, widely apart from each other. In the language of Stella Kramrisch, the miniatures of the Asiatic Society MSS are 'classically Indian' and that of Cambridge MSS are 'mediaevally Indian'. While Kramrisch believes in the

possibility of the simultaneous existence of these two trends, S.K. Saraswati asserts that these two types of painting-style were developed during two different periods belonging to the reigns of different Pāla rulers bearing identical names. As such the Asiatic Society manuscript is to be assigned to the reign of Mahipāla I, while the Cambridge University manuscript is datable to the reign of Mahipāla II.

The two different artistic trends as evidenced by the Asiatic Society and Cambridge University manuscripts, give rise to the question: how does the Pāla school of painting stand in relation to different traditions of Indian art? Undeniably, the Pāla paintings had their foundations in the classical art of India of the Gupta period and stylistic features of the Pāla miniatures reveal their close connection with the practice and tradition of the Ajanta and Ellora murals. The pictorial art of Ajanta and Bagh represents this characteristic feature by maintaining the plasticity, modelling in soft colour with subtle tonality and also in rounded form with continuous and sinuous lines, the thickness of which is increased or decreased according to the surging roundness that they outline or accompany. But the mediaeval style is opposed to this classical concept and is based on entirely linear form, which lacks in modelling capacity and modelling in colour. Whereas

the Pala sculpture is rooted in the classical norms of Indian art and is largely free from the influence of mediaeval art trend, the Pala painting exhibits the impact of the same to a large degree. Yet, the Pala manuscript painting did not totally surrender or yield itself to the concept or trend of the mediaeval phase of Indian art. Indeed, the oscillation between the classical and the mediaeval in the pictorial art throughout the Pala period is not difficult to discern. And it was in this constant oscillation that the Eastern School exhausted itself and the impending end was hastened by the Muslim conquest of the land about the close of the twelfth century. Aesthetically, the specimens of the Pala school of painting may not stand a comparison with the Ajanta murals, but historically they are significant insofar as they serve as a bridge between the Ajanta and the Rajput paintings.

**Terracotta**

For its pliability and easy availability clay has been regarded as the common and most popular medium of the artistic expression of the people from the earliest times. Art objects in burnt clay or terracotta have thus been abundantly discovered from a number of sites in Bengal and Bihar, notable centres being Mahasthan,
Mainamati, Paharpur, Tamluk and Mālandā. Chronologically, these terracottas cover a wide period, from the prehistoric times to the present-day. Kramrisch has divided the Indian terracottas into 'ageless' and 'time-bound' types, a division which understandably applies to the clay sculptures of ancient Gauḍa-Vanga kingdom as well.

Apart from the few well-known terracottas from Mahasthan (e.g., the amorous couple plaque) and Tamluk (e.g., Pañchachudā Yakshipī) of the pre-Pāla period, the art of clay sculpture seems to have been in a comparatively flourishing state in the Pāla culture-epoch. This is testified to by the wealth of relevant material recovered in course of excavations and explorations, particularly in Bangladesh in recent times.

The most eminent example of the terracotta art of our period is furnished by the colossal brick temple at Paharpur. It is embellished with continuous bands of terracotta plaques set in recessed panels, which run in a single row all around the basement and in double rows.

69. For terracottas of pre-Pāla Bengal, see ERP, Ch. VIII.
around the walls of the circumambulatory passages in the upper terraces. These terracottas mirror the everyday life of the common people of the contemporary Bengal: they depict their joys and sorrows, amusements and occupations and sports and pastimes. Their subject-matter is diverse, comprising human, divine and semi-divine beings, birds and animals, flowers and plants, and floral and geometrical designs (lotus petal, stepped pyramid, dental edges, chain and sun motifs). Aesthetically and tectonically, these Paharpur terracotta plaques bear a close affinity with their Mainamati and Mahasthan counterparts.

The terracotta plaques recently discovered at Mainamati and Mahasthan deserve a comparison with their well-known Paharpur counterparts. Among the Mainamati pieces have been noticed the typical dharmachakra and triglyph symbols, the latter occurring on a number of coins recovered from the same site. One of them depicts a richly jewelled person perhaps a Bodhisattva of the

70. The original number of these terracotta plaques is supposed to be in the neighbourhood of three thousand.

71. These terracotta plaques and figurines justly constitute a dependable source of religious and socio-economic history of the given time and space. Such objects found at Paharpur, Mainamati, Mahasthan etc., have been profitably utilised by Shahnara Hussain in her Everyday Life in the Pala Empire, Dacca, 1968.

Early Deva period (first half of the 8th century), while another piece portrays a crowned person, probably an early member of the Deva dynasty, holding a bow. Besides these plaques, a few terracotta human and animal figurines and architectural and decorative terracottas (carved and ornamental bricks) have come to light. According to Rashid, who has carried on excavation at Mainamati, 'the Mainamati examples are superior to those of Paharpur in richness of details and artistic perfection', in spite of their bad preservation. The most interesting among the Mahasthan series are a half-man and half-fish, a half-flower motif and a panel showing an archer aiming at an elephant with a cobra behind him in striking pose. According to Nazimuddin, who has brought these objects to light, the terracotta finds from Bhasu Vihara at Mahasthan, 'appear to be somewhat different from the Paharpur-Mainamati series in general character, refinement, style and workmanship, probably because they may be somewhat later in date.'

73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., p.6.
75. Bangladesh Lalit Kala, p.15, Pl.VI, figs. 3, 4; Pl.VII, fig.5. Nazimuddin has discovered them from the said site.
76. Ibid.
The representations of Buddhist divinities in the terracotta art of Paharpur include those of the Mahāyāna school, such as Bodhisattva Padmapani, Mañjuśrī and Tārā, apart from the Master himself. The seated figure of Buddha in the bhūmiṣparśa mudrā occupying a somewhat conspicuous position of the basement wall on the east deserves attention. In the Mainamati plaques have been noticed Buddha, stūpa, tri-ratna and dharma-chakra. It is to be noted that at Paharpur Brahmanical deities are also represented along with Buddhist ones, a fact attesting the age-old spirit of religious catholicity. In short, the terracotta plaques and figurines as well as bricks of Paharpur, Mainamati and Mahasthan constitute an unusually attractive and distinctive school of art, all dating from about the second half of the 7th to the 10th-11th century A.D. They represent an indigenous idiom practically unrelated with similar objects found in other regions of India. The terracotta art of Bengal till the Gupta period is generally affiliated to similar plastic efforts prevailing in the rest of the Northern India in different phases. By and large, this art articulates the classical and hieratic trends, but the art expressed at Paharpur-Mainamati-Mahasthan is completely different and divergent. It is related to the stone sculptures of Paharpur which are aesthetically separated from others of the same monument.
Unsophisticated in plastic diction, this art is remarkable for its dynamic naturalism and elemental vitality.

A slightly different type of material is found used in the embellishment of a number of the late Gupta and post-Gupta monuments at Pālandā. In fact, stucco decoration became a characteristic feature of the said Pālandā structures. In Bengal also stucco seems to have found favour with the artists, though in respect of popularity it was not comparable with the clay medium. Stucco art of Bengal is represented, among others, by heads from Tejanandi (Rajshahi) and Gangamati (Kurshidabad). Assignable to the pre-Pāla period, both of them are characterised by a soft and refined modelling and a felicity of expression.

Terracotta plaques and figurines have been discovered from other places like Tomluk, Benserb, Harinarayanpur, all in West Bengal, but chronologically and thematically they are outside the scope of our discussion.

77. ESR, pp. 108-9, Excavations at Rajbadidanga (ancient Karnasuvrā) in the Kurshidabad district have also brought to light stucco heads; S.R. Das, Rajbadidanga (Calcutta, 1968), pp. 24, 25, 43.