CHAPTER II
SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF MAIN CENTRES OF
EARLY BENGAL TERRACOTTAS

The archaeological sites of Bengal so far discovered are located mainly either by the side of an old river or a little distant from it. Successive explorations indicate that in later period some of the hilly regions were also well known for their material culture. Western and south-western parts of Bengal have a larger number of archaeological sites than its eastern and south-eastern parts. Antiquities from the archaeological sites of western part of Bengal (that is those situated on the western side of the river Bhāgīrathī, in the ancient Rāgha sector) reveal the existence of much earlier culture or habitation than that of eastern parts of Bengal. While the pre-christian sites have a concentration in the western and south-western parts of Bengal, most of the old sites of the early christian eras are located in proper eastern Bengal now in Bangladesh. Only a few pre-christian sites have so far been discovered in north-eastern part of Bengal. The archaeological sites of the coastal region, especially those situated on the mouth of Bhāgīrathī or adjoining areas, reveal features of human settlement. Following is a discussion of some of these ancient sites (arranged alphabetically) which have yielded a rich crop of terracottas in the course of excavations and explorations in addition to casual and chance finds.
**ĀṬGHĀRA-SĪṬĀKUNḍU**

Between the beds of Āḍī-Gaṅgā and the dried up Vidyādharī is Āṭghāra - Sīṭākunḍu which is believed to be a pre-christian site.¹ It is situated to the east of Baruipur Railway Junction Station on Sealdah South Suburban Railway and 19.3 km. south of Calcutta. The twin villages are situated on a level higher than that of the adjoining villages. Apart from unexcavated old mounds, tanks and traces of underground heavy brick-built structures, a number of antiquities including terracotta figurines, plaques, toy-carts and seals discovered here claim the attention of an archaeologist. Some of these figurines betray influence of the Hellenistic technique in the graceful folds of the drapery and stylistically many of them belong to the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa epoch. A few terracotta moulds, also discovered from the site, prove that Āṭghāra-Sīṭākunḍu was a terracotta manufacturing centre.

**BĀNGARH.**

Bāngarh, the ancient Koṭi-varṣa was the seat of a district (vishaya) in the Puṇḍravardhana province (bhukti) in the Gupta period. On the eastern bank of Punarbhava, about 29 km. to the south of Dinajpur in the Rajshahi sub-division of Bengal and 2.4 km. to the north of Gaṅgārāmpur (another ancient place) are the extensive ruins of Bāngarh. As early as 1921-22 a terracotta figurine was picked up by K.N.Dikshit belonging to the Pāla period.² The University of Calcutta

---

2. *ASIAR*, 1921-22, p.84.
carried on an excavation from 1937-41. The terracotta figurines discovered in this process of excavation belong to the chronological range from the Śuṅga to the Pāla period.

BĀHIRĪ

It is situated 6 km north-east of Contai town in the district of Midnapore and 91 km south of Kharagpur Railway Station on North-Eastern Railway. The archaeological site of Bāhirī consisted of three tiny villages - Pāikbāḍ, Deulbāḍ and Dīhibāhirī. Most of the terracotta objects of the Kushana, Gupta and medieval times have been salvaged from the surrounding mounds of Rasanālā, a dried up bed of an ancient river on the western border of the village.

BĀCHHĀRĪ

In the district of Howrah and within the jurisdiction of Shyampur P.S. is situated the village of Bāchhārī. It is about 5 km from Bagnan Railway Station on Howrah-Kharagpur Railway route. The big mound locally known as Damadamā and the old tank adjacent to it is the most important archaeological spot in the village. A large number of terracotta objects including figurines and seals bearing proto-Bengali script have been salvaged from this village. Most of these objects are now preserved in the Ānanda Niketan Kīrtisālā, Bagnan and the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta University.

BORĀL

Lying 8 km. south of Calcutta, along the course of the Ādi-Gaṅgā and half km. from Garia, Borāl is a predominantly mediaeval site. Here no scientific excavation has so far been conducted. However, in the course of digging for brick building in recent times, two layers, 8 metres below the datum level have been exposed. The lowest layer of the habitation is enriched with several terracottas dating from the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa period to the Gupta age.

BURĀRTAṬ

The coastal region of Burārtuṭ in G.Plot just bordering the Bay of Bengal was explored in 1965-66. It is indeed delightful that in examining the three ancient mounds in this locality several Śuṅga terracottas, both figurines and animals of the known types from Tamluk and Chandraketugarh have been discovered.

CHĀNDIPUR

The village is situated within the jurisdiction of Kulpi P.S. in the district of south 24-Parganas. It is situated very close to Dholāḥāṭ. Some terracotta dancing female figurines and toy - carts belonging to the Śuṅga-Kushāṇa-Gupta idioms have been salvaged from this site.

CHANDRAKETUGARH (BERACHAMPĀ)

Adjacent to the almost dried up course of the river Vidyādharī and 48.3 km. north-east of Calcutta, Chandraketugarh is noted for its prolific yield of terracotta. The archaeological site of Chandraketugarh at present consisted of such villages as Śīmher Āṭi, Dewan Āṭi, Sānpukur, Jhikrā, Kālitalā, Hādipur etc. each of which exhibit a large number of terracotta figurines, plaques and seals. The scientific exploration by the Asutosh Museum in 1950 has proved this site to be of considerable antiquity and the most important site ever explored in Bengal. The excavated rolling mounds including marks of a rectangular fort rising to a height of 30 ft. encompassed by rampart walls bear relics assignable between the Maurya and Gupta periods. Of these relics the terracotta figurines of the Kushāna epoch bearing Hellenistic traits in drapery and foot-wear are of special importance.

In the environs of Chandraketugarh and on the bank of the Vidyādharī is another ancient mound locally named as Khanā-Mihirer Dhībi. A fascinating terracotta head of a female wearing a head-gear consisting of charming discs is capable of claiming the avid attention of a modern dainty god. The attire revealed in this specimen that of the Maurya heads of the third century B.C. ⁵

DĀBU

In the unexplored regions of the ancient Sunderbans and adjacent to the river Māṭlā, Dābu is a newly discovered site. ⁶ From the

---

5. Ghosh, D.P., op.cit., p.46.
Canning Railway Station to Satamukha's hat by bus and then 6 km. of walking distance to the south-east one can reach Dābu where terracottas mainly toy-carts and plaques enrich the archaeological treasures of the Sunderbans.

DEULPOTA

The archaeological site of Deulpotā is situated about 9.7 km. north of Diamond Harbour, 24-Parganas district, on the eastern bank of the Gaṅgā or Bhāgīrathī. The terracotta objects salvaged from this site throw an important light on the proto-history of deltaic Bengal by revealing certain connection with the culture of Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhībī.

FARĀKKĀ

On the right bank of the Gaṅgā where it is joined by the stream Gumani is located the site of Farākkā. Excavations carried out here have unearthed a forgotten city with traces of habitation starting from a great depth and continuing uninterrupted till the mediaeval times. The site has been identified with ancient Kajaṅgala and Ka-chu-wen-ki-lo of Hsüan-Tsang. Thus, lying within the overlapping culture of Champā and Puṇḍravardhana, Farākkā might have played a leading role in spreading Indian culture in the Far East. Terracottas recovered here representing Mother Goddess and other deities bear the marks of a well established archaic tradition.

GITAGRAM

During 1928-29 an ancient settlement site was discovered at Gitagram in the Kandi sub-division and under Bharatpur P.S. of the Murshidabad district situated 9.7 km. west of the river Gaṅgā. Gitagram is an archaeological site of great interest. It is a village on the eastern bank of the Mayūrākṣhī river. A mound of this village locally called Saidgor or Saidgur Dāṅgā is the find spot of some terracotta figurines of Gupta and earlier periods.

GOKUL

Near Mahāsthān in the Bogra district, Gokul is a small village. It is about 10 km. from Bogra on the western side of the river Karatoya. Excavations carried out here by the Archaeological Survey revealed 170 rooms in the shape of honeycombs with walls bearing terracotta reliefs of floral designs and figures of humans and animals. They have a stylistic kinship to the Pāhārpur panels.

HARINĀRĀYANPUR

(I) It is situated about 2 km. south-east of Bagnan Railway Station, district Howrah, on the dried up branch of the Dāmodar river (Kānā Dāmodar). There is a highly raised mound in the centre of the village. Some significant terracotta figurines and plaques have been salvaged from the site.
(II) The other village of the above name, about 7 km. south-east of Diamond Harbour, south 24-Parganas, on the banks of the river Gaṅgā or Bhāgīrathī, is also of considerable antiquity. The remains of this site including a proto-historic terracotta bull and terracotta figurines, seals and plaques of pre-Maurya to Gupta period proved beyond doubt that Harinārāyanpur was in occupation from the neolithic period onwards.

JALCHAK

The village is situated within the jurisdiction of Pingla P.S. in the district of Midnapore. It is about 20 km. south of Balichak Railway Station on Howrah-Kharagpur Railway route. Among many ancient mounds and ponds the most important one is locally known as Darpārpukur. Here a large number of terracotta plaques and figurines of different cultural epoch have been found.⁸

MAHĀSTHĀN

In the heart of Varendra, the quasi-lateritic highlands of North Bengal and on the western bank of Karatoya and 12.9 km. north of the head-quarters of Bogra district, is situated Mahāsthān or Mahāsthānagāh. It has been identified as the ancient site of Puṇḍravardhana, the capital of the Varendra country. From the two

mounds known as 'Khodar Pāthar' and 'Mānkālirkuṇḍa' in the old fort at Mahāsthāṅgarh, and from Vairāgī's Bhīṭā and Govinda's Bhīṭā several terracotta plaques identical with the Pāhārpur examples have been discovered.

Situated about 6.4 km. to the west of Mahāsthāṅ and about 4.8 km. south-west of Shibganj P.S. of Bogra district lie the ruins of Bhāsuvināra. This largely extended undulating plain known locally as 'Narapārit Dhap' is very close to the well known earthen embankment (Bhimer Jangal) of the Bogra and Rangpur districts. Through the plain flows the Nāgar, a small sluggish winding rivulet, a branch of the Karatoıyā. As early as 638 A.D. Hsūan Tsang in his itinerary mentioned this place as Po-Shi-Po-Viḥāra (Bhāsuv Viḥāra). Most of the thirty-four terracotta plaques recovered from excavation are complete and fairly preserved. In general they appear to articulate an idiom which is somewhat different from that of the Pāhārpur-Maṅāmatī series. They depict human, semi-divine and composite beings, various animals, birds and floral patterns.9

MAHĪŚDAL

It is situated within the jurisdiction of Bolepur P.S. in the district of Birbhum and about 2.5 km. north-east of Santiniketan. The village is situated on the banks of the river Kopāi. The ASI (Eastern Circle) conducted some excavation at this site.10 Some important

10. IA, 1963-64, pp.59-60.
terracotta figurines of early period and some clay seals bearing symbolic signs are significant finds from this place. The radio carbon dating of some of the antiquities of the first phase is between 1380 B.C. and 855 B.C.11

**MAINĀMATIC**

8 km. to the east of modern Comilla and on the eastern side of present day Indian state of Tripura stand rows of small mountains of various names. Of these the largest one is the Maināmatī-Lālmāi range (15 km. in length) which is extended up to the hilly tracts of Chittagong. The Maināmatī rock is about 34 metres in height from sea-level and about 15 metres in height from plain land. The region of Maināmatī-Lālmāi is full of both small and large mounds which abound in archaeological finds. Five mounds (locally called 'Murā' = Mountain) viz. Kotīl murā, Bhojājār Prāsād, Rūpavaṇa-kanyā murā, Śālavana Vihāra and Ānanda Vihāra, supply us with terracotta plaques depicting divine figures, social life and flora and fauna. The antiquities of the said mounds mainly belong to the Pāla-Sena period. After the partition of Bengal the Archaeological Survey of Pakistan carried on excavations from 1955-57 in the mounds of Śālavana, Kotīl murā and Charapattāmurā. A number of bas-relief panels like those of Pāhārpur were found in the vicinity.

MANDIRTALĀ

The archaeological site of Mandirtalā is situated within the Sāgar Island in the district of south 24-Parganas. A large number of terracotta objects including some seals bearing proto-Bengali script, toy-carts etc. have been salvaged from this site.

MAṆGALKOṆ

(I) Situated at the confluence of river Ajay and the Kunur in the Katwa sub-division of Burdwan district, MaṅgalkoṆ is an important archaeological site. Here recent excavations carried out by the Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta, in two successive sessions have brought to light remains of various cultural phases even from the Chalcolithic age. The entire village forms a highly raised mound which are rich in terracotta objects from various cultural phases.

(II) Another ancient remains of the preceeding name lying on a small mound is situated to the west of Mahāsthāṅgarh. Here life-size terracotta sculptures, fragments of female heads with elaborate head-dress and busts with full breasts and decorated tunics have been found. They have some affinity with the Gupta and Pāla art.¹²

NĀTSĀL

It is situated in the vicinity of Tamluk town in the district of Midnapore and very close to the river Rūpnārāyaṇ. A large number of terracottas have been discovered from this site.

¹² Bangladesh Archaeology, I, No. 1, 1979, p. 16.
**Pāhārpur**

A major, perhaps the most well known, archaeological site in Bangladesh is Pāhārpur. It is located about 4.8 km. to the west of Jamalganj Railway Station in the Rajshai district of modern Bangladesh and lies at a distance of 46.7 km. to the north-west of Mahāsthāṅgarh and over 48.3 km. to the south-east of Bāṅgarh. Excavations here have revealed the existence of a great monastic establishment of the Pāla period. The exterior walls of this Buddhist monastery were adorned with terracotta panels (numbering almost 2800) depicting animal figures, tales from fables, mythology, religion and scenes of social life.

**Pakurtalā**

The village is situated within the jurisdiction of Kakdwip P.S. in the district of south 24-Parganas and on the banks of a dried up river-bed Kālnāginī. It is about 12 km. east of Kakdwip. Some terracotta plaques, figurines and toy-carts, mostly of Śuṅga-Kushāna art idiom have been salvaged from this site.

**Palāsβādī**

This archaeological site is located close to the north-western corner of Gokulmedh near Mahāsthāṅgarh in the Bogra district of Bangladesh. A series of sixth century terracotta plaques depicting ancient tales and carrying inscription constitute a rich and significant repertory.
PĀṇḍu-rajār Dhibi

The most important chalcolithic site of Bengal stretching from east to west on the southern side of the river Ajay in the Burdwan district of West Bengal is the Pāṇḍu-rajār Dhibi. Here the main routes of communication are from the Railway Station of Bhedia before Bolpur from Calcutta, from Panagarh across Radhamohanpur and Ramnagar. The excavations, carried out here under the auspices of the Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal, have disclosed the existence of a chalcolithic culture and has thus put Bengal on the proto-historic map of India. Some of the archaeological relies from the site, surprisingly comparable with those from Central India, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and even from the extra-Indian Territories like Anatolia and the Aegean world¹³ betoken a culture which seems to have developed in the second millennium B.C. Several terracotta busts and heads have been unearthed from this site.

Pāṇnā

On the river valley of Śīlāvatī, within the jurisdiction of Ghatal P.S. in the district of Midnapore, Pāṇnā is a small village. In 1955 several terracotta figurines of the Gupta style were recovered from Pāṇnā. One of them is a female head with parted lips indicative of graceful smile.¹⁴

¹³. Das Gupta, P.C., Ibid., p.11.

POKHARNA

On the south bank of the Damodar river, within the jurisdiction of Barajora P.S. in the Bankura district lies this small village. It is about 48 km. to the north east of Susunia hill famed for the inscription of Chandravarman. There are some high mounds and old ponds in the village. The most important of these, from the viewpoint of archaeology, is the Rājgarh Dhibi\textsuperscript{15} situated on the western section of the village. The explorations conducted by the Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal have brought to light some terracottas which include a fragmentary lower part of a Mother Goddess with splayed hips and a beautiful figure of an apsara showing elegance of her sisters from Pāṭaliputra. All of them are of the Maurya convention.

PUKURBERIA

The village is situated within the jurisdiction of Kakdwip P.S. in the district of south 24-Parganas. It is about 6 km. from Pākurta. Some important terracotta Mother Goddess of ageless variety have been discovered from here.

RĀDHĀPUR

Rādhāpur village is situated within the jurisdiction of Shyampur P.S. in the district of Howrah. It is accessible from Bagnan Railway Station on the Howrah-Kharagpur Railway route. The river Rūpnārayaṇ flows through the western boundary of the village. A large number of

\textsuperscript{15} ASIAR, 1927-28, p.115-116.
terracotta figurines have been found from the silted bank of the river. The most important of these finds is the figure of a two-faced deity with Roman head-gear.

RAGHUNĀTHBĀDI

Raghunāthbādi, situated 18 km. south of Tamluk within the jurisdiction of Panskura P.S. in the district of Midnapore have yielded series of terracotta heads of which two with half circular palm-leaf patterned head-gear bear strange affinity with Aztec art of Central America. The environs of an ancient pond, known as Dompukur, of the village is the most important spot of this archaeological site.

RĀJBĀDI-DĀNGĀ

The extensive barren mound of Rājbādi Dāngā (Rājbādi = palace, Dāngā = mound) in the Murshidabad district stand massively in the north western periphery of the village Jadupur (on the western side of the Bhāgīrathī) near Chiruti Railway Station of the Eastern Railway, 191.4 km. from Howrah. On the basis of the contents of the seals and sealings discovered from the exposed Buddhist monastic structures, the site has been identified with the famous Raktamrītīkā-Sanghārāma in the suburb of Karṇasuvāngā, the capital city of the kingdom of Gauḍā under king Śaśāṅka. Excavations conducted here, under the auspices of the Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta, from 1962 onwards for a few seasons have yielded numerous antiquities including inscribed
terracotta seals and sealings, clay figurines and a unique terracotta frieze of birds. Two anthropomorphic terracotta figurines are extremely interesting, one a votive folk-deity and the other, a Gupta female head with fan-shaped headdress.

**RĀNGĀMĀṬI**

The site of Rāṅgāmāṭi is situated on the west bank of the Bhāgīrathī, 9 km. below Behramapore, district Murshidabad. Two ancient mounds of the locality are the Rājā Karna's palace and the Rākshasī Dāṅgā or Devil's mount. Rāṅgāmāṭi has been identified with Karnaśuvarṇa, the royal capital of king Śaśānka and Jayanāga. Some terracotta heads of late Gupta period have discovered in Rākshasī Dāṅgā.

**SĀBHĀR**

Lying about 27.4 km. to the north-west of Dhaka at the confluence of the Bamsāvatī and Dhalesvarī rivers, the site has yielded an oval terracotta plaque with the figure of Vīshṇu with āyudhapurushas of seventh-eighth century A.D. Terracotta slabs stamped with the figures of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are among other antiquities.

17. ASIAR, 1928-29, p.100.
SĪTĀKOṬ.
On the southern edge of village Foatehpur Marash in the Nawabganj P.S. of the Dinajpur district is situated the archaeological site of Sītākoṭ.\textsuperscript{19} It is about 8 km. north-east of Charkai Railway Station and 3.2 km. south-east of the Nawabganj P.S. Terracotta objects of this site excavated from a series of apparently contemporary cultural mounds of various sizes include animal figures, body fragments, loose heads, a mould of a toy fish, cones, net-sinkers, discs etc.

TAMLUK
On the right bank of the river Rūpnārāyan in the district of Midnapore, Tamluk or ancient Tāmralipti was a port town in bygone days. It finds prolific mention in Indian and foreign sources. The exact location of the ancient Tāmralipti could not be determined with any undoubtful precision till the present day. The town of Tamluk with its adjoining villages, such as Kānkra, Gayespur, Golkoria, Dābdāri, Loadā, Āmatābad, however yielded the main bulk of the terracottas salvaged from this ancient site. Excavations and explorations have yielded varied and aesthetically significant terracotta objects dating back to the Maurya-Śuṅga and Kuśāṇa epochs. The notable among them is a beautiful female figurine, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

\textsuperscript{19} Bangladesh Archaeology, op.cit., p.21.
TILDĀ

Near Tamluk and flanked by the course of the Kasāl (ancient Kapisā which was navigable in the remote past) is situated the ancient site Tildā within the jurisdiction of Pingla P.S., district Midnapore. It is about 20 km. south from Ballychak Railway Station (Howrah-Kharagpur Railway route) on Ballychak-Moyna Road. Archaeological excavations conducted on behalf of the University of Calcutta in 1955 laid bare Kushāna and Gupta structures. From the surface a unique object in the shape of a terracotta tablet inscribed in Greek of the beginning of the Christian era was discovered. Lately an inscribed terracotta Buddha plaque has been recovered from the Chandpur mound in this village. Terracotta figurines from this site are mostly datable to the Gupta period.

Collectively the finds from these centres eloquently speak of the existence of a flourishing art in the clay medium in the distant past. This was largely due to the location of the find places in the riverine tracts of Bengal where all kinds of clay suitable for superior terracotta specimens were within their reach. Without incurring any cost one could give any desirable shape to this plastic medium and in order to avoid short tenure of life the artists hardened the soft clay models by exposing it to the sun or burning it by fire.

Thus the location and environment of Bengal together with the instinct of the real artistis, gave birth to a rich terracotta art portraying human and divine being, scenes of daily life, flora and fauna, religious beliefs and popular tales.

20. Ghosh, D.P., op.cit., p.44.