CHAPTER THREE

Area of Study—On the basis of availability of the materials.

The area of study covers most of the important districts of West Bengal. The sites yielding evidence of the emergence of Chalcolithic cultural phase can be seen to form clusters in the Birbhum, Bankura and Bardhaman districts. Continuity of settlement in certain sites hints at cultural evolution in the broad region we are discussing here.

In case of lower Ganga valley and the Brahmaputra delta region (ancient Bengal) trends of urbanity and even cultural efflorescence or political organizations in terms of "State Formation" took a little time longer to happen than the middle Ganga plains, where the process began at least three hundred years before than that in the lower-Ganga plains. In the mid-Ganga plain urbanization got momentum from the 6th century B.C onwards. Evidence from North Bengal (Barindri), Bangarh ancient Kotivarsa in West Bengal and Mahastangarh ancient Pundravardhana now in Bangladesh reveals that the urban development took place during the 3rd century B.C and reached its climax during Gupta period. The present study will lay emphasis on the urban centers like Bangarh in north Bengal, Chandraketugarh and Tamluk in south Bengal as they indicate pre-urban to urban settlements in early historic Bengal.

Till circa A.D.12th century the Bhagirathi was the main flow of the Ganga, although between modern Kolkata and Sagar Island at the mouth of the estuary, the river moved in a different channel to the east. The original course of Ganga which in this section is
called Adi Ganga which is still traceable and considered holy. In the estuaries around Sagar Island there is series of places which have sporadically yielded in large quantities of sophisticated terracottas. The important sites are Atghara, Chhatrabhog-Khari, Pakurtala, Tilipi, Mandirtala, Harinarayanpur and Deulpota. All these sites lie on the bank of the old channel of the Bhagirathi.

THE SITES

Bangarh, (Fig. 4) & (Fig. 5) ancient Kotivarsha on the Punarbhava in our part of Bengal, adjacent to Mahasthangarh was another important early-historic centre. The site was excavated from 1938-39 to 1940-41 by the University of Calcutta under K.G. Goswami. Here excavation revealed five periods, from Maurya to early mediaeval. Female terracotta figurines having techniques and features of Sunga period have been recovered like yakshā and mother-goddess. The succeeding periods are Kushan and Gupta. Excavation unearthed an important terracotta type like goddess Lakshmi standing on lotus. The tradition of terracotta art continued in the Pala period also.

Excavation also revealed that Bangarh was enclosed by a ring of rampart walls, in successive ages. The city was in a prosperous condition in the Pala period is also inferred from the find of rampart wall with circular bastion attached to it in the north-western portion. The peculiarity of the sculptures of the Pala period is that when any important large house was constructed the general practice was to make its side-walls stout and massive and in the interior, stone pillars with octagonal body and square at
the top and bottom place on decorative stone pillar bases were provided for supporting the roof.

**Tamluk (Fig 6)** ancient Tamralipti port on the river Rupnarayan grew as an important settlement as being a port town on eastern coast mentioned in the writings of Ptolemy and other itinerary sources. At Tamluk trading vessels from China, Java, and Cylon and of the yavanas from the West halted for rest. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* and was known to Kalidasa, Varahamihira and Chinese travelers Fa-Hien, Hieuen-Tsang and Itsing. Excavation in this site recovered terracotta figurines ascribable to the Sunga, the Kushan and the Gupta period.

The site **Chandraketugarh** (Fig 7, 8, 9, 10) was a fortified city located on the dried up course of the Vidyadhari, one of the branches of the Ganga-Bhagirathi which was not very far from the sea. The site was excavated by Calcutta University from 1955-56 to 1965-66. Excavation has revealed an almost continuous sequence of occupations from the pre-Maurya to Pala period. Terracotta figurines representing typical urban Sunga-Kushan themes found from this site in different stratigraphic context and some typical Mauryan terracotta figures recovered from surface collection revealed that in Chandraketugarh and its adjoining area had come to share in the socio-economic changes famous as the second urbanization of Indian subcontinent.
Mangolkot- Situated in the confluence of river Ajoy and Kunoor in district Bardhaman the site was first excavated by Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta from 1986-1990. Excavation revealed here a continuous habitation from chalcolithic to Gupta periods. The Chalcolithic period reveals a few specimens of human figurines representing ageless type of objects exhibiting highly generalized modelling-represents a handmade female figure having an appliqued waist girdle possibly associated with mother goddess cult. A hoard of early-historic terracotta figurines recovered from Mangalkot provides a good idea of the stylistic features which are characteristics of the Kushan-Gupta idioms. (Fig 11&12)

A small scale excavation at Tilpi&Dhosa (Fig 13&14) the twin sites of Joynagar P.S in Twenty-four Parganas (South) unearthed some urban Sunga style terracotta human and animal figurines. At Tilpi notable among them are the famous Panchachuda Yakshis and a plaque delineating a male playing a lyre type musical instrument and a dancing female figure in a narrative plaque. Another terracotta figure where a mother ram feeding her two offsprings is also very interesting which is recovered from Dhosa belongs to c.5th-6th century A.D.

Panna- One of the finest images in terracotta of secular character is represented by a group of females found from Panna located on river Silabati of West Medinipur district. The delicate feminine charm of the classical idiom is beautifully reflected in the facial features in dropping eyelids, sensuous smile lit up by a pair of parted lips. It is clear reminiscence of the Gupta art tradition. (Fig 15, 16, 17)
Pakhanna ancient Pushkarna - (Fig 18,19,20) The Department of Archaeology, University of Calcutta excavated the ancient site of Pakhanna in Bankura district of West Bengal between 1997 and 2002. The site is located on the right bank of Damodar river, which forms a natural boundary between Bardhaman and Bankura districts. The present village lies in Barojora Police Station of Bankura subdivision.

The ancient site of Pakhanna developed in close interactions with similar cultures found in the middle Ganga valley as well lower Bengal. The rich antiquity of the historic period from Pakhanna was brought to light by K.N. Dikshit in 1927-28 and subsequently different scholars have reported antiquities from the site from time to time. The materials found both from explorations and excavation revealed that it was a very important urban centre having tradelinks with lower Bengal and Middle Ganga valley during the early part of the Christian era. The Maurya/Sunga phase of this site also yielded lower part of a female figurine. The discovery of two terracotta snake mother goddess is indicative of snake worship being prevalent custom in the contemporary society.

Farakka - The site Farakka is situated on the bank of River Bhaglrathi where the River Gumani meets. The site was exposed during the construction of a canal. (Fig 21, 22) Many terracotta mother goddess female figurines have been reported from this site. The folk or the archaic character is found to be present in the identical and rustic treatment of the face, body, the position of head and overall animic appearance of the figurines.

Mahanad – This site in district Hooghly was first reported in 1936 by N.G. Majumder. Some silver punchedmarked coins were found from the site along with terracotta figures.
(Fig 23), pottery from the Gutpa period, some Gupta gold coins, and stucco of 5th-6th century A.D. Some gold coins of Sausana were also found. Many Pala period sculptures were recovered. The site also yielded decorated and glazed ware from the mediaeval period.

SECTION II

PERIODISATION- Chalcolithic, Maurya-Sunga, Kushan, Gupta, Post-Gupta, Early-Mediaeval, Late-Mediaeval- Material study in relation to different cultural phases of Bengal.

Archaeological excavation and exploration in post-independence era have clearly shown that Bengal's past was no less Interesting than those of other archaeologically potential sites like the present day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. Antiquities of all the periods from pre-history to history have been recovered from here. Habitation started in Bengal around 2nd millennium B.C.

The present study aims at an analysis of the terracotta female figurines from Chalcolithic to Late-mediaeval sites of West Bengal. The art was practiced in Bengal from the earliest through early mediaeval to mediaeval times and even persisted on Hindu monuments till the mid-nineteenth century. The art is noticed in all forms, small clay figurines, clay sculptures in the round, and lastly the terracotta plaques of late
Mediaeval brick temples of Bengal. As explained by Late Sri Gurusaday Dutta that terracotta panels and friezes used as surface decoration or brick buildings are Bengal’s remarkable contribution to the sum-total of South Asian Art.

In absence of scientific basis for dating of early terracotta of Bengal, a major problem confronting any study of the early terracotta relates to the issue of their classification. It is difficult to arrive at classification from the point of view of chronology, as most of the terracotta are surface finds and thus rarely stratigraphically located. Most of the terracotta objects even from the excavated sites have been recovered from surface collections. Unfortunately Bengal does not possess stone sculptures of early historic period. So attempts have been made to establish a typological chronology for the terracotta pieces by comparing them to both contemporary terracotta and stone sculptures of the rest of India. The major sites with which the Bengal terracotta objects are frequently compared are Ahichchatra, Kausambi, Mathura, Patna, Buxar, Hastinapur, Sonkh etc.

Chalcolithic phase-In the 1960s patient persistent exploration of the archaeologist of Bengal revealed the evidence of chalcolithic culture of West-Bengal. Remains of chalcolithic settlement were discovered at Pandu Rajar Dhibi flanking the Ajoy River in the district of Bardhaman. Late Sri P.C. Dasgupta exposed a broad stratigraphic sequence of pre and protohistory of this region at Pandu Rajar Dhibi. For the first time it established firmly the existence of chalcolithic culture in West Bengal. Terracotta female
figurines of hand-made crude variety have been recovered from chalcolithic phase of Padu Rajar Dhibi. (Fig 24, 25)

The feature of this hand-made type is typical of many other sites of early farming community of the Indian sub-continent. The head ends in flat base, with a perforated fan-shaped head-dress. Beauty of femininity is vividly revealed by the well modeled breasts and fleshy waist. Ear ornaments and necklace are depicting by creating holes.

The site of Mangalkot has revealed here a continuous habitation from chalcolithic to Gupta periods. The Chalcolithic period reveals a few specimens of human figurines representing ageless type of objects exhibiting highly generalized modelling-represents a handmade female figure having an appliquéd waist girdle possibly associated with mother goddess cult. A hoard of early-historic terracotta figurines recovered from Mangalkot provides a good idea of the stylistic features which are characteristics of the Kushan-Gupta idioms.

An overview of the archaeology of the Chalcolithic sites of ancient Bengal suggests that basically the region belonged to two major eco-system-ones in the lateritic upland and the second in the older alluvium stretch, sharing to some extent the deltaic eco-condition. The old alluvium stretch of land watered by the river like the Mayurakshi, Ajoy, Damodar, Dwarakeswara, and Sal-Kopai was proverbially fertile; rice was the main cultivated crop. This was an area of attraction, showing long duration of occupation.

Subsequently this region became associated with the wider territory of the mid-Ganga valley, showing continuity of successive period of occupation and shows a definite
infiltration of the mainstream of culture of the heartland of India and has passed through all the known stages of the history of northern India— the Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and the Gupta. In this context it is important to mention that style and cultural studies have been employed to determine chronology. Researches on different cultural phases and the terracotta objects recovered from various stratified level reveal the stylistic variations evident in different cultural phases of the same site and make it evident that it is difficult to determine a unidirectional path for evolution of style and society during Maurya-Sunga&Kushan period.

Ancient terracotta figurative forms are produced by three techniques— hand modelling, wheel made and moulding. The hand modelling was prevalent throughout the proto-historic and historic periods. But the existence of archaic handmade forms indicates utility in non-urban ritualistic uses. Similarly the moulded compositions may also be associated with decorative and aesthetic taste of affluent and urban consumers. So for a general periodic classification, first we have to select some excavated sites and depending on the techniques of modelling and the stylistic features we may broadly categorize them.

In West Bengal it has been seen that from about 1450 B.C, a rich chalcolithic culture grew up in a concentrated form and in specific ecological complex that is in the area watered by the rivers like Mayurakshi, Bakreswar, Sal-Kopai, Ajay-Kunur-Damodar, and Kasai-Dvarakeswar-Rupnarayan. The pattern of culture was more or less same. But the span of duration and its spread had been conditioned primarily by the geographical situation. The absence of detailed reports of the excavated sites do not provide sufficient data to make a thorough investigation on comparative study of ceramics, but
there is hardly any doubt that the chalcolithic people of Bengal shared with their counterparts in central India and Bihar (Chirand), certain common elements.

So far as the religious female figurines of West Bengal are concerned, typologically they are closely related to the proto-historic mother-goddess figurines of other regions of India. The parallel is no doubt significant and is indicative of a persistent tradition. The first terracotta female figurines of Indian subcontinent have been found in the settlement of the agricultural communities of Baluchistan in the Zhob-Quetta and Kulli regions. In both Baluchistan and Harappan cultures the female figurines seem to be associated with the cult of the mother goddess either as images or as votive offerings. Typologically, the figurines of each culture differ and have their own peculiarities, although technically they have a common method of hand-modelling and applied decoration. The Kulli female figurines have applique roundels for eyes on a pinched face. The mouth has not been indicated. The figure abruptly ends at the waist suggesting that it rested on a pedestal when worshipped. The Zhob figurines have a high hooded head hollow holes for eyes, an owl-beak nose and a slitcut mouth. The necklace is made of a series of clay strips often covering part of the breasts. In some examples, the head of the female is covered by what looks like a shawl. The general appearance of the Zhob figurines reflects the terrific aspect which the goddess represented.

Mohen-jo-Daro, Harappa and Chanhu-Daro have yielded a large number of terracotta female figurines. The Mohen-Jo-Daro female figurines usually have a fan-shaped head-dress. In some examples, a cup is found attached to either side of her head. The cups
probably contained incense. The eyes are shown by tiny applied clay pellets. The female has prominent breasts, a thin waist and broad hips which are potential characteristics of the mother goddess. The legs of most of the figurines are straight and with no indication of feet. She wears short skimpy skirts or a short skirt held up by a single or double belt. She also wears a girdle and a heavy necklace. There are also some female busts which have no jewellery.10

The terracotta figurines from Harappan sites are all hand-modelled. The eyes, breasts, jewellery and apparel are invariably in applique technique. The mould was not used by the Harappan artists.11

Mauryan Phase—Archaeologically; third century B.C. seems to be the accepted date and history in undivided Bengal. On the basis of the discovery of the inscribed Mahasthangarh plaque (now in Bangladesh) we came to know about the foundation of the provincial Mauryan headquarters at a beautiful city called Pundranagara, located on the bank of the Karotoya, under a Mahamatra. Period I is representing the Mauryan phase. The material recovered from the site reveal that the city witnessed a most flourishing stage of life in the third century B.C. The successive phases which represented the Kushan, Gupta cultural periods maintained prosperous life and a kind of parity in life-system with the mid-Ganga plain.
During this phase there was a sporadic outburst of artistic activity in clay, as we find them from whole Northern Gangetic plain. Among them women figures surely outnumbered themale figures. So far as the modelling is concerned the Mauryan terracotta figurines are not very different from the terracotta of indigenous type. And the treatment of these female figurines as foundearlier in fertility themes attained urban sophistication in the vitality alive forms of *yakshis* and *shalasthanikas* etc. (Fig 26)

In addition to the stone carvers the clay to satisfy the needs of the society ranging from king to the in lower ordinary people. Especially in the urban areas such as Bulandibagh and Kumrahar they fashioned extraordinary pieces and gained a special position parallel to other medium of art. In Chandraketugarh the prototype of these types of figures were also recovered. (Fig 27, 28, 29) The large size female figurines wearing heavy jewellery, head-dress, long skirt (Fig 30, 31) and distinguished by sensitive modelling are no doubt the work of skilled masters. On the other hand stone carvers, the potters of Mauryan period fashioned Buxar, which was not the capital city in Mauryan times, had yielded terracotta figurines completely distinct in nature and recall Pre-Mauryan mother goddess. Most of them are completely handmade but few show the moulded face. Lack of drapery, heavy jewellery and typical Mauryan coiffure are clear indications of its belonging to the urban area. The goddess of fertility in the Mauryan Empire, the symbolic of the great mother is feecting, fertility and procreation/perpetuation of the species. The Mauryan Empire keeps the original model of predecessors whose representation is common in the earlier civilizations which gives importance to the female sex or the breasts giving the maternal milk.
The understanding of the aesthetic ideology of Mauryan art and its significance may perhaps be further helped by bringing it into comparison with the art of the Shunga period, which chronologically was closest in succession.12

**Shunga Phase**- The representation of goddesses in human appearance, flourished in the school of art of Shunga Empire. The sculpture consecrates the beauty and the sensuality of the woman body and devotes to showing the nudity only decorated by jewels consecrating the Shakti cult and its fertility practices.(Fig 32, 6)

A few facts and factors regarding the background of Shunga art are worth taking into consideration. Ashoka's policy of Dhamma, based on the universal ethical concept, which he sought to inculcate amongst his people by mandate and ordinances, was largely foreign to the people of India in general. The prohibition of sacrificial slaughter, festive gathering, the processions or *yatras* and *samajas*, the *utsavas*, and the auspicious rites and rituals performed by the people and the women folk to beneficial causes were directed against the age-old popular religion which was current in India agelessly through centuries.13 In the name of Dhamma, Ashoka's intention was to execute two things, one to suppress the time honoured religious rites and rituals, and the other to impose the new code of moral instructions adopted by him for cause of Dhamma.14

But people in general had hardly any faith or love for mauryan dynasty and their social, cultural and religious ideology. Added to it was Ashoka's disrespect of age-old rites and rituals which people seem to have kept alive so long. In politics it took the shape of popular revolts.15
The Shunga coup d'etat was an expression of the smouldering resentment among the cross section of the population culminating in the overthrow of dynasty by one Pushyamitra Shunga who murdered the last Mauryan emperor and became the founder of the Shunga dynasty.16

Though Shunga rulers were Brahmana, Buddhist religion and art enjoyed one of its greatest creativity during this time. While mauryan religious art was highly symbolical in the shape and form of monumental pillars of peity with crowing animals expressing Ashoka's imperial will and might. Buddhism and Buddhist art during this period rooted itself strongly in the tribal and peasant culture. It was clearly a negation of the Mauryan attitudes.17

While the Mauryan art is basically symbolical, revealing the entire fabric of Mauryan civilization the Shunga art is narrative, primarily and art of reliefs.18 The Shunga artists appear to delight in the handling of human figures, especially they realized that the beauty lies in the female body. The joy of a new discovery seems to urge them on to depict the human body in every conceivable position and attitude.19

One of the frequent motifs of the Buddhist art of the time is the *Salabhanjika, a Yakshi* flowing sala tree. In such portrayal the emphasis on the attributes of fertility in swelling breasts and heavy hips was more intuitive, rather than the result of sculptors following any prescribed recipe. It is important to observe that though the figures exist in volume,
they are conceived fundamentally as reliefs against the upright to which they are attached. At this stage in Indian sculpture, the dynamic vitalisation of body is shown by absorbing the life-fluid of nature.

The art of Sunga period is an art of folk inspiration, a documentation of popular life and cult beliefs. There is in it little urban tension and sophistication like the Mauryan period. The yakshas and yakshis stand out pre-eminent in their own right, they are not yet the puny subordinate and accessory attendant figures that they become in Kushana art.

The Buddhist, facing the popular infatuation, allows the representation of their goddesses in the same sensual design.

During the Shunga period the concept of *matrikas*, whose representations vary with the function expressed by the image, is spreading. This development should mark the beginning of concept of various religious cults of ancient Indian society. Even some scholars are of opinion that Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, consort of the Lord Vishnu identified with Mayadevi by the Buddhists evolves to Sita wife Rama, with the Brahmins The mother goddess, initially fertility mother goddess, becomes Lord Shiva's consort and bears his attributes, the new armed goddess of Shungas. (Fig 33)

The abundance of terracotta female figures with distinct Shunga characteristics discovered from northern, western and southern Bengal would suggest that the art of these areas were under the influence of an idiom bearing the name of this dynasty. In
fact, the style was so strong as to have remained substantially effective long after the collapse of the royal family in about 75 B.C and continued till the middle of the next century, up to the emergence Kushan art. As Prof Enamul Haque thinks the archaeological evidence available so far would suggest that the Shunga period played a substantial role in the formative stage of the development of art in Bengal.

**Kushan Phase**—The Kushan art continues further the same indigenous tradition of folk inspiration of the joy arising from the life of the senses and the pulsating buoyancy of open air feminine sports and pastimes, but their emphasis is increasingly human and the centre is shifting towards an urban civilization. There is a plentiful supply of evidence as many depictions of women survive from the Kushan period mainly in terracotta art of Bengal. (Fig. 34, 35, 36, 37) In Bengal the art of Kushan period reflects a material prosperity of the region, much of which was based on trade link with the other countries. Shunga terracotta traditions at Bengal largely continued in the Kushan period as well so far as the themes and subjects are concerned the Yakshi and the Apsara figurines were again numerous, a more refined version than those appeared in the previous centuries. Many of the female figures of this period showed a wide variety of expression. They tended to be very sensuous in appeal. Their diaphanous draperies not only revealed the contour of the body but enormously enhanced their feminine charm and delicacy. The Kushan artists were devoted to the pursuits of elegance in the moments of graceful relaxation. The face proportionately smaller than the body while facial features are shown with mastery skill. The rest of the body and the details of anatomy and ornaments are depicted by careful hand modeling.

The artists of **Kushan period** also produced hollow figurines of light weight with double moulds. (Fig 38) The difference between the Shunga and Kushan period is that the
specimens of earlier period were produced by single mould in low relief with flattened features; the Kushan images show roundness and moderate depth in relief. These hollow interior sometimes has been utilizes as rattle toys of the children.

During the post-kushana period to the theme and the style of modeling of terracotta figurines was very much changed. The main factors behind this were probably the change in the socio-religious concept. The earlier Yaksha-Yakshi tradition ceased completely. Instead the cult figurines and the narrative plaques(Fig 39) sometimes related to the stories of two great Epics became very common.(Fig 40) All these figurines weremodeled according to the Kushan-based-Gupta idiom, vibrant, buoyant and ideally balanced between spirituality and sensuality.

Though it is assumed that the influence of Gupta period was not very prominent in Bengal, but the frequent occurrence of some types of female terracotta figures reveal that Bengal during the Gupta Age was not completely isolated culturally and socially from the other urban centres ofwas under the cultural phase of Gupta period. The whole range of terracotta art can be classified into two distinct categories on the basis of their functional roles, sizes, mode of manufacturing technique etc. The distinct features are is in its hair style, facial features and the aesthetic expression. (Fig 42) Slim and slender physical features with plasticity of the body are the common characteristics of Gupta terracotta art. (Fig 41, 43, 44)
If we considered the classical norms reflected in the two aspects of stone sculptures — the gliding linearism and the plasticity of the body. Various terracotta figurines recovered from West Bengal reflect these classical norms.

Subsequently in the later periods, the art of terracotta was displaced by sculpture in stone and bronze. Post-Gupta art of terracotta evolved from the skill and expertise of past centuries and is confined to eastern India, (Fig 45, 46) in particular Bengal. The primary reason for the choice of the material was the abundant supply of alluvial clay on the banks of Ganga and the durability of fired clay which is most suitable in a region prone to torrential rain and curiously devoid of suitable stone for carving.23

The foundation of Pala dynasty in 8th century A.D. marks an important phase of History of Bengal. So far as Bengal is concerned, north Bengal, more specifically Varendra, was their core centre. The Palas ruled Bengal from 750 A.D to 1155 A.D. The great Palas called themselves Parama-Saugata, the worshipper of Lord Buddha. They erected a number of stupas and monasteries in Bengal and Eastern India. Most notable among them is the famous monastery of Paharpur (now in Bangladesh) erected by Dharmapala. Numerous terracotta plaques (Fig 47, 48) revealed that the artists working here were free from trammels of iconographic bondage derived their inspiration directly from the life around. The main purpose of these terracotta plaques was to decorate the walls of the temples and to break the monotony of the severe plainness of the temple walls. These plaques had another purpose— they also served as sources of instructions and recreations for the pilgrims. The subject matters
not only include the gods and goddesses of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon but also documented the day to day life of the people. The terracotta modelers reflected the various aspects of life as led in palaces, in plain dwellings of the common people and in the huts.

From the analysis of the themes illustrated one can clearly see how the artists were involved with local rites and rituals. It should be noted that in spite of the strong influence of the Gupta-postGupta terracotta tradition, the terracotta art of early mediaeval period had intimate connection with ethnic and local roots. The Pala period regarded as the golden era or at least the main constructive age for art and architecture of Bengal. In this period we find that Bengal was already in passion of a distinctive school of art and her influence was felt in other places also beyond her boundaries. The composition of the sculpture and the detail rendering of the stories reveal the local elements which were beginning to emerge in varying processes.

This fact is also applicable in the NandadirghikaMahavihara at Jagjivanpur, Malda, erected during the reign of Mahendra Pal (Circa A.D 845-860). A large number of terracotta plaques delineating female figures both religious and secular have been recovered. (Fig 49a, 49b, 49c)

The use of terracotta art in adorning architectural buildings seems to have undergone a total eclipse in Bengal after the Palas. The major art form in clay was almost dormant. During these days (a hiatus between 500 to 600 years) the art of burnt clay was alive to satisfy the ritual and domestic needs of the ordinary indigenous people. The Indigenous clay art of Bengal never lost its integrity and its fundamental distinctive characteristics in
the course of its evolution through the centuries. It was the inner spirit of common people which had never been dominated and suppressed by external imperial and Brahmanic influences. It was a moving process of life. Whenever the outside influences came in its way, the indigenous culture assimilated it without losing its basic characteristics.

**Late Medieval Period**- The Indo-Islamic brick structure of Gaur in Malda district and the numerous beautifully terracotta decorated Late-Medieval Temples scattered all over Bengal. In the next phase lack of material has hindered the way to proper understanding of the subject. During this period Bengal witnessed the Islamic invasion. For sometimes it seemed that the terracotta art ceased to exist in Bengal. But the tradition was very much alive and transmitted to the next generation.

During the 13th and 14th centuries Muslim invaders were engaged in the subjugation of local forces of Bengal. In 1338 A.D Bengal finally cut itself adrift from the body politic of northern India under Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah and remained independent for almost two hundred years under the Sultans of various dynasties. The unifications were achieved in the region of Ilyas Shah (1342-1357) when a polisory definition was given to the region for the first time. Under the succeeding Muslim rulers, especially the Sultans of the HussainShahi dynasty (1493-1538 A.D). Bengal were controlled by a centralized administration. The Sultans wanted to broaden the base of their rule by securing the support and sympathy of the local people.
During 15th and 16th centuries Bengal underwent a profound political, social and religious and Cultural Revolution, the chief result of which was the formation of a distinct regional identity. The most important factors in this revolution were the political unification and consequent independence of Bengal. "Being far away from the central authority virtually a border province, Bengal always had the tendency of being in an unstable state with its rulers often on the lookout for an opportunity to shake off the central Delhi and declared independence".

Under the HussainShahi rulers Bengal enjoyed a period of reawakening and renewed actively in various fields of art, literature, architecture etc. These were Inspired by the teachings of Sufi saints of Bengal and Chaitanya's neo Vaishnavism, the doctrine of love which swept 15th century Bengal.

This Bengal renaissance was the result of spiritual self-expression of indigenous Bengali people which for the first time established a Bengali style of art distinguished by common characteristics and activating from numerous center. The indigenous sculptors now took pride in duplicating the indigenous life style of contemporary society. Thus late mediaeval brick structures embellished with terracotta decoration was purely a localized innovation of the Bengali people. The Islamic structures depict only floral, vegetal and geometric motifs whereas the Hindu structures used all types of motifs including human and animal.

Under the Muslim rulers a distinctly regional style of architecture evolved for the first time, the building erected by the ns combined traditional Islamic techniques and types
with local materials and forms. By the end of the 16th century, a uniquely Bengali style of temple architecture and sculpture had established itself as the Hindu artistic expression of the new social, religious and Cultural Revolution.

Bhakti movement in Bengal had been fastened by sheer devotions of a good numbers of Bengali saints and social reformer who preached about the unison of God. Some of the saints of Bengal aimed to propagate the monism and dualism into a distinctly separate system.

Two distinct streams of religiosity determined the growth of Bhakti movement in Bengal. On one hand there is the influence of the Vaishnava tradition and on the other the non-Vaishnava influences from Buddhist and Hindu sources.

The Vaishnava momentum came first of all in the scene of bhakti movement through the Bhagata Purana with its glorification of Lord Krishna. This came to Bengal under the Pala kings and found its typically Bengali literary transformation in Jaydeva's passionately lyrical Gita-Govinda towards the end of 12th century. The Gita-Govinda brings into Bengal Vaishnavism a new aspect, derived from another source than the Bhagavata, namely the prominence given to Radha, the favourite of Krishna. The erotic mystical theme of the love of Lord- Krishna and Radha occupies here the centre of Stage, and henceforth dominates Bengali devotionalism. (Fig 50a, 50b, 50c, 50d, 50e)
Non-vaishnava influence of Bhakti movement came from two sources, distinct yet interconnected. Buddhism had been on the decline in India for sometime, but in Bengal it survived under the Pala Dynasty, after which it became decadent. In its decadence it produced forms that affected the development of Vaishnavism, and both these Buddhist and Vaishnava forms then influenced Bengali devotionalism. The emphasis of them was on the female principle of the universe and they exalted the religious value of sexual passion. In reaction against the congealed discipline of Mahayana Buddhism, they preached the doctrine of naturalism, thus idealizing sensuous and showing a new path to salvation in and through the senses. Intense emotionalism and eroticism pervaded their rites and mystical teachings. Chaitanya (1435-1533 A.D), the greatest of the Bengali Bhakti saints, did not himself come under their spell, but they certainly had an impact on the erotically inspired Krishna-bhakti of Bengal, leading in some cases to decadent practices.

Chaitanya gathered together the various strands of Bengali Vaishnavism became a reformer and founded a sect with enormous influence on Bengali religious life. He was the initiator of a very broad movement which covered Bengal and spread into whole of east India. Chaitanya expressed himself in the Sankirtan, a session of hymn-singing by a group of devotees. These songs were often accompanied by ecstatic dancing to the sound of tambourines. In his lifetime Chaitanya himself became the object of popular devotion. He was a social reformer, but not militating against the caste structure. Within the devotional practice the followers of Chaitanya completely rejected all distinction of caste and thus promoted a sense of equality that penetrated deep into the Bengali life. The regeneration and revival of the morale of the people under his spiritual leadership created a different sphere of purified or platonic romanticism, purifications of habits and
rituals in daily life and truthfulness of vision against all sorts of injustice and inequality is the social fabric. The Chaitanya movement had a great impact on Bengali society as a whole. It gave Bengal a special identity, provided a new inspiration to life and which persisted of Bengali common people.

"But these anti-caste tendencies became weaker after Chaitanya, when various religious practices and divisions were re-introduced." Many Yogic-tantric practices gradually penetrated and brought into the fold of Vaishnavism (GauryaVaishnavism) propagated by Sri Chaitanya. As a result the ideals of parikṣa and prakṛtisadhna became the basis of the Sahajya cult which developed in 17th century. This kind of religious development presupposes a much earlier beginning for Tantra. The early mediaeval period of Indian history, especially after the 7th century, is regarded to be the golden age of Tantrism especially amongst the Saktas and the Buddhist. The employment of five Mas (pañcakārasya), viz., madya (wine), mithuna (sex), mudrā (use of gestures/poses in rituals), matsya (Fish), and mamsa (flesh) in the Tantric (Sakta) rituals and practices was gaining popularity.

This Bengali renaissance of late mediaeval period was the result of a spiritual blossoming in the field of religion in the shape of Vaishnavism, accentuated by the works of Jayadeva and Chandidas and the teachings of Sri Chaitanya.

"Probably the most significant manifestation of the new regional culture of Bengal was the remarkable development of a vernacular literary tradition."
In our old and mediaeval literature man's glory is seldom depicted in its own grandeur and eulogized independently of divine glory. The versions of the Ramayana(Fig 51a&b) and Mahabharata that we have in our literature possess a vein more religious than human; the heroes and heroines of the various mangala-kavyas are depicted more as toys in the hands of the gods and goddesses than as dignified figures glowing with the heroic grandeur of their personality. Lausen of the Dharma mangala is a mere agent of Dharma thakura, Kalketu of Chandi Mangala is originally a god, being the son of Indra, and is dragged down from heaven on earth only to glorify the almighty power of goddess Chandi and to establish her worship on earth. The human interest struggle of Chand Sadagar of Manasa Mangal has been minimized by the undercurrent of the religious tone by the fact that it really represents the struggle of decaying Saivaism of Bengal against the growth and spread of Saktism represent by the Manasa cult.

The devotional movement in Bengal has given great impetus to our literature, and the beautiful literary fragments, which are extant, can be found abundantly in the love-lyrics of the Vaishnava poets. Though we have a fair amount of Ramayanic literature in Bengali and though a deep religious vein runs through many of them, the Rama cult could not gain sufficient ground as a religious faith in Bengal, it pushed corner of Krishna cult.

Siva of Bengal, at least as found in depicted in late mediaeval Bengali literature and art, is not exactly the same Siva with whom we are acquainted in the Brahminical literature, particularly in the Puranas. The Indigenous elements of Bengali life and culture have
supplied flesh and blood to his Brahminic skeleton and made him into a typical Bengali Siva. Siva in relation to his troublesome family, composed of two sons, two daughters and a wife, represents through his wild mode of life and unscrupulous activities, a vivid picture of some of the aspects of the social life of mediaeval Bengal.

During our research we have also spotted 'Siva is engaged in love sport with her consort'. (Fig 52) As Stella Kramrisch referred Suprabhedhagama XXX,"Gods and ascetics therefore should be represented in their love sport: (Krida, Lila) on the walls of temples but ascetics practicing the game of love(Fig 53, 54) should not figure on the habitations of men for their game is none of the three purposes of life. It is a symbol of final release, its fourth and ultimate purpose.

The Sakta cults(Fig 56,57, 58) of Bengal represents a particularly distinctive feature of religious life of Bengal and the extant of literature which flourished under the direct influence of those cults is also fairly large. The Sakta literature of Bengal generally belongs to the type of Mangala literature- which is literature of religious propaganda. Among the Sakta cults, the more important are the cults of Chandl or Kall or Kallka the consort of Lord Siva and the cult of Manasa, the serpent Goddess. We have also mangala Kavyas belonging to the cults of Goddess Sitala (the Goddess of small-pox.) Kamala or Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth (Fig 59) Sashthi,(Fig 55) the Goddess believed to be in charge of the welfare of the children, and others.
The most outstanding Sakta revival was furnished by the Tantras which necessitated and understanding and a general acceptance of the Female Principle (Fig 60) in religious worship. The tantric cult of the goddess lays special emphasis upon the mantras (prayer and formulae), bijas (syllables of estoric significance), yantras (diagrams), mudras (special positions of fingers) and nyasas (feeling the deity in different parts of the body). The aim of the Tantric worshipper (Fig 61) is to realize the universe within him and her and become one with the goddess.

The Devi-mahatmya which is also called Chandi or Durga-septasati is vitally important for assessing the growth of Saktism in the context of Indian history. The Devi-mahatmya also contains references to matrikas and goddesses like Sakambhari, Sivadutt and Bhramari; it has also elements of monotheistic philosophy of Sakta-tantras and concept of bindu, etc. However, the existence of Tantrism connected with Sakti worship is well attested to by an Inscription at Gangdhar in Rajasthan, because this Inscription, which preserves a distinct reference to Tantra practices, is dated in A.D. 423-24.30

Tantric goddesses belong mostly to the Kali group. Unlike the Pauranic goddesses they have mythology. They are all mind-borne, intended solely for the purpose of contemplation and meditation. Three main streams of the mother-cult dominated the religious scene of Bengal. The first stream was represented by Uma-Parvati, the second by Durga (Fig 62) and third by Kali. The three streams amalgamated into one and the icentity of Parvati-Uma, Durga and Kali was finally established. The popular religious
ceremonies of woman folk, particularly of the maidens, have also supplied us with nice pieces of folk literature.

The terracotta artists of late mediaeval period have depicted women in both the categories of plaques, e.g. mythological and secular. In the mythological scenes they have been shown in robes appropriate to the subject matter, often in such divine form as Devi or as Sita, Devaki, Yosoda (Fig 63) and Radha etc. But in the plaques depicting secular life we find women have been represented in few cases. This very fact reflects the attitude of the contemporary society, which confined the womenfolk to the seclusion of the houses. Their main roles were to be wife and mother. But anyhow life of women appears to be a very attractive subject of depiction of the terracotta artists of Bengal, who had displayed their intimate care in portrayal of various scenes in the life of women in the terracotta plaques or panels of the late mediaeval temples of Bengal. (Fig 64) Women are depicted with children, birds, parasols, worshipping Siva linga, kneeling at the feet of an ascetic, fluting coucshshell. (Fig 65) Woman milking cow, (Fig 66) cutting fish, with butter churns, spinning threads on a charkha (Fig 67), feeding parrot and peacock, seated at the window (Fig 68), watching from the balcony, women in jheki-sala, woman under toxic influence, (Fig 69) bathing woman, wringing hair after bath, hair dressing of woman, (Fig 70) women beautifying themselves, (Fig 71) woman playing vina, (Fig 72) European woman playing violin woman standing with pitcher, bust of woman- a close-up, looking outwards from the interiors, woman enjoying smoking, naked woman and erotic scenes. The marriage scenes depicted on the terracotta temples are all in connection with the epics and mythologies, those of Rama-Sita and
Siva-Parvati. The celebration of marriage scenes depicted elaborately on these temple walls.

The art of music was cultivated by women of this period is proved by the numerous terracotta portrayals of the various temples of all over Bengal. The professional singers and dancers, the bailis, (Fig 73) who were patronized by the jamindars and other aristocratic classes, have been depicted in many plaques, entertaining gentlemen. They have been shown dancing and playing musical instruments on boats, ox-cart, and horse-carriages and of course in the houses of their patrons. “All these indicate that these bijis formed a very essential element of the society”.

Dance, music and drama were also commonly associated with the contemporary religion. These were performed at various social ceremonies and other auspicious occasions. “The art of music, dance and songs had not only been guided by specific norms and principles but also became popular institutions of Bengal which afforded a specific basis for proper culture of these faculties.”

Women at the time of marriage and other socio-religious ceremonies performed music and dance. The marriage scene depicted on the terracotta temples are all in connection with the epics and mythologies, those of Rama-Sita and Siva-Parvati. The celebration of marriage scenes depicted elaborately on brick temples of Bengal.

European women have been portrayed in various terracotta plaques of these temples. European women appearing in public in a country observing a strict purdah system,
have always been center of attraction and attention, which is evident in such portrayals. (Fig 74, 75)

The birth of a child has been depicted in terracotta plaques on late mediaeval bricktemples of Bengal in connection with birth of Krishna. (Fig 76) This scene of divine birth reflects certain customs which must have been prevalent in Bengali society of the time and as such has been depicted by the terracotta artists. Here the expectant mother is shown leaning over a inverted hemispherical basket (dhama in Bengali) while the body is being born almost in the manner of a quadruped. This method is known to older women of rural Bengal even today.

Various episodes of the Lord Krishna's life were an all-time favourite subject of the artists of 18th century Bengal.

Escape from Kamsa's palace, the sleeping soldiers, their heads resting on their hands are also have been depicted.

Like Krishna's birth usually indicated by the tiny four-armed god standing between Vasudeva and Devaki, the biological parents of Krishna, are either seated or standing.

Sometimes Krishna lies in the lap of his Devaki.

The parents lift up the four armed baby. Musicians and dancers are often in attendance.

Vasudeva carries the infant Krishna across the river Yamuna.

Infant Krishna is protected by nag Basukl.
Costumes and dresses of woman—Dress being marked characteristics of culture, revealing tastes and tendencies of people, are clearly indicated in the terracotta art depiction of late mediaeval Bengal. The tastes and fashions being observed in such sculptures are fascinating human documents, (Fig 77a, b&c) which show minutest details of costumes and jewellery executed by terracotta artists of Bengal.35

Though saree is the attire of woman(Fig 79) in general of Bengal, we noticed kachuli and odna(Fig 78) to cover the upper part of the body and ghagra for the lower part. The style of wearing saree seems to be almost same in the various plaques, e.g., after wrapping round the lower body it is taken from the right waist, over left shoulder and then covering the head is brought to the front over the right shoulder. The style of wearing a saree is still very much prevalent in the country, especially in the villages, where the excess part of ancal after covering the head is taken from under the right arm and is flung over the left shoulder, thus twice covering the breast which often is not covered by any sort of blouse.36 In terracotta portrayals we find the female figures wearing sarees with borders and patterns and horizontal designs.


4. Amita Ray, "Chalcolithic Culture of West Bengal", in 'Studies in Archaeology', Asoke Datta (Ed)
P 124

5. Ibid, p-132.


7. A.Ghosh (Ed), 'Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology VOL-1 New Delhi 1989, p 339


9. Ibid, p 3

10. Ibid, p 3

11. Ibid, p 4

P-380.


15. Ibid, p380.


22. Ibid.
27. M.C.Joshi, "Historical and iconographical aspects of Sakta Tantrism", in 'Exploration in Art and Archaeology of South Asia,' Essays Dedicated to N.G.Majumder, Debala Mitral (Ed). 1996. P- 415
35. Julekha Haque, 1980, p-180