CHAPTER IV

MOTHER GODDESS IN ICONOGRAPHY
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While in the preceding chapters the representation of Puranic and Tantric goddesses have been discussed, this chapter on *Mother Goddess in Iconography* intends to make an analytical study on the goddess as represented in sculptures of ancient Assam and Bengal. The special branch of knowledge or study, which deals with icons, is known as *iconography*. *Iconography* deals with the idea behind the image. The study of iconography is blended with the study of religion, because the word Icon (Greek *eikon*) means a devotional image, a figure representing a deity or a saint, in painting, mosaic, sculpture terracotta etc. which is specially meant for worship or which is in some way or other associated with rituals1. So the proper understanding of *iconography* enables one to be quite conversant with one of the most important aspects of the religious life of different races of mankind. *Iconography* is helpful not only for the purpose of identifying images, but also for that of dating the works of art. Thus, in a broad sense, *iconography* really signifies the interpretative aspects of the religious life of a country. The study of icons in Assam and Bengal has to a great extent been corroborated by the representation of the goddess found in the Puranic and Tantric texts. The icons have been classified into three categories according to the creed to which they belong such as: Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain.

The description of physical form of divinities for worship and meditation are given in some Puranas, Upa-Puranas and Tantras. Following such

descriptions the icons of deities are carved out of stone, wood, metal etc. The sculptors were required to be fully thorough with the text and an expert in the technique. *Brihat Samhita*, compiled in sixth century A.D. includes a chapter on iconography. Some of the compilations of econometric texts have stated clearly that the image of divinity should be proportionate, attractive and charming because an icon must help the sadhaka realising the divine spirit.² *Sriprasna Samhita* devotes three chapters to explain creation of icons (*bimbas*).

An iconographic study of images of female divinities, found in different regions of Assam and Bengal leave no scope of doubt that by the twelfth century A.D. the cult of Mother Goddess received a universal recognition among all religious sects and cults of the two states. However, so far images of Jain goddess has been found in Bengal but not in Assam. Due to some unknown reason Jainism could not flourish in ancient Assam. The later Vedic texts, epics and the early Puranas propagated the idea of Sakti denoting the female energy of the male divinities. The *Devimahatmya* section of the *Markandeya Purana* explains the significance of the concept of Sakti. Here the chief goddess is Candi or Candika. The Puranas drew an outline of the image of the great goddess and the sculptors of the later period utilized the Puranic description.

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar states that up to seventh century A. D. Indian art displayed an all-Indian character. However, it is from the eighth century A.D. that the history of Indian art begins to take a new direction. In the political arena regional kingdoms began to assert their independent identity. Regional spirit became stronger and this is reflected in Indian art. For example, under the Pala rulers of Bengal, a new local idiom of expression evolved developing its own characteristics and had continued for almost four hundred years till the advent of the Turko-

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Afghans. This particular school came to be known as the *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Art* (EISMA). The Palas ruled in Bengal and Bihar for the entire period i.e. from the eighth to the twelfth century A.D., and occasionally exercised suzerainty over Assam.

The worship of deities in their *iconographic* forms goes back to remote antiquity in India and both iconism and aniconism went side by side. The representation of Siva and Devi in the form of linga and yoni respectively, are found extensively in Assam. No sculptural art in any medium assigned to a period earlier than the fifth-sixth century A.D. is found in Assam, as is proved by the ruins of Da-Parvatia. The stone doorframe of Da-Parvatia with icons of goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna may be placed in fifth-sixth century A.D., which is generally accepted as a fine example of Gupta art, in view of the similarity of the general lay-out of those of the Parvati temple of Nachna-Kuthara, Siva temple at Bhumara. An art tradition in wood and terracotta may have existed in Assam prior to the fifth century A.D. and might have found expression in stone under the classical influence of Gupta art. Up to eighth century A.D., Assam witnessed, as in contemporary Bengal, a sculptural style, which continued the classical tradition but was greatly influenced by local idioms and tribal motifs. *Bengal's Pala art greatly influenced the art of Assam from ninth century onwards.*

So far as iconographic representation of the Brahmanical Goddess in Assam is concerned, it is seen that images showing the goddess in the act

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3 R.C. Majumdar mentioned that the *East Indian School of Medieval Art* (EISMA) was actually indebted to the Classical tradition. Like other regional art school it has some special features of its own which made it distinct from others. The sculptures of EISMA generally were carved out of black stone and were well polished. The images were mostly carved on the stela and rarely round. The EISMA shows a significant growth of the use of stela which signifies the periodic development of the EISMA sculptures. The *Kirtimukha* decoration is a significant characteristic of the EISMA stelas. Elaborate ornamentation and sensuous representation of the sculptures became distinct. Majumdar, op. cit. pp. 535-540. Also see Banerjee, R.D., *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, Delhi, 1981.


5 Ibid.


7 Ibid, p 36
of fighting and killing the demon Mahisasura far outnumber those of the other orders. This form of the goddess is beautifully delineated in Brahmanda Purana, Markandeya Purana, Matsya Purana Agni Purana etc. T.A. Gopinath Rao on the basis of the Agamas has collected a large number of names of the different forms of the goddess and their iconographic descriptions. She is represented with two, four, eight, twelve, sixteen, eighteen, twenty, and even thirty-two hands. A large number of eight and ten-handed images of Mahishasuramardini have been discovered in Eastern India. Worship of the ten-armed Goddess however, appears to have been most popular.

Most of the images of the war-goddess of ancient Assam belonged to the period between the ninth and eleventh century A.D. During that period Pala School of Eastern India inspired the local art of Assam. The art of Assam till ninth century was simple and direct and it was hardly done on a large scale. Later sculptures were highly animated, refined and ornamented, sharing many characteristic features of Pala style of Bengal.

In popular Indian perception of divinity, the dominant image is of a male god, accompanied by his consort, who is his benevolent Sakti. But Mahishamardini Durga is one important goddess who is portrayed as independent. Though created from the combined energy of the gods, she wields the weapon and fights battle alone with no male support and slays the buffalo demon Mahisha. Mahishamardini, the ugra form of Durga, is the most important and earliest, according to the literary texts. The Devimahatmya gives the description of this aspect of Durga in great detail.

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8 Choudhury, R.D., *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1985, p. 82.
12 Markandeya Purana, 82/9-10
This form of goddess Durga is most popular in India, particularly in Assam and Bengal. The images of Mahishamardini, rock-cut as well as carved on stone slabs, are found in Assam. As already mentioned, Mahishamardini Durga had different names according to the number of hands. The ten-handed image is called Katyayani and eighteen-handed image is called Ugrachanda according to Matsya Purana and Agni Purana 13.

An image of Mahishamardini, carved on a stone-slab is to be found at Sirajuli, a village of Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district and is now preserved in a private house of Dhekiajuli town14. Here the goddess has ten arms. Her right leg is placed on the back of the lion (her vehicle) and the left leg is on the back of the beheaded Mahisha. She stands in tribhanga posture. The ayudhas in her hands are trisula, cakra, tanka, arrow, khadga, shield, bow, battle axe, ankusha and keshabandha(hair-lock) of the asura. The goddess is shown piercing the chest of the demon Mahishasura. The asura, who comes out of the decapitated neck of buffalo hold the sword in both hands in such a way so as to suggest that he is fighting with the goddess. This image displays excellent proportion in execution and is a pleasing work of art. Rabin Dev Choudhury states that the sculpture belonged to pre-Ahom period. An eighteen-handed Mahishamardini was carved on a rock in Uzanbazar area of Guwahati. Except the sword in the right topmost hand, a trisula in the lowest right hand and a bow in the third left hand, all other attributes in the hands are indistinct. The image corresponds to the dhyanas of Agni purana15. An eighteen-handed Mahishamardini or her portrayal in the form of Ugrachanda is rare in Assam. In that respect the image is of high iconographic significance.

15 Agni Purana, 50/ 7-10.
One interesting image of sixteen-handed Mahishamardini, made of clay stone, is found from Ambari (Guwahati) site. She has her right leg on her usual vahana, the lion while the left leg is placed on Mahisasura with a view to push him down forcefully. She is standing in alidha posture. The pedestal bears an inscription, identifying her as 'Candanayika'. In the Kalika Purana Candanayika is described as one of the eight Saktis of the great goddess. In the Agni Purana and the Bhavisya Purana Candanayika is mentioned under the collective designation of Nava-Durga. The Nava-Durgas are Rudracanda, Pracanda, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa, Aticandika and Ugracanda. However, the ayudhas of Candanayika prescribed in the Agni Purana and Kalika Purana do not conform to that of the Candanayika found at Ambari. Inscribed goddess image is rare in Assam and for this the image has great significance. The stela is pointed. The kirtimukha is depicted on the top of the stela. Two flying Vidyadharas are holding malas on both sides of the upper stela. The influence of Pala art is visible here.

A unique bronze sculpture of Mahishamardini (Fig-1) is found from Narakasur hill, Kahilipara, Guwahati. A circular medallion shows the face of the goddess, in bold relief. Her neck rests on the mahisha (buffalo demon). Choudhury holds the view that dagger-shaped horizontal horn, somber eyes and small size of his head stress his subjugation. In this manner the artist has succeeded in portraying the features of the goddess without resorting to the conventional features of weapons, vehicle etc. The circular shape of the medallion is utilized as a halo for the goddess. This is a unique piece of art not found anywhere in Bengal.

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17 Rao, op.cit., p. 357
18 Choudhury, R.D. The Sculptures of Assam, Delhi, 1987, p. 47.
19 Ibid.
A ten-handed Mahishamardini image is noticed at Hajo. The small image is carved on a block of basalt. The deity is shown in *sthana*ka attitude. The *ayudhas* held in the hands of the goddess are *trisula*, *vana*, *ankusha*, *gada*, *mudgara*, *sankha*, *chakra*, *mushala*, *dhanu* and *nagapasha*. Her ornaments are *karanda* *mukuta*, *hara*, *valayas*, *kundalas*, *nupuras* etc. The goddess holds a *trisula* in her right hand. The trisula is thrust into the chest of Mahishasura. Stylistically the image is approximated to eleventh/twelfth century A.D by local scholars 20. Similar images of Mahishamardini are found at Ulubari and Siddheswari temple, Sualkuchi.

A stone image of Mahishamardini is found in the *natamandapa* of Kamakhya temple. The goddess has four hands. Another four-handed small image of the goddess is seen on the wayside to Kamakhya. Two mutilated stone images of the goddess are preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati. In all the four images, the right foot of the deity is placed on the lion, while the left foot is on *mahisha*. So far as the style is concerned, all the images represent the same features. The lion and Mahishasura are

20 Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, pp 82-83
depicted facing each other in each case. These above mentioned images could be compared with an image of the deity found in Dacca, now preserved in Dacca museum\textsuperscript{21}. Two female figures on both sides of the deity are seen fighting with the asuras. However, the images of Assam do not depict attendant figures.

Other ten-handed Mahishamardini images are also found in the ruins of Singari, Charduwar and Bamuni Pahar area in Sonitpur district in Assam. All the images display the same characteristics. An eight-handed bronze image collected from Kukurmuta, Hedayetpur, Guwahati is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image is very small and it is difficult to identify the image. Here the \textit{vahana} of the goddess is not shown. Choudhury holds the view that this is the only icon of Mahishamardini so far found in Assam belonging to the pre-Ahom period, where the \textit{vahana} of the goddess is absent\textsuperscript{22}.

Six miniature images of ten-handed Mahishamardini Durga from Ambari ruins are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. All these images are made of grey sandstone. All the images carry identical attributes in the hands. In all cases the goddess is shown with her right leg upon the lion and the left leg upon the buffalo. A big image of Mahishamardini is found in Bholi Parvat in Nagaon district. The image is cut on a piece of granite boulder. The goddess' right leg is on the back of the beheaded buffalo and the left leg on the lion. The position of the buffalo shown here is different from the former images and is placed to her right while the lion is to her left at the bottom. This arrangement is nowhere seen in any other composition of Mahishamardini Durga\textsuperscript{23}. It appears from the above discussion that the

\textsuperscript{21} Bhattasali, N.K., \textit{Iconography of Buddhist and Brahanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum}, Dacca, 1921, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{22} Choudhury, \textit{Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam}, pp. 86.
\textsuperscript{23} Bhattacharjee, A, \textit{Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam}, Inter-Indian Publication, Delhi, 1978, p. 25
war-goddess of Markandeya Purana gained firm footing in ancient Assam only by the ninth century A.D.

It is of interest to note that though goddess Durga is most popular in her Mahishamardini form, at a certain phase of art history, Durga became associated with the god Siva as his wife. Durga assumes domestic characteristics in this role. She also assumes the role of mother at a later phase. She is represented with her children: Kartikeya, Ganesha, Saraswati and lakṣmi in autumn Durga Puja festival. In the Devimahatmya of Markandeya Purana, various aspects of Durga are described along with her icon types. Sometimes she is also depicted in the santa (pacific) form in the sculptural art of Assam.

A big image of Durga, carved on a block of granite, is noticed at Deopani near Golaghat. Here the deity is in samapadasthanaka attitude. The goddess is four-handed. The lower right hand is in padmahastavaradamudra and the upper right hand is holding a trisula. The upper left hand holds a cakra and the lower left hand holds a sankha. The goddess adorns a jatamukuta and the third eye. The image follows the dhyanas of Saradatilaka Tantra. The peculiarity of the image is that it is adorned with a vanamala. This is a characteristic of the Vaisnavite deities. Another twelve-handed image of the goddess is carved on granite rock in Surya Pahar in Goalpara. The ayudhas in the hands are not distinct. The goddess is also wearing a vanamala. The image belongs to thirteenth century A.D. Thus it appears that there has been an attempt to represent a synthesis between Sakti and Visnu in sculptural art.

Another image of Durga in her placid form is seen at Dimapur (now in Nagaland). This four-handed image is in Samapadasthanaka attitude. The sculptors adopted the same technique and same style in executing the

24 Ibid, p. 27
25 Ibid, p. 27
earlier-mentioned images of Deopani and that of Dimapur. Looking at the physiognomy of both in the icons, it can be said that they are different in style from the common sculptures recovered from the Brahmaputra valley. The sculptures might have been affiliated to a culture influenced by the non-Aryans. The sculptures of this area, with a remote influence of the classical tradition, and some local traits of their own, are treated as a separate school and Manoranjan Dutta termed this school as Deopani School. In this area of Assam there still exist the ruins of the peculiar culture associated with the Kacharis. To quote Stella Kramrisch, ‘Ethnical heritage, cultural levels and regional conditions are the determining factors. The traditions expand and contract’. Stylistically these two sculptures can be assigned to eighth century A.D.

Fig - 2

26 Choudhury, R.D., Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, p.88.
27 Dutta, op cit., p. 54. Chief Characteristics of Deopani School are round face, thick lips and stout body. Its influence expanded up to Tinsukiya in upper Assam. But the influence of the Deopani School was short lived. It may be due to the lack of royal patronage and influence of the East Indian School of Medieval Art.
28 Kramrisch, S., The Art of India, Motilal Banarsidass Publications, Delhi, p. 34.
29 Choudhury, R.D., Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, Delhi, 1985, p.88.
An interesting image of ten-handed Durga in grey sand stone found at Mangaldoi in Darrang District (Fig-2) is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The local tribe used to worship this deity as Durga and Burhi Gosani (i.e. old goddess). This image belongs neither to EISMA nor to any other recognized school of art of India\textsuperscript{30}. The treatment is typically local. The workmanship is simple but crude and flatly carved on a stela. The hands are stiff extensions from the body like some parallel lines. No emblem is there in the hands. For eyes, ears and mouth there are sockets. The deity is represented with a hole on her forehead, identified as a third eye. The goddess is flanked by one figure in the right hand and two figures in the left hand. In the pedestal there is a lion. The image is approximated to the thirteenth/fourteenth century A.D by scholars like Bhattacharjee and others\textsuperscript{31}.

Besides the former aspects, Durga is sometimes found riding on her \textit{vahana}, the lion. Such a ninth-century image carved on a block of granite is preserved in the Assam State Museum. This four-handed deity holds a \textit{khadga} in the right hand, \textit{khetaka} in the left hand, and \textit{sula} in the left back hand. In Barkhetri on the west bank of the Moamarijan, a four-handed image has been found. This image is locally called Bagheswari. The goddess is depicted as seated on a tiger. This may represent Durga\textsuperscript{32}. Another rock cut four-handed image of Simhavahini Durga is found at Vasundhari Pahar in Nagaon District. The goddess is locally called as Vasundhari.

\textbf{Kali} is regarded as one of the Sakta goddesses. Most of the Sakta literature is dominated by the theme of the benign versus destructive goddesses. Independent goddess Kali is portrayed as dangerous and destructive goddesses. Though Kali is often an independent goddess, in later period

\textsuperscript{30}Dutta, op.cit., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{31}Bhattacharjee, op.cit, p.27.
\textsuperscript{32}Choudhury, N.D., op.cit., p.158
she is portrayed as a spouse. Here the conventional relations are completely reversed. In the ultimate icon, Kali dances with abandon, her foot trampling on a prostrate, corpse-like Siva\textsuperscript{33}. The iconographic text of the deity is given in the Candi portion of the \textit{Markandeya Purana}. According to it Mahakali should hold, \textit{manda}, \textit{khadga}, \textit{kapala} and \textit{khetaka}. The sculptor of ancient Assam followed this text. An image of Kali is noticed in Deopani which stands in \textit{samapadasthanaka} attitude on \textit{padmapitha}. The deity wears \textit{mukuta} and \textit{mundamala}. She is flanked by two female attendants. This image has been assigned to the ninth century A.D. A four-handed image of Kali is seen in Panchanan temple, North Lakhimpur, where the deity is shown seated on a prostrate human figure. Two forms of Kali have been recovered from the excavation at Bhaitbari in Garo hills, Meghalaya. The first one is depicted in \textit{sthana}\text{\textsuperscript{k}}a attitude, wearing a long \textit{mundamala} and long disheveled hair and a protruding tongue. She holds \textit{khadga} in her right hand and \textit{kapala} in her left hand. This is the common form of Kali. The second form is shown seated on a prostrate human male figure holding his \textit{urdha linga} by the two toes of the right foot. The pot-bellied goddess holds human head in her hand. This form of Kali is rare in Assam.

A peculiar image of four-armed \textbf{Tripura Bhairavi} (Fig-3) is found from Jogijan, Nagaon district and now preserved in Assam State Museum. The goddess wears \textit{jatamukuta} and \textit{mundamala}. It is very interesting that on the stela there are some small images of Saptamatrika such as: Vasnavi, Kaumari, Maheswari, Brahmani and Camunda. In between the figures of Saptamatrika miniature Bhairavas are seen seated on \textit{pretasana}\textsuperscript{34}. The image is assigned to tenth century A.D\textsuperscript{35}. This type of image of Sakta  

\textsuperscript{33} Consorthood of the same goddess is sometimes differently expressed in text and icon. In the myth the confrontation between Kali and Siva is resolved by the ultimate taming of the former but the icon invariably captures the moment of confrontation, not the denouement. In the popular Bengali legend about how Kali became embarrassed when she realized she had trampled on her husband, it is trying to make a consort out of Kali. (Ganesh, K., op.cit.,p.60)


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
Tantric goddess is very rare in Assam or Bengal. From the iconographical point of view this unique image is of great importance.

The evolution of the concept of Matrikas is interesting in the history of the worship of Mother Goddess in India. Though the Matrikas are nominally the female version of the respective gods, they usually occur as an independent set. We may trace its origin to the period of Harappan culture. We find seven figures in a dancing pose on an Indus seal. In the Puranas its origin is given in detail. In the Rigveda and in the Mahabharata also we get reference to Sapta Matrika36.

The usually accepted lists of the Matrikas, supported by iconographic data, consist of Brahmani, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Aindri and

36 Srivastava, M.C.P., Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1979, p.136.
Camunda\textsuperscript{37}. Generally they are known as Sapta Matrikas. The idea of seven mothers can be found in the \textit{Bhagavata Purana}\textsuperscript{38} as well as in the \textit{Matsya Purana}\textsuperscript{39}. Sometimes this order is slightly changed with an increase in number. According to the \textit{Varaha Purana}, Matrikas are eight in number\textsuperscript{40}. Here the name of Yogeswari instead of Maheswari and Yami are included. According to \textit{Brihatsamhita}, the Matrikas are armed with the same weapons, wear the same ornaments and ride the same vahanas as their corresponding male gods. Puranas like \textit{Markandeya Purana}, \textit{Agni Purana}, \textit{Bhagavata Purana} etc. state that the Sapta Matrikas appeared to defeat the thousands of Andhakasura that were born from the blood of demon Andhakasura. It is stated that the Matrikas were sent by their male consorts to assist Siva in his fight with Andhakasura. However, the characteristics of Sapta Matrikas differ from region to region and from scriptures to scriptures.

The iconographic features of the Matrikas have been described in Hindu scriptures like \textit{Mahabharata}, \textit{Varaha Purana}, \textit{Agni Purana}, \textit{Matsya Purana} \textit{Markandeya Purana} etc. The Sapta Matrikas are often carved in relief on a rectangular stone slab with the Birabhadra and Ganesa on either side\textsuperscript{41}. In the depiction of the Matrika images in early Assam we find some departure from the prescribed iconographic rule. In Assam the images of Camunda, Yami, Varahi and Vaisnavi are identified as icons of Matrikas.

\textbf{Camunda} is a common image usually with four hands and sometimes with six or eight hands too. The following are the general characteristic features of the Camunda image: She is depicted as a skeleton in appearance with flesh dried up, bones showing through the skin, eyes sunken and abdomen contracted; she wears a necklace of skulls and bones; she is often dressed in a tiger skin and have a corpse and an owl as her vehicle; her complexion

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Bhagavata Purana}, 12/28. Here Krisna is said to have seven mothers.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Matsya Purana}, 44/72.
\textsuperscript{40} Rao, op.cit., pp.381-82.
\textsuperscript{41} Banerjea, J.N., p. 505.
is generally of dark or blue colour. Sometimes a vulture is represented on her banner. She may be represented as standing, dancing, sitting etc.\(^{42}\)

In Assam a six-handed image of Camunda is to be seen at Na-bhanga, five miles away from Hojai railway station in the Nagaon district. The image is carved on black stone. The image has a dreadful appearance. The body is emaciated, the bones of the chest are exposed, eyes are sunk into their sockets, abdomen is shriveled and the mouth is open. Human heads are laced around the hair-lock, the waist and also the neck. The image is half-seated upon a dead body. In the pedestal on the right side is a vulture and in the left, a jackal. Scholars like Bhattacharjee approximates the image to tenth/eleventh century A.D.\(^{43}\). Nalini Kanta Bhattachasali makes mention of a similar image, in his book *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*. Here the image is mentioned as the Camunda of Rudracarciika type.\(^{44}\) In the vicinity of the Kamakhya temple there is a small but very finely cut image of Camunda with four hands. The image is cut on grey basalt stone. The goddess is seated on a double-petalled lotus pedestal with legs crossed. The headdress is *jatamukuta* bedecked with three human skulls and two serpents. The goddess is wearing *naramundamala*. In the upper right hand she holds a *naramunda* and the lower left hand holds a *khatbhanga*. Behind the head of the deity is a circular *sirascakra*. The image is said to belong to the ninth/tenth century.\(^{45}\)

An image of Camunda is seen inside the *natamandapa* of Kamakhya temple. Here the deity is shown in *sthanaka* attitude on a prostrate human body in dancing posture. This six-handed deity holds the *ayudha* in her hands are- *kartrika*, *damaru*, *kapala*, *munda*, *khatvanga* and *sula*. She

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\(^{42}\) Bhattachasali, op.cit., p. 208.  
\(^{43}\) Bhattacharjee, op. cit. p.30  
\(^{44}\) Bhattachasali,op.cit. p.209.  
\(^{45}\) Bhattacharjee, op.cit p 29.
wears a long *mundamala*\(^{46}\). An eighth century image of Camunda, collected from Barpather, is preserved in the Assam State Museum. The deity is carved on a block of sandstone. The goddess is seated in *uktatikasana* posture. Her emaciated body has exposed ribs, sunken eyes, shrunken belly. The deity has a very unpleasant appearance. The *ayudhas* in her hands are not distinct except *kapala*. The image has been assigned to seventh/eighth century A.D.

**Vaisnavi** is one of the Saptamatrikas. Vaisnavi, the power or Sakti of Visnu is described as seated on Garuda (vehicle of Visnu) with four or six hands. She holds *sankha* (conch), *chakra* (discus), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). Sometimes her hands are depicted in *varada mudra* (blessing hand gesture) and *abhaya mudra* (no fear hand gesture). Like Visnu she is adorned with ornaments like necklace, anklets, bangles etc.

A terracotta plaque depicting goddess Vaisnavi, was recovered from the excavation at Bhaitbari now in Meghalaya. The four-handed deity is seated on *padmasana* posture on *padmapitha*. Two female attendants of the goddess are noticed. The deity is shown in *dhyana mudra*. The goddess wears *hara*, *kankana* and *kativastra*. She is voluptuous with a slim waist and prominent navel. Below the *padmapitha*, Garuda is shown seated in kneeling posture and both the hands are in *anjalihasta* posture.

An image of Vaisnavi is noticed at Purani Sripur Devalay near Barama in Nalbari district. This four handed goddess is seated in *lalitasana* posture. The *ayudhas* of the goddess are- *sankha, cakra, gada* and *padma*. The top of the *silapatta* is pointed and occupied by *kirtimukha*. This has been assigned to tenth / eleventh century A.D.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) Choudhury, N.P., op.cit., p. 162.
\(^{47}\) Ibid, p. 164.
Varahi is described as the power of Varaha, the boar-headed form of Visnu. Varahi had a boar head on a human body. She holds a danda or plough, a sword, sometimes she carries a bell, chakra and a bow. She wears a crown called karandamukuta with other ornaments. An independent ninth century image (svayampradhana murti) of Varahi is preserved in Assam State Museum. The goddess is two-handed. The deity holds a gada in her left hand. The ayudha in the right hand is not distinct. The face of the deity is of Varaha. The vahana of the deity is not shown.

Yami, the sakti form of Yama, is mentioned in Varaha Purana. According to Brihat Samhita, the Matrikas are depicted with the same weapons, ornaments and vahanas as their corresponding males. Utpala, the commentator of this verse mentions that Yami is one of the Matrikas. The sources help to identify an image in bronze found in Narasasura ruins in Kabilipara. The goddess wears a mukuta, kundala and kankanas. The vahana of the goddess is buffalo. The lower right hand of the goddess holds a rope, the upper right hand a mirror, the upper left hand a lotus and the lower left hand is carrying a piece of rope. According to Brihatsamhita the characteristic vahana of Yama is buffalo and characteristic weapon is danda. On the basis of vahana the image may be identified as that of Yami. An image of Yami is rare in Assam and Bengal. So this icon is of great iconographic significance. The image is said to belong to the ninth century A.D.

In ancient Assam the Matrika images of Camunda, Varahi, Vaisnavi and Yami are carved on the stone slabs separately and all of them are svayampradhana murti (independent images). The images of Sapta Matrikas are reported from various regions of the country. The Parvameswara temple of Bhubaneswar contains a group of Saptamatrika. In the Mukteswar temple also the preservation of seven

mothers can be seen. Patna Museum contains a complete set of Sapta Matrika sculptures. But in Assam, so far, no independent panel of the Sapta Matrikas has been noticed. On the other hand svayampradhana Camunda Murtis are very common in Assam. It bears evidence to the fact that Saktas of Assam preferred to worship the independent Matrikas.

River goddess and icons of Gaja-Laksmi are always single. According to Kamala Ganesh, Gaja-Laksmi symbolises abundance, fertility and auspiciousness by her very presence and femininity. Figures of river goddess Ganga and Yamuna represented on the door-jambs at Da-Parvatia, are found to be common in door-jambs of early Gupta and mediaeval temples. According to Agni Purana, Ganga is said to hold a water-pot and lotus in her two hands, while Yamuna a water-pot only. In spite of the absence of these iconographic traits, their identification can hardly be doubted as they represented in the door frames of a Gupta temple. From the archaeological site of Ambari, Guwahati, icons of Ganga and Yamuna are discovered. Here Ganga, made of sand stone, is depicted in tribhanga posture and standing on the back of a makara. The two-handed goddess holds a pot and a snake. A three-haired snake is shadowing her head. One duck is depicted on the left. Goddess Yamuna, made of sandstone, is also in tribhanga posture. The two-handed goddess is standing on her vahana, kurma. A single-haired snake is shadowing her head like an umbrella. Raj Mohan Nath has noticed an image of Ganga at Nabhanga.

One important aspect of Goddess Laksmi was Gaja-Laksmi, depicted as an independent goddess. In the art of ancient Assam Goddess Laksmi was represented either independently or as a consort of Visnu. According to scholars the development of Srilaksmi is a striking illustration of the shift

49 Ganesh, K., op. cit., p. 60.
51 Sonowal, M., op.cit., p. 47.
52 Ibid
53 Barpujari, op. cit., p. 385.
108
from independent auspicious goddess to spouse. Earlier images do not show her with a male partner. It was after fifth century A.D. that she settles down as the gentle and compassionate consort of Visnu, involved in a so-called 'moral order, in righteous behaviour, in correct social observance' of a patriarchal set-up\textsuperscript{54}.

The composition of Gaja-Laksmi shows the goddess with two elephants pouring water over her head. Some scholars like to associate this motif with the fertility aspect of the goddess, the elephant being depicted as the harbinger of clouds and rain\textsuperscript{55}. In \textit{Sri-Sukta} the goddess is said to take delight in the sound of elephants. A few images of Gaja-Laksmi have been found in ancient Assam. The description of the motif is given in \textit{Visnudharmottara purana}, and \textit{Matsya Purana} where the goddess is seated on lotus and with lotus in her hands is said to be bathed by water from pitchers held by elephants\textsuperscript{56}. One terracotta sculpture of Gaja-Laksmi found from Da-Parvatia is now preserved in the Assam State Museum which closely follows the classical idioms. One eight-century sculpture of Gaja-Laksmi in Assam State Museum is depicted in \textit{lalitasana} posture. The composition is too well known to admit of any doubt about the identification of the image as that of Gaja-Laksmi. Similar type of Gaja-Laksmi have also been noticed at Devasthan (Nagaon) and Maudanga, Mahamaya than and Tezpur. Besides this independent aspect of Laksmi, the goddess was worshipped with her consort Visnu. A large number of Visnu images of pre-Ahom Assam were accompanied by his consort Laksmi and Saraswati.

Goddess Saraswati is represented either independently or in accompaniment with Visnu in the art of Assam. The description of the goddess appears in many texts like Vedic, Epic, Brahmanical (including Puranic and Tantric literature), Buddhist and Jains. In the context of Assam we have to restrict our study to the Hindu goddess Saraswati of whom a few

\textsuperscript{54} Kinsley D, \textit{Hindu Goddesses}, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987, pp. 19-26
\textsuperscript{55} Barpujari, op. cit., p. 379
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid
images have been found. An image of two-handed Saraswati, playing on a vina is preserved in the Assam State Museum which has been roughly approximated to tenth / eleventh century. Seated, four-handed images of Saraswati are reported from Tezpur and Kamakhya. However, representation of Saraswati as consort of Visnu is the most common.

Snake goddess Manasa was a popular folk-deity in both ancient Assam and Bengal. However, her identification is not very clear. In Mahabharata (chapters 13-16) it occurs that she married hermit Jaratkaru and became the mother of Astika. Sometimes she is said to be the daughter of Siva. She can be identified with Janguli in Buddhism. In the commentary of Kasiram Vachaspati on Tithyaddi Tattvam by Raghunandana, section 79, a dhyana is given regarding the description of Goddess Manasa. According to the dhyana she is represented with full and prominent bosom and snakes in both hands, a child on her lap and huge snakes on all sides attending her. Certain images of this deity have been found in Bengal and Assam, which tally with the description given above.

An image of Manasa found in Guwahati is now preserved in Assam State Museum. This two-handed deity holds a fruit in varada- mudra in her right hand and a child on her lap with the left hand. There is a chatra like a serpent's hood over her head. Another similar type of image is found from Narakasur hill. It is carved on a piece of black basalt. The deity is canopied by a seven-hooded snake. To the right of the deity a rishi probably Jaratkaru is seen sitting while to the left a figure holding unidentified ayudha, is sitting in lalitasana. The image is comparable with one from Bengal as illustrated by Nalini Kanta Bhattasali. This image also has seven-hooded snake and the figure of Jaratkaru is also present. A kumbha is seen below the asanas of both the images. Similar stone images of the goddess are found from Barangabari and Phulbari Devalaya of Sonitpur.

57 Barpujari, op. cit., p. 381.
58 Bhattasali, op.cit., pp. 212-213
59 Ibid, p. 222
60 Bhattasali, op. cit. p. 226.
district which may be assigned to tenth-eleventh century A.D. In these sculptures the traditional figures of Kirtimukha flanked by two figures of Vidyadharas are depicted on the pointed *silapatta*. Influence of Pala-Sena art is clearly visible.

Another very interesting image of Manasa (Fig-4) is found in a tea garden near Kaliabar (Nagaon district). The *vahana* of the deity is an elephant which is an exception. Bhattasali has found out an appropriate *dhyana* from *Brahmavaivarta Purana* where the *vahana* of the goddess is denoted by the term 'nagendra'\(^{61}\). Though this term means a huge snake, but *naga* also means a *gaja*(elephant). Thus the sculptor did not make any mistake in carving the figure of an elephant as the *vahana* of snake goddess Manasa. **This is a rare icon and not found in Bengal.**

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\(^{61}\) Ibid, p. 223
One very familiar iconographic theme is the composit image of Uma-Maheswara where the god Siva is shown in the company of his consort Uma or Parvati. The motif is commonly known as Uma-Maheswara. This motif is fairly common in Assam and follows generally the description of the Matsya Purana and Visnudharmottara Purana. The motif shows the god Siva seated with the goddess on his lap and embracing her by one hand sometime touching her chin with the other. The god is shown either with two hands or with four. Uma in every case has two hands. An image of Uma-Maheswara from Dabaka, now in the Assam State Museum shows the god and the goddess together on a lotus seat. One peculiar image of Uma-Maheswara is found from Uzanbazar, Guwahati, and now preserved in Assam State Museum. It is roughly approximated to ninth–tenth century A.D. The whole scene is divided into nine parts. The central scene is represented by two miniature figures of Uma-Maheswara. The lowest row shows the figures of Visnu and Surya. It is a peculiar image and iconographically is very important as the figures of Visnu and Surya are relegated into background. Some specimen of Uma-Maheswara is from Tezpur, Barganga and Deopani. Regarding this form scholars observe that it is an attempt at synthesis of the two major cults i.e. Saivism and Saktism.

A composite iconographic motif combining Siva and his consort in one body is known as Ardhanarishwara. This combined form is depicted in early Assam and is evident from the Khanamukh and Subhankarapataka grant of Dharmapala in each of which the first verse invokes the god under the name of ardhayuvatiswara. One such image is found from Mathorbari in Nagaon district. It is said that ardhanarishwara icon captures a concept of gender as a holistic unity. There is no hard dividing line between male and female. However, from a feminist point of view, the concept is an attempt to

64 Sarma, Dimbeswar (ed.), Kamarupasasanavali, Publication Board Assam, second edition, Guwahati, 2003, pp. 214-221
make the goddess a dependent deity. The female is often not equal in the 'ardhanarishwara'. 'Ardhanarishwara' is often described as a form of Siva, and rarely as that of the goddess, as in her Sakta sects65.

One very interesting composite Harihara image belonged to eighth century A.D. is now preserved in Assam State Museum. Here Harihara is depicted along with Durga and Laksmi, consorts of Siva and Visnu respectively. The peculiarity of the image is that the sculptor maintained the height of the figures of Laksmi and Durga equal to the main figure of Hari and Hara. It is apparent that equal status was given to Saiva, Vaisnava and Sakta cult.

It is already stated that Sakti goddesses are generally worshipped in various iconic representations or in the form of yoni symbolizing the creative principle. In Assam yoni worship is very popular from ancient period. A large number of yoni-pithas, big and small, have been unearthed from various archaeological sites like Ambari, Suryapahar etc. At Ambari site while big-sized yoni-pithas are found to be made of clay stone, the small ones are of granite66. It is interesting that in the temple of Kamakhya the deity is represented not by any icon but by this phallic representation. Thus Kamakhya temple is unique from other temples of the Devi in different parts of India67. But phallic representation of Sakti in her yoni aspect is rare in Bengal68.

Apart from Brahmanical goddesses Buddhist goddesses were also popular in ancient Assam. Though most of the rulers of ancient Assam were followers of Saivism yet Buddhist goddess Tara occupied an important position in the religious history of Assam. Two miniature metal images of the goddess, now preserved in Assam State Museum, have been found

65 http://en.wikipedia.org retrieved on 19/03/2012.
66 Sonowal, op. cit, p. 46.
67 Kakati, B, The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1989, p. 34.
68 Choudhuri, P.C., op.cit., p. 314.
from Narakasura hill. In one she is represented in standing *tribhanga* attitude which may be assigned roughly to ninth-tenth century A.D\(^69\). From her position as seen in the image it appears that she has been represented as a companion goddess of Avalokiteswara and not in her independent aspect. The most common attributes of the goddess are *varada* and lotus or water lily held by stalk in right and left respectively. The goddess with these two aspect may easily be identified as Tara. But the second image is shown in her independent aspect as Arya Tara form date of which can be assigned to eleventh century\(^70\).

It is a very strange phenomenon in the history of Jainism that due to some unknown reason Jainism could not flourished in ancient Assam. Though Pragjyotishpur played a commendable role as an important trade center on the bank of the Brahmaputra from time immemorial, the ancient site of Ambari when excavated has yielded a large number of antiquities and sculptures but not a single object connected with Jainism. However in Surya pahar in Goalpara district, two images of Risavnath and Adinath have been found\(^71\). But no Jain goddess is found so far in Assam. However, prevalence of varieties of Buddhist and Jain images of Goddess prove that Bengal was a fertile soil for the development of Buddhism and Jainism.

**Iconography in Bengal assumed a distinct phase with the coming of Pala rule in the eighth century.** It is already stated that prior to the eighth century, Indian art displayed an all-Indian character. However, from eighth century onwards the regional spirit gradually got better of the Indian tradition\(^72\). In the political arena the regional kingdom began to assert their identities in their respective boundaries. Kunja Govinda Goswami states that with the decline of the Guptas in the sixth century A.D. local rulers like

\[69\] Barpujari, op., cit., p. 419.  
\[70\] Ibid  
Dharmaditya, Samacharadeva and Gopachandra asserted their power in south- Bengal. In the beginning of the seventh century A.D. west and possibly north-Bengal was ruled by Sasanka who was a Saivite. Goswami holds the view that it was then that Bengal was asserting its individuality in the field of art. The origin of the Paharpur school of sculptures may be traced to the beginning of the seventh century A.D. Thereafter the Pala rule began in Bengal in eighth century A.D. In Bengal under the Pala rulers a new local idiom of expression evolved developing its own characteristics. gods or goddesses, whether Buddhist, Brahmanical or Jain, have all well-established iconographic types which are never transformed, except in minor details, by any peculiar personal artistic experience.

The stone sculpture in Bengal was preceded by terracotta art. Terracotta figures of goddesses found in Bengal are traced to remote antiquity. To quote S. K. Saraswati: 'most of the human figurines represent female with heavy and bulging heaps and prominent round breasts, sometime with the naval and abdomen clearly marked. They seemed to be associated with the primitive conception of a mother or fertility goddess'. The terracotta images found from Tamluk, Bangarh, Chandraketugarh, Mahasthan bearing the characteristics of the fertility goddess as described above. One such ageless terracotta image of Mother Goddess is found from Pandu Rajar Dhibi and preserved in State Archaeological Gallery.

So far as the iconography of Brahmanical goddess is concerned, among the different varieties of Durga images, the Mahishamardini type is the most popular in India, especially in Bengal, where her worship is almost a national festival among the Hindus. The Mahishasuramardini aspect of the goddess is one of her earliest and most important forms described in

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73 Goswami, K.G., *Excavation at Bangarh*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1948, p. 2
74 Ibid.
71 Bhattasali, op.cit., p. 194
the *Devimahatmya*. In the preceding chapter it has already mentioned that the *Markandeya Purana* describes how the great goddess came out of the accumulated fury not only of Brahma, Visnu and Siva but also of all other gods, when the gods were defeated by the buffalo demon (Mahishasura) in the initial stage of the rise of the demon. Devid Kinsley in his work *Hindu Goddesses* holds the view that:

She exists independent from male protection or guidance, represents a vision of the feminine that challenges the stereo-typed view of women found in traditional Hindu law books. Such a characterization perhaps suggests the extraordinary power that is repressed in women who are forced into submissive and socially demeaning roles. In her role reversal Durga exist outside normal structures and provides a version of reality that potentially, at least, may be refreshing and socially invigorating.

The sixth century was the culmination of the classical Gupta tradition in India but from seventh century A.D. new energy seems to seek expression. According to Majumdar this must have been due to contacts with different local traditions that gradually began asserting themselves. In Bengal a specimen of this stage is worth mentioning. An eight-handed guilt image of Sarvani is unearthed from Deulbari, Tippera, depicting her demon killing aspect, bearing an inscription of queen Prabhavati, wife of Buddhist king Devakhadga. The stiff and erect Sarvani can be said as a forerunner of the Pala image. On the basis of this image we may assume that the Puranic concept of war-goddess did not take a long time to introduce in eastern India. According to Pargiter traditional concept of demon slayer goddess was in vogue for a long time before the composition of *Devimahatmya*. In Bengal it seems that the introduction of the goddess occurred sometime before the seventh century A.D.

A unique image, recovered from a village of North Bengal, in the district of Dinajpur, depicts in a very interesting manner the Nava-Durga motif. The
eighteen-armed Mahishamardini is the central figure. Other sixteen-armed miniature replicas of the same type are grouped around it\footnote{Ibid.}. Same theme was re-oriented by the Sakti worshippers of Bengal which is illustrated by another unique image found from the same district. The goddess has thirty-two arms, riding on a lion and in demon slaying mood (not the buffalo demon in particular). On the top section of its *prabhavali* are shown the miniature figures of Ganapati, Siva, Visnu and Brahma while the Sakta cult was being indicated by the main image.

One ninth century Mahishamardini image (eight-armed), found from a village of Darjeeling, showing her fighting aspect in a graceful fashion\footnote{Ibid, p 30-31.}. The image is broken at the upper right portion of the *prabhavali* and face of the goddess is mutilated. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharyya in his work *Iconography of Sculptures* states that the image is in low profile and sparingly decorated, without traces of *Kirttimukha* or the flying *gandharvas*\footnote{Bhattacharyya, P.K. op. cit, p. 31.}. The simplicity of the whole composition mark it as an extremely graceful specimen of the early Pala art.

One interesting stone sculpture representing the ten-armed goddess slaying the demon Mahisha (Fig-5) was recovered from Dulmi in Manbhum district. The goddess is in *pratyalidha* pose and belonged to tenth century A.D. She carries in her ten hands trisula (piercing the neck of the demon), *khetaka*, *tanka*, *sara*, *khadga*, *dhanu*, *parasu*, *ankusa*, *nagapasa* and *suchimudra*\footnote{Sarkar, S., *Mother Goddess in Pre-Medieval Bengal*, Firma K.L M., Calcutta,2001, p. 163.}. One sculpture in granite of a ten-armed Durga in Mahishamardini form is found from Sundarban in West Bengal. A number of Mahishamardini images are found from different places of Bankura and now preserved in the Vangiya Sahitya Parisat Museum\footnote{Ibid}. A number of Mahishamardini image of the Pala-Sena period are found from the villages
of Dacca, Faridpur, Tipperah and Backargang as family or village deities. One fine specimen of twelfth century A.D. is found from the same place in Darjeeling which yielded a ninth century image of Mahishamardini. The ten-armed goddess is in 'pratyalidha' pose with the left and right legs placed on the decapitated buffalo and the lion respectively. The booted right leg of the demon is thrown at the mouth of the pouncing dragon shaped (Tibetan) lion, while the other leg is still within trunk of the buffalo. The Kirttimukha and usual flying gandharvas on either side is shown at the stele. A splendid ten-armed image of Mahishamardini in black stone found from a village of Dacca, similar in composition, bears on the pedestal inscription 'Sri-Masika-Candi' in characters of the twelfth century A.D. It is not clear what may be the meaning of Masika. Bhattasali states that since the reign of Sena kings, three Mahishamardini images are worshipped in the three villages of Dacca in the name of Candi.

Fig-5

86 Bhattasali, op.cit. pp 195-98.
87 Bhattacharyya, P.K., op. cit, pp31-32.
88 Bhattasali, op. cit. p-198.
89 Ibid, pp 203-205.
The wide distribution of the Mahishamardini images from Darjeeling in the north to Sundarban in the south and Manbhum in the southwest to Samatata in the east makes it obvious that the war goddess earned widest popularity since an early period. Probably this is the reason why in Mediaeval Bengal she was recognized as the national deity.

The abundance of Mahishamardini images in Bengal, stands in contrast to Assam and perhaps an explanation to this could be the fact that the region underwent a lot of crisis and battles from ninth to the twelfth century compared to Assam. After the death of Harsavardhan of Kanyakubja, the whole of North India from Bengal to Kanauj became a field of tripartite struggle for power among Palas of Bengal, Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Rastrakutas. The Hindu doctrine of the demon-slaying saviour and the actual course of history reinforced each other. Probably depiction of the war-goddess in the art of Assam was because of the influence of the Bengal art.

It has already been mentioned that at a particular phase of art history, Durga became associated with the god Siva as his wife. Thus Durga assumes domestic characteristics in this role. A remarkable number of images of the goddesses in her placid form such as Gauri, Parvati, Ambika etc. are found in the museums of West Bengal, which prove that they were well known in ancient Bengal. Generally the images of this type are represented as two or four armed with either lion or iguana (godhika), being accompanied by Kartikeya and Ganesa or two female attendants. The ninth century specimen of this series was found from Bholahat, Rajsahi. The standing goddess is found accompanied by a bull (mount of Siva), a lion and a linga (representing Siva). Two images of Parvati one from Mangalbari

(Dinajpur) and other from Rajshahi are good specimens. Kartikeya and Ganesa attend the Goddess.

Two images of goddess Ambika, one from Paharpur and other from Malda are reported. First one is a two-handed image, right hand is in varada pose while her left hand rests on the left knee with her child (probably Kartikeya) seated on her lap, representing a mother-image. The simplicity of the whole composition marks it out as one of the fine specimens of Pala art (late tenth century A.D.)\textsuperscript{92}. The second image is four-handed and its artistic execution is not of a very high order. The image may be assigned to the early eleventh century A.D\textsuperscript{93}. Two eleventh century specimens designated as Gauri, now preserved at the State Gallery of Archaeology, West Bengal Government.\textsuperscript{94}. One interesting image is found from Ambika nagar, Bankura and now preserved in the Vangiya Sahitya Parisat Museum, Bisnupur.\textsuperscript{95}. The goddess is found with heavy breasts, attended by two female and standing on lotus pedestal. Below the pedestal, there is a carved image of an animal, not properly identified. The characteristics of the local art are found prominent.

According to Jitendra Nath Banerjea the iconic motif of Parvati associated with iguana has been found in other parts of India and many sculptures from Eastern India (especially Bengal) illustrate this aspect of the goddess.\textsuperscript{96}. One unique image of Parvati in black besalt is reported from Bhitargarh, Jalpaiguri. Figures of lion, antelope and a creeping iguana are shown in the pedestal\textsuperscript{97}. A decorated image of Parvati seated on a lion, is found from Bogra is found. A seated four-armed goddess was discovered from Rajshahi with Kartikeya and Ganesa on either side. She holds in her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[92] Bhattacharyya, P.K., op.cit. p. 27
\item[93] Ibid
\item[94] Sarkar, op.cit., p. 165
\item[95] Ibid
\item[96] Banerjea, J.N., op.cit., p. 501
\item[97] Bhattacharya, P.K., op.cit. pp. 28-29
\end{footnotes}
hands vara, padma, trisula and bhringara\textsuperscript{98}. She is identified as Sarvamangala aspects of Devi. A six-armed goddess known as Bhubaneswari belonged to the Pala–Sena period and is still worshipped at a village (Sekhati) of Jessore\textsuperscript{99}. One mutilated stone image representing goddess Candi was found from the ruins of Mahasthana (Bogra). Bhattasali reports one unique image of Candi found from the ancient ruins of Rampal (Dacca). One peculiar image representing Candi with both lion and iguana was found from a village in Jalpaiguri District and now preserved in a museum. A seated twenty armed goddess with various attributes discovered in a village of Rajshahi. The image is showing a miniature linga on its head which is tentatively identified by Gopinath Rao as Mahalaksmi\textsuperscript{100}. \textbf{This is a rare specimen of Bengal.}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Goddess Durga or Parvati in her mother form exhibits herself accompanied by her sons Kartikeya and Ganesa and this type is styled as \textit{Sadyajata} (Fig-6). Generally the stone slabs representing this aspect are marked with a linga carved above the half-lying goddess. The goddess was popular mainly in the Varendri region. \textit{This type is not found in Assam.}}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{98} Majumdar, R.C., op.cit, p.551.
\item \textsuperscript{99} R.D. Benarjee, \textit{Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculptures}, Manager of Publication, Delhi, 1933, p 123.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Sarkar, op.cit. p 166.
\end{itemize}
Elizabeth Anne Knox holds the view that in their explicit iconography, the goddesses of India emerge more consistently as warriors. A group of goddesses, though called Matrikas, are seldom depicted with children. It is already mentioned that the Matrikas are brought into existence in order to wage war. Though they are regarded as Saktis of gods after whom they are named but iconographically they are represented as independent goddesses. The names and numbers of Matrikas vary under different contexts, but their development in seven forms got general recognition in medieval time.

A large number of images of Sapta-Matrikas are found from different parts of Bengal. A slab broken in two pieces contain images of Sapta-Matrikas in this manner: Camunda, Varahi, Indrani, Kaumari, Vaisnavi, Maheswari and Brahmani. It is found in the collection of Rajshahi Museum. A stone slab having five mothers is preserve in Malda Museum. A bronze slab representing images of Kaumari, Brahmani and Vaisnavi is dated in the fourty eight regnal year of Mahipala. In contrast, no independent panel of the Sapta Matrikas has been noticed so far in Assam. Like Assam in Bengal also Mothers were sometimes represented separately. Images of Camunda are fairly common in Bengal. Her sculptural representation is found from the ninth century AD. onwards. The earliest image of Camunda in Bengal is from Itahar, Dinajpur. A tenth century Camunda image is found from North Bengal. Two eleventh century images of Camunda are reported from Malda and Dinajpur. A four-armed inscribed image of Camunda seated in her vehicle, ass has been found from Dubail, Tandor of Rajshahi District and is now preserved at

101 Knox, Mother or Yaksi?: A Consideration of a pre-Kushana sandstone relief fragment from Mathura in the Royal Ontario Museum in Venkateswarier, S (ed), op.cit,pp. 52-53.
102 Chatterjee, R, Religion in Bengal: Dunng the Pala and Sena times, Punthi Pustak, 1985, Calcutta, p 189.
103 Bhattacharyya, M.S., op cit. p. 34.
104 Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 190.
105 Bhattacharyya, P.K, op. cit. p. 26
Images of Indrani, Varahi, Brahmani are represented separately. One four-armed unique image of Varahi is found from a village in the district of Hooghly, now preserved in Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. She holds a fish which is unique characteristic in Varahi image. Banerjea holds the view that this figure indicates some Tantric trait (fish is one of the five ma's that is panca-makara). Thus from iconographic representation of Matrikas from both panel and independent form it appears that Matrikas played an important role in the religious history of Bengal from early period.

A tendency is to be marked in cases of some icons which illustrate genuine attempt towards a synthesis between principal rival sects. A very interesting sculpture of this type can be seen in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. Images of

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Visnu, Durga, Surya and Ganapati carved on the four sides of the square Sivalinga which symbolizes the syncretistic attitude of five major cults namely: Vaisnava, Sakta, Saura, Ganapatya and Saiva.

In Bengal, there are several images represents Siva and Sakti together representing the inseparability of the Purusha and Prakriti of the sankhya system. Such image variantly styled as Hara-Parvati, uma-Maheswara, Kalyanasundara, etc. A unique composite image (Fig-7) discovered from the ancient ruins of Vikrampur, which depicts a stone linga (phallus), out of which emerges the half-length figure of a four-armed goddess. According to Banerjea the sculpture was created to satisfy the religious need of the worshipper of Siva and Sakti. There has been some difficulty regarding the identification of this goddess. On the basis of Markandeya Purana and Kalika Purana, Bhattacharji states that this sculpture is of goddess Mahamaya. The Puranic description of Mahamaya, however, does not fully tally with this unique sculpture. But one main peculiarity of the goddess as described in the later text that ‘....Mahamaya rent open the linga and came out’. This is a unique mode of representing Siva and Sakti and a rare icon of Bengal. No image of this type is found in Assam.

The growth of anthropomorphic representation of Siva with fervent leaning to erotic sentiment for Parvati is prominent in some of the conjugal images of Siva-Parvati. Such an image corresponds to the description as given in the Kalika Purana. Uma seated enthusiastically on the lap of her consort resembles with Tripura-Sundari of the tantric Text. An excellent bronze image of this type assigned to the period of Devapala (ninth century A.D.) found from Kurkihar, is notable for its artistic form. An image of this category was found from Boram, Purulia and is now preserved in the State Gallery of Archaeology, West Bengal Government. Only one sculptural

108 Banerjea, op. cit. p. 508.
110 Ibid, op. cit p120
representation of Ardhanariswara was found from Dacca and now preserved in the Rajshahi Museum.

Though composite forms like ardhanariswara, Uma-Maheswara are common in both in Assam and Bengal another type of this composite category known as Kalyana Sundara or vaivahika form is unknown to the sculptor of ancient Assam. Kalyana Sundara images are very common in South India. Sena rulers of Bengal are originally from South India. It is possible that this variety was brought from South India under the Sena rule. A number of images of this type were collected from Dacca and Bogra. The specimen depicts a scene of Siva's marriage with Parvati. One artistic specimen, found from Eastern India, is now preserved in Stuart Bridge Collection of the British Museum, London.

Goddess Laksmi was represented as an independent deity in early terracotta sculpture in Bengal. The stone sculpture of Bengal was preceded by terracotta art. One image of terracotta Laksmi has been found at Hadipur, North 24-Parganas. The right hand of the female divinity holds ears of corn (paddy) and the left rest on her thigh. The image contains a Brahmi inscription, which is read as 'Dhangnaji Jiju'. The Sanskritized form of this inscription might be 'Dhanyaji (Devi) jajyatu' which means 'Devi Dhanyajayi Pujya'. The image on the seal assigned to the third century A.D. might be regarded as the earliest specimen of Laksmi in Bengal. A number of terracotta images of Mother Goddess assigned to Maurya-Sunga period has been collected from different sites of Bengal like Bangarh and Chandraketugarh. In all the cases the images stand on lotus and hold fully blossomed lotus in the hands. The obvious association of all the figurines

112 Sarkar, op. cit. p. 169.
with lotus establishes their identities with Sri-Laksmi. The images represented on early terracotta seals in Bengal prove that the goddess of corn and good fortune enjoyed far more popularity than 'sakti' or the war-goddess.

However, in later period, the icons of Laksmi were represented in Laksmi-Narayana (Laksmi as consort of Visnu) motif. Another independent aspect of Laksmi like Gaja-Laksmi was represented in the art of Bengal. Two Gaja-Laksmi images belonging to tenth and eleventh century A.D. are found in Bengal. Laksmi-Narayana was a new type of Visnu image that emerged during the Sena period. Probably goddess Laksmi lost her independent status in later period and in this motif she held a secondary position. It is believed by Nihar Ranjan Ray that the concept of this type of image was brought by the Sena rulers to Bengal from South India, as the Senas worshipped Laksmi-Narayana as their tutelary deity.

Image of Laksmi Narayana, assignable to the Pala-Sena age was found in village Basta (Dacca). Here goddess Laksmi is found sitting on the left thigh of Visnu. In a specimen found at Vikrampur, Dakka, Vishnu is represented with Laksmi and Saraswati on either side. Sarasi Kumar Saraswati mentions of a small copper image of Visnu along with Laksmi and Saraswati recovered from Bishnupur, Bankura. It is interesting that Visnu in his Matsya and Varaha incarnations is found accompanied by two wives, Laksmi and Saraswati, as it is evident from two sculptural representations recovered from two villages of Dacca district. This type of image is absent in Assam.

114 Majumdar, op. cit. p. 639.
116 Bhattasali, op. cit., p. 89.
So far as goddess Saraswati is concerned, she is strongly associated with culture and weakly associated with motherhood\textsuperscript{118}. Saraswati is sometimes said to give birth (as is the story of the birth of Manu), but she is a reluctant mother. One of the earliest associations of Saraswati with culture is her increasing identification with speech and the goddess of speech (Vagdevi) in certain Vedic texts\textsuperscript{119}. She is also identified with thought and intellect. The tendency to refer to goddesses as Mother Goddess, sometimes results in stereo-typing image of the divine feminine. Though goddess Saraswati was originally a goddess of learning in the sculpture of Bengal, she is mainly represented as the consort of Visnu. The image of Saraswati usually worshipped in Bengal corresponding the description ‘pustaka-malika hasta vina hasta Saraswati’ is however rare in stone or metal representation of ancient Bengal.

Among the minor or folk deities of Bengal the most prominent position might be ascribed to the snake goddess Manasa. A number of sculptural representations of this goddess have been found from different parts of Bengal. An early bronze image of Manasa found from Rajshahi shows a child on her left lap and is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The inscribed image recovered from Bangarh is an excellent specimen. Five Manasa images are in the collection of the Malda Museum\textsuperscript{120}.

Goddess Sasthi is generally represented by symbols like earthen pot or piece of stone under a tree. Probably for this reason images of goddess Sasthi are rare in Bengal. Two images of Sasthi, one from Rajshahi and

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid
\textsuperscript{120} Bhattacharya, M.S., op.cit., p. 32.
other from Bihar bearing an inscription furnishing the information regarding its installation during Mahendrapaladeva’s (1144-1158 A.D.) reign. Image of Sasthi is not found in Assam.

The river goddess Ganga used to be worshipped in Bengal. An image of Ganga (twelfth century A.D.) was found from Deopara, Rajshahi. The image of the goddess found at Jessore shows standing on her vehicle makara, accompanied by a naga and nagini on either side. The Paharpur ruins depict the goddess Yamuna standing on a tortoise, with her right hand touching a lotus and her left hand holding a lotus¹²¹.

Another distinctive feature of the iconography of Bengal, is the existence of numerous Buddhist goddesses, which have been found in lesser number in Assam. The Pala rulers of Bengal were ardent followers of Buddhism and they patronized the Tantric form of this religion¹²². In eastern Bengal the Devas and Chandras were also devout Buddhist and with royal patronage Buddhism became a dominant force in the religion of Bengal. Ray calls the Pala period ‘the golden age of Buddhism in Bengal’¹²³. In Bengal Mahayana Buddhism developed as a unique form of mystic Buddhism known as Vajrayana-Tantrayana¹²⁴. A good number of images including not only the Buddha but also numerous Buddhist tantric goddesses have been discovered in Bengal and well preserved in various local museums¹²⁵. Among the female divinities the different forms of Tara like Khadirvani Tara, Bhrukuti Tara, Vajra Tara etc., Marichi, Parnasavari, Hariti, Cunda and Prjnaparamita deserves special mention.

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¹²¹ Majumdar, op.cit., p. 179.
¹²⁵ Majumdar, R.C., ed. op. cit., p. 466-474
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The images of Mahayana divinities, discovered in Bengal usually follow the descriptions of *Sadhanamala* (twelfth century A.D.) and *Nispannayogavali* (eleventh/twelfth century)\(^{126}\). However, in some cases the *dhyanas* available in two texts do not correspond to the iconographic representation of some divinities. It is thought that in the Pala period local beliefs began to be mixed up with the Mahayana Buddhism of Bengal and out of the intermixture many local gods and goddesses arose\(^{127}\). Some examples are Candradvipa Bhagawati Tara (a special form of goddess Tara prevalent in Candradvipa in backargang district), Patikere Vumkara Cunda (Cunda from Pattikera, Tipperah), and Uddiyana Marici (Marici of Uddiyana identified with the village Vajrayogini of Dacca\(^{128}\).

Tara occupies the same position as the goddess Durga does in Hinduism\(^{129}\). Tara, like Durga, is also sometimes described as the consort of Dhyani Buddha Amoghasiddhi. She is also believed to be the consort of Avalokiteswara\(^{130}\). She occupies, more or less, the supreme position in Buddhism of Mahayana and Tantrayana affiliations. Between eighth and twelfth centuries, when Tantric ideas overwhelmed Buddhism, the popularity of goddess Tara increased to a great extent\(^{131}\). The goddess has innumerable forms. Other goddesses of the Buddhist pantheon having separate existence and function like Janguli, Ekajata, Bhrikuti, Parnasabari, Mahacinatara etc. are believed to be manifestations of goddess Tara. Khadirvani type of Tara (Fig-8) is popular in Bengal.

The first image of Tara in Bengal belonging to Pala period was found at Hilsa (Bihar) bearing an inscription of the 35th regnal year of Devapala. Another ninth century image of Tara was found from Mangalbari, Dinajpur and, while a tenth century specimen hailed from Rajshahi. The

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128 Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p-156.
129 Saraswati, *op.cit.* p. XXXIV.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
Dacca Museum specimens include an image of Vajratara (Tara of yellow colour). Vajratara is known to be an emanation of Dhyani Buddha Ratnasambhava. From an old temple site of Bhagalpur, Bihar an image of Vajratara accompanied by nine Brahmanical and Buddhist deities was found. The image is dated in the tenth century A.D. Two inscribed images of Tara, one belonging to the reign of Mahendrapaladeva (ninth-tenth century A.D.) and the other belonging to the reign of Ramapala (A.D. 1077-1130) were found from Bihar. An interesting image of Tara with five miniature Dhyani Buddhas round her head was found from the village Vikrampur and is now preserved at Swamibag, Dacca.

Parnasabari is a prominent female divinity of the Mahayana Buddhism. Purnasabari is considered as a form of Tara. Two images of Purnasabari were found in Dacca by Bhattasali. The dwarfish and pot-bellied goddess has three faces and the six-handed goddess holds Vajra, parasu and sara.
in her right hands and tarjani, dhanu and parnapichchika in the left ones. Five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted on the stele. Another same type of goddess is found from village Vajrayogini, Decca\textsuperscript{134}. Marici (manifested from Tara) is the solar goddess in Mahayana Buddhist pantheon. Some of stone sculptures of this goddess were mainly found in Vanga (Faridpur) and are now preserved in the Dacca and Rajshahi Museum. The Dacca museum specimen hailing from Ujani(Faridpur) represent Marici with three faces and riding on a chariot drawn by seven pigs. The image is said to belong to eleventh-twelfth century A.D\textsuperscript{135}. Buddhist goddess Hariti the protector of child like Sasthi is rarely represented in stone or metal in early medieval Bengal. Only two specimens come to our notice, one from Dacca and the other from Nalanda. The goddess Prajnaparamita occupied a very exalted position in the Buddhist pantheon. She is believed to be the personification of ‘transcendental knowledge’. Her image was rarely found in Bengal. One was found in the Raghurampur excavation at Dacca and noticed by Bhattasali\textsuperscript{136} and another image remains in the Malda Museum. The two-armed deity is found seated on a large lotus in a meditative pose and five miniature dhyanibuddhas are seen carved around her.

Jainism, which once no less popular than other religious sects in Bengal, lost its foothold after the seventh century A.D\textsuperscript{137}. During the visit of Huien Tsang there were a good number of Nigranthes in Pundravardhana. However, after that there is no direct evidence of them in epigraph or literature. Ray suggests that probably during the Pala period a few of the Jaina Bhiksus and Upasakas were converted to the Buddhist faith and the rest were merged with the Kapalikas and Avadhutas in the later period\textsuperscript{138}. However it has been found that the Svetamvara sect worshipped Kuladevis or Tantric goddesses whose numbers vary in the different texts\textsuperscript{139}. B.C.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. pp. 43-45.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid. p.42.
\textsuperscript{137} Maity, op.cit., p. 62
\textsuperscript{138} Ray, op.cit., p. 612
\textsuperscript{139} Bhattachary, B.C., The Jaina Iconography, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1974, p.2 3
Bhattacharya holds the view that 'this predominant Tantric element in iconography seems to be represented by the Svetambara sect, who like the Mahayana Buddhist developed by assimilation and invention, a tantric system of their own'\textsuperscript{140}.

A few images of Jain Tirthankaras were discovered during the Pala period\textsuperscript{141}. In some district of West Bengal (Chotanagpur plateau) Jain images were found. An image of the chief Jain goddess Ambika belonging to early medieval period was found in a temple of a village named Ambikanagar. Ambika is recognized as the Sasanadevi or Sakti of Tirthankar Neminatha. Ruins of another Jain temple were found in a village named Barkola, Purulia which yielded an image of Ambika accompanied by other image of Tirthankaras. A number of Yaksini images symbolized by \textit{Kalpavrikha} on their heads were found. Two similar independent images of a female deity found from Paresnath, show some peculiar characteristics. The ten-armed three-faced image of a goddess is shown as standing on a corpse or a living human. The weapons are not very clear. It might be some Jain Tantric goddess or Mahavidya\textsuperscript{142}.

An analysis of the iconographic types of Brahmanical Buddhist and Jain goddesses indicates a trend towards mutual assimilation and synthesis. The basic idea behind the artistic creation of the form of the goddess was not remarkably changed. The basic idea behind the creation of the form of the goddess like Hindu Durga, Buddhist Tara and Jain Ambika are same. Like Durga, Tara is the supreme deity of female divinities of Mahayana form of Buddhism and Ambika occupied the supreme position among the Jain goddesses. All of them were depicted as consorts. Among the Jain goddesses, Ambika is the female consort of Neminath. There are several goddesses that are manifestation of Durga and Tara in Hinduism and

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid
\textsuperscript{141} Maity, op.cit., p. 62.
\textsuperscript{142} Sarkar, op. cit., p. 179
Buddhism respectively. Ambika may be considered as Jain counterpart of Puranic Durga. The characteristic iconographic feature of the goddess is her association with a child seated either on her lap or in her waist. This feature may be traced in Sadyojata type of goddess in Hinduism. In Jainism the Sasanadevis, Yakshinis and Mahavidyas hardly introduced an iconographic standard that might be distinguished from the Brahmanical and Buddhist norms. In this connection we may draw a comparison between Puranic war-goddess Mahishamardini on one hand and Buddhist Parnasabari and Marici on the other. Mahishamardini is the manifestation of Durga and Marici and Parnasabari are the manifestations of supreme Buddhist goddess Tara. The attributes held in the hands of Puranic Mahishamardini and Marici and Parnasabari like bow, arrow, ankusa, vajra suggest their belligerent mood. The fearful aspects are often found in the Tantric Buddhist goddess which may be traced in different manifestations of Camunda like Rudracanda, Ugracanda etc. Another example is yuganaddha, a theme of Tantric Buddhist art represented the union of Male and Female Princple. In this connection we can mention here the ardhanaariswara form which represents the union of Siva and Sakti. It is clear that there was a constant process of give and take between the Brahmanical and Buddhist art and iconography. It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Buddhist mysticism was indebted to Hindu Tantricism because it has been suggested by some scholars that Buddhist Tantricism might have started the process of Tantricisation of Bengal art or in other words the Tantrayana art.

So far as the icon of war-goddess is concerned, she earned popularity in both the region. However, goddess Laksmi is represented on the terracotta seals of Bengal belonged to third to fifth century A.D. which prove that the goddess of corn and good fortune enjoyed far more popularity than 'sakti' or the war-goddess in early period of Bengal. In Bengal war-goddess became popular from seventh century A.D. which is proved by the archaeological finding like Sarvani image of Deulbari, Tippera. Apart from war goddess,
goddesses represented as consort of Siva and Visnu are popular in both the regions. Thus Durga assumes domestic characteristics. Devi in her placid and terrific form is represented in the art of Assam and Bengal. In both the region Matrikas, are popular. One of the Matrikas, Camunda played an important role in the religious history of both Assam and Bengal which is proved by large number of her sculptures. Matrikas are hardly represented with their children. Their attributes suggests that they were mainly warrior goddess. Laksmi and Saraswati are represented independently as well as consort of Visnu.

Pala rulers of Bengal were ardent Buddhist and they patronized the tantric form of the religion. Tara, chief goddess of the Mahayana Buddhism earned immense popularity during the Pala rule in Bengal. The representation of different forms of Tara and other Buddhist goddess prove the fact. Though in ancient Assam, rulers were mostly Saiva, they showed catholicity towards Buddhism. Different forms of Tara and goddess like Cunda were depicted in the art of Assam. Though Buddhist goddess played an important role in the religious history of both the region, its popularity in Bengal may be largely attributed to royal patronage under the Pala kings. Jainism could not flourish in ancient Assam. In contrast, Jainism was popular in early period in Bengal up to seventh century A.D. In Bengal art apart from Ambika, the Sakti of Tirthankar Neminath, Jain Mahavidyas and Yaksinis are also depicted. East Indian School of Medieval Art influenced the art of Assam. Whether all the images found in Assam belonged to this school strictly following the norms or not, cannot be said definitely. There were exceptions too as the influences of the local traits are clearly discerned.