CHAPTER II

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In the preceding chapter, while discussing the origin and growth of the cult of Mother Goddess, several references have been made to tribal goddesses of both the region of Assam and Bengal. This chapter will explore how Puranas acted as a catalytic agent in the process of transforming a tribal goddess into a Brahmanical deity and also trace the status of Mother Goddess in Assam and Bengal during the early period of history in the light of literature and inscriptions.

Before Puranic Brahmanism reached eastern India, the region was under the widespread influence of Tantra, where goddesses occupied the most dominant position. As the Mother Goddess is central to most religious beliefs in both these regions, particularly among the local tribal cults, the depiction of the Mother Goddess is found in the Puranas as a marked deviation from early Vedic literature which seldom discuss goddesses. This puranic depiction marks a transformation of an independent tribal goddess to the status of a consort of a male god, in a subordinate position or the representation of the concept of “mother”. A process of reconstruction is clearly discernible as an interaction between two traditions: the Brahmanical patriarchal social order and local traditions upholding matriarchal or matrilineal rights. This reconstruction has led to the emergence of a regional cult. Hence interestingly, the Puranas written in

these regions, as suggested by Kunal Chakrabarty\textsuperscript{2}, appear to have been an attempt at reinforcing Brahmanical social order \textit{vis-a-vis} the widespread popularity of Buddhism and the beliefs and practices of Tantra.

It is well known that \textit{Sakti}, the Mother Goddess conceived as power, both creative and destructive, has been an object of worship in India from early times\textsuperscript{3}. The Harappan culture represents the worship of the female principle as has been proved by the terracotta images of the goddess and the ring stones\textsuperscript{4}. The adoration of female entity can be traced in the Vedas also, where Vak, Usha etc are identified with supreme godhead. But the Epics and the Puranas are mainly responsible for the consecration of this independent and powerful female entity to the larger Hindu Pantheon and unfolding her diverse aspects supported by various myths and legends\textsuperscript{5}, that legitimizes patriarchy.

In this context it may be stated thus:

The Gupta period saw the first of the series (traditionally 18) of often-voluminous texts that treat in encyclopedic manner the myths, legends and genealogies of gods, heroes and saints. Along with the epics to which they are closely linked in origin, the Puranas became the scriptures of the common people, they were available to everybody, including women and members of the lowest order of the society (\textit{Sudra}), and were not like the Vedas supposedly restricted to initiated men of the three higher orders. The origin of much of their contents may be non-Brahmanical but they were also accepted by Brahmins and thus brought new elements into Vedic religion. For example goddesses are rarely discussed in the Vedas, yet they rose steadily in recognition in Puranic mythology\textsuperscript{6}.

One of the objectives of the composition of the Puranas was to revitalize the Brahmanical social order as stated by Chakrabarty in his essay, \textit{Cult Region: The Puranas and the Making of the Cultural Territory of Bengal} \textsuperscript{7}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{3} Banerjea, J.N., \textit{The Development of Hindu Iconography}, Munshiram Manoharlal pub., Fourth edition, Delhi, 1985, p.66.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Banerjea, op.cit. pp.66-69.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Marriam-Webster's \textit{Encyclopedia of World Religions}, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 445.
\item \textsuperscript{7} Chakrabarty, K., op.cit., p. 235.
\end{itemize}
Brahmanical social order entrenched in patriarchy was seriously undermined during the first century A.D. by the widespread popularity of Buddhism, the beliefs and practices of Tantra and such other factors. In order to meet this challenge, the Brahmanas attempted to draw people from non-Brahmanical fold into their sphere of influence and earn their trust in Brahmanical leadership. Thus the Puranas evolved out of an interaction between Brahmanical tradition and many local traditions. But the level of assimilation achieved by the Mahapuranas which are eighteen in numbers, have proved inadequate to the needs of a particular region. Therefore, a new genre of religious literature came into being called Upa (minor) Puranas which offered a balance between Puranic tradition and exclusively regional local traditions. In Bengal most of the Upa-Puranas were written in between the eighth and thirteenth centuries A.D. *Kalika Purana* is one of the most important Sakta Upa-Puranas composed in Kamarupa or ancient Assam in the tenth or eleventh century A.D.

Moreover it is apparent that during this time the position and power of Mother Goddess was in transition. R.C. Hazra has noted in his work ‘*Studies in the Upa-Puranas Vol-I*’ that out of the eighteen Mahapuranas not a single work has ever dealt exhaustively or even principally with goddess worship. However, chapters on the praise and worship of the different forms of *Devi* are to be found in the *Markandeya Purana, Yamana Purana, Varaha Purana,* and so on. In comparatively later days there arose a number of Sakta Upa-Puranas like *Devi Purana, Kalika Purana, Devi Bhagawata, Candi Purana* etc. These Upa -Puranas very often relate to the central Goddess Devi and sometimes to one or other of her principal forms such as Durga, Kali, Candi, Sati etc.

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8 Ibid
Regarding the status of goddess in religion, Radhika Seshan pointed out the contrast in the ascribed status of women and their real position\textsuperscript{10}. She states that within the construct of religion, the goddess has a superior role. However, popular traditions usually place the goddess as an adjunct to a male god, as for example Siva and Pavrvati, Visnu and Laksmi, Brahma and Saraswati etc. Much has also been written about the demarcating line between ‘dangerous’ (because ‘unhusbanded’) goddess like Kali, and benevolent ones like Laksmi.

It is interesting to note that many myths connected with Siva, Parvati and \textit{Sakta pithas} (seat for \textit{Sakti}) were elaborately discussed by the \textit{Puranakaras}. Many tribal and regional goddess were depicted as the manifestation of Aryan Goddess Durga with the help of the \textit{Daksa Yajna}\textsuperscript{11} story. The presiding deities of the \textit{pithas} were originally local independent goddesses and the story of Sati’s death, falling of her limb in different places etc. was obviously invented to bring all these goddesses into Aryan fold\textsuperscript{12}. It is believed that Mother Goddess lived with her husband Siva in such places assuming different names.

Thus the independent local goddess was made subordinate to her husband Siva and thereby occupied a secondary position. According to D.C.Sircar this may have been mainly due to the fact that cult of Mother Goddess was unknown to the Aryans who were moreover a patriarchal people unlike the matrilineal aboriginals\textsuperscript{13}. Number of \textit{Sakta Pithas} varied from four to one hundred and eight. An early list of this nature can be traced in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} According to various Puranic text Sati(wife of Siva) being unable to tolerate her husband’s insult by her father Daksa, left her mortal coil at the place of sacrifice arranged by the latter. Siva out of anger moved frantically with Sati’s dead body upon his shoulder. There was earthquake and the destruction was imminent. To make Siva quiet, Visnu cut with his \textit{Sudarshana Cakra} Sati’s lifeless body into pieces. The severed parts of Sati’s body fell on the earth and each formed a \textit{pitha}. It is believed that Mother Goddess lived with her consort Siva in such places assuming different names.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Sircar, D.C., \textit{The Sakta Pithas}, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, reprint, Delhi, 2004, p. 103.
\end{itemize}
Mahabharata but a complete list of one hundred and eight names of the Mother Goddess with the specification of her association with particular holy places is probably to be found for the first time in the Matsya Purana\textsuperscript{14}. Most of the Puranakaras believed that Kamarupa is most important seat of Sakti as genital organ of Sati fell on this land.

In Assam and Bengal a local tribal deity was 'raised' to the rank of one of the approved Brahmanical Goddesses only to lose her independent status. The process of transformation as observed by Chakrabarty in the case of Bengal is also identifiable in ancient Assam. The central goddess of a popular non-brahmanical women's vrata (vowed observance) in Bengal is Mangalacandi, who is not mentioned in any Sanskrit texts outside of Bengal. However, in the Bengal Puranas she occupies a prominent position as is evidenced from the eulogy in a major poem, Mangalakavya. The Devi Purana refers to a goddess called Mangala who is worshipped to ward off evil and for the attainment of happiness\textsuperscript{15}. Shashibhusan Dasgupta maintained that Mangala is the precursor of the later Mangalacandi, by citing a verse from Sabdakalpadruma where Mangala is depicted as one of the eight Yoginis. No formal procedure for the worship of these Yoginis are provided in the sankrit texts probably because, as Chakravarty observes most Yoginis were non-Brahmanical goddesses venerated by women only. As such Brahmanism was unwilling to include the Yoginis as dominant in the patriarchal religious structure. The following passage, an address by Siva to the Goddess, from the Brahmaavaivarta and the Devibhagavata Puranas shows how a Puranic deity was perceived:

\begin{quote}
You bestow delight and good fortune; you bestow bliss and auspiciousness (mangala) that is why you are called Mangalacandika. ....You are worshiped on Tuesday (mangalavara), desired by all. The king Mangala born of the family of Manu always worships you. ....The Goddess Sarvamangala was first worshipped by Siva, next by the planet Mangala (Mars), then by the king Mangala and then on every Tuesday by the
\end{quote}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p.25.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Devi Purana, 45/19.
\end{itemize}
woman of every household. Finally she was worshipped by all men desirous of their welfare. It seems obvious that Mangala was the precursor of the Puranic Mangalacandi. To quote Chakrabarty - ‘The Puranas accepted the literal meaning of the word and proposed a simple equation between the name and the meaning to justify the Puranic reconstruction of the deity’. The Puranas reveal that their authors were familiar with popular local stories associated with Mangalacandi. The Brahmavaivarta Purana contains a verse which reads:

You tricked Kalaketu by assuming the form of a lizard and granted him a boon. You are the auspicious Mangalacandi, you saved a merchant and his son from king Srisailivahana by devouring and throwing up an elephant, sitting on a lotus.

The two legends are found in the Candimangalakavyas of medieval Bengal and it is apparent that the author of the Puranas deliberately ignored them. Another deliberate rejection of the local popular goddess is evident from the narration of the stereotype story that Siva defeated demon Tripura with the help of Goddess Mangalacandi in the Brahmavaivarta Purana and Devibhagavata. Thus began a process of reconstruction. It is evident that while the local non-Brahmanical goddess, Mangala was elevated to the rank of the Brahmanical goddesses, Mangalacandi was equated with Durga, by depicting her as another manifestation of the established Goddess of the Puranas. This Puranic reconstruction of the goddess culminated with Mangalacandi being assigned a Sakta Pitha, the most venerated place of worship for her followers.

In the context of early Assam, Kamakhya is the most dominating name in the Kalika Purana which reflects the religious life of the people. From the

16 Brahmavaivarta Purana II 44/30-38, Devibhagawata Purana IX, 47/27-35.
17 Chakrabarty, op.cit. p. 238.
18 Brahmavaivarta Purana, 16/45
19 Brahmavaivarta Purana II 44/5-6, Devibhagawata Purana IX, 47/5-5
34
jumble of myths in the *Kalika Purana* it can be gathered that since the time Naraka was anointed on the throne of Pragjyotisha, the land came to be known as Kamarupa. There are many Narakas and the historical Naraka may be placed in the first century A.D., if not earlier. The text also states that when Naraka was crowned king of this land, Goddess Kamakhya was already an established deity. According to *Yogini Tantra* the religion in the Yogini Pitha, the sacred place of Goddess Kamakhya, was of Kirata origin. The people whom Naraka conquered were Kiratas — strong, ferocious, ignorant and addicted to meat and drink. This suggests their non-Aryan character. Thus, it is clear that before the coming of Naraka in Pragjyotisha, Kamakhya was a living faith of this land. Banikanta Kakati holds the view that cult of Kamakhya must have been belonged to certain matrilineal tribes of ancient Assam like the Khasis and the Garos.

Kamakhya was later associated with and patronised by Visnu. In the subsequent legends told in the *Kalika Purana* Kamakhya is identified with primordial force and epithets like Mahamaya, Yoganidra etc. were superimposed on Kamakhya. A complete chapter in the *Kalika Purana* was devoted to glorify Kamakhya by telling the stories of sufferings undergone by Krishna, Brahma, Indra and others for not showing due respect to Kamakhya. The long list of animals those to be offered to the goddess Kamakya includes boar and bull. The instruction for sacrificing boar and bull suggest the lingering on the primitive practices.

However, later on in *Kalika Purana*, Kamakhya has been identified with Parvati, Tripura, Ugratara etc. *Yogini Tantra* mentions that Tara is the same as Kali, so also is Kamakhya. It is, thus, apparent that independent local

21 *Kalika Purana* 39/104
23 Shastri, op.cit. p.4
24 Ibid
25 Yogini Tantra, 1/2/8.
Goddesses were affiliated to the manifestation of the Puranic goddess as Durga or Kali.

The existence of independent powerful Goddess Durga has been recognised first in the *Mahabharata*. Later, *Markandeya Purana* builds up a complete myth about the origin of the Goddess Durga. Once her existence was recognised and worship formulated, all local and independent deities began to be identified with her in her local manifestations\(^{26}\). The concept of Mother Goddess assumed a cosmic proportion in the Puranas and all unconnected local numina were affiliated to her\(^{27}\). The myth about the carrying of the Sati’s dead body was an attempt in this direction. The identification is so complete that Kamakhya has been assigned a *Sakta Pitha*. Now it becomes clear that how a Puranic deity evolved.

Under the Gupta hegemony, Puranic religious beliefs spread. Bengal was annexed to the Gupta Empire around the fifth century A.D. and became included in the cultural life of Northern India. From the Allahabad Pillar Inscription during the reign of Gupta ruler Samudragupta, it is clear that ancient Assam was also under the influence of the Guptas. Gupta period witnessed not only the spread of Brahmanical culture but also Puranic religious beliefs and practices. Puranic literature is richly equipped with the references of Mother Goddess and it becomes important to trace the Devi concept in some of the important Mahapuranas and Upa-Puranas.

The early Puranic texts such as *Vishnu Purana*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Brahmanda Purana* and *Matsya Purana* were completed in the Gupta period. The *Brahma Purana*, probably the earliest among the Puranas, deals mainly with the placid aspects of the goddess. It records the burning

\(^{26}\) Kakati, op.cit., p. 64.
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
of Sati, daughter of Himalaya\(^{28}\) and wife of Siva. She is called Uma in one of her manifestation. Though the *Bhagavata Purana* is a gospel of Vaisnavas text, it contains plenty of evidences concerning the worship of Sakti. Here Kali is referred to as the patron deity of a band of thieves whose leader sought to achieve Kali’s blessings in order to have a son.

The text contains a story that a chieftain of the Sudras, desirous of an issue, proceeded to offer a human victim to goddess Bhadrakali. The Purana also mentioned a person named Jada Bharata, being offered to goddess Kali. The reference to human sacrifice to Goddess Bhadrakali seems to suggest an incorporation of some non-Aryan elements in an early Puranic text\(^{29}\).

Bhadrakali is one of the names of Mahisamardini in the *Devimahatmya*\(^{30}\). Since very early period the worship of Bhadra Kali was prevalent in Samatata region of Bengal. It is evident from the Sarvani image inscription of Deulbari in Tippera which is identified as Bhadrakali by N. K. Bhattasali on the basis of Tantric text *Saradatilaka Tantra*\(^{31}\). Some other names of the goddess mentioned in *Devimatmya* like Narayani, Chandika, Durga, Ambika etc. are also found in the *Bhagavata Purana*\(^{32}\).

The *Visnu Purana*, a purely sectarian text of the Vaisnavites, eulogises Sakti as essence of all that exist. Here we find reference to various names of the Goddess like Ambika, Durga, Arya Bhadrakali etc. All of them have been depicted as personal deities. The goddess is described as fond of meat and wine. The concept of goddess killing the demon Mahisa was known to the author of the *Vishnu Purana*. It is evident from the appellation Mahisasuramardini.

\(^{28}\) In the Puranas Mother Goddess is sometimes associated with mountains like Himalaya, Vindhya etc. Thus Goddesses like Vindhyavasini, Himasailaja, Girija, Parvati are popular in the Puranas. Most probably earlier they were worshipped by the non-Aryan people who lived in the hills and forest. Chattopadhyaya, S., *Evolution of Hindu Sects: Up to the Time of Sankaracharya*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1970, p. 101-102, also see Srivastava, M.C.P., *Mother Goddess in Art, Archaeology and Literature*, Agam Kia Prakasan, New Delhi, 1979, p. 109.


\(^{30}\) Markandeya Purana, 84/39.


\(^{32}\) *Bhagavata Purana*, X.2. 11-12.
The **Markandeya Purana** with its *Devimahatmya* section has now become a text of the Sakta worshipers. Here all these forms of Devi are primarily conceived as war goddesses who only confer victory and success on her devotees in the battle field. The chief goddess Candika is the goddess of war in this Purana. She is able to incarnate herself on earth in various guises at various crucial moments to destroy demons who gave formidable challenges to the gods of heaven. Mahisamardini (goddess killing the demon *Mahisa*) is one of the earliest and important aspects of Devi in the *Devimahatmya* section of the Purana. Goddess Ambika is equated with Candika. Devi is identified with *Prakriti* and has both fearful and benign form.

**Matsya Purana** which is an earlier generation Purana relates the goddess with two mountains. The Himalayas depicted as the father of Devi Parvati and Vindhya is referred to as her abode and lion as her vehicle. The text narrates the story of the origin of the goddess Kali which is also described in *Devimahatmya*. Matsya Purana also portrays the dreadful aspect of Bhadракali. There is a reference in this Purana that Kali is a nickname of Goddess Parvati. Another fearful Goddess Kaushiki is born out of Parvati. A composite figure of Siva and Sakti called *Ardhanariswara* emerges in this Purana. It is generally assumed that *Ardhanariswara* symbolises a syncretistic attitude of the Saivas and Saktas. However, from a feminist point of view, the concept is an attempt to make the goddess a dependent deity of a male god. The female is often not equal in the ‘Ardhanariswara’. ‘Ardhanariswara’ is often described as a form of Siva, and rarely as that of the goddess, as in her Sakta sects. Siva has often two supernatural arms and Parvati has just one earthly arm, and his bull *vahana*, not her lion *vahana*, typically accompanies them.

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34 [http://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) retrieved on 19/03/2012
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The *Agni Purana* in the Puranic literature is celebrated for its encyclopaedic character. It deals separately in full details with the *Devi Pratimas*\(^{35}\). Several techniques for the making of image of *Devi* have been referred to in this text. It is said that goddess Candika should be represented as having twenty hands, each holding various weapons like trident, sword, spear, axe, bow, bell, banner etc. Different names of Durga images have been referred in this Purana where Camunda is also included, a form of the goddess found in the *Devi Mahātmya*. Goddess Camunda is described as awful in appearance: she is gaunt, has fangs, laughs loudly, dances madly, wears a garland of corpses, sits on the back of a ghost and lives in a cremation ground. It describes the image of the goddess with sunken eyes, thin belly, fleshless skeleton body, upward hairs, holding skull and a skin of tiger in her left and trident and axe in her right hand\(^{36}\). In *Agni Purana* she is mentioned in invocations that aim at success in war and against one’s enemy.

Goddess Bhadrakali and Mahakali are described with their legends of origination from the anger of Siva to destroy the sacrifice of Daksa. The Bangarh Prasasti of Murttisiva\(^{37}\) of the reign of Nayapala(1027-43 A.D.) refers to Goddess Carcika whose attributes and form are similar to that of Camunda known from the *Agni Purana*. Sian Stone Inscription\(^{38}\), found from Birbhum District mentions Goddess Carca (Carcika) which confirm the evidence of the *Agni Purana* suggesting the popularity of the Tantric form of the goddess in Bengal. Several sculptures of Camunda prove that this goddess was known in Assam from a very early period.

In the *Vayu Purana* it is said that Uma was born to Menaka. Here she was Rudrani who was born at the request of Siva\(^{39}\) to safeguard the Brahmanas

\(^{35}\) *Agni Purana*, Chapters 50, 52, 94.

\(^{36}\) *Agni Purana*, 50/21-23


\(^{38}\) Ibid. pp. 102-22.

\(^{39}\) *Vayu Purana*, 72/16-20.
and to control whole of the world by yogic power. She is identified with Prakriti, the primordial energy and cause of the creation. Of her various manifestations, the white and black as well as benign and fearful forms are depicted respectively by Gauri and Kali. Brahma Vaivarta Purana is composed in Bengal between eighth and sixteenth century A.D. Some prominent local female deities like Manasa, Sasthi, Kali Candika, Mangala-Candi got recognition in this text. These goddesses gained much popularity in Bengal. They are supposed to be the different manifestation of Mother Goddess. Stone representation of these goddesses is found in Bengal. Mediaeval poets of Bengal composed Kavyas like Candimangalakavya, Manasamangalakavya etc. in a Puranic fashion glorifying the female divinities worshipped in rural Bengal.

Assam, where snake cult has been widely prevalent, has also produced a few images of Manasa. Mention should first be made of a standing image of the goddess at Silghat in Nagaon District of Assam which seem to belong to the eleventh century A.D approximately. Two images of Manasa have been found among the Narakasur ruins. Mangalacandi, the goddess of welfare and happiness was once popular in early Assam. In Kalika Purana the goddess is regarded as one of the manifestation of Sakti. One temple dedicated to this deity is the Catrakara temple situated at Guwahati.

The Brihaddharmapuraṇa describes the fearful form of Devi which recalls Kali in the Daksa yajna. The legend is slightly different from other Puranic accounts. Here some of the causes of Daksa’s displeasure with Siva have been described. It also describes the origin of Dasamahavidya. In the Brihaddharmapuraṇa Sati is named as Parvati who is identical with river goddess Ganga. The reference of the worship of goddess Durga annually in

40 Ibid 23.9.
41 Sarkar, op cit. p. 97.
43 Brihaddharmapuraṇa, 6/ 22-26.
autumn occurs in this Purana, as also in the *Kalika Purana*. Thus, the tradition of the *Markandeya Purana* was upheld in the later Puranas. The *Varaha Purana* (eighth to eleventh century A.D.)\(^44\) depicts mainly a fearful (and thereby powerful) goddess that we find in *Devimahatmya*. One of the forms of Devi is mentioned here as Sankari who is described as having twenty arms equipped with weapons to kill Mahisa. Goddesses like Raudri, Candika, Camunda, and Kali are mentioned in this text. In the *Vamana Purana* (ninth / tenth century A.D.)\(^45\), Parvati is described as Kali for her dark complexion. Parvati became angry when she heard Siva calling her black. She took offence and undertook austerities in order to change her dark complexion. From Kali or black she became Gauri or fair and her dark sheath was transformed into the goddess Kaushiki, who subsequently created Kali in her fury\(^46\). The legends of the emergence of Parvati in the form of dark Kali, the removal of her blackness through the creation of Kausiki (often identifies with Candika or Ambika), the demon slaying activities of the goddess, occurs in many Puranas\(^47\).

*Devi Purana*, composed in Bengal, deals with the exploits of Devi, who incarnated herself in the Vindhyas and was known as Vindhyavasini\(^48\). The Purana deals with a war- goddess who associated with Siva, was to kill demon, Ghora. In the *Devi Purana* Devi is associated with Siva only. She is depicted as the protector of Brahma, Visnu and Siva\(^49\). The Goddess is also called Mahisamardini because the demon Ghora, took the form of a *mahisa* (buffalo)\(^50\) was killed by her. The text deals with different names of the

\(^{45}\) Ibid, pp.50-51.
\(^{46}\) *Vamana Purana*, 54-57.
\(^{48}\) The association of the Goddess with the Vindhya region is interesting. S. Chattopadhyaya in his work mentions that this range was the home of various Proto-Austroloid tribes while elsewhere the goddess is expressly associated the Sabaras and Pulindas who lived in the same range. The description clearly shows that a Mother Goddess of the Proto-Austroloid tribes was now being merged with the great Aryan Mother Goddess. Chattopadhyaya, S., *Evolution of Hindu Sects: Up to the Time of Sankaracharya*, Munshiram Manoharlal. New Delhi, 1970, p. 101-102.
\(^{49}\) *Devi Purana*, Ch 26.
\(^{50}\) *Devi Purana*, Ch 2o, 21.
Goddess such as Ambika, Kali, Uma, Durga, Sakambhari, Vindhyavasini, Kausiki, Narayani, Laksmi, Saraswati, Katyayani etc. It refers to some composite deities as Uma-Mahesvara, Hari-Hara, Ardhanarisvara. According to *Devi Purana* Durga is the central Goddess and she is worshipped along with eight forms of Candi such as Ugrachanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa, Aticandika etc. and eighty four Yoginis. From this text it is clear that Saktism had a close affinity with Saivism. **In this text the female deities are much powerful then the Puranic god.**

The *Mahabhagavata Purana* is an Upa-Purana dealing with the praise of Devi and her worship. The Puranas open with four Mangala slokas, containing the salutations of Devi. The Purana mainly deals with the praise of Devi, her incarnations to destroy the demons, their exploits, praise of Kamarupa and fifty-one *pithas* of Devi. *Kalika Purana* was one of the very important Sakta Upa-Purana composed in Kamarupa or ancient Assam probably in tenth century A.D. or first half of eleventh century A.D. The chief goddess of the text is Kamamkya, a local deity of Kamarupa. The goddess is consort of Siva having a cordial relation with Visnu. She is not portrait as a war goddess. The ultimate aim of the text is to extol the glory of Kamakhya. She is depicted as earth goddess. Her appellations Pritvidevi, Vasundhara, Jagannmata, Jagaddhatri, support the fact that she is Earth Goddess. *Kalika Purana* also states that Durga is worshipped along with eight forms of Candi and eightyfour Yoginis whose names are similar to those of *Devi Puranas*.

Interestingly enough, *Devimahatmya* section of *Markandeya Purana* tells us of the goddess’ various mythological exploits and thus almost all aspects of Devi are available here. Some of the goddess tradition discussed in the *Devimahatmya* and other Puranas and Upa-Puranas can be discernable in

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51 Hazra, R.C., op. cit., p.261
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the religious history of ancient Assam and Bengal. Aspects of the Puranic portrait of the goddess need to be focused upon. Some important aspects of the goddess as represented in the Puranas are as Siva and Visnu's consort, warrior goddess, earth goddess, bloodthirsty goddess and a belonging to a group of goddess collectively called Matrika or the mothers.

Goddess is often represented as Visnu and Siva's consort. Kamala Ganesh states that the issue of spouse-hood is a complex one. The very goddess who is the domesticated spouse is demonstrably independent in earlier form. Development of Srilaksmi can be taken as an example in this respect. The development of Srilaksmi is a striking illustration of the shift from independent, auspicious goddess to spouse. She is a pre-Buddhist icon and earlier images do not show her with a male partner. The Kushana Srilaksmi stands amidst lotuses issuing from a pumaghata, pressing her breast to assure plenty and prosperity. Thus early Srilaksmi has a strong association with vegetation. In the later period she is linked to a number of gods. By 400 A.D. she settles down as the benign consort of Visnu, evolved in the moral order, in righteous behaviour, in correct social observance.

In the Devimahatmya different forms of goddess such as Candi, Parvati, Uma, Gauri, Haimavati, Kali and Sati mentioned. The Goddess is generally associated with Siva while in the first episode of the Devimahatmya the Goddess is consistently associated with Visnu. Her peculiar relationship with Visnu is described that she remains with Visnu as Yoganidra under whose spell Visnu is asleep. In the opening scene of the third episode all
gods assembled at Himavata (Himalayas) to petition the Devi who is known as Visnumaya. She remains in all created beings as Visnumaya (ya devi visnumayeti savdita). Of the seven mothers (Saptamatrika) who appears to help the goddess in the third episode, three of them — Varahi, Vaisnavi and Narasimhi - are clearly associated with Visnu or his avatars. Several times the goddess referred to by the gods as Narayani (female counterpart of Visnu-Narayana). The name of Srilaksmi, the best-known name of Visnu's consort, are used as epithet of the goddess in several places. No reference is made to the Goddess Earth like Prithvi or Bhumi in the Devimahatmya. The Goddess is called Jaganmaye i.e. 'who contains the world' and also called 'visvasya Bijam' means 'the seed of the universe'. Although the Goddess is identified with the material world and the universe generally, this identification is not made in terms of the epithet.

From the second episode of the Devimahatmya it is clear that Siva is one of the several gods from whom the goddess derived her strength and power. Parvati and Kaushiki are depicted as Siva's consort. Maheswari, one of the Saptamatrika is clearly identified with Siva's consort and appeared as a feminine version of Siva. The sakti of the great Goddess herself is named as Sivaduti. She is given this name because she commands Siva to deliver message to Sumbha and Nisumbha for her:

\[
yato niyukto dautyena taya devya sivah svayam
sivadutiti lokehasmingstatah sa khyatimagatah.\]

The epithet Sarvani, Isa and Gauri further affiliate the goddess as Siva's consort.

56 Ibid 85/14
57 Markandeya Purana 88/12-20
59 Markandeya Purana 82/19
60 Markandeya Purana 88/27
However, the representation of the goddess as consort of either Visnu or Siva is popular both in Bengal and Assam. As the consort of Visnu, the goddess is variously named as Gaja Laksmi or Abhiseka Laksmi and popular in both the regions. A few terracotta and stone images of Gaja Laksmi belonging to pre-Ahom period have been found in Assam. In *Kalika Purana* Goddess Kamakhya is regarded as Dharitri, Prithvidevi, Vasundhara etc. Thus, it is apparent that people of ancient Assam was familiar with these Puranic goddesses. In the same Purana, Kamakhya is also depicted as Siva's consort having cordial relation with Visnu. Thus an independent goddess became the spouse goddess and thereby held secondary position. In Bengal Laksmi is popular in her independent aspect as goddess of prosperity. However, some images of Visnu are found associated with Laksmi. Sometimes Laksmi and Vasundhara or Prithvi are found standing on both sides of Visnu. Siva's consort like Uma, Parvati, Gauri, Mahesvari were also important deities in both these region. In this connection it should be pointed out that the saktas made an attempt to bridge the gulf between the Vaisnavas and Saivas. The dogmatic sectarianism was overshadowed to a great extent mainly due to the growth of saktism.

The representation of Mother Goddess as *warrior or war Goddess* is made in the *Markandeya Purana*, which indicates the theory of association of various goddesses with one another. The *Devimahatmya* section of this Purana which now became the text of the Saktas, asserts that the goddess was formed by the union of the energies of all the gods:

```
itham ni sama devanam vasamsi madhusudhanah
cakara kopam sambhusca bhrikuti kuti ananau
anyesancaiva devanam satrudinam sariratah
nirgatam sumahattejastaccaikyam samagachchata61
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61 *Markandeya Purana* 82/9-10
Thus it appears that though indicated as an independent war-goddess, power was derived from male god. It is interesting that in spite of patriarchal character of the society, there emerged a goddess as the supreme among the divinities. As observed by Sikha Sarkar, the multifarious material contribution on the part of female member of the society such as carrying baby in the womb, giving birth of children, managing family affair, assisting the male members in some economic activities might have led to the recognition of women as protectors. It was in this social milieu that the position of female divinity exalted.62 However, regarding the war-goddess Durga, Devid Kinsley states that:

[she] exists independent from male protection or guidance, represents a vision of the feminine that challenged the stereotyped view of women found in traditional Hindu law books. Such a characterization perhaps suggests the extra ordinary power that is repressed in women who are forced into submissive and socially demeaning roles.63

The war-goddess in the Devimahatmya is also called Mahamaya, Ambika, Chandika, Bhadrakali and Mahakali. All these forms of Devi is primarily conceived as the war goddess who only confers victory and success on her devotees in the battlefield. All three episode of this scripture concern the cosmic struggle to maintain order and defeat the forces of chaos. The goddess that is primarily and principally renowned for her abilities on the battlefield in the Devimahatmya. It is difficult to find a warrior goddess similar to the Goddess of the Devimahatmya in the literature of the Hindu tradition prior to the Devimahatmya.64 The consorts of great male gods rarely assumed the role of a warrior.

Candika, Kali, Durga and others represent the Puranic war-goddess. Religious history reveals a constant power struggle for existence even among the divinities. It appears that every important gods or goddess is of a

62  Sarkar, op.cit. p.76
63  Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses, op.cit., p. 99
64  Kinsley, Devimahatmya, op.cit.,p. 493
composite character. The narrator of the Puranas knows the 'Corn Mother' Sakambhari as a form of Goddess Durga. The rituals of Durga show that she was primarily a goddess of vegetation and fertility but her legends and iconographical features point to her warlike characteristics. She is conceived as the destroyer of enemies and depicted in a fighting mode. It is interesting that this feature is absent in the concept of Parvati, Uma with whom Durga is often identified. The martial could be interpreted as a metaphor to underscore the protective functions of the goddess, who as bestower of plant, animal and human fertility, has to be a fighter.

The powerful goddess of war is reflected in the character of Candika or Kausiki, the heroine of Devimahatmya. She is purely a war goddess having no role other than slaying of the demons. This concept is further developed by the concept of Kali who was originally a tribal Goddess and later identified with the goddess dwelling in the Himalayas. She is also identified with Camunda in Devimahatmya on account of her slaying the demons Canda and Munda:

Tabanitau tato dristva chandamundau mahasura
Uvacha kaling kalyani lalitang chandita bachah
Yasmachandasya mundasya grihitva tvamupagata
Chamundeti tato loke khyata devi bhabisyati

The Markandeya Purana, while dealing with the exploits of the Sakta Devi, describes the Mahisamardini episode that was elaborated in later Puranas. Other achievements of Devi like her slaying of the demons, Sumbha and Nisumbha, vetra and Rudra are described in the Puranas. The Sakta Puranas elaborate the exploits of the Devi which were mentioned in the earlier Puranas. The Devibhagavata records the Devi's fight with Mahisasura, Submha, Nisumbha, Durgama, Aruna etc. In the Devi Purana

65 Bhattacharya, N.N., op.cit., p. 58.
66 Ganesh, op.cit., p. ws-61
67 Markandeya Purana 87/24-25
the war goddess is known as Jaya, Vijaya, Aparajita, Jayanti etc. Here Devi
is associated with the slaying of the demons like Ghora, Subala, Ruru etc.
Though *Kalika Purana* does not narrate any description of the war goddess
it occasionally refers to the slaying of demon Mahisa and others\(^{68}\).

The popular form of the Puranic war goddess in Bengal was Mahisamardini
Durga. The traditional socio-cultural festival of Bengal is still held on the
occasion of the worship of Goddess Durga, the slayer of the demon Mahisa
in the autumn. The early sculptural representations of Goddess
Mahisamardini of Kushana period are found in some places of north and
western India\(^{69}\). However, not a single image of Mahisamardini or any other
form of the goddess found in Bengal which might be assigned to Gupta
period in the Samatata region the first historical evidence of the worship of
the warrior goddess may be traced. In the Deulbari village of Tippera district
one eight armed Goddess Sarvani was discovered which belonged to
seventh century A.D.\(^ {70}\) The goddess is found carrying sword, arrow, discus,
trident, shield and bow. The attributes of the goddess are similar to those of
Mahisamardini. However the goddess is identified as Bhadrakali,
Bhadradyrga, Ambika, Vedagarbha, and Ksemankari by N.K.Bhattasali on
the basis of the description found in the *Saradatilaka Tantra*\(^ {71}\). Sarvani is
the Sakti of Sarva, one of the eight forms of Rudra in the *Atharva Veda*. In
the *Markandeya Purana* also sarvani may be traced as one of the names of
Goddess Candika\(^ {72}\). Sarvani is included as one of the sixteen names of the
Goddess Durga in the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana (Prakritikhanda)*. The
popularity of the warrior goddess in Bengal is evident from an image styled
as Durga killing demon Mahisa belonged to seventh century A.D. found in
Bihar and now preserved in the Indian Museum, Kolkata\(^ {73}\). The attributes of

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\(^{68}\) Bhattacharyya, N.N., op.cit., p.125.
\(^{69}\) Sahai, B., *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi,
1975, p.185.
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
\(^{71}\) Bhattasali, N.K., *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmonical Sculpture in the Dacca Museum*,
Dacca, 1929, p. 204.
\(^{72}\) *Markandeya Purana*, 85/9-10.
\(^{73}\) Sarkar, op.cit., p. 73.
Mahisamardini as found in the Puranic texts do not conform to the art form of the above image.

Puranic war goddess was also popular in ancient Assam, which is evident from sculptural details. It is seen that images showing the goddess in the act of fighting and killing the demon far outnumber than those of the other order. The Devimahatmya section divides the exploits of the Devi in the matter of killing the demon into three sections (charitas), the first with the killing of the demon Madhu and Kaitabha, the second with that of Mahisasura and third with that of Sumbha and Nisumbha. It is the second, the Devi killing Mahisasura, which has been represented most frequently in the art of ancient Assam. In this manifestation she is worshipped as an independent deity during autumn, a practice that is still widely in vogue all over eastern India including Assam.

That the Mahishamardini form of Durga is very popular in ancient Assam is evident from the fact that sixty eight images of the deity have been unearthed from Amsari Area. A sixteen-handed image of a goddess bears an inscription, identifying her as 'Candanayika' found at Amsari area of Guwahati. In the Agni Purana and Bhavisya Purana there is mention of Goddess Candanayika under the collective designation of Nava-Durga who possesses sixteen hands. It may, thus, be assumed that north Indian Puranic concept of the Mother Goddess did not take a long time to be introduced in eastern India. In Bengal the introduction of the mother Goddess occurred sometime before the seventh century A.D. The Goddess is also depicted as 'Mother Earth' in the Markandeya Purana. Important functional aspect of the Devi in the Purana is that she is the giver of victory and she is the chief force of nature and the protector of troubles.

That the Goddess Candi of the Devimahatmya has some connection with nature world is evident from chapter 90 and 91 of the Markandeya Purana. After the death of the demon, Sumbha states:

49
'When the evil-souled demon was slain, the universe became placid, the earth regained perfect well being and the sky grew pure. Portent clouds which were full of flame before became tranquil.'

This description simply describes the lull after a heavy storm. The goddess represents the power of well-being and the goddess makes the earth peaceful, placid and suitable for living.

In the 91 chapter of the *Markandeya Purana* it is stated that Devi promises to descend on the earth as an incarnation to deliver the world from the oppression of the demon and nourish the whole world with the life sustaining natural herbs grown out of her own body. In this incarnation her name is Sakambari (Herb-bearing or herb-nourishing). The goddess is none but Earth from whose body life sustaining plants grow. This aspect of Devi is present both in Assam and Bengal from very early period. Both in Bengal and Assam one of the chief features of Durga Puja is the worship of 'Navapatrika' in which nine plants represent nine goddesses. According to R.P. Chanda this worship of Navapatrika is but a survival of the agrarian phase of Durga worship. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya observes that goddess Durga was originally a 'Goddess of vegetation' and later transformed into a 'Goddess of war'. The assumption behind the observation is that the 'Goddess of the vegetation' represents the interest of the peasantry who are reduced to poverty. The goddess fought against the natural disasters and against the privileged class in order to secure agricultural yields for her worshipers.

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74 *Markandeya Purana*, 90/28-29.
77 Bhattacharyya,'N.N., op.cit. p.58.
The theme benign versus destructive goddess dominates much of the current literature on the goddess. The two faces of the goddess are both faces of power, but as properly married spouse, she is the embodiment of grace and benevolence; as the independent goddess, she threatens to destroy the very basis of the social order\textsuperscript{78}. The concern with the control of female sexuality manifests itself in many institutions, norms and customs that are current in India. Both in Assam and Bengal, Durga is worshiped both in fierce and placid forms. In ancient Assam, Mother Earth was popular. Goddess Kamakhya’s association with the world of nature is evident from \textit{Kalika Purana}. The text states - ‘As germination of seeds is caused by rainfall, the nutrition and growth of this animal world have been caused by the Goddess’. The Goddess always protects and nourishes the creation caused by herself. Her appellations Prihvidevi, Dharitri, Jagaddhatri, Jaganmata, Vasundhara in the \textit{Kalika Purana} support the fact that Mother Earth was quite prevalent in the religious life of ancient Assam.

The goddess is also represented as a \textbf{bloodthirsty Goddess} in the \textit{Devimahatmya} section of \textit{Markandeya Purana} wherein Kali single handedly slays Canda and Munda and she virtually saves the situation when she kills Raktabija by sucking the blood from him. \textit{Devimahatmya} equated Kali with Goddess Camunda. In Puranic and Dramatic literature that may be roughly dated as contemporary with the \textit{Devimahatmya}, she is suspect, an inauspicious, fierce, bloodthirsty goddess who is associated with the wild tribes\textsuperscript{79}. It is also important to note that this strand of the goddess, wild, fierce and bloodthirsty is not associated in any male deity. Kinsley thinks that Kali is more than a parochial tribal goddess. In the \textit{Devimahatmya} and in all references prior to the \textit{Devimahatmya} Kali is an independent goddess.

\textsuperscript{78} Ganesh, op.cit. p. ws-61.
\textsuperscript{79} Kinsley, op.cit.
Kali was probably the best-known bloodthirsty goddess at the time the *Devimahatmya* was composed, but not the only one by any means. In the closing section of the *Devimahatmya*, Suratha and Samadhi worship the Devi by offering their own blood.

Popularity of Kali in Bengal is beyond dispute. In Bengal she is represented as standing on the bosom of Siva lying like a corpse. In case of Assam there are several references of the Bloodthirsty Goddess. *Kalika Purana* mentions that the eastern most boundary of Kamarupa was under the spiritual command of Goddess Dikkaravasini. She has two forms *Tiksna-Kanta* (dreadfully attractive) and *Lalita-Kanta* (gracefully attractive). In her *Tiksna-Kanta* form her most delectable offerings consisted of strong spirituous liquor, Human sacrifice, flesh curry etc. She dominates later history as the dreadful goddess Tamresvari calling for annual human sacrifice. The goddess was popularly called as *Kecai-khati* (eater of the raw flesh) because of the annual human sacrifice. This goddess also known as Ugratara or Tara. *Yogini Tantra* states that Tara is the same as Kali. We have definite evidence in the *Kalika Purana* that human sacrifice was given canonical sanction by the Hindu tantrists in the tenth century where a whole chapter called the 'blood chapter' is devoted to injunctions in regard to the sacrifice of animals and human beings to the goddess.

Another important facet of the goddess's presence in the Puranas is expressed in the group of goddesses known as the 'mothers' (*Matrika*). However it is doubtful whether they are the invention of the author of the Puranas. Generally the mothers are seven in numbers. Group of goddess or feminine spirit, collectively called Matrikas are mentioned in the

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80 Kakati, op.cit., p. 60.
52
Mahabharata. We get reference of Sapta Vanih in the Rig Veda. Sapta Matrika concept, however, takes its final shape in the Puranic period. The Matrikas are the Saktis of great well-known gods or avatars or they are said to be the manifestation of the Mahadevi herself. The nature of the goddesses is fierce and wild. Matrikas are popular in both Assam and Bengal. However, Matrikas who are associated Devi in the Puranas, are given more importance in the Tantras. Thus, in the Puranas we may trace the beginning of the Tantric elements.

From these discussions, it is clear that the cult of Mother Goddess consolidated itself on a strong foundation in early period in Assam and Bengal. For the first time, Devimahatmya section of the Markandeya Purana propounds the cult of Mother Goddess in all her glory and greatness. The Goddess of Markandeya Purana in her different forms found in the Puranas and Upa-puranas which are known almost certainly to have been composed in Bengal and Assam or in the territory adjacent to them. We can see the regional character of the goddess in the Eastern Indian Puranas. The forms and names of the goddess either in Gauda-Vanga or in Kamarupa suited the taste and environment of the people concerned. Kamakhya of Kamarupa and Mangalacandi of Bengal were manifestation of the supreme goddess. It was moulded thus to meet the needs of the local traditions. Puranic religious beliefs and practices accommodated both non-Aryan and Aryan elements. The fearful and terrible aspects of the goddess or the rituals comprising the use of blood and flesh seem to have been borrowed from the aboriginal tribes. It is interesting that relation of Mother Goddess with both Siva and Visnu has been maintained although by the authors of the Puranas.
The various aspects of Devi can be seen in the *Mahapuranas* and *Upapuranas* and people of both Assam and Bengal are familiar most of these manifestations of the goddess from a very early period. Table 1. and Table 2. highlight the status of Puranic goddesses in the light of inscriptions within the geographical boundary of ancient Assam and Bengal. The expansion of the Puranic Brahmanism in Eastern India including Assam and Bengal is indicated by the occurrence of various names of Puranic deities in the epigraphic records of this region. Puranic Brahmanism developed centring round the chief five deities, Visnu, Siva, Sakti, Surya and Ganapati. The epigraphic records of Bengal and Kamarupa suggest these five cults received a cordial welcome in both these regions.

In Bengal, fourth and fifth century inscriptions marked the expansion of Brahmanical settlements which were mainly Vaisnavite in character. It was during the post-Gupta period that Siva received royal patronage in Bengal. The epigraphic records of the reign of Sasanka, the king of Gauda and of the post-Sasanka period, however witness the growing popularity of Saivism along with Vaisnavism. The introduction of the Puranic cult of Siva, in the sixth century A.D. seems to suggest the simultaneous acceptance of his Sakti. *Devi Purana*, composed in Bengal in the sixth or seventh century A.D, states that the female deity in the form of Siva's Sakti in various aspects was well acquainted in Bengal. To trace the history of the development of the Mother Goddess Cult in Bengal we can classify the records according to the dates and according to the find-spot of the records that would reveal a chronological development of the Mother cult region-wise.

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54 Various names of God Visnu like Cakrasvamin in Susuniya Rock Inscription (4th century A.D., Govindasvamin in the Baigram Copper Plate Inscription (447-48 A.D.), Svetabarahasvamin in the Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription etc. prove the fact.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Goddess</th>
<th>Find spot of the inscription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Medinipore Copper Plate Inscription of the reign of Sasanka</td>
<td>608 A.D.</td>
<td>Mahi (Earth Goddess)</td>
<td>Debra Village, fifteen miles south east of Midnapore Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deulbari Sarvani Image Inscription of Prabhavati</td>
<td>658-673A.D.</td>
<td>Sarvani</td>
<td>Deulbari Village, Tipperah district, 20 miles south of Comilla</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Kailan Copper Plate Inscription of Sridharanararata</td>
<td>673A.D.</td>
<td>Gajalaksmi</td>
<td>18 miles south west of Comilla town</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Vanga-Salavana-Bihara Inscription of Abhinavamriganka Deva</td>
<td>775-800A.D.</td>
<td>Laksmi</td>
<td>Area not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Khalimpur Copper Plate Inscription</td>
<td>807A.D.</td>
<td>Kadambari Sarvani, Rohini, Svaha, Bhadra, Puloma, Laksmi</td>
<td>Khalimpur Village, close to the modern Bangladesh border, just north of the Ganges</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Badal Garuda Prasasti</td>
<td>861A.D.</td>
<td>Laksmi Saraswati</td>
<td>Badal Village, Dinajpur District</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Pascimbhag Copper Plate of Sricandra</td>
<td>930A.D.</td>
<td>Bhabani Laksmi Indrani Sarvani</td>
<td>Maulavi Bazar, Sylhet.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Mainamati Copper Plate of Larahacandra</td>
<td>1006A.D.</td>
<td>Durga Rudra Saraswati Laksmi Vasundhara Ganga Siva Sri</td>
<td>Lalmai Mainamati hills</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Mainamati Copper Plate of Govindacandra</td>
<td>1020-55A.D.</td>
<td>Ganga, Durga</td>
<td>Lalmai Mainamati Hills</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Bangarh Prasasti of Murtissiva of the reign of Nayapala</td>
<td>1027-43A.D.</td>
<td>Carckla, Bhavani Saraswati</td>
<td>Dinajpur District</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Reign/Year</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Irda Copper Plate</td>
<td>1043 A.D.</td>
<td>Baleswar District (Orissa)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Amgachi Copper Plate</td>
<td>1055 A.D.</td>
<td>Dinajpur District</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Ramganj Copper Plate</td>
<td>1075 A.D.</td>
<td>Dinajpur District</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Bhuvaneswar Prasasti of Varman Dynasty</td>
<td>1077 A.D.</td>
<td>Bhuvaneswar, Orissa</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Sian Stone Inscription of the Pala king</td>
<td>1091-1110 A.D.</td>
<td>Village near Bolpur, District-Birbhum</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Samalavarman Plate</td>
<td>1127-37 A.D.</td>
<td>Munshiganj, Dacca</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Barrackpore Copper Plate of Vijayasena</td>
<td>1158 A.D.</td>
<td>Barrackpore, District-24 Pargana</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Paikor Image Inscription of Vijayasena</td>
<td>12th century A.D.</td>
<td>Village Paikor, District-Birbhum</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Naihati Copper Plate of Vallalasena</td>
<td>1170 A.D.</td>
<td>Naihati, Katwa Subdivision, District-Burdwan</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Candi Image Inscription of the reign of Laksmanasena</td>
<td>1182 A.D.</td>
<td>Rampal (Dacca)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Madhainagar Copper Plate Inscription of the reign of Laksmanasena</td>
<td>1204 A.D.</td>
<td>Pabna District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mainamati Copper Plate of Ranavankamalla</td>
<td>1221 A.D.</td>
<td>Five miles west of Comilla town.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of the find spot of the inscription, there are four prominent centres in ancient Bengal as observed by Sikha Sarkar viz. **Varendri, Radha, Vanga and Samatata**.

**Varendri** consisted of Northern Bengal including Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Bogra district. **Radha** consisted of Midnapore, Birbhum, Burdwan, 24

82 Sarkar, S., op. cit., p. 35
56
Parganas, Nadia, Nurshidabad district. Vanga included Dacca, Vikrampur and Faridpur area. Samatata consisted of Srihatta, Comilla, Chittagong and Tipperah regions. Records of **Varendri** region mention some Puranic female divinities such as Kadambari, Rohini (wife of Candra), Svaha (wife of Agni), Sarvani (wife of Siva) Bhadra (wife of Kubera), Puloma (wife of Indra), Bhavani (consort of Bhava i.e., Siva) Saraswati, Carcika etc. Independent status of Mother Goddess may be traced in Kadambari and Carcika. Other female divinities are found in association with their male consort and thus seem to have held a secondary position. There is a controversy regarding the identification of the goddess Kadambari. In the Medinikosa Goddess Bharati (Saraswati) is considered as a synonym of Kadambari. The Goddess may also be regarded as a local deity. In the Khalimpur Copper Plate Inscription the shrine of Kadambari is used as an indicator of a boundary: *uttarena Kadamvari devakulika khajuravrksasca* (line 32). This suggests that the goddess earned a great popularity. In the Bangarh Prasasti of Murttisiva the poet makes his prayer for appeasement of the frightful goddess Carcika who alone could protect the universe. From her terrible form we can assume that she may be a Tantric Goddess. **It indicates the expansion of Tantricism side by side with Puranic Brahmanism in Bengal in tenth/eleventh century A.D.** In the same record we find reference to temple of Goddess Bhavani. Although the goddess is generally introduced as consort of Bhava (Siva) her independent status is substantiated by the separate temple made for her worship. One new motif of Goddess Gauri, the wife of Siva, can be seen in the Madhainagar Copper Plate of Laksmanasena where the Goddess is described as seated on the lap of Pancia (Siva), occupying half of his body. The description reminds one of Ardhanarishwara form of Siva-Sakti.
which earned popularity during the Sena period in Bengal. Goddess Laksmi has been referred to most of the inscriptions of Bengal as the consort of Visnu. Goddess Saraswati is represented as the co-wife of laksmi in the Badal Garuda Pillar Inscription. This aspect is often mentioned in the Puranas. However, Saraswati was an independent goddess of wisdom and learning in early Vedic period but in Puranas she is represented as the consort of Brahma or Visnu.

Table 1. shows that the following records of Radha throw some light on the cult of Mother Goddess: Two Medinipore Copper Plates, Ird Na Copper Plate, Sian Stone Inscription, Bhuvaneswar Prasasti, Paikore Image Inscription, Barrackpore Copper Plate, Naihat Copper Plate etc. Puranic Goddesses like Mahi(Prithivi), Himasailaja(daughter of Himalaya), Laksmi saraswati, Mahagauri, Mahalaksmi, Ardhanarismwara are occurred in the epigraphs of Radha. However the most informative record of the Radha region is the Sian Stone inscription where female Tantric deities like Carca(Carcika), Pingalarya and sixty four Yoganis are mentioned. All these goddesses are of Tantric character. The wide popularity of the goddess of the Markandeya Purana in that region is proved by the erection of temples for Nava Candica(nine Candikas). One inscribed image of Manasa discovered in Paikore village in Birbhum district shows that folk goddess like Manasa was popular in twelfth century A.D. in Bengal during the Sena period. One unique inscribed image of goddess Candi was found in the ruins of Rampal(Dacca). This proves the popularity of the Puranic war-goddess in the Vanga region.

In the Samatata region Candra and Deva rulers ruled for a long time. Probably due to this reason no Pala-Sena record is to be found in this
region (comprising Srihatta, Comilla and Chattagram). Epigraphic records prove that Buddhism predominated in the region because the kings introduced themselves in the records as Paramasaugata. However, Puranic Brahmanism was also popular. A queen of Buddhist Khadga dynasty caused to guilt in gold the image of the Puranic Goddess Sarvani (consort of Siva) in the seventh century A.D. From the epigraphic records of Samatata region we have significant mention of Indrani, Bhavani, Laksmi, Saraswati and Vasundhara by way of comparison. On the other hand female divinities like Durga, Rudrani, Durgottara, Sarvani seems to have represented mother Goddess with her great glory in that region.

The Brahmanical culture and religion had gained firm footing in early Assam at least from fifth century A.D. Reference of Balabhadraswami in Umachal Rock Inscription (fifth century A.D.) proved the fact. The following table will show the prevalence of Mother Goddess Cult in ancient Assam:

Table. 2.: Female Divinities in Assam’s Inscriptions (Source: Kamarupasasasanavali, edited by Dimbeswar Sarma, Inscriptions of Ancient Assam by M.M. Sharma)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL. NO.</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Goddess</th>
<th>Find spot of the inscriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Doobi Copper Plate originally issued by Bhutivarman later reissued by Bhaskarvarman</td>
<td>600-50 A.D.</td>
<td>Bhogavati Durga Laksmi</td>
<td>Doobi Village in Barpeta District. 3 miles from Pathsala Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nidhanpur Copper Plate originally issued by Bhutivarman later reissued by Bhaskarvarman</td>
<td>600-50 A.D.</td>
<td>Syama Laksmi</td>
<td>Sylhet District, Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tezpur Copper Plate of Vanamalavarman</td>
<td>832-55A.D.</td>
<td>Mahagauri</td>
<td>Tezpur, Sonitpur District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

84 Sarkar S. op.cit. p.52
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Names and Dates</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Parbatiya Copper Plate</td>
<td>Middle of the ninth century A.D.</td>
<td>Candika</td>
<td>Parbatiya village, 3 miles from Tezpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Deopani Harihara Image Inscription of the time of Diglekhavarman</td>
<td>Ninth Century A.D.</td>
<td>Gauri</td>
<td>Deopani, Golaghat District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bargaon Copper Plates of Ratnapalvarman</td>
<td>920-60 A.D.</td>
<td>Kuladevi (Goddess of the family) Laksmi</td>
<td>Nahorhabi within Bargaon, Tezpur, Sonitpur District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Guwahati Copper Plates of Indrapalavarman</td>
<td>960-90 A.D.</td>
<td>Gauri Parvati Ganga Sachi Rohini</td>
<td>Barpanara within Patidarrang, Kamrup District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Guwakuchi Copper Plates of Indrapalavarman</td>
<td>960-90 A.D.</td>
<td>Mahagauri Ganga Girija Laksmi Saraswati</td>
<td>Near Nalbari Police Station, Nalbari District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Khanamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapalavarman</td>
<td>1030-65 A.D.</td>
<td>Ardhayuvatiswara Girija Saraswati</td>
<td>Within Barbagagia, Nagaon District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Subhankarapataka Grant of Dharmapala</td>
<td>1030-65 A.D.</td>
<td>Ardhayuvatiswara Laksmi Parvati Saraswati</td>
<td>Area not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Puspabhadra Copper Plates of Dharmapalavarman</td>
<td>1030-65 A.D.</td>
<td>Saraswati</td>
<td>North Guwahati, Kamrup District</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the prevalence of Mother Goddess or Sakti in ancient Assam. The Doobi Copper Plate and Nidhanpur Copper Plate of Bhaskaravarman contains various names of Sakti. In Doobi Plate queen Nayana Devi is compared to Durga (and Parvati). It appears that Sakti cult became popular and as a result the queens assumed the names of Sakti or Goddesses and they were compared to Sakti in power, beauty and fame. The Nidhanpur Copper Plate refers (1.87) to a donee named Kaliswami which signify that the cult of Kali was already popular to certain extent. The same plate (V. 20) also refers to the goddess Syama and the queen assumed the name Syamadevi. Syama is supposed to be a form of goddess Durga or Kali, the great goddess of the Devimahatmya. Both
inscriptions refer to the various Puranic gods and goddesses which focus the liberal attitude of the Varmana Kings who were Saivas.

Reverential reference is made in the Tezpur (ll. 10-11) of Vanamalavarmadeva to the presence of Kameswara and goddess Mahagauri on the top of a hill called Kamakutagiri. On the basis of the Kalika Purana (64.48, 18-42) it may be presumed that Kameswara means God Siva and Mahagauri is Goddess Kamakhya and Kamakutagiri is the Nilachala hill or the Nilaparvata. The Parvatiya Copper Plate also refers another important Puranic Goddess Candika Devi. Here we get a reference of a tank named Candika and we can assume that the people of this area cherished special devotion for the war goddess of the Markandeya Purana. In the Deopani Visnu Image Inscription Visnu paid homage to Hara (Siva) and said that Goddess (Devi) is adorable and identical with Visnu. The Bargaon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapala refers to Kuladevi(Goddess of the family) belonged to the king of the Bhauma family. The Sualkuchi Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapala states that there existed Tantric rites during the reign of Ratnapala. He himself was a well versed in Tantric lore. Mention is also made to a playful quarrel between Gauri and Sambhu in the Gauhati Copper Plate (V.1) of Indrapala. In the same epigraph (V.14) queen Durlabha of Purandarapala is compared to Goddess Siva belonging to Sambhu(Siva). The Guwakuchi Copper Plate of Indrapala (L49-60) refers to a plot of land chartered in the name of Goddess Mahagauri and Lord Kameswara. In the same epigraph (ll 71-2) king Indrapala is named Haragirijacaranapankajarakarjanjitottamanga, i.e. one whose head is coloured with dust of the lotus feet of Hara and Girija.

The Gachtal Copper Plate of Gopalavarmadeva refers to the daughter of mountain Himalaya (Parvati). In the Khanamukh Grant of Dhamnapala the mangala verse is addressed to the Goddess in the Ardhayuvatiswara form. In the eleventh verse of the same plate queen Ratna is compared to Goddess Girija belonging to Sambhu. The same plate (V.9) also refers to
Goddess Saraswati. In the Subhankara Pataka Grant of Dharmapala (V.19) the mother of the donee is compared to Goddess Parvati, the spouse of Siva, the killer of Andhaka (parvatica dainthandhakadvisah). The Hayunthal Copper Plates of Harzaravarman mentions that Harjaravarman was born to Jivadevi, which is identified as Mother Earth.

It is seen from the above discussion that various manifestation of the goddess are popular in ancient Assam. Siva was directly associated with Sakti in the physical manifestation of Gauri as seen in the Tezpur Copper Plate Inscriptio of Vanamala and Guwakuchi Grant of Indrapala. The Bargaon Grant also shows a new motif where Siva and Gauri were playing Dice. Later on Siva and Parvati acquired a unity and both were coalesced into one. The Khanamukh and Subhankarapataka Grant of Dharmapala invoke Ardhayuvatisvara. Sakti or Bhagawati equated with Visnu also. This new motif can be seen in Deopani Visnu Image Inscriptio. Another important fact of the Sakti worship is the reference of Tantra as a subject which was studied by Indrapala.

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that independent local tribal goddesses were transformed into Brahmanical deities and Puranas played an important part in this process of reconstruction. Bengal and Assam were aryanised at a later date compared to the rest of India due to the geographical locations. Before the Puranic Brahmanism reached eastern India, tantricism had a stronghold in both these regions where goddess occupied the most important role. The Puranakaras chose the goddess mainly due to their popularity among the local people. In the process of aryanisation the tribal goddess lost her independent status. Most of the independent local goddesses were represented as the consort of male gods and thereby indicating a subordinate position. Though the nature of the goddess of Assam and Bengal are different, yet the process of transformation was almost similar.
It has appeared from the epigraphic record that Puranic goddesses made their advent in Bengal and Assam by the seventh century A.D. Both literary and epigraphic records prove that both Vaisnavite (Laksmi, Saraswati) and Saivite (Bhavani, Gauri, Sarvani) goddesses were popular in ancient Assam and Bengal. However in Assam, Saivite goddesses earned more popularity. So far as war-goddess is concerned, Upa-Puranas written in Bengal laid more emphasis on the war-goddess. It could be attributed to the occurrence of lesser political struggles in the region compared to her popularity in Bengal, whose history abound in conflicts and struggles between the regional powers. Most probably sculptors of ancient Assam were greatly influenced by the theme Mahisamardini that is very popular in Benagl during the Pala-Seana period.

It is interesting that in most of the epigraphic records of both the regions, we find incidental and stray references to the names of Puranic goddesses in the context of drawing comparison with some noble ladies belonging to the ruling class. The Khalimpur Copper Plate Inscription contains a comparison between Daddadevi, mother of Dharmapala with goddess Laksmi. In Badal Garuda Pillar Inscription, Ralladevi, wife of Someswara is compared with Laksmi. In the Subhankara Pataka Grant of Dharmapala, the mother of the donee is compared to Goddess Parvati. The references indicate that the names of such goddesses gained familiarity and popularity in these regions.

Certain land grants contain valuable information regarding the village deities of these regions. Khalimpur Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmapala refers to a temple of Kadambari on the northern border of the village Krauncasvabhra of Pundravardhana bhukti. Parbatiya Plate of Vanamalavarmana of Assam refers to goddess Candika residing near a tank on the south-eastern boundary of the village Haposa on the northern bank of Brahmaputra. Most probably they were independent village deities bearing a local appellation and worshipped generally by the non-Aryan people. Moreover the fact that a goddess, and not a god, was generally
worshipped as the village presiding deity is reminiscent of the matrilineal stage of the early society. Syncretism found in concept of Ardhanarishwara, Ardhayuvatishwara etc. is very suggestive in explaining an ideological compromise among the rival philosophy of different sects. Concept of mountain goddess like Himasailaja, Girija are prevalent in both the regions. Apart from the Brahmanical goddess, Bengal epigraphs mention Buddhist goddess also. It was absent in case of Assam. However, in Bengal Buddhism got the royal patronage; whereas in Assam most of the rulers were Saivite.

Although the earlier epigraphic records of both the region hardly make mention of the female divinities, a number of epigraphic records dated from seventh century A.D. to twelfth century A.D. gives us to understand that the cult of Mother Goddess in different forms and with various names gained popularity in Assam and Bengal.

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85 Choudhury, A.K., Early Mediaval Village in North East India, Puthi Pustak, Calcutta, 1971, p. 239.
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