CHAPTER THREE

MAHISHASURAMARDINI IN BENGAL ART : AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY -
SCOPE OF STUDY - CLASSIFICATION OF RELEVANT SPECIMENS OF ART
ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT IMAGES
CHAPTER THREE

MAHISHASURAMARDINI IN BENGAL ART:
AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY

Mahishasuramardini, one of the various forms of Durga, occupies a position of distinction among the Sakta goddesses of Hindu pantheon. Due to the wide prevalence of the worship of Sakti or the Female energy in India from a very early period among almost all the different ethnological elements comprising the vast mass of Indian population, goddess Durga in her various manifestations, especially as Mahishasuramardini, gradually became the supreme object of adoration among the followers of Saktism. Iconic representations of the goddess are met with all over the country and Bengal being one of the chief centres of her cult, has its due share in the iconic manifestation of the goddess in her various forms, which is rather a fascinating study.

I
SCOPE OF STUDY

The concept of Mahishasurmardini has remained an everlasting source of creative inspiration to the artistic talent of Bengal through the ages, representing a tangible iconographic transformation which is evident from a comparative study of the earliest of such icon discovered in Bengal, and those of the same deity figured in the
temple terracotta and pictorial art specimens of the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. The former one, a terracotta image of Mahishamardini of c. third-fourth century A.D. from Sarsabaz in Bogra district of Bangladesh, shows a robust four-armed goddess piercing the demon in zoomorphic form with a śūla, while the latter type of goddess usually possesses a benign smile on her face and is flanked on either side by her sons (Gaṇapati and Kārttikeya) and daughters (Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī) and there is nothing in the expression and attitude of these deities to show that they are in anyway involved in the combat in which their mother is engaged. It is difficult to reconcile this conception of Mahishāsuramardini - Durgā with the militant form of the goddess revealed in the icon of the same goddess from Sarsabaz described above.

The various aspects of the iconographic transformation of Mahishamardinī image as revealed by material remains of Bengal art between these two cardinal points of this long span of time (about one and a half millenium) still remains an untrodden field for observation and indepth study. No doubt, some scholars have dwelt upon some specific icons of this group of Bengal origin, but these have been done as a passing survey in the context of a general study of Mahishamardinī icons in Indian art. An indepth analysis of the iconographic traits of relevant specimens from Bengal is still awaited.
Moreover, almost all the surveys made so far in this respect are partial to the extent that they do not cover the entire range of development of the iconographic portraiture of the goddess concerned from the date of the earliest discovered icons to the nineteenth century depiction of the goddess in temple terracotta and pictorial art, leaving aside a scope of study of the later phase of such development. Further, an extensive field investigation in different parts of undivided Bengal, both in India and Bangladesh, resulted in a discovery of a large number of icons of this group hitherto unknown, both in the forms of sculptural art consisting of stone and metal images, temple terracottas, plaques, wood carvings and pigments, which remained still unnoticed and unestimated. Indeed, the Bengal icons of the goddess concerned offer considerable varieties in their iconographic formalization which in fact deserve absorbing interest of researchers in this field of study.

II

CLASSIFICATION OF RELEVANT SPECIMENS OF ART

The depiction of Mahishasuramardini in her various forms is not only confined to stone sculptures, but also extended to other works of art, such as metal castings, wood and ivory carvings, line engraving on different hard substances, terracottas and pigments. With the exception of a few, most of the representations of the goddess through these different art-mediums are in conformity with
either one or other description of the goddess given in different texts. Moreover, the relevant specimens of art when studied in their true perspective unfold the iconographic portraiture of the goddess concerned at different stages of its development, distinctly indicating some of its regional variations. Nonetheless, during the later phase of development of the iconographic portraiture of the goddess, some transformation in the thematic composition of the art-specimens depicting Mahishāsura-mardini is noticeable, which is inseparably related to the icono-mythical aspect of the goddess and may be convincingly explained by referring to the changes in religious art motivation at later stages of development of Mahishamardini cult-worship in late medieval and early modern Bengal.

The specimens of art under review admit of a broad classification on the basis of A. material, B. thematic representation, C. iconographic formalisation. A discussion thereon seems to be necessary before an indepth analysis of the iconographic development of Mahishāsura-mardini as represented by her depiction in Bengal art. However, at the outset, two important things should be noted. First, most of the relevant art specimens of earlier period in the form of stone sculptures and metal castings are chance finds and without any inscription, and as such, their approximate date of carving or casting, as the case may be, can only be assumed on stylistic consideration. Secondly, relevant materials available for the iconographic study of Mahishāsura-mardini in Bengal art onwards eighteenth century (for example, depiction of the goddess in temple
terracotta plaques, pigments etc.) are so enormous in number and sometimes so confusing in treatment that a selective approach to the study of such materials is a desideratum.

A. MATERIAL CLASSIFICATION

The works of art delineating various forms of Mahishamardini in Bengal art repertoire are executed in different materials of art-medium. On the basis of materials used for technique followed for these art-productions, the formal representations of Mahishamardini is divisible into a. stone sculptures, b. metal castings, c. terracottas, d. wood carvings, e. ivory carvings, f. line engravings and lithographs and g. paintings. Following is the material-cum-technique wise discussion on the art-objects carrying the formal representations of the goddess.

a. Stone Sculptures

The majority of stone sculptures in question are carved out of basalt, while the rest are of sandstone, schist and chlorite. Sculptured figures of Mahishāsuramardinī of this order carved out of basalt, chlorite and schist are generally more neat, and more meticulous in details and less weather torn than the majority of the relevant specimens executed in sandstone. The reason of such tectonic differences lies in the differences in texture of the varieties of stone. There are, however, some small specimens executed in
fine-grained sandstone which are no less elegant than their counterparts delineated in other types of stone.

Among the notable black basalt specimens is an image of Mahishāsuramardini from Sakti of Dhaka district of Bangladesh, now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum. This splendid ten-armed image of the goddess is one of excellent proportions and shows a graphic representation of the combat between the deity and the demon whose left leg is depicted as still within the trunk of the decapitated buffalo. The use of fine-grained sandstone can be seen in an icon of Mahishāsuramardini from Gangarampur in the district of Maldah, West Bengal, now preserved in the Varendra Research Museum of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. This seventh century fine-grained grey sandstone relief, though damaged in its upper part, shows a rare six-armed image of Mahishamardini in pratyālīḍha with her left foot placed on the back of the Mahisha whose head does not appear to have been severed. That the coarse-grained sandstone medium is likely to be weather-torn and disallows meticulous treatment of figurative form of the deity and her attributes, is proved by an image of Mahishamardini in coarse-grained sandstone salvaged from a tank at the village of Darinda Rasulpur in Tāpṣerā district of Bangladesh and now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum. The image of this ten-armed Mahishamardini is so weather-

1. Alam, Shamsul A.K.M., Sculptural Art of Bangladesh : Pre-Muslim Period, p.207, Fig.92.
torned that only the bare outlines of the figures of the goddess and the demon who is depicted fully emerged out of the decapitated Mahisha are recognisable. The chlorite-schist is, however, a convenient material for carving images with all their attributes and a representative example is provided by a c. twelfth century image of Mahishāsuramardini from Dulmi (Manbhum district), now in the collection of the Indian Museum at Calcutta. It represents the ten-armed goddess, standing in pratyālīḍha, fighting vigorously with Mahishāsura who emerges out of the decapitated trunk of the buffalo (PLATE XIV.a).

Formal representations of the goddess including her vehicle and the demon encountered on the lithic art objects are as a rule in reliefs, high as well as low. Many of them exhibit meticulous details in delineating the figures of the goddess, demon and animal, while others only show broader features of the same.

b. Metal Castings

Almost all the metal sculptures of Bengal art repertoire bearing images of Mahishamardinī are made of bronze or octo-alloy. They generally represent the image of the goddess with her associates and the demon in the round. Compared to the number of lithic examples, those of the metal casting are relatively very few and in respect of formal representations of the goddess they are limited. Moreover, as metal objects are more susceptible to

environmental overtures than those of lithic origin, some of the metal images of Mahishamardinī from Bengal are so corroded that it is sometimes difficult to identify some of the attributes held by the goddess. Of the metal images of Mahishamardinī mentioned may be made of a two-armed bronze image of the goddess concerned from Kankandighi village of South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. This small and partly corroded image of Mahishamardinī of c. twelve-thirteenth century is almost unique in Bengal art repertoire in delineating the form of the goddess as well as that of Mahisha (PLATE XLI a). Another interesting metal image of Mahishāsuramardini comes from Kuchilbari in the district of Cooch Behar, West Bengal. This ten-armed figure of Mahishāsuramardini is shown her as attacking the demon in her pratyālīgha pose, while the dragon shaped lion is pouncing on the right hand of the demon who is decorated with a crown 4.

c. Terracottas

The depiction of Mahishamardinī in the terracotta art of Bengal during the period under review may be conveniently divided into two sub-classes: i. terracotta images and plaques of earlier period, and ii. temple terracotta panels of within time bracket of the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. The representation of the goddess in the former one is very limited and materials available of

this category is scanty, while the latter one is most prolific and varied in formal and thematic representations of the goddess in the whole range of relevant materials available for the entire study.

The former sub-class is represented by a terracotta image of Mahishamardinī of c. third-fourth Century A.D. hailing from Sarsabaz in Bogra district of Bangladesh. This four-armed goddess in the round with broad shoulders, wide hips, heavy breasts, an attenuated waist and visibly engaged in destroying the demon is the earliest image of the goddess so far discovered within the geographical confines of Bengal (PLATE V.a). Another example of this sub-class is furnished by a terracotta piece hailing from Tamluk and now preserved in the Tamralipta Museum and Research Centre at Tamluk. This fifth-sixth Century fragmentary plaque, with only the lower part surviving, deals with the elaborate theme of killing the buffalo-demon Mahishāsura by a four-armed Mahishāsuramardini. An attractive example of the second sub-class is provided by a terracotta plaque of a temple at Vishnupur in Bankura district of West Bengal, which displays a vigorous figure of a ten-armed Mahishamardinī in tribhanga pose who being accompanied by her vāhana lion is piercing the chest of the anthropomorphic demon with a long spear (PLATE XX.a). Another terracotta panel of a temple in Hadal-Narayanpur village of Bankura district in West Bengal shows a more elaborate representation of a legend associated with the

5. Mukhopadhyay, Uma., Socio-Economic Life as Depicted in Early Bengal Terracottas, Chap.III, Sec.IX(C) under Divinities. (an unpublished doctoral thesis of the University of Calcutta), 1991.
goddess. In this specimen of art Mahishamardini-Durga is shown as fighting with Rāvana of Lanka (PLATE IX.b).

d. Wood Carvings

Figures of Mahishamardini carved out in wood are numerically scanty. But they are noteworthy because of some distinctive portrayal borne by them. In these objects the manner of depicting the figures of the goddess on wooden door, timber post etc. is generally frontal. An exquisite image of Mahishāsuramardini carved in one of the wooden posts of the Chandimandapain Sripur village of Hooghly district, West Bengal, is a notable example of this group (PLATE VI.c). Another attractive specimen of wood carving of the goddess in door, now preserved in the Amūlya Pratnasālā of Rajbalhat in the Hooghly district, from Bhelia village of the same district, is also worthy of appreciation (PLATE VII.a). The former one presents a profusely ornamented ten-armed figure of Mahishāsuramardini-Durga with a dragon-like lion and a curl-haired demon. The latter one shows the goddess standing in pratyālīgha pose having her right foot on the shoulder of the lion and the left on the head of the seated demon. Both of the specimens seemed to belong to the closing years of the eighteenth Century.

c. Ivory Carvings

Very few images of Mahishāsuramardini, carved in ivory, from Bengal have been discovered so far. Though numerically scanty, they
are worked out so magnificently in minute details as to give them a place of elegance in Bengal art repertoire. Of the few such specimens, mention may be made of an ivory carved image of Mahishamardinī-Durgā with her attending deities, vāhana lion and the demon in anthropomorphic form hailing from Murshidabad in West Bengal, and now preserved in the gallery of the Indian Museum in Calcutta. In this meticulously carved out piece of art of the nineteenth Century the entire assemblage of divinities, demon and animals is placed on a two-tiered throne with a chālchitra or backslab decorated with lattice work of superior symmetrical beauty (PLATE XVII.a).

f. Line engravings and lithographs

Mahishamardinī in her various icono-mythical forms also figures prominently in the eighteenth - nineteenth Centuries' line engraving art of Bengal. Some of these line engraving plates or prints show Mahishamardinī-Durgā in her usual iconographic form as worshipped in Bengal at that time, while others visualize some mythological episode of the combat of the goddess with the demon. A line engraving plate on wood (usually called woodcut) of late

6. Line engraving in art means the process of engraving designs on hard substance by incised lines, or a plate engraved by such a line, or a print produced from such a plate (see Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Vol.II, p.1051). The printing press reached Eastern India from western sources around 1777-78 A.D. The owners of the presses and the printers are all Europeans. For illustrating the books they engaged engravers to prepare printing plates for the same. (see Pal,Asit. (ed.), Woodcut Prints of the Nineteenth Century Calcutta, p.12).
eighteenth century shows the depiction of a ten-armed Mahishamardini-Durga with her usual attending deities, vāhana and combating asura. The plate bears the following inscription in Bengali character: 'Shri Shri Durga Pūjā, Shri Nritya Lal Datter Khodita, Sakim Jodabagan'. (The worship of Shri Shri Durga, Engraved by Shri Nritya Lal Datta of Jodabagan), Calcutta. Another such woodcut of almost of the same time shows Mahishamardini-Durga engaged in a fearful combat with the buffalo-demon whose anthropomorphic body being half-emerged from the decapitated body of the Mahisha. This plate also bears an inscription in Bengali character (PLATE VIII. a). A lithograph for printing carved out in mid-nineteenth century also represents Mahishāsuramardini-Durga with her associates and the demon (PLATE VI. b).

**g. Paintings**

Representations of Mahishāsuramardini in pigment are numerous and varied in content. Most of them are works of art painted within the time bracket of late seventeenth and concluding decade of the nineteenth centuries. Barring a few most of these works of art are line drawings with innerspace of the delineated objects being filled up by pigments. Paintings betraying Mahishāsuramardini in her various forms may be divided into the following sub-classes: (i) portrait for worship or hangings, (ii) miniature for illustration; (iii) ritual drawings, and (iv) paṭa-chitra.
Among the specimens of art belonging to the first sub-class, mention may be made of a big sized oil painting still worshipped during the annual festival of the goddess in the Durgāmaṇḍapa of Shri Bimalendu Bhattacharya of Bhatpara in the district of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. This multi-coloured painting of a ten-armed Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā with her usual attending divinities, vāhana lion and the demon represents the iconographic formalisation of the deity in the late eighteenth Century (PLATE XVIII.b). An example of the second sub-class is furnished by an illustration of Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā of the late nineteenth Century. The ten-armed goddess is piercing the chest of the asura by a long spear; the lion is trampling the Mahisha; the demon is emerging out of the deep wound inflicted on the central part of the body of the Mahisha. Stylistically the art form of this painting belongs to the nineteenth Century Bengal School of Painting (PLATE XIX.c). Of the third sub-class best examples are supplied by ritual Sarā-chitra or painting of figures of deities for worship on the convex side of well burnt earthen dishes, which are objects of veneration to every Hindu household of Bengal. Some of these sarā-paintings of the eighteenth-nineteenth Centuries preserved in the Gurusaday Dutta Museum and West Bengal State Folk Art Museum, both in Calcutta, show Mahishamardini-Durgā in broad outline and bright colour-composition. The last of the sub-class of this order, the Paṭa Chitra or scroll painting is a segment of the folk art of Bengal. These colourful paṭa-chitras sometimes represent many of the episodes narrated in the Purāṇas and the Epic concerning the goddess Mahishamardinī-
Durgā. One of the most illuminating examples of this type of folk art painting of the seventeenth-eighteenth Century hails from Hooghly district of West Bengal. The painting depicts an episode from the Rāmāyana where Rāma is worshipping the goddess; the demon is standing on the foreground of the deity with folded hands; its body is in anthropomorphic form, while the head is that of a buffalo (PLATE XIX.a).

B. THEMATIC REPRESENTATION

On the basis of thematic composition, the various representations of Mahishāsuramardinī in Bengal Art may broadly be classified as (i) images of certain determinate forms, and (ii) visualization of different mythical episodes involving the exploits of the goddess.

As regards certain determinate forms, sculptural and pictorial representations of the goddess in the Bengal art repertoire show her in a number of designated forms, such as Mahishamardinī, Mahishāsuramardinī-Durgā, Chaṇḍī or Chaṇḍikā, Katyāyanī, Navadurgā, Kokāmukhā-Durgā etc. The Mahishamardinī form of the goddess is well-represented by a small metal image of the deity hailing from Kankanadighi village in the district of South 24 Parganas. This partly corroded small image show the two-armed Mahishamardinī piercing the head of the Mahisha by a śūla (PLATE XII.a). As regards Mahishāsuramardinī most of the sculptural representations of
the goddess in stone and metal of Bengal art repertoire belong to this group. The name Mahishāsura-mardini itself suggests the presence of the demon alone in its anthropomorphic form or sometimes with the decapitated body of the Mahisha along with its anthropomorphic representation. Images of this designation are abundantly found in Bengal sculptural repertoire. The stone Mahishāsura-mardini from Dulmi in Manbhum district, now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta is one of the best examples of this designation. It represents the ten-armed goddess fighting vigorously with the demon who emerges out of the decapitated trunk of the Mahisha (PLATE XIV.a). Mahishāsura-mardini-Durgā is also well-represented in the art of Bengal, especially in pigment. In Bengal this designation of the goddess signifies a special formal representation and sometimes is designated simply as Durgā. Here Mahishāsura-mardini-Durgā is usually identified with the present-day image of Durga accompanied by her sons and daughters, the mount lion and the Mahishāsura. As regards Chaṇḍī or Chaṇḍikā, it may be mentioned that a black stone image of an eight-armed Mahishamardini, worshipped as Ādyā, in the famous Madhava temple at Dhamrai in the Dhaka district of Bangladesh, bears a short inscription of the twelfth Century character identifying the goddess as 'the Chaṇḍikā of the illustrious Khulmanika'. The Nava-Durgā form of the goddess is illustrated by an image, unique of its kind, hailing from Porsha in the present-day Rajshahi district of Bangladesh and now in the collection of Varendra

7. IBBS., p.196.
Research Museum. This specimen of Bengal art represents in an extremely interesting manner nine figures of Mahishamardinī, one of them being carved out as the central piece, while other eight, miniature replicas of the former, are grouped round it, five being carved out in the top part of the stela, another two on either side and the rest one of the nine images found its position on the middle of the pedestal (PLATE XII.b). The whole conception behind this representation is fairly in conformity with the description of the goddess Nava-Durgā given in the Bhavishya Purāṇa. The representation of the Kokāmukhā form of Mahishamardinī in Bengal sculptural art is furnished by an outstanding eight-armed image of the goddess in black stone from the Pabna district of Bangladesh and now preserved in the Mahasthan Museum, where the deity is shown with face of a wolf (kokah). The present image (PLATE XII.c.) probably represents the Kokāmukha variety of the goddess mentioned in the Durgā stotras of Arjuna in the Mahābhārata (VI.23).

The delineation of different mythical episodes as narrated in different Purāñas and the Epics involving the exploits and other connected legends of Mahishāsura-mardinī in sculptural and pictorial art of Bengal represents the second group of this broad classification of relevant specimens. Barring a very few, most of the images of Mahishamardinī in both stone and metal show the

8. BS., p.251.
10. BS., p.247.
visualization of the episode involving the combat between the fearful goddess and the tormented demon Mahishasura which has been so vividly presented by the Devīmāhātmya section of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa\(^\text{11}\), Mahishamardini Stotra of Tantrasāra\(^\text{12}\) and the Sanskrit poems of Mayūra\(^\text{13}\). Only a very few specimens from this group of art work probably represent faintly some other episode concerning Mahishāsuramardinī. A black stone image of the goddess from Betna in the district of Dinajpur with thirty-two hands may be cited as an example supporting this induction. Being equally interesting and unique in iconographic portraiture, the goddess, equipped with various weapons, with a miniature lion between her legs, is depicted engaged in combat with a host of pot bellied demons among whom conspicuously the Mahishasura is absent. A female attendant is seen holding a chhatra over the head of the goddess, while on the upper part of the stela are depicted Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, Gaṇeṣa and the pedestal shows a donor couple and an ascetic in meditation. In this unique specimen of sculptured narrative, the sculptor may depict either the final or penultimate sequence in destroying the Mahishasura. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa\(^\text{14}\) states that the slaying of the Mahishasura occurred after the slaughter of many of his fellow fighters like Udagra, Vidala, Asiloma, Chikura, Chamara, Uddhata and others. It is thus assumed that the scene depicted in this

\(^\text{11}\) Chap., 82.
\(^\text{12}\) Avalon, A., Hymns to the Goddess, p.91-93.
\(^\text{13}\) Sanskrit Poems of Mayūra (c.fourteenth-fifteenth Century A.D.), translated by Quackenbos.
\(^\text{14}\) Chaps. 82, 83.
particular specimen of sculptural art represents one of Mahishāsura-sainyavadha (killing of the armies of Mahishāsura) episodes as mentioned in the above text.15

But in the temple terracotta panels and pictorial art specimens of the later Centuries the representations of the epic scenes, especially from the Rāmāyana, involving the mythology of Mahishamardinī-Durgā, are more prolific and varied. In a patachitra of early nineteenth Century from village Ondā in the district of Nankura the scene of Rāma worshipping the ten-armed Mahishamardinī-Durgā is depicted in all the grandeur of folk-art of Bengal16, while a temple terracotta panel of late eighteenth Century at Hadal-Narayanpur village of Bankura district furnishes the battle-scene of the goddess and Rāvana of Lanka.

C. ICONOGRAPHIC FORMALIZATION

The most numerous among the ugra and terrific representations of the Devī in Bengal art, both sculptural and pictorial, is Mahishāsurmardinī who is related to parvata-vāsinī tradition and also known in Bengal by her various designations such as Mahishamardinī, Katyāyanī, Chaṇḍī, Chaṇḍikā and above all Mahishamardinī-Durgā or simply Durgā. Though archaeological evidence seems to suggest some alternative sources of iconographic

15. BS., p.253, plate, 204.
formalization of the goddess earlier than the Puranic tradition, the Devīmāhātmya section of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa is generally accepted as the main source of inspiration to the development of the various iconographic forms of the goddess. But strangely enough, though Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa provides Devī with more than two hundred designations, such as, Chaṇḍikā, Ambikā, Durgā etc., the name Mahishamardini is completely absent in that text. On the other hand, the Puranic accounts also depicted the goddess as emerging out of the combined energies of Brahmā, Vishṇu, Śiva and other gods which somehow associated her with the cult of Śiva-worship and added some new features to the iconographic formalization of the goddess. But in the process of iconographic development of the goddess, the Śaiva affiliation of the deity is sometimes subordinated to the Vaishṇavī character attributed to Śakti in some particular feat of killing the asura. This Vaishṇavī Śakti aspect of Mahishamardini is mentioned in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. The Śrīmad-Devī-Bhāgavatam also indicates certain elements in formalizing the iconography of Mahishamardini and states that Vishṇu gave the goddess a chakra and Varuṇa endowed her with the śāṅkha. In the Suprabhedāgama it is mentioned that the Brahmāṇī character of the goddess should be sculptured like Brahmā, and Vaishṇavī like Vishnu.

Many of the description of Mahishamardini-Durgā in the Purāṇas and

18. BS., p.237.
20. Part II, ch.IX, 5-10.
other text attribute to her different ayudhas, because in all these iconographic formalization different gods provide her with their own weapons. Besides all these factors the imagination of sculptor plays a constructive role in formalizing the iconography of the deity. While trying to maintain the tradition the sculptor did not hesitate to overcome the traditional barriers when it is warranted. For example the depiction of goddess dealing with the demon in its anthropomorphic form emerging out of the severed neck of the Mahisha, reveals the closeness of the sculptor's idea about the episode to the textual references. But the artists sometimes conceived the idea of projecting the demon in its anthropomorphic form, without beheading the Mahisha. Another important thing to be noted here is that, though few evidences of depicting Mahishāsuramardini amidst some other mythological scenes involving the goddess, in general the iconic formalization of Mahishamardini epitomises the final scene of the combat in three figures in a synthetic composition in which the Devi as the principal character stands in tribhanga, or dvibhanga attitude supporting her right foot on her mount lion and at a little higher plane, the left toe reaches on the shoulder of the vanquished Mahishāsura.

As regards to the iconic formalization of Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā in her family form, i.e. the goddess with a benign smile flanked on either side by her sons and daughters and in the lower

22. Nagar, Santilal., op.cit., p.87.
part of the foreground of this assemblage of divinities stands mount lion in a graceful manner, while the demon in its anthropomorphic form being struck by a long trisūla hold by the principal deity, some scholar has referred to a late Bengali tradition which deserves attention.23 According to this tradition, Durgā in this family-form goes to the home of her father Himalays on the sixth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Āśvina and returns to the abode of her husband on Mount Kailāsa on the tenth day of the same fortnight. In the late medieval Bengal Mahishāsurmardini-Durgā was conceived as a housewife as Śiva, her husband, is conceived as a poor self-indifferent person. The earliest definite reference to such a form of Durgā is furnished by the well-known Chandimahāgal-Kāvya24 of post Mukundarāma who flourished in Bengal in the sixteenth Century.

Keeping the above perspectives of the iconic formalization of Mahishāsurmardini in view, the various iconographic forms of the goddess as depicted in the Bengal art repertoire may be studied as follows.

The main iconographical features of the images of Mahishamardini of the relevant art repertoire centres round the different number of hands displayed by the divinity in her various

manifestations. On this basis Mahishāsuramardini of Bengal art, both sculptural and pictorial, may be classified as two-armed, four-armed, six-armed, eight-armed, ten-armed, twelve-armed, sixteen-armed, eighteen-armed and thirty-two-armed images respectively. So far the representative of these different types of the relevant icons in Bengal sculptural and pictorial art are concerned numerically ten-armed Mahishamardini surpasses other types in a more prolific manner, though in stone and sculptural art specimens, if considered separately, ten-armed representations probably rank immediately after that of eight-armed. Two-armed representation of the goddess is almost unknown, only two or three images of this type could be traced so far. The number of four-armed and six-armed images is also small and except a few, most of them are carved out in miniature form in stone. Eighteen-armed images, though not so prolific in number like those of eight or ten-armed, have been discovered in good numbers. As regards other types of images, i.e., twelve-armed, sixteen-armed and thirty-two armed, they are very scanty and some of them are represented by a single image only.

As to the facial features and headgears of the goddess, represented in the relevant art repertoire, various types are also discernable. Some of the images concerned bear a peaceful facial appearance and in some the facial expression is fearful, while in others the goddess has a benign smile on her face which is almost a regular feature of the depiction of Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā in temple terracotta panels and pictorial art of the later period. In
general the relevant images of the goddess in sculptural and pictorial representations have three eyes, though in some of them only a pair of eyes is noticeable. In most of the cases Mahishāsura mardini in Bengal art wears kīritamukūṭa, though jaṭāmukūṭa and karanḍa mukūṭa are not altogether absent. A large number of specimens from later terracotta temple panels and depiction of the goddess in pigment show the goddess wearing a crown type of head-gear, which is in form somewhat different from those mentioned above. In some images of Mahishamardinī from Eastern Bengal, a peacock feather is seen depicted behind or on the top of the Devī's head which seems to be an iconographic element inspired by the Durgāstotra of Mahābhārata or Āryastava of Harivamsa.

The representations of Mahishamardinī in Bengal art also exhibit various postures and poses. Of the postures majority of the images show the goddess standing in tribhanga, while goddess standing in dvibhanga or atibhanga are not altogether absent and in many cases the goddess is found standing erect with her legs being spread sideways without any bending of the knees which may be identified as some sort of samabhanga form of standing. Moreover as a battle-goddess Mahishamardinī also appears in many of the works of art of Bengal in her āttīdha as well as pratyātīdha poses. A comparative study of the relevant images in this particular context

25. BS., p.21.
show that the use of ālīḍha pose is more prolific than that of pratyaḷīḍha attitude of standing. In some images where the goddess is required to apply extensive force for effective use of her striking weapon, her retracted leg is seen almost in an obtuse angle, while in some other it seems to be in a hypotenuse bending. In the later phases of the development of the iconography of Mahishāsuramardinī-Durgā, the sculptor and painter have made it a general practice to depict the goddess as having her right foot on the back of the lion and left on the Mahishāsura which finds corroboration in Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa as quoted by Hemadri.

Like her other Indian counterparts, Mahishamardini of Bengal art display varied weapons, different mudrās and hand poses. Of the weapons most of them are offensive, though a very few may be designated as of defensive nature. Some sort of musical instruments, like a bell and a domaru, are occasionally found in the hands of the goddess as attributes. As regards mudrās and hand poses some of the Mahishamardini images display abhaya, tarjani and varada mudrās and sometimes also the katyābalambita or katīpahasthitā-hasta pose, which are more prolific in sculptural art specimens representing the goddess.

Lion, the mount of Mahishāsuramardinī, and Mahishāsura, the demon par excellence combating the goddess, are also represented in

27. Mṛta-khanda, p.111.
their various attitudes and forms in the images of Mahishāsuramardini. The study of both of them in their iconographical formalization is always considered as a part of the iconographic composition of the image of the goddess in a wider perspective. In visualizing the images of Mahishāsuramardini or Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā the sculptors and painters employ lion, the vāhana of the goddess, in its various stylistic and characteristic forms, which are evident from relevant material representations of the goddess in Bengal art. In some of the images of the goddess the lion is bold and majestic, again in some it is aggressive and in others assumes dragonic appearance. The demon is also represented in the relevant sculptural specimens of Bengal in different attitudes and forms. In majority of the images of the goddess the asura appears in his anthropomorphic forms, while the decapitated mahisha is lying near the feet of the deity. In some of the images the asura is emerging out of the decapitated body of the buffalo, while in very few cases only the anthropomorphic form of the demon is available where there is no depiction of any decapitated mahisha. In a very few representations of Mahishāsuramardini in Bengal art the demon appears only in its zoomorphic form, while in one of two cases in pigment the demon appears in an anthropo-zoomorphic form wherein the head of the demon represents that of a buffalo and the body appears as that of a human being, recalling some of the images of the goddess depicted in the caves of Mahabalipuram in Chingleput. The iconography of Mahishāsuramardini in Bengal art being the central theme of this discussion, the issue is left over to
the succeeding section of the present chapter for a thorough discussion, iconographic featurewise and selected specimenwise.

III

ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT IMAGES

The iconographic features of the Mahishāsuramardinī images depicted in Bengal art may be studied suitably on the basis of following considerations: A. The goddess and her attributes; B. Representation of Mahishāsura; C. The depiction of the mount of the goddess and D. The mythical scenes in the relevant works of art. This discussion, however, includes all selected specimens of sculptural and pictorial art, which are considered to be important and enlightening for the purpose, item-wise.

A. Goddess and her attributes

The discussion on the iconographic features of Mahishamardinī or Mahishāsuramardinī-Durgā depicted in Bengal art may be spread up as follows with occasional references to the physical and other features of the goddess available in various texts.

a. Numerical varieties of arms

A detail survey of the extant Mahishāsuramardinī images of Bengal both in sculptural art and pigment shows numerical varieties of arms displayed by the goddess which deserve attention.
i. two-armed

Mahishāsuramardini images displaying two arms only are almost unknown in Bengal art repertoire. However, in course of a thorough search for such icons, some rare evidences of a very few icons of this type have come to light. A bronze two-armed Mahishamardini image, unique in Bengal art repertoire, has been recently salvaged from an old tank during conservation work in Kankandighi village in the district of South 24 Parganas. This partly corroded image represents the goddess in sightly ālīḍha posture, the right leg being softly bend forward while the left one remains in a stiff standing position. The goddess wears a crown and a pair of earrings, possesses well-developed breasts and a small piece of apparel covers the lower part of her person from the waist down to the knees. The demon in its zoomorphic form is seen lying between the legs of the goddess stretched apart, while with her two hands she is piercing the demon with a śūla. The goddess including the Mahisha is placed on a lotus base (PLATE XII.a). The image being corroded, other significant features of the goddess cannot be recognised now, except that the facial formation of the goddess betray some peculiarity and she is unaccompanied by her vehicle or any accessory figure.

There is also a passing reference to a two-armed Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā image of the Pāla period hailing from South

28. The image is now worshipped as a family deity in the house of one Abani Mondal of the same village.
Mohammadpur in the Tippera district of Bangladesh, but detail information about the image is lacking and its present whereabouts is unknown.

i. four-armed

Depiction of four-armed Mahishamardinī in the relevant art is not so scanty as claimed in some recent studies on Bengal sculptures. A good number of such images have been discovered in recent years from West Bengal, especially from the coastal districts. It should be noted here that most of specimens of art representing four-armed Mahishamardinī are in some sort of condensed form of the goddess and invariably carved in small stone plaques.

On the basis of iconographic representation of the goddess, the images with four arms may be broadly divided in two different varieties: (i) representation of the goddess where she is unattended by her mount lion or any accessory figures and where the demon is depicted in its zoomorphic form; (ii) representation of the deity with her mount and other accessory figures and where the demon appears in its anthropomorphic form. Most of the four-armed Mahishamardinī images discovered so far from Bengal belong to the former variety.

30. BS., p.238, 241-244.
The most important example of the first variety is a terracotta image of the goddess of about third-fourth Century A.D. coming from Sarsabaz in Bogra district of Bangladesh. According to some scholar, some element of folk art and an over-emphasis on the volumes of the main parts of the body are noticeable, in delineating the image of the goddess under review. The deity with a round face, few ornaments, open mouth and open eyes stands in pratyāliṅga. Her left foot is placed on the shoulder of the demon in its zoomorphic form. While the lower left hand of the goddess pressed down the snout of the buffalo, the lower right one though partly broken, suggests by its posture that it is engaged in piercing the demon with a śūla. The upper right and left hands hold the khāḍga and khetaka respectively. In contrast with similar images of Mahishamardini from other parts of India, it may be pointed out that while those images are depicted as standing in āliṅga and pressing down the snout by one of her left hand, the Bengal specimen shows the goddess standing in pratyāliṅga and both her left foot and left hand are engaged in an unusual manner in pressing down the snout of the buffalo.

Another specimen of the same variety in stone has recently been discovered from an old tank in the village of Dhapdhapi in the district of South 24 Parganas and now being worshipped in the temple of Dakshin Ray of the same village. This image

of Mahishamardini of c. fifth-sixth Century A.D. is carved in a small piece of fine-grained sand-stone. Here the deity standing in ālīḍha position with her right foot being engaged in pressing the head of the demon in zoomorphic form and the lower left hand is probably pressing the buttok of the buffalo. The goddess is piercing the head of the mahisha with a long sūla caught by her upper right hand, while the lower right hand and the upper left one hold a khadga and probably a khetaka respectively. The goddess wears some sort of head-gear which cannot be identified due to some mutilation on that part of the plaque concerned. This image has some similarity with identical images discovered in other parts of India.

Another image of similar distinction carved in a small rectangular piece of fine-grained sand stone hails from Ramnagar village of South 24 Parganas district. In this work of art of c. sixth-seventh Century A.D. the four-armed deity is standing in pratāyālīḍha, having her right foot pressing the head of the demon in mahisha form. The lower right hand of the deity is holding an indistinct āyudha (probably a khadga) and the upper right one is engaged in piercing the head of the buffalo with an elongated sūla, while the upper right hand is probably holding a mace and the lower left is holding the tail of the buffalo, being placed almost in the form of katyalambita hasta. The goddess wears kūndala, kanṭha and other ornaments which could not be identified due to some

33. Ibid., p.73.
abrasion caused on the surface of the image which is carved in low relief. The goddess, probably with jatāmukūṭa, stands in a graceful posture (PLATE 1.a). The image is now worshipped in the house of Late Sakti Chakraborty in the village of its provenance.

Almost of similar description and same variety as the one discussed above, another image of Mahishamardini hails from near about Mahasthan in the Bogra district of Bangladesh\(^{34}\), which is now preserved in the Mahasthan Museum, Bogra. In this figure also the goddess stands in alidha and tramples the head of the demon in buffalo form by her right foot, while in her right hands she holds a raised khaḍga and a sūla which is piercing the demon. A khetaka is visible in the upper left hand of the goddess and by the lower left she is seen lifting the buffalo by its tail.

Further, a fragmentary stone miniature plaque from Boral\(^{35}\) in South 24 Parganas district also provides almost identical variety of a Mahishamardini image of c. fifth-sixth Century like those from Dhapdhapi, Ramnagar, (both in South 24 Parganas district and Mahasthan (Bangladesh), carved in it. Though partly damaged in the figure of the goddess still remains intact. Some sort of a jatāmukūṭa as visible in the head of the deity which stands in alidha, while the goddess is holding the tail of the mahisha by her lower left and piercing the body of the demon by a elongated sūla holding by her

\(^{34}\) BS., see Plate 195.

\(^{35}\) See plate No.6, Kausikī (a Bengali journal) annual number, 1995.
lower right hand. The āyudha in other two hands of the goddess are indistinct. This specimen of Bengal art is now in the collection of the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

In view of the discovery of similar variety of images from Bhūmāra 36, Bhīta 37 and from some places of Central India 38, it has been suggested that identical depiction of Mahishamardini is inspired by some ideas of the goddess visualized in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa 39. But on the basis of other convincing evidences and reasoning some scholars are of the opinion that presentation of the goddess with such features like, four-armed, absolutely zoomorphic appearance of the demon, absence of lion mount etc., might originate from other sources also 40. Even keeping this controversy in view, it may be assumed that this Mahishāsuramardinī image is one of early forms which remains unique for Bengal in the study of iconographic development of this goddess in Bengal art. That this form of the deity was once well known to sculptor of Bengal is proved by the fact that many other images of same variety have been found in some other places of the region under survey 41.

37. ASIAR, 1911-12, p.86, pl.XXI.
40. See SB., p.242-244 for a detail study.
41. Similar image preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum (SB., p.243); image of Mahishāsuramardinī from Howrah district preserved in the Ānanda Niketan Kīrtīśālā, Bagnan (Howrah district); some fragmentary images of this variety in the collection of Khāḍī-Chhatrabhog- Kriśnachandrapur Saṅgrahaśālā etc.
A second variety of four-armed Mahishāsuramardini, though rare, is also available in the sculptural art repertoire of Bengal. The best specimen of this type is represented by a four-armed Mahishāsuramardini carved in a small black stone plaque hailing from Hiranmoypur within the jurisdiction of Basanti Police Station of the district of 24 Parganas. The object is now preserved in the private collection of Shri Bimal Kumar Chakraborty of Jaynagar-Majilpur, South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. In this representation of the goddess some remarkable features are noticeable. The deity is standing in pratayalidha posture with her lower right hand piercing the asura in human form with a śūla, while by the lower left hand she is holding the hair of the demon. The upper right hand of the goddess displays a sword like weapon while the āyudha in the upper left hand is indistinct. There is not trace of any decapitated buffalo in the plaque. The mount lion is standing on the left side of the demon, while an elephant figure appears on the right side of the Mahishāsura. The figure of the deity is heavily ornamented and apparels for both lower and upper parts of the body are provided. The deity wears a peculiar type of head-gear. Among the ornaments of the body vājuvalaya, kundala, mekhala, keyūra and hāra are noticeable. The third eye of the goddess appears prominently (PLATE IV.b).

Specimen of four-armed Mahishāsuramardini are also available in other medium of art expression than those of the stone, though of much latter period. A terracotta plaque of the Nṛsiṁha temple at
Gokarna in the district of Murshidabad shows the depiction of the goddess with her vāhana lion and asura in human form (PLATE IV.c). This early sixteenth century work of art shows the four-armed deity with heavy ornaments in her body including a kinjakini. The deity is piercing the body of the demon with a śūla by her right front hand, while the left front one is holding the demon by his tuft of hair. Another important feature of the image is that the lion caught the right hand of the demon by his mouth, while its front right leg is pressing the right leg of the demon. This medieval terracotta plaque shows a stage in the gradual transformation of the iconographical features of Mahishamardini in Bengal art.

Another example of a four-armed Mahishāsuramardini being depicted through another medium of art is also interesting. A line engraving in wood shows a four-armed Mahishāsuramardini in combat with Mahishāsura, who happens to be half-emerged from the neck of the standing but decapitated mahisha; the severed head of the animal is lifted in the air by the charge of a spear hold by the front right hand of the goddess. Other two interesting features of this depiction of the image are the horns in the head of the demon in human form and sitting of the goddess on the back of her mount lion (PLATE VIII.a).
iii. six-armed

In comparison with the number of eight-armed and ten-armed images of Mahishāsuramardini or Mahishamardini-Durgā, six-armed images of the goddess are rare in number. Similarly reference to the goddess having six arms are also quite scanty. Only some passages in the Prapanchasāratantram and Prapanchasarasarasamgraha describe the goddess with six arms. Though some scholar has reported the discovery of only one such image from Bengal, there are evidences to prove that more such images are available in this part of the country.

Of the available images of this group the most important one is from Gangarampur of Maldah district in West Bengal. This grey sand-stone relief of c. seventh A.D., partly damaged in the upper part, depicts Mahishāsuramardini in pratyālaṅga with her left foot placed on the back of the buffalo whose head does not appear to have been severed. But strangely enough the anthropomorphic demon emerges out of the back of the demon in zoomorphic form. By her main pair of hands the goddess is piercing the demon with a śūla and also caught its tuft of hair. The upper left hand of the goddess displays a dhanu, while the upper right a sara. The other pair of hands of the deity is missing and the vāhana lion is absent.

42. Nagar, Santilal., op.cit., p.81.
43. BS., p.238, 244.
44. BS., p.244
Another six-armed image of Mahishamardinī depicted in a small black stone plaque has been recently collected by the authorities of Khadi-Chhatrabhog-Krisnachandrapur Saṁgrahāsālam, in the South 24 Parganas district, from Kankandighi of the same district. This six-armed deity is standing in ālīḍha posture with her right foot pressing the head of the decapitated buffalo, while the demon in its anthropomorphic form almost totally emerged out of the neck of the mahisha. The three-eyed goddess is placed on a lotus pedestal; she wears a kṛitamukuta in her head, a kanṭha in her neck, keśūna in her arms and other ornaments of the goddess are indistinct. Of the other attributes of the deity, the front right hand of the goddess is engaged in piercing the chest of the asura by a trident, the upper right hand is holding a sword and the lower right one displays an indistinct āyudha. Of the left hands of the deity, the upper one displays a wheel, the middle one is holding the head of the Mahishāsura who also wears a mukuta and the lower left hand is not visible. (PLATE I.c). The Mahishāsura has also some indistinct ornaments in its body, beside the mukuta. The demon is also seen brandishing a sword.

Information about another unique image of six-armed Mahishāsura is also available from Hariharpur village in the district of Dinajpur, West Bengal. The image is carved in a block of black chlorite stone along with other three images depicted in other three

sides of the block. Here the goddess is standing on a bull and not on a lion. With her two hands she is thrusting a śūla into the heart of the mahīṣa. One of her hands is in tarjini mudrā, while in her other hands she has an axe, a sword, and a skull-cup. There are two female-body guards flanking on her two sides. The attributes of such an image of Mahishāsura, no doubt, is not to be found in any standard work on iconography. But T.A. Gopinath Rao has quoted a verse to show that the goddess may have six hands also and she may display any other weapons, other than mentioned in the texts, which please the fancy of the artist. So this differences in emblems does not stand in the way of identifying this image as that of Mahishāsura.

It is surprising to note that the concept of a six-armed Mahishamardini stimulated the fancies of some the artists even in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal. A sketch in sharp outline of early nineteenth century by an unknown artist sows a six-armed Mahishamardini in a dynamic pose. The goddess is standing in aīdha posture with her right leg in an obtuse angle. The front right hand of the goddess is pressing the head of the demon, whose body is that of a human being and head that of a buffalo. By her upper right hand the goddess is piercing the chest of the demon with a long spearlike weapon. While she displays a shield by her left upper most arm, the left middle arm of the

47. Chakraborti, Biswar., op.cit., p.224.
goddess is in the Kāṭisamsthitā-hasta pose. Her right middle hand is holding the chain of a hanging pendant and the middle left arm shows abhaya mudrā. This early nineteenth century sketch of Mahishamardini is important in the development of the iconography of the goddess concerned in Bengal art for two important reasons. First, it shows that the ideas of modern Bengali artists still centre round iconographic tenets left for posterity in the ancient texts, and secondly, the figure of the demon with a human body and a buffalo head recall similar depiction of the demon in other parts of India (PLATE XI.b).

iv. eight-armed

That the eight-armed figure of Mahishāsurasamardini was favoured by the sculptors of Bengal is proved by the existence of many of such images in the sculptural art repertoire of Bengal. The Prapanchasara Tantra, the Saradatilaka Tantra and a number of other sanskrit texts describe her having a noose, a conch, a trident, a sword, a bow, an arrow, a chakra and a club in her different hands. In the artistic representations of the goddess sometimes some āyuḍhas are replaced by different mudrās, such as abhaya, varoda, Katihasta and tarjanī etc., which is also to be found sometimes in delineating Mahishāsurasamardini images of this group in Bengal. In general the eight-armed images of the goddess in Bengal are either in ālidha or pratyālidha and lion is usually

49. Ch.X and XX.
depicted as attacking the Mahishāsura, who seems to be emerging from the neck of the decapitated buffalo, by one of his legs.

Of the large number of images of this group, the specimens, in black stone, discovered from south-eastern Bengal offer a special type of representation of the Goddess. The stone images from Madhavapasa (Barisal district), from Sonarang (Dhaka district), and other two from Eastern Bengal belong to this special type. In all these images Mahishāsuraṇārdini stands in pratyālīḍha with her left foot being placed on the severed head of the buffalo. The four right hands of goddess in every case display Khadga, śara, cakra and trisūla, while the demon is being pierced by the last one of these ayudhas. Two of the left hands of the goddess exhibit khetaka and dhanu, while the other two hold a tuft of hair of the demon and show tarjiṇi mudrā respectively. In every specimen a female attendant is seen standing on either side. An important feature pertaining to two of these images is the depiction of a peacock feather on the top of the image-slab. It has been pointed out by some scholars that in the Durgastūpas of Arjuna in the Mahābhārata the Dēvi along with other designations also mentioned as śīkhipicchadhvaṇa-dhārīṇī, and in the Aryastava in the Harīvamsa.

50. BS., 245.
52. Preserved in the Varendra Research Museum.
53. One of them housed in Bangladesh National Museum and other in a private collection.
54. BS., p.241.
she is called **mayūrakpicchadhvajinī**. Another important thing to be mentioned here is that at least three of these four images positively show its concurrence with the textual prescriptions with regards displaying of **tarjānī** mudrā and placing the goddess over the decapitated head of the buffalo.\(^{56}\)

Another type of six images of eight-armed Mahishāsuramardinī in stone show the goddess in **pratyālidhā**. In these images as one foot lying on the decapitated body of the buffalo and other foot on the ground, while severed head of the animal-demon lying on the ground. In these images the goddess displays in her right hands **khaḍga**, sūla, cakra and banā, while in her left hands she shows the khaṭaka, dhanu, the tuft of the hair of the demon and a ghantā. Of two of these images one hails from Eastern Bengal and the other comes from some other part of Bengal. The former one is in the collection of the Bangladesh National Museum and the other is preserved in the Stuart Bridge Collection of British Museum. Other four images mentioned above come from Katnerpara of Bogra district (Bangladesh), Sarai in Hooghly district (West Bengal), Pekharna in Bankura district (West Bengal) and from somewhere of North Bengal; they are preserved respectively in the Bangladesh National Museum, Asutosh Museum Calcutta, in the findspot, and in the Varendra Research Museum respectively.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p.234.

\(^{57}\) Sārādātilakatāntra, 11.25; Prapāñcasāratantra, 14.24.

\(^{58}\) B.S., p.246.
Three other stone images of Mahishāsura-mardini discovered from different parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal show another distinctive feature shared by them. The deities hold khadga, śūla, cakra, and bāna in their right hands and kheṭaka, dhanu, and a tuft of the hair of Mahishāsura by three left hands, while they hold a nāga or snake in their fourth left hand which is mentioned in many texts as a nāgapāśa. These images were discovered from Abdulpur of Khulna district (Bangladesh), Chandima of Comilla district (Bangladesh) and Paikore in the district of Birbhum (West Bengal); they are preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, the Mainamati Museum and in the place of provenance respectively. The image from Chandima also shows some other distinguishing feature besides the nāgapāśa. The sculptor carved mayūrapicchadhvaja in the stela behind the goddess and the prabhāvatī or halo of the goddess is surmounted by the images of Gaṇapati, Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Kārttikeya.

The eight-armed image of Mahishāsura-mardini-Durgā from Backerganj District, now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, shows the left hand of the goddess in tarjini mudrā with difference divinities in a row at the top of the stela (PLATE V.d).

Another eight-armed Mahishāsura-mardini, by one of its unique feature, forms a separate class in the whole range of sculptural representations of the goddess. This black stone image of

59. B.S., p.246.
Mahishasuramardini from Pabna district in Bangladesh is now preserved in the Mahasthan Museum, Bogra. The goddess standing in alīdha, displays almost all usual āyudhas in her eight hands as prescribed by relevant texts. The unique feature of this image is related to the countenance of the deity. In this work of art the goddess appears with a face of animal which inspired the authorities of the aforesaid museum to identify it as Vārāhī-Mahishamardinī taking the face of the goddess as Vārāhī-like. As the face does not actually has any similarity to that of a varaha or boar, and as there is no textual prescription for such a compound form of Varahi, the Śakti of Varāha, and Mahishāsuramardinī, some scholar has attempted to identify the goddess properly. It has been suggested that in the Durgāstotras of Arjuna in the Mahābhārata\(^61\), the goddess is named along with other designations as Kokamukha. This assumption appears to be more logical than the identification of the goddess referred above (PLATE-XII.c). Report of another 'Kokamukhi-Durgā' in a temple at Raipur in Bankura district of West Bengal is also available\(^62\).

Another black stone image of Mahishāsuramardinī from Rangamati in the district of Murshidabad in West Bengal represents a peculiar way of depicting animal form. This badly mutilated image of the goddess, once identified by Layard as a six-armed Kāli, was properly identified later on as an eight-armed Mahishāsuramardinī\(^63\).

\(^{61}\) VI.23.

\(^{62}\) Ray, J.C., Puja-parvan (in Bengali), pp.81-82.

\(^{63}\) Das, Sudhir Ranjan, Archaeological Discoveries from Murshidabad District, pp.29-39, Pl.I.
Two important features of this image are worthy to note and rare in the Bengal varieties of the goddess. The deity is a dynamic standing figure in alīdha. Its left leg rests on the pedestal and the right one, on the body of the animal below, which is a double headed composite figure, buffalo and lion. This form of representing a double headed composite animal form is very rare. On the right, all arms of the deity are mutilated excepting the upper and the lower ones. The upper arm seems to hold a quiver, which is also very rare in the depiction of Mahishāsura images in Bengal.

Mention may be made of several other images of eight-armed Mahishāsurasūramardini discovered from Bengal. They are two stone images of similar variety from the Sarvamangala temple at Naricha in the district of Bankura, eight-armed stone image of the goddess from Amarkandi, North 24 Parganas, another Mahishamardini image from English Bazar, Malda, image of similar description from Bamangola, Malda, eight-armed Mahishamardini from Gazole in Malda district, Mahishamardini of similar description from Ghoshpukur, Darjeeling district etc. Some of these images are decorated with flying gandharvas carrying garlands; in some of them figures of female attendants are noticeable; while in some other kṛttimukha figures at the top of the stela. Of many such images of eight-armed Mahishāsurasūramardini of Bengal three of them with certain amount of

64. Bhattacharya, Malay Sankar., Art in Stone, p.31.
65. Ibid.
67. Ibid., pp.30-31.
distinction may be considered separately. An image of an eight-armed goddess in marble stone from Jessore in Bangladesh, now worshipped in a house at Bhatpara in North 24 Parganas district, shows the goddess standing erect with her right foot on the back of the lion and the left foot straight on the ground. The two front hands of the deity is engaged in piercing the body of the demon in zoomorphic form with a trident, while lower left hand holds the tuft of its hair. On other five hands the goddess displays some of her usual ayudhas (PLATE XV.a). The image is in round and the reverse side of the image shows her well modelled bare body, a long tassel hanging from the head and back portion of the lion (PLATE XV.b). The goddess wear a peculiar headdress. The image is dated c. fifteenth Century A.D. Another blackstone image of the eight armed goddess of much earlier period salvaged from an old tank of Lalbati village near Diamond Harbour of South 24 Parganas also deserves attention (PLATE V.b). The deity standing in alidha placed her right foot on the decapitated body of the Mahisha which is lying on the right side of the Goddess. She is striking the head of Mahishasura in human form who is completely out of the decapited body of the Māhisha, while her front left hand displays a naga or snake. Two images of devotees with folded hands are visible on the pedestal of the image.

The third one is also made of marble stone, but beautifully painted with exquisite colours; it is now being worshipped in the Hamsēsvārī Temple at Bansberia in the Hooghly district and a
product of a late eighteenth century sculptor. Besides holding usual attributes like sword, pāśa, club, ghata by her upper four hands, the deity is engaged in piercing the body of the demon in anthropomorphic form by a trident. The goddess is holding the tuft of hair of the demon by one of her left hand, while the right hand is holding a fruit like object above the head of another human like figure. The decapitated body of the mahisha lies before the goddess and the deity is in ālidha, her right foot being placed on the decapitated body of the demon. The goddess wears a saḍī as her lower garment and she is profusely decorated with ornaments, (PLATE I .b).

Another eight-armed Mahishāsuramardini image in stone from Mahespur, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal (now preserved at Siva temple of the same village) is also noteworthy. The goddess in a dynamic pratyālidha posture is pressing the head of Mahishāsura in human form by her left front hand. Due to mutilation of the figure most of āyudha hold by the goddess in other hand are indistinct. But the most important feature of this image of c. sixth-seventh Century is the mukṭuta worn by the goddess which resembles some of the headgears represented in the south Indian bronzes (PLATE II .c ). An image of eight-armed Mahishamardinī-Durgā worshipped in the village of Naricha in the district of Bankura also deserves attention. Though of much later period the goddess shows a Kīṇjalkini in her breast hanging from the neck (PLATE VIII .c).
The depiction of Mahishāsura-mardini-Durgā with ten arms is the most prolific among the different varieties of images of the goddess, and this type of image of Mahishāsura-mardini of the medieval period became the accepted iconographic form of the deity, with certain elaborations, to be handed over unto the present day. Many Sanskrit texts mentioned with adoration the different ayudhas to be hold by the goddess, such as a trident, a sword, a chakra, a sakti, an arrow, a bow, a śūla, a vajra, an aṅkuśa and a bell. Of course certain variations in this respect are noticed in the relevant images of the goddess in Bengal.

Before dealing with some selective material remains of the subject under consideration, some important aspects of the ten-armed Mahishamardini images of Bengal are to be noted. Ten-armed Mahishamardini appears in Bengal art either in single along with her mount lion and the demon, or with her sons and daughters (i.e. Ganapati, Kārttikeya, Laksñī and Sarasvatī) along with the lion and the demon. In depicting the deity with ten arms the artists of Bengal represent the goddess in both ālidha and pratyālidha and in most cases, especially in the later phases of development, the left foot of the goddess is shown over the asura in human form, while in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in temple terracottas and pigment the goddess has her right foot on the back of the lion.
According to some recent studies on the ten-armed Mahishamardinī-Durgā images, such depiction of goddess in stone may be broadly classified under two different types. The first type, undoubtedly dominant in number among such stone sculptural specimens, shows the goddess holding the Khetaka, dhanu, parasu, ankusā and pāṣa (or tuft of hair or both) by her left hands, and by her right hand she displays khadga, śūla, cakra, śūra and śakti. Of course some deviations are noticeable from this general practice, such as, a ten-armed Mahishamardinī-Durgā from Dulmi in Manbhum of West Bengal, now preserved in the Indian Museum, shows among other attributes of the goddess a taṇka or stone-cutter’s chisel (PLATE XIV.a).

In the second types the goddess hold all her normal āyudhas as mentioned in the description of the previous one, the only difference that is noticeable is that in lieu of sakti the goddess holds of ghanṭa by one of her right hands. This type of images of Mahishāsuramardinī-Durgā are extremely rare in the stone sculptural art repertoire of Bengal.

Specimens of first type of images carved in stone are found in good number in different parts of Bengal. A selective reference may be made to some of the outstanding images of ten-armed Mahishāsuramardinī-Durgā from the villages of Darinda-Rasulpur and Matlab, both in the Comilla district of Bangladesh, Dhorsa and

68. BS., pp.248-249.
Bagmara in the district of Rajshahi, Bandergram and Jangai in Dinajpur district, Sakta in Dhaka district of Bangladesh, Singbhum in Birbhum district of West Bengal, Dulmi in Manbum of West Bengal, Navagram in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, Pallanpara in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, Bakherganj district of Bangladesh and from a village in the district of Faridpur in Bangladesh.

The last one, an image from Faridpur district in Bangladesh has some special features in depiction. Here in this image the goddess is seen surrounded by flames rising out of her body, and she has a band that keeps in tight the heaving breasts of the goddess, a feature very common in the south Indian Laksmi images.

The image from Dulmi, now preserved in the Indian Museum, shows the ten-armed goddess fighting vigorously with the demon who emerges out of the decapitated trunk of the buffalo. The goddess in pratyalidha plants her right leg on the back of the vāhana lion and presses the demon with her left leg. Of her different āyudha two are very important, one is nāga-pāśa and the other is the showing of sūchimudrā (PLATE XIV.a). A close observation of the two armed demon shows that the emerging demon in human form has still his leg within the trunk of the animal below which lies the severed

69. Sahai, Bhagwant, Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities, p.187.
head (PLATE XIV.b). The demon is carrying sword and shield in his hands and chaurī-bearing miniature male figures are visible on either side.

The well preserved ten-armed image of Mahishāsuramardinī in stone from Navagram of Murshidabad district has some special features to note. It shows the goddess pulling out arrows by one of her right hand from the quiver kept behind the right shoulder of the deity; she has a naga pasa hanging down from the upper most hand in the left, the goddess is pressing down the demon in human form by holding his tuft of hair. The deity, profusely ornamented, wears a kṛitamukuta and a peculiar type of breast-band (PLATE.II.b). Another image of same variety curved in a stone plaque from Pailanpara, South 24 Parganas district also show a quiver in the back of the right side of the shoulder. Though the image is much abraised, it still shows the deity in a dynamic ṛṅḍha posture (PLATE.VII.b).

Representations of ten-armed Mahishamardini-Durga are also to be found in large number in other media of art expression. Several such images of metal are important from iconographic point of view. The ten-armed Mahishāsuramardinī from Malda, preserved in the Museum of same designation, shows the goddess standing on a lotus pedestal in a pratyāṅgha posture. The goddess holds all normal ṣyudhas in her different hands, wears a karaṇḍa-mukuta and she has ornaments all over the body. Her right leg is placed on the
body of a stylised lion, while the left one is placed on the
decapitated body of the buffalo from whose neck the demon in human
form came out. 

Another bronze image of Mahishāsuramardini from North 24
Parganas district, now worshipped in a house at Bhatpara of the
same district, is a rare piece of sculptural art in metal so far
discovered in Bengal. The three eyed deity wears a jaṭa-mukuta with
heavy but sophisticated ornaments all over the body. With her front
right hand the deity is piercing the breast of the asura in human
form by a sharp spear, while by front left hand she is holding the
tuft of hair of the asura. Besides her normal āyudhas she holds a
ghaṇṭā by one of her left hand. The decapited body of the mahisha
is lying on the ground on the left side of the goddess. The lion
being stylistically presented caught the right arm of asura by his
mouth (PLATE XVI a). The backside view of the image show matted
hair lobs rolling down from both sides of her head. Bāju, kaṅkan,
nupura, valaya, mekhalā etc. worn by the goddess are distinctly
visible from this side (PLATE XVI b). This work of art probably
belongs to late Sena period.

Another metal image, made of brass, hails from Barasat (?)
in the district of North 24 Parganas and now being worshipped in a
priest’s house at Bhatpara in the same district. Stylistically this

70. Karmaker, Anil Kumar, 'Chemical presentation of Bronze objects
of Malda Museum' in Pratna Samikṣhā No.1, p.201, Pl. facing
the same page.
ten-armed image represents a strong element of Ñhokrā folk art of some earlier period. The most distinguishing feature of this c. thirteenth-fourteenth Century image is that the goddess is simultaneously attacking the demon in human form by a spear and a sula kept in her front right and front left hands respectively. The goddess is flanked on her right and left side by Gañapati and Sarasvatī respectively. This image is profusely ornamented like the previous one (PLATE XVII.b).

Another metal image of Mahishāsuramardinī, resembling to a great extent the metal image from Barasat (?), discussed above, is now in the collection of Chittagong University Museum in Bangladesh (PLATE VII.c). This image also betrays strong folk-art element in formation. The attending deities are completely absent in this image. The deity is holding all normal āyudhas by her hands including a śakti and a karttrka. By her left front hand she is holding the asura in anthropomorphic form by his tuft of hair, while piercing the chest of the demon by a sula kept in her front right hand.

An octo-alloy image of a ten-armed Mahishāsuramardinī from Kuchilbarī71 in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal, now in the collection of Akshya Kumar Moitra Museum of the University of North Bengal, shows the goddess in pratyālīḍha piercing the chest of the demon in anthropomorphic form with a trident. The deity in clockwise

form holds trisula, khejaka, sāra, cakra, khaḍga, akṣamalā, dhanu, aṅkuṣa, paraśu and nāgapāśa. The goddess wear conventional ornaments in her body and bears a jaṭamukuta in her head. The figure of the demon also wears a mukuta and brandishes a sword. The dragon shaped lion is pouncing on the right hand of the asura. This c. eighteenth century metal image also shows some influence of folk art.

So far iconographical features are concerned, another sixteenth century bronze image of a ten-armed Mahishāsuramardini from Bengal, now preserved in the gallery of the Asutosh Museum of Calcutta, is more significant than that of Kuchilbari discussed above. The ten-armed deity with a crown in her head is standing in ālijha and her right foot is placed on the back of the lion who is pouncing on the right hand of Mahīshāsura in human form. Among the different ayudhas hold by the goddess, mentioned may be made of at least three ayudhas which are not so common among other images of the deity. These are a ghanta or bell, a mirror and a dagger like weapon. The goddess is standing within a trifoiled arched torana supported by pillar on either side with depiction of elephant heads on the top of each pillar. Two birds are resting on the top of the arch. Ghanta, mirror and the dagger like weapon appear off and on in the images of Mahīshāsuramardini of Bengal art.72

In Bengal the number of hands of the goddess came to be stereotyped as ten and even in the medieval period, Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā was worshipped in Bengal singly and not along with her sons and daughters. The first definite reference to the strange form of Durgā appearing with her sons and daughters seems to be found in the well-known Candimāṅgala-Kāvyā of Mukundarama who flourished in the sixteenth century. Tradition has it that Raja Kāmsanarāyaṇa, the son of Kulluṅkabhaṭṭa the famous commentator of Manusmṛti, worshipped Mahishamardini-Durgā, in her present form with her sons and daughters. Though there are evidences to prove that even after the sixteenth century in some works of art Mahishāsuramardini is still represented only with her mount and the demon, in general she is seen appearing with her sons and daughters in majority of the cases. This transformation of the iconographic representation of the ten-armed goddess from Mahishāsuramardini to Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā is well represented by works of art of the later centuries.

An ivory image of Mahishasuramardini-Durga of the nineteenth century from Murshidabad in West Bengal, now exhibited in the gallery of the Indian Museum, shows the goddess with her sons and daughters flanking on either sides. The asura in human form is emerging out of decapitated body of the buffalo, while the lion is

pouncing on the right arm of the demon. The severed head of the buffalo lies in the ground before the lion. The goddess along with her sons and daughters (Gaṇapati, Kārttīkeya, Lākṣmī and Sarasvatī) are profusely ornamented and display their respective attributes (PLATE XVII.a).

It is in the temple terracotta art of Bengal that prolific representations of Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā in her present form is noticed, though in a good number of cases the goddess also appears only with the lion and the demon. In a terracotta plaque of Sarvamangala temple in Bardhaman town of West Bengal, the goddess with her sons and daughters, her mount lion and the asura in human form, is depicted within a bow shaped arch supported by two pillars. The goddess and the other divinities display their usual attributes (PLATE III.a). In another terracotta panel of an abandoned Jorabunglow temple at Bally-Dewanganj in the district of Hooghly Mahishamardini-Durgā along with her sons and daughters is housed in a row of separate niches. All the divinities show their respective attributes (PLATE III.b). Another temple terracotta fixed in the façade of a temple at Halisahar in North 24 Parganas district, built in 1665 Śaka era, depicts almost in a similar way the goddess and her attending deities. Here Durgā with Lakshmi and Sarasvatī are housed in one compartment, while Gaṇapati and Kārttīkeya are depicted inside two rear compartments (PLATE IV.a). In the Vasudeva temple at Bansberia in Hooghly district similar representation of the goddess along with the other divinities is noticed in a single terracotta
plaque. In this plaque facial expression of the goddess seems to be fearful and the asura in human form is wearing a turban like head gear (PLATE IX.a). Similar representation of the goddess with other divinities is noticeable in a terracotta plaque of a Navaratna Siva temple at Khamarpara in the Hooghly district (PLATE III.c).

Though it was an usual practice of the artists of temple terracottas of late centuries to depict the ten-armed goddess with her associate divinities, the earlier practise of representing Mahishāsura-mardini only with her mount and the demon continued from a much earlier time to late centuries in this medium of art expression. A terracotta conical shaped stand for incense-stick from Harinarayanpur, South 24 Parganas district, belonging to c. eleventh-twelfth Century, shows a ten-armed Mahishāsura-mardini with fearful expression of her eyes charging the demon in human form with a spear like weapon. The goddess wears a crown and other attributes in her hand are indistinct (PLATE I.d). That in terracotta art of Bengal this type of representing Mahishāsura-mardini only with her mount and the demon continued up to the seventeenth-eighteenth century is evidently proved by some terracotta temple plaques in which the goddess has been depicted in similar manner: A mutilated terracotta plaque of the famous Jayadeva temple at Kendulia in Birkhumb district of West Bengal shows the deity with ten arms attacking the demon in a pratyāśīḍha posture. One noticeable feature of this terracotta representation of c. fifteenth century is that, other than the front two hands the rest of the hands of the goddess are shown in
miniature form in a row behind the shoulder of the deity on either side (PLATE VII.d). Another important specimen of this type of terracotta-representation of the goddess can be seen in the sixteenth century temple of Shyamaray at Visnupur. The goddess is standing in pratyālīdha with her right leg on the back of the lion which appears in a dragonic form. Other noticeable features of this depiction of the goddess are the caplike headgear of the demon in human form, the basket-like crown of the goddess and displaying of a fly-whisk in the uppermost left hand of the deity (PLATE VIII.b). But the most masterly treatment of such a representation of the goddess is met within another terracotta plaque of a temple at Visnupur (PLATE XX.a). The heavily ornamented and robust figured goddess is attacking the demon with a long spear in a pratyālīdha posture placing her right leg on the back of her mount. There is a nāgapāśa in the lowermost left hand of the deity.

Mahishāsuramardini along with her mount and the asura in human form is also represented in the wood carvings of later centuries Bengal. One of such exquisite specimens hails from Balagarh in the district of Hooghly (PLATE VI.c). This eighteenth century image of Mahishāsuramardini is shown as standing in pratyālīdha with her right leg on back of the dragon like lion. Here also the demon in complete human form wears a turbanlike headgear and the goddess is adorned with a basket like crown. As usual in such work of art, the main two hands of the deity are carved in proportion of the body, while the other arms in a row behind the shoulders of the deity
appear much smaller than front pair of arms. Another piece of exquisite wood carving depicting ten-armed Mahishasuramardini hails from Sripur village in the Hooghly district. This specimen is carved in a wooden post of the Chandimandapa of the village (PLATE VI.c). The goddess with her mount and the demon show almost identical attributes like those of the specimen from Balagarh discussed above. Another piece of masterly executed specimen of wood carving depicting a ten-armed Mahishasuramardini is to be found in the wooden door of temple at Bhelia village in the district of Bankura and now preserved in Amulya Pratnasala at Rajbalhat in Hooghly district. The compositional aspects including the iconographic features of the goddess and her assemblage are similar to the other two works of art of same variety discussed above (PLATE VII.a).

The iconographic composition of ten-armed Mahishasuramardini-Durgā as visualised by temple-terracotta artists and wood-carvers of the eighteenth-nineteenth century Bengal is also discernable in the pictorial art of the similar time. This is materially evident from specimens of works of art pertaining to its different branches like, portrait for wall-hangings or worship, pāṭa-chitra or scroll painting, ritual art and book illustrations of the period concerned.

Of the several portrait paintings for wall hangings or worship of the time bracket seventeenth and nineteenth century, mentioned may be made of a beautifully executed portrait of a ten-armed Mahishasuramardini-Durgā in bright colours of about late eighteenth
or early nineteenth century now worshipped during the time of Autumn festival every year in the Chandimandapa of the house of Shri Bimalendu Bhattacharya at Bhatpara in the North 24 Parganas district. In this portrait the goddess is present with her usual divine followers. The demon in human form is in the position of ardhanāiskṛnta or half-emerged from the decapitated body of the buffalo. All other accompanying deities, like the central, are showing their usual attributes (PLATE XVIII). Another colourful portrait of the early nineteenth century depicts the deity along with her mount and the combatting demon (PLATE XIX). Of the different ayūdhaś displays by the goddess, a dagger like weapon in one of her right hand and a battle-axe in one of her left hand are very important to note.

A portrait of ten-armed Mahishamardini along with her mount and the demon is also interesting (PLATE XIX). This is the work of an unknown artist belonging to the Bengal school of art during the early years of the nineteenth century. The goddess, the mount and the demon, all are treated in a stylistic manner, which is very much similar to some formal representations of the deity worshipped in our own time. Interestingly enough, a masterful painting by one Mr. Salvince, an European Painter, in 1799 A.D. shows a Mahishāsuramardini-Durgā image being worshipped by the priests. The artist has depicted the goddess as wearing a sādī in Bengalee manner. She bears all usual attributes assign to her.

But in pata-chitra or scroll painting Mahishamardini-Durgā with ten arms is usually depicted in connection with some mythical scene. In a pata-chitra from Narindra in Murshidabad district of about early nineteenth century the ten-armed goddess have been depicted as standing on the back of the Mahisha demon and piercing the asura with a long spear. The scene represents a battle field and there are other demons of same description combating with the goddess (PLATE XI.a). In this representation of the goddess, she appears in a battle-dress with a helmet like head gear, a long skirt type drapery covering the lower part, but with decoration of ornaments such as nupura, kanta etc. In another colourful pata-chitra from Onda in Bankura district of about early nineteenth century, the ten-armed Durgā stands within a maṇḍapa or place of worship to be worshipped by Rama.

In some sarā-chitra or painted terracotta plates meant for rituals the ten-armed Mahishāsurasamardini-Durgā appears with her associate divinities including the mount and the asura. In such specimens the goddess with her companion display their individual attributes usually attached to them. A sarā-chitra of the early nineteenth century, now preserved in the Gurusaday Dutta Museum at Behala, Calcutta, provides us with such an example (PLATE VI.a).

Book illustrations printed by woodcut blocks during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also show the depiction of ten-armed Mahishāsurasamardini-Durgā along with her sons and daughters
in a compact manner within the frame of a well decorated chāla-chitra or back-slab. A book illustration from Nutan Pañjikā (an almanac) of 1243 B.S., corresponding to 1836-37 shows such a representation of the goddess with ten arms.

vi. twelve-armed

Though Matsya Purāṇa describes the goddess having twelve arms with her various attributes, its representation in the sculptural art of Bengal is very scanty. Only one such image has been discovered so far in Bengal, though some scholar about half a century ago claimed that the twelve-armed Mahishāsura-mardini are very common in Eastern India. This single specimen of the sculptural art repertoire of Bengal is represented by rare bronze image of c. eleventh century A.D. discovered from Keshavpur in the Dinajpur district of Bangladesh. In this work of sculptural art the goddess stands in pratyalidha with her left foot being on the body of the buffalo demon. In her right hands she holds Khadga, śara, śakti, cakra and a short dagger. Probably by her another hand she was holding a sūla. The demon in human form is in the position of ardhaniskrānta. Two of the āyudhas of the left hands could be identified as dhanu and khetaka, others are indistinct. The lion is pouncing on the body of the Mahishāsura, while two devotees are visible on the pedestal.

78. Ibid., see Pl. LXIIIId.
vii. sixteen-armed

Textual references of the sixteen-armed Mahishamardini are only found in the Agni Purana and the Kālikā Purana. Depiction of sixteen-armed Mahishamardini in sculptural art of Bengal is very scanty. The Ashutosh Museum has acquired such an image, which shows the goddess having all usual attributes as prescribed by the Purāṇas. In a stone panel of Nava Durga from Porsha in West Dinajpur district of Bangladesh, now preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, appears nine figures of the goddess, some of which are of sixteen arms.

viii. eighteen-armed

Mahishamardini with eighteen arms is very rare in Bengal sculptural art and few of them have been noticed by some scholars. In Vāmanapurāṇa where she kills the Mahishāsura, the eighteen-armed goddess is called Katyāyanī. We can refer to the image of the eighteen-armed goddess depicted as the central figure in the Nava-Durgā panel from Porsha. In this sculpture the head and one of hands, probably bearing trident, are broken. The remaining right hands bear elephant, goad, thunderbolt, chisel, stick, mace, 

---

79. 50.6b-13a.
80. 62.54-61.
82. 19. 1-20; 20.6.
discus, arrow and sword, while the left hands hold tarjanīmudrā, the
tuft of hair of the demon, shield, bow, flag, kettle-drums, mirror,
bell and nagapasa. The description corroborates with the Bhaviṣya-
Purāṇa quoted by Hemadri\textsuperscript{83}. The ardhanārāṇa demon holds his
sword which is yet to be drawn out from the scabbard (PLATE XII.b).

Another eighteen-armed goddess of same designation is preserved in
the Asutosh Museum in Calcutta. The goddess here stands in
pratyālīdha with her right foot placed on the lion and left on the
body of the decapitated buffalo-demon. A two-armed replica of the
goddess is seen in the composition which includes kirtimukha, two
Vidyādharas and sign of flames on the upper part of the stela\textsuperscript{84}.

Another eighteen armed Mahishāsāsuramārdini appears in a group of
Mātrikas depicted in a stone slabs from Bakreswar in the district of
Būrbhūm\textsuperscript{85}.

\textbf{ix. thirtytwo - armed}

The single image of a thirty-two armed Mahishāsāsuramārdini in
stone discovered from Betna in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh is
equally unique and of great iconographic importance. No such image or
its corresponding textual reference is known. The goddess in this
image stands in pratyālīdha and the main pair of her hands holds a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{83} Vratakhaṇḍa, p.84-85.
\textsuperscript{84} BS., p.251-252.
\textsuperscript{85} Chakrabarti, Deb Kumar, Birbhum Zelār Purākīrti (in Bengali), p.56-57.
\end{flushright}
śaṅkha, while the other thrusts a trisula in the abdomen of the
demon. A third pair of her arms displays a musala like āyudha. The
other hands of the goddess display āyudhas like Varada, sarpa,
damaru, śakti, tarjani, kārtri, vajra, darpana etc. There is a
miniature lion between the legs of the deity. She is seen engaged in
combat with the demon, but not with the buffalo demon particularly.
A female figure is holding an umbrella and there are four pot-bellied
wide-eyed dwarfish demons on the left side of the goddess. On the
top of stela are carved the miniature figures of Gaṅapatī, Sūrya,
Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. Miniature figures of donor couple also appear
in the pedestal (PLATE XIII.b) Though some scholars have objected to
its identification\textsuperscript{86} as a Mahishamardinī, on the basis of the
description of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa that the slaughter of the
Mahishāsura is preceded by the slaughter of several other demons,
we can with reason accept that the image of Betna visualised the
penultimate sequence in the killing of the Mahishāsura\textsuperscript{87}.

B. REPRESENTATION OF THE MOUNT

In the foregoing iconographic analysis the different postures
and physical formations of the lion, the Vāma of
Mahishāsuramardinī, as depicted in various sculptural and pictorial


\textsuperscript{87} BS., p. 253.
representations have been discussed. To sum up, sometimes the lion stands unmoved by the combat between the goddess and the demon; sometimes it is in an aggressive mood and pounces upon the demon in human form; in many instances the goddess places her foot on the back of the lion; and sometimes the lion appears in a draconic form. These are some usual features noticed in different images of Mahishāsura-mardini in Bengal art. But at least in one image of much later period a tiger has been depicted as the mount of the goddess. This peculiar image is still now worshipped in the temple of Bhavani Devī in the town of Cooch Behar in West Bengal. The ten-armed Mahishasuramardini image of c. seventeenth-eighteenth century is now placed inside a highly ornamented throne. She has in her hands different usual ayudhās prescribed by texts. By one of the right hands she is piercing the chest of the demon in human form, but with a terrific facial expression. The demon is also brandishing a sword. The most important feature of the image is that the goddess is flanked by two vāhanas, on the right a lion is visible and on the left a tiger is pouncing on the terrific demon (PLATE XIII.a). No textual reference is available for this peculiarity in representing at the same time a tiger and a lion as the vāhana of the goddess 88.

C. THE RELEVANT MYTHICAL SCENES

In sculptural and pictorial art the goddess Mahishāsura-mardini is sometimes depicted amidst some mythical scenes which have been

discussed earlier. To sum up, there are scenes from the Purāṇas, such as, the penultimate combat of the goddess with the demons before her final showdown with Mahishāsura; the rising flame behind the image of the eighteen-armed Mahishāsurasūtramardini, preserved in the Ashutos Museum, may indicate an aspect of the creation of the deity. According to the text of the Devimāhātmya, Viṣṇu and Śiva became so filled with rage after hearing the defeat of the gods at the hands of Mahishāsura and their consequent expulsion from the heaven, that the Great Two emanated fiery flames from their mouth which combined with similar flames issued from the bodies of all the gods and this eventually concentrated into a female form and created the goddess.

As regards depiction of Mahishāsurasūtramardini-Durgā in some of the pata-chitra of the eighteenth-nineteenth century Bengal in connection with some episodes of the Rāmāyana, it should be noted that such episode probably have no relation with Valmiki's Ramachandra. It is only in the Rāmāyana of the Bengalee poet, Krittivasa (fifteenth century) that the worship of the goddess by Ramchandra, in the form depicted in some of the scroll paintings, is mentioned.

89. supra., p. 153

90. Sahai, Bhagwant, op. cit., p. 182.