Chapter III

PURANIC MOTHER GODDESS IN BENGAL

Of the Purāṇas, some at least were given final shape within the Gupta period. The Puranic religious beliefs spread almost all over Northern India under the Gupta hegemony. Bengal after having been annexed to the Gupta empire about the fifth century A.D., was a participant in the cultural life of Northern India. It would be reasonable, therefore, to assume that the Gupta period witnessed not only the spread of Brāhmanical culture but also Puranic religious beliefs and practices.

The Puranic religion, based not on sacrifice but on devotion to one’s tutelary deity, allow the devotees to have their own choice in selecting their own god or goddess. The Purāṇas gradually gave recognition to the deities represented as the Triad, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara. The female consorts of the male divinities were regarded as their energy (Sakti) in formal forms. From the sixth to the twelfth-thirteenth century A.D., Indian religious history has been characterized by the progressive recognition of Sakti (female energy principle) in the pantheon of different religious cults and sects. An in-depth study would indicate three stages in the development of female divinities. In the earliest period, that is, during the Vedic age, the female divinities in general had a secondary position in comparison with the male-divinities. Later, the female-principle was associated with each respective male-divinities as an inseparable part gradually acquiring equal status with them.
Ultimately the goddess personified all the powers and attributes of all gods together and was exalted to a position independent of and higher than all of them.

However, the most popular forms of the Purānic goddess in Bengal was Mahiṣāsuramardini Durgā. The traditional socio-religious festival of Bengal is still held on the occasion of the worship of goddess Durgā, slayer of the demon Mahiṣa in the autumn. The earliest mention of Durgā-worship in the autumn is found in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa (92/12): Sarat kāle mañāpūjā kriyate va ca vāraśikī. The terrible goddess of war has made her fullest manifestation in the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa of which thirteen chapters (81-93) entitled Devimāhātmya describe the glory and greatness of Devī. She is described as an 'embodiment of the accumulated lustre of all the chief god's.

Regarding the date and place of composition of the Devimāhātmya section of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa, we may consider the views of Pargiter and R. C. Hazra. Scholars are unanimous in assigning the date of composition of the original Purāṇa to the end of the Gupta period but they have no doubt regarding the later origin of the Devimāhātmya section. According to Pargiter, "it would represent the incorporation of barbarous practices borrowed from the rude tribes of Central India into brāhmanic doctrines, and might be assigned to the sixth or perhaps the fifth century ....... . The Devimāhātmya, the latest part, was certainly complete in the 9th century and very probably in the 5th or 6th century A. D." The basis of his argument is that the
Devimahatmya is anterior to that of the Malati-Madhavam of Bhavabhuti composed about the end of the 7th century A.D. This view is generally accepted.

Pargiter does not consider Bengal to be the place of composition of the Devimahatmya, although it is recognised as the only dependable religious scripture by the Saktas of Bengal. The scholar has taken into consideration the statement in the Mahabharata (iv, 6) that Durga has her eternal abode in the Vindhyas and thus assumes that the middle portion of the Narmada valley (Madhya Pradesh) should be regarded as the place of composition of the Devimahatmya. The Vindhyan region, no doubt, earned fame as an abode of the great goddess as it is known from different texts. In the Kubjikatantra, the Vindhy region is referred to as one of the Siddhapithas. This region is undoubtedly associated with the celebrated non-Vedic goddess Vindhyavasini whose temple stands near modern Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh. Tradition says that near Vindhyacala, the head of the Vindhya lies prostrate in worship of this goddess, while his feet are at Chunar and Rajmahal. The Harivamsa (ii.3, 6-8) also refers to the Mother goddess as residing in the Vindhyas and being worshipped by such non-Vedic tribes as the Sabaras, Barbaras and Pulindas. In the Matsya Purana (Xiii, 32, 39, 43) mention has been made of goddess Vindhyavasini (goddess having her abode in the Vindhya). The Markandeya Purana identifies Vindhyavasini as a manifestation of the goddess Candl or Candikā. Devi Vindhyavasini as a manifestation of the goddess is also referred to in the Devi-Purana, the earliest Saka Upapurana written in
Bengal. It is said that in order to kill the demons at the request of the gods, she incarnated herself as a maiden mounted on a lion in the Vindhyas and was thus known as Vindhyavāsini.

A particular Purānic tradition, no doubt, associates the goddess with the Vindhyā mountain, most probably due to the popularity of her non-Aryan attributes among the people of Central India. It hardly indicates the exact place of the composition of the Markandeya Purāṇa. Because, the Purānic texts were composed in course of additions and alterations over a wide period. Such additions and alternations were made by generations of Pundit copyists who hailed from different regions of India. It is, therefore, difficult to locate exactly the place of origin of the Purāṇa in its present shape. Besides, we have a different Purānic tradition, derived from the Vedic times, associating the goddess with Himavat (Haimavati) or the Himalayas and describing her Śīlasūtā, daughter of the Himalayan mountain.

**INTRODUCTION OF THE CONCEPT OF WARRIOR-GODDESS IN BENGAL**

The early sculptural representation of goddess Mahiśāsuramardini of the Kuśāṇa period found from some places of North and North-western India and an early terracotta plaque found from Nagar or Karkotanagar, testifies to the popularity of the cult of Mahāsiṣamardinī in some parts of India at an early date. In some reliefs assigned to the Gupta period found from Udaygiri, Bhita and Sarnath, the two armed goddess is shown subduing the buffalo demon. The mode of attack makes us believe that the Markandeya Purānic tradition was known to the artists of
Northern and Central India in the Gupta and the early mediaeval period, whether the said text was written by that time or not.

Not a single image of Mahiṣamardini or any other form of the goddess is found in Bengal which might be assigned to the Gupta period. The first historical evidence of the worship of the warrior-goddess may be traced in the Samatata region. One inscribed image of an eight-armed goddess designating itself as Sarvāṇī was discovered from the village of Deulbadi in Tippera district, situated about twenty miles south of Comilla. The pedestal inscription records the name of the donor, Prabhāvatī, the queen of Davakhaḍa, ruling in East Bengal at the 7th century A.D. The eight-armed goddess is found carrying arrow, sword, discus, conch-shell, trident, bell, shield and bow. The goddess stands on a lotus seat on the back of a couchant lion with a well-executed head. The attributes of the goddess are similar to those of Mahiṣamardini. N. K. Bhattasali, however, identifies her with Bhadrakāli, Bhadradurgā, Ambikā, Vedagarbhā and Kṣemaṅkarī on the basis of the description found in the 11 Śāradāṭīlaka Tantra (ch. xi).

In this connection mention may be made of a gold coin of an unknown King who probably reigned after Saśāhka. The obverse of the coin bears a carved image of an eight-armed goddess duly weaponed (not very clear), resembling Deulbadi Sarvāṇī image. The findspot of this coin is also Samatata region. Sarvāṇī is the Śakti of Sarva, one of the eight forms of Rudra in the Atharva-Veda. Sarvāṇī may be traced in the
Mārkandeya Purāṇa (85/9-10) as one of the names of goddess Candikā. The Brahma-vaivartta Purāṇa (Prakṛtikhaṇḍa 57/2) includes the name as one of the sixteen names of goddess Durgā.

A 7th century A.D. image styled as 'Durgā Killing a demon', found from Bihar and now in the possession of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, demonstrates the popularity of the warrior-goddess in the region concerned. The two armed goddess stands in āṭhyāpādā attitude on the curly head of a lying demon whose right shoulder is seen pierced by the spear of the goddess. The attributes of Mahiṣamardini as found in the Purāṇic texts are not properly followed by the artist of the above image. It shows, however, that the theme of a goddess killing a demon obtained popularity in some regions of Eastern India. At least, on the basis of the three instances mentioned above, we may safely assume that North Indian Puranic concept of the Mother-Goddess did not take a long time to be introduced in Eastern India. If we accept Pargiter's view regarding the date of the Devimāhātmya it has to be admitted that the traditional concept of the demon slayer goddess was in vogue for a long time before the composition of the Devimāhātmya. In Bengal, it seems that the introduction of the goddess occurred sometime before the 7th century A. D.

DEVI FOUND IN THE DEVIMĀHĀTMYA: MYTH AND REALITY

The thirteen chapters of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa known as Candi Saṁtā or Devimāhātmya comprising Brahma-stuti, Śakrādi-Stuti, Viṣṇumāyā-stava and Nārāyanī-stuti indicate i) origin of
the goddess, ii) her relation with other gods, iii) different forms and manifestations of the goddess iv) some functions of the goddess.

ORIGIN OF THE GODDESS

Although in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa the great goddess is described as independent and glorious in her own grace, she owes her origin to the gods. It is said:—

"Iththam niśāma devānām vācāmsād madhusūdanah;  
Cakāra kopam śambhūscābhrikūṭi kutilānanāu;  
Anyyasaṅcāiva devānāṃ śatrudinām śarīratah;  
nirgatam sumahattejastaccāivyam samagachchātā;"

(Candi 2 / 9 - 10)

"Hearing (the news of defeat) from the gods Madhusūdana expressed anger, the frowning-faced Sambhu (Rudra or Śiva) also became enraged. Then a great lustre issued from the mouths of angry Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śaṅkara, and from the bodies of Indra and others, and obtained oneness". Then "that unparalled energy born of the bodies of all the gods, which pervaded the three worlds with its light, gathering into one, became female. By what was Śiva’s energy her face was developed, and by Yama’s energy grew her hair, and her arms by Viṣṇu’s energy, by the Moon’s energy her twin breasts, and her waist came into being by Indra’s energy, and by Varuṇa’s her legs and thighs, by the Earth’s energy her hips, by Brahmā’s energy her feet, her toes by Sun’s energy, and by the Vasu’s energy her hands and fingers, and by
Kuvera’s her nose; and her teeth grew up by Prajāpati’s energy, and three eyes were developed by Agni’s energy; and her eyebrows were the energy of the two twilights, and her ears Viṣṇu’s energy; and the coming into being of the energies of the other 14 gods became the auspicious goddess”. [Atulam tantra tattejāh sanvadevaśāpiśram: Ekāsthām tadabhunanāl vyāptalokatrayam tvishā].

After giving the full shape of a “Female” the gods decorated Her with their respective weapons. Śaṅkara gave his trident, Viṣṇu his discus, Varuṇa his conch, Agni his spear, Maruta his bow and quiver filled with arrows, Indra his thunderbolt, Yama his pāśa, Prajāpati his necklace of beads, Brahmā his earthen pot (Kamandalu), Sūrya his rays and Kāla his sword and spotless shield.

The goddess also received her dress and ornaments from the gods. The great mountain Himālaya gave her a lion to ride on and valuable gems of various types. Kuvera gave her a drinking cup full of wine. The serpent-necklace was presented by the King of the serpents ‘Seṣha’. Thus the mighty warrior goddess represented all Purānic divinities in an all-out war against the demons who had acquired their suzerainty over the three worlds, Svarga (Heaven), Marttva (Earth) and Pātāla (Nether world).

It would not be unreasonable to make an investigation into the circumstances leading to the emergence of the goddess as the supreme among the divinities, in spite of the patriarchal character of the society.
Firstly, it may be argued that the concept of demon-slaying warrior goddess owed her origin to some foreign countries like Crete, Greece, Asia-Minor, Egypt and Meditarreanean countries where there was a tradition of worshipping Mother-goddess associated with lion and hill-region and having the attributes of a warrior. The resemblance of the Dravidian name Umā with Babylonian word Ummu or Umma or the Accadian Ummi may be taken into account in this connection.

Secondly, it may be assumed that the multifarious material contributions on the part of the female members of the society such as carrying baby in the womb, giving birth of children, breast-feeding, nourishing, managing the family affairs, assisting the male members in some economic activities, participating in religious rites etc. might have led to the recognition of woman as the arbiter at the helm of affairs. It was in this social milieu that the position of the female divinity was highly exalted.

The hypothesis referred to above, do not stand on strong grounds. We have to search for an appropriate explanation from a different point of view. The goddess is described as a slayer of demons. The goddess stands for productivity and vegetation, while the demons symbolise the enemies of agricultural production, the natural calamities such as drought, flood, fire, insects etc. The vegetative aspect of the goddess is quite manifest in her nomenclature of Śākambhari (Devīmāhātmya, ch. 11). Besides, the use of Navapatrikā (nine plants) and of a maṅgala-ghata, full of water, bearing on it a drawing of a female
figure in vermillion and surmounted by a green coconut and five plants (Pañca pāllava) on the occasion of the worship of Durgā gives an emphatic stress on fertility-cult that was of supreme importance in an agrarian society. The gods who provided the goddess with weapons, dress and ornaments may be taken to stand for those who cultivate, sow the seeds, make transplantation of the seedlings and devote themselves to other agricultural activities. Their efforts would prove to be futile, if there would have been lack of fertility and if there would have been no measure for keeping away or resisting the natural calamities. It would be, therefore, quite reasonable to hold that Durga represents the divinity presiding over agricultural prosperity. In this connection, we may refer to a RigVedic myth representing the long drawn war between god Indra and Demon Vṛtra. The reality behind the myth is a long continued attempt to keep away drought (Vṛtra) by pouring sufficient quantity of rain (Indra). The myth of the struggle between goddess Durgā and Demon Mahisa also has a similar mundane reality behind it.

RELATION OF THE GODDESS WITH ŚIVA AND VISNU

The goddess in her different forms as Cāndi, Kāli, Gaurī, Umā, Durgā, Pārvatī, Haimavatī, and Sati is generally associated with god Śiva and the mountain Himālaya. In the Devimāhātmya of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa, we find her intimate relation with Viṣṇu also.
Her peculiar relationship with Viṣṇu is thus described: She remains with Viṣṇu as Ṭoganiḍrā under whose spell Viṣṇu is asleep, and when the two demons Madhu and Kaitabha emerges to pounce upon Brahmā, he prays to (Brahma-stuti) Ṭoganiḍra for awakening Viṣṇu:

"tusṭava yoganiḍrām tamekāgraḥrdayaṣṭhitāh
Vivodhanārthāya harserharinētra kṛtalayam
Viśvesvarīm Jagaddhātrīṁ sthitisamhārākārinīṁ
Nidrāṁ bhagavatīm Viṣṇorātulam tejasah prabhuh

(Mārk. p. 81 / 62-64)

The appellation of the goddess had been Viṣṇumāyā before she killed the demon brothers, Śumbha and Niśumbha. When the demon-brothers disturbed the gods in the heaven, all the gods assembled at Himavat (Himālayas) to invoke the goddess, Viṣṇumāyā (Viṣṇu’s illusive power) [Viṣṇumāyā-stava].

Itikṛtvā matim deva himavantam Nagesvarām:
Jagmustatra tato devim viṣṇumāyāṁ pratustubh

(Mārk. p. 85/14)

She remains in all created beings as Viṣṇumāyā “Yā devī Viṣṇumāyeti śayditā” (Mārk. p. 85/14). Many times she has been referred to by the gods as Nārāyanī (female-counterpart of Nārāyaṇa i.e. Viṣṇu) in Nārāyanī stuti (Mārk. p. 91). Even she promised that during the Vaivasvata Maṇvanta she will be born out of the womb of Yaśodā, the wife of Nandagopa. At that time her name will be Ṭoganiḍvā and she will kill Śumbha-Niśumbha.

(Mārk. p. 92)
Again, the goddess in the Devimāhātmya has her connection with Śiva and gets the name Śivadūtī. During the battle with the demons Śumbha-Niśumbha, Śiva (Īśāna) requested the goddess to kill the demons for his pleasure. The goddess then appointed Śiva as her courier (dūta) to convey her orders to the demon-brothers. And as she herself appointed Śiva as her messenger, she came to be known as Śivadūtī:

Yato nivukto dautvena tayā devyā Śivāh svayan;
Śivadūtīti lokehasmingstatah sā Khyātimāgataḥ;

(Mārk. p. 88/28).

Regarding her relation with, Himalaya, only it is said in the Devimāhātmya (2 / 28 – 30) that Himalaya gave her mount lion and precious stones of various types. But in many earlier and later texts she has been portrayed as a dweller and daughter of the Himalayas.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that the Śāktas made an attempt to transform the goddess of their choice into a divine agent to bridge over the gulf between the Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas who might have remained engaged in a long-drawn struggle for supremacy in the religious life of the people. In other words, it was due to the growth of Śaktism that the dogmatic sectarianism of those days was overshadowed to a great extent.
CHIEF FORMS OF THE GODDESS

The collective powers of the gods embodied in a female form and, decorated and weaponed by the gods, took the shape of an all-powerful female-deiyy and came to be known as Candī or Candikā, whose divine-grace has come to be illustrated in the Devimāhātmya section of the Markandeya-Purāṇa. The goddess Candī or Candikā has incarnated and manifested herself in different forms at crucial moments to destroy the demons and to cause thus the stability of the Creation.

Candī is the goddess of Bengal. At the folk-level, she has taken various names and forms such as Joycandī, Melāicandī, Dhelāicandī, Pāthrāî candī, Boāincandī and so on. In many places she has no shrine or temple or even an image. The divinity represented by a piece of stone besmeared with vermillion under a tree. Rural women usually take up vrata (religious vow) in the name of ‘Maṅgalacandī’ on every tuesday in the month of Jaiśthya (May-June). Mediaeval poets of Bengal sang the glory of the divinity in the Candīmaṅgalakāvyas.

Again, goddess Candī had a non-Aryan origin. Because, the name of Candī is derived from Dravidian or Austric word 17 Candī. The goddess is worshipped even to-day among the Draons 18 of Nagpur (M. P.) and Koras of Palamau (Bihar). Further, the Atharvaveda refers to Candakanyā, that is, daughters of demons or ghosts (apadevata). The name Candī might also be derived from the word Candakanyā. It is admitted that the Purāṇic beliefs and practices have accomodated both non-Aryan and Aryan elements in a
sophisticated form. Although in the Purāṇa, she is represented as a fighter against the asuras (i.e., non-Aryans), she herself might have non-Aryan origin.

Another manifestation of Devi of the Devimāhātmya is Kālī or Kālikā whose popularity in Bengal is beyond dispute. The author of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa traces the origin of goddess Kālī from the goddess Pārvatī. It is said, "Ambikā issued forth from the treasure-house (Kośa) of Pārvatī's body, she is therefore named in song as Kausikī among all the worlds. Now after she had issued forth the other also, even Pārvatī became Kṛṣṇā; She is celebrated as Kālikā; She fixed her abode on mount Himālaya".

'Isvam Viṁgikitavantu kṛṣṇābhut sāpi pārvatī !
Kāliketi somākhvatā Himācalakrtāśrayā !
(Mārki p. 85 / 88)

She (Kālī) emerged from the frowning face of the goddess Caṇḍi when she (Caṇḍī) was fighting with Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa, the demon brothers and she is thus described: -

"Vicitrakhaṭvāṅgadvaharā naramālābhibhūṣanā !
dvīpicarmaśparidhānā śuṣkamāśātibhairavā !
estivistāravadanā jihvālalābhibhūṣanā !
nimagnaraktanayanā nādapuritadiṅgukha !
(Mārki p. 87 / 6-8).

"Holding iron-rod, decorated with garland of human-skulls wearing skin of tiger, having dried flesh, much dreadful large stretched face, fierce-looking with her lolling tongue, sunken red eyes she
emerged with filling all the sides by her roaring”.

Thus, Kālī of the *Devīmāhātmya* is an emanation from Pārvatī, but having no relation with god Śiva. However, in Bengal she is represented as standing on the bosom of Śiva lying like a corpse. This is in accordance with the description given in the *Tantrasāra* written by Bengali Tāntric scholar of the 16th century A.D., Kṛṣṇānanda Āgāvīgīśa. It seems that Kālī gained popularity in Bengal as a Tāntric goddess, although her attributes, associates and habitat indicate her non-Aryan origin. The rites and rituals that are observed on the occasion of the worship of Kālī at dead of night on Amāvasyā tithi remind one of the tribal religious practices. *Rakṣākālī* is often worshipped in the villages of Bengal seeking redemption from natural calamities, diseases, death and destruction.

Cāmundā, another form of the Devī, is also well-known in Bengal. Large number of images of Cāmundā, assigned to the period from c. 9th century A.D. to c. 12th century A.D. and found from different places in Bengal, indicate the popularity of the goddess. In the *Devīmāhātmya* the goddess earned the name of Cāmundā after slaying the demons Cānda and Munda. Cāmundā represents a terrible or fierce (ghora) form of the goddess. Again, in her placid (śānta) form the same goddess is represented as Nārāyaṇī or Pārvatī. Interestingly enough, the fierce form of the goddess is preferred than to her placid form in Bengal.

One of the emanations of the goddess Cāndi in the *Devīmāhātmya* is known as Durgā. The most popular form of the
goddess in Bengal is known as **Durgā = Mahisamardini** combining both benign and terrible aspects. On the one hand, she is the consort of Siva, a resident of Kailāsa (Himalaya) and beloved daughter of Bengal who visits every year her mother land, on the other she is the slayer of ferocious demons. The **Devimāhātmya** (4/11) describes her as **Durgāi durgā-bhavasāgaranausāṅgā** ("You are Durgā because you can remove one from all distresses and the fears of the world"). In another chapter of the same text (11/49-50) Durgā is so named as the slayer of great demon 'Durgama':

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taili ca vadhiśvāmi durgamākhyām mahāsurām
durgādevīti vikṣaṇam tanme nāma bhaviṣvati !!
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Some scholars consider the goddess to be the protectress of the fort (Durga). Kautilya has prescribed the installation of an idol of goddess Aparājitā as the presiding-deity of the fort. In the **Markandeya Purāṇa** also we find reference to Aparājitā as one of the names of the Devī. In Kautilya's **Arthasastra**, a pre-Christian text, it appears that Aparājitā was known since early times. Later, Aparājitā was identified with Durgā, the name that gained more popularity in Bengal.

In the **Prādhānīka-rahasya** of the **Candī** (a supplementary of the **Devimāhātmya**) it is said that the primary goddess was MahāLakṣhmī, in whom all the three gunas (sattva, raja and tama) are manifest. She assumed at the time of dissolution the form of Mahākāli, in whom the **tamoguna** was predominant. The secondary goddess came also to be known as Mahāmāyā, Mahāmāri, Kshudhā,
Trīṣṇā, Nidrā, Kālarātri etc. Out of the great goddess MahāLakṣmī again emerged goddess Mahāsarasvatī in whom the sattvaguna was uppermost. This emanation also came to be known as Mahāvidyā, Mahāvāmā, Bhāratī, Vāk, Āryā, Brāhmī, Veda garbhā etc. Out of the three forms of Mother-goddess, one primary and the others emanatory were evolved in turn Brahmā and Śrī, Rudra and Trayī or Vedavīyā, and Viṣṇu and Gaurī.

**ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS OF THE DEVĪ**

The universal popularity of Mother-goddess is based on her functional aspects indicated in the Devimāhātmya: She is the giver of victory, she is the chief vegetative force and she is the protectress from all troubles. These are evident from the glory of the goddess sung by the gods following her final victory against Mahiṣāsura.

The power of making one victorious must have been possessed by the goddess. That is why, the gods, when their kingdom of heaven was lost to the demons, sought her protection and prayed for annihilation of the enemies. Such concept of victory lying with the goddess has some affinity with the Oraon concept of worshipping their goddess Cāndī. The Oraon hunters usually worship Cāndī before entering into the forest and pray for success and victory in their hunting. In course of Aryanisation in India, the upholders of Brāhmaṇical culture borrowed from the original inhabitants some of their religious beliefs. It is not unlikely that the author of the Markandeya Purāṇa borrowed the idea that victory lies with the goddess.
That the goddess Caṇḍi of the 'Devīmāhātmya has some connection with the vegetation-world is evident from the chapters 90 and 91 of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa. The account of the defeat and death of the demon Śumbha, in this connection, deserves our attention. After the death of the demon, "tathā prasannamakhilam hāte tasmin durātamani / jagat savasthyā-mativāpa nirmalācàbhavannabhāh \(:\) utpātomeghāh sollā ye pragasamste śaman vajuh \(:\) sarito mārgavāhinvastathā- samstatra pātite \(:\) (ch. 90/28-29) "when the evil-souled demon was slain, the universe became placid, the earth regained perfect well-being, and the sky grew pure. Portent-clouds, which were full of flame before became tranquil, and the rivers kept within their channels, when he was stricken down there." This description simply reminds us of the nature of the world after a heavy norwester. The goddess destroys both the 'evil-souled demon' and 'protent-clouds' at a time. The goddess represents the power of well-being. The power of well-being comes out victorious and the earth becomes peaceful, placid and suitable for living. The goddess causes the rainfall by extinguishing the flames (probably lightning) of the clouds for the benefit of the earth.

Chapter 91 of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa gives us to understand that after final reversal of the demons, Devī promises to descend to the earth, as an incarnation to deliver the world from the oppression of the evil-doers (demons), and nourish the whole world with the life-sustaining vegetables grown out of her
own body, during a period of heavy rain. In that incarnation she
promises to have the name Śākambhari (Herb-bearing or Herb-
nourishing) and also slay the great demon Durgama.

She thus promises:

punaśca śatavarṣikyamanavṛṣṭvāmanambhasi!
munibhiḥ samstutā bhumaṃ sambhavīśvāṃvavonijā!!
tatāḥ ātena netrānāṁ nirikṣaisvāṁ vaṃvunino!
kirtavisvānti manujah śatāksīmiti māṃ tathā!!
tatohbhahamkhilam lokamātmadeha samudbhaveh!
bhayāvāmi surah sakairvṛsteh prānadhārakeih!!
śākambharīti vikhyātim tadā vaśvanyaham bhuvi;
tatraiva ca vadhīśvāmi durgamākhyām mahāsuram!!

(Mark p. 91: 46-50)

"And again after a period of a hundred years during which rain
and water shall fail, praised by the munis I shall be born, but
not-womb-begotten, on the earth. Then because I shall then behold
the munis with a hundred eyes, mankind shall therefore celebrate
me as "Hundred-eyed" (śatāksī). Next, o ye gods I shall support
the whole world with the life-sustaining vegetable, which shall
grow out of my own body, during a period of heavy rain. I shall
gain fame on the earth then as "Śākambhari; and in that very
period I shall slay the great Asura named Durgama". The goddess
is none but Mother Earth from whose body grows the life-
sustaining vegetables. In this connection, we may refer to a seal
unearthed at Harappa, the obverse of which shows a nude female
figure with the head downwards and legs stretched out upwards,
and a plant issuing out of her womb. This may be regarded as
the prototype of the Earth Mother 'Sākambhari' of the Devimāhātmya. Not only that, there are many other Indus valley seals in which trees and plants are associated with the goddess. In Bengal, the annual worship of the goddess is performed with pomp and splendour in the autumn, the season of ripening and harvesting of crops. One of the chief features of Durgā pūjā is the worship of Navapatrikā i.e. the nine plants representing nine goddesses. According to R.P. Chanda, "this worship of Navapatrikā is but a survival of the agrarian phase of Durgā-worship." Scholars in recent times have also upheld the view that the goddess Durgā was originally a goddess of vegetation, later transformed into a goddess of war. It is observed: "Agricultural communities, even today, have to live with uncertainty. In addition to flood, drought and other calamities of nature, they also have to contend with the oppression of the surplus-enjoying class... The goddess must fight against the natural disasters and against the privileged class in order to secure the agricultural yields for her worshippers." The assumption behind the observation is that the goddess of vegetation represents the interests of the peasantry reduced to poverty. The peasant-community is stratified, comprising the upper, middle and lower stratum, namely, the landed aristocracy, peasant-proprietors and landless peasants. Sākambhari was worshipped by all of them for agricultural yields. She fought as a warrior against natural calamities that might cause positive harm to agriculture.
The goddess confidently utters in the Devimahatmya (11: 5-6) that those who would listen to the recitation of her eulogy, would be rescued from all troubles and restraints.

"Na teṣāṁ duṣkṛtāṁ kincid duṣkṛtotttha na ca padahānāṁ, bhāviṣyatī na dārīdryam na caibestavījanam; śatruto na bhavam tasya dasvuto va na rājataḥ; na śāstrānātovaghāt kadācit sambhāviṣyatī āṁ.

"To them shall happen no wrong-doing whatever, nor calamities that arise from wrong-doing, nor poverty, nor indeed deprivation of their desires. Never shall he experience fear from enemies, from robbers, nor from kings, nor from weapons or fire or water-flood."

Thus, she not only promises to provide her devotees with sufficient vegetables but also assures them rescue from all types of worldly troubles and dangers including poverty. Again, she gives assurance of protection against robbery, royal oppression, weapons of war, fire and flood. She is called Durgā, as she assures smooth sailing of her devotee’s boat across ocean of worldly existence: Durgasi durgabhavasāgaranaurasangā (Mārk. p. 84/10).

Thus the functional aspects of Mother-goddess have been all-pervasive and universal so that the devotion to any other divinity for the satisfaction of worldly desires has become irrelevant. Thus, the exaltation of Mother-goddess to the supreme position has been complete. The goddess who started her Purānic career as a female energy of either Viṣṇu or Śiva has
consolidated her position of importance over both of them. It indicates, no doubt, that the emergence of female energy (Śakti) as the source of all energy ushered a new chapter in the religious history of Bengal.

TRACES OF THE DEVI-CONCEPT OF THE MĀRKANDEYA PURĀNA IN EARLIER TEXTS:

A: RGVEDIC TEXT

The goddesses occupy a subordinate position in Vedic religion. As female counterparts of the great gods they play an insignificant role. Only a few hymns addressed to the goddesses occur in the Ṛg-Veda. The concept of the gods like Indrāṇī (wife of Indra), Varunāṇī (wife of Varuna), Agnāyī (wife of Agni) and personified Nature like Uṣās (dawn), Prithivī (earth) have been referred to sometimes as Śakti. But the word ‘Śakti’ occurs in the Ṛg-Veda in the sense of Māyā (illusory power). Of course, M. M. P. V. Kane thinks: “No direct connection can be traced between these Vedic goddesses and the later conception of ‘Devi’ or ‘Śakti’”. Because, they have been portrayed as mere shadowy reflections of the gods but with little independent status. Even the so-called important goddesses like Aditi and Uṣās lost their position in the subsequent period of religious history.

Although, not at all comparable with the glory and divine grace held by the great goddesses of the Devimāhātmya, we may refer to the theme of the Devī-sūkta where the goddess Vāj declares her greatness:
"I am the queen, the gathered-up of treasures,
Most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship,
I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike,
and slay the hater of devotion.
On the world's summit o'er all existing creatures,
And touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.
I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest,
The while I told together all existence
Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens.
I have become so mighty in my grandeur."

In Bengal, there is a tradition of reciting the hymns
of the Devī-sūkta before commencing the recitation of the Devī-
māhātmya, popularly known as Cāndī. But there exists a gulf of
difference between the concepts of the goddess as delineated in
the Devī-sūkta and the Devī-māhātmya. The former declares herself
as 'queen' of the earth, whereas the latter is conceived of as
'mother' of all created beings. From the description it appears
that the goddess Vāk is an abstract Nature-goddess, having no
relation with any god, her form and appearance being unknown to
all. Her origin remains unexplained. But the goddess Cāndī, the
embodiment of the accumulated lustre of the gods has a specific
form. She has been assigned some specific duties of destroying
enemies, removing distresses and supplying vegetables of the
world with nourishment. She has a special relation with Viṣṇu. In
the Devī-sūkta the name of Rudra is once traced but no
relationship between Rudra and Vāk is mentioned. One can trace a
little similarity between the Devī-sūkta and Devī-māhātmya.
portraying the goddess as almighty. But in no way can we consider the former (Vāk) as the prototype of the latter (Caṇḍī).

The Sāktas sometimes consider the Rātri-sūkta as a hymn to Śakti. The Rātri-sūkta says: "The immortal goddess has filled the expanded (firmament), the low places and the high places, she fights the darkness with lustre". There are two verses in this hymn which clearly refer to goddess Durgā. Sāyanaçārya, the great Vedic commentator on the Rg-veda has pointed out that this Durgā is none other than the great Śakti. In a hymn Rātri is said to be the sister of Uṣaṣ (Dawn), possessing many eyes and looking forth with these at many spots. But it will not be reasonable to trace the source of goddess Kālī to Rātri (the dark night) on the basis of similarity of their dark colour. Because, according to the Purāṇic tradition, goddess Kālī was born from Caṇḍikā, when the latter was engaged in war with the demons, whereas the same goddess Kālī is described as one of the seven tongues of Agni in a Vedic text.

Separate hymns or partial hymns are attributed to a number of female divinities. Those divinities are Uṣaṣ, Rātri, Sinīvālī, Rākā, Gunjā, Prithivi, Aditi, Prṣṇī, Diti, Svasti, Apdevīs, Sarasvatī, Aranvāṇī, Indrāṇī, Varunāṇī, Agnāyī, Sūrya, Śacī, Dhīśanā, Ilā, Mahī, Bhārati, Gaurī, Niṝṛtī, Apsarās and some others. According to some, the large number of hymns, referred to above, indicate the existence of female-deities in the Rg-Vedic period. But, in fact, those hymns represent abstract forms of natural phenomena, abstract qualities or
spirits which are not at all comparable to the powerful warrior-vegetative goddess of the Purānas.

B: LATER VEDIC TEXTS

In some of the later- Vedic texts recognition is given to the female divinities referring to some of them in connection with their male-counterparts. In the different texts of the Yajurveda as well as in its Brāhmaṇas there are, of course, passages in which Ambikā has been mentioned and often called Rudra’s sister and once his mother as well. But in these passages Ambikā has been allowed a share of the sacrificial offerings. The Hiranyakesī Br̥hyasūtra (II. 8.7) prescribes sacrificial offerings to god Bhava’s wife: bhavasya devasya pātavāi. But this text is of a comparatively late date. In the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (I. 6. 10) and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (II. 6.2.9.) Ambikā is styled ‘autumn’ (śaṇat). While commenting respectively on the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa (I. 6.10. 4) and the Vaiṣeṣika Gaṁbī (3.57) Śaṇaya and Mahīdhara describe Ambikā as a cruel deity (bhimsīka krutā- devatā) like Rudra and say that Ambikā helped Rudra in his slaughter by appearing as śaṇat and creating fever and other dieases. The identification of Ambikā with ‘śaṇat’ would mean that the later worship of goddess Durgā in the autumn season, prescribed in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa (92/12) might have some conection with Ambikā. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa (86/9-10; 87/4; 86/16.22) mentions more than once the name Ambikā as one of the forms of the Devī.
The name 'Umā', though not found in the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa, is a popular form of the goddess in Bengal. The name first appears in the Kena Upanisad (3/12) without any relationship with Rudra-Siva. She is called Haimavatī (daughter of Himavat i.e. Himalaya). This connection of the great goddess is very popular in Bengal especially in the mediæval ballads, known as Agamani. Umā has been portrayed as daughter of Himalaya and wife of Śiva. She comes once a year to her motherland (Bengal). Her relationship with Śiva is first found in the Jāttirīva Aranyakā (X. 18) where Rudra is described as Umāpati and also as Ambikāpati and thus Umā is identified with Ambikā. J. N. Banerjea thinks that the later Purānic stories, legends and myths regarding Umā-Haimavatī have their origin in the Haimavatī-concept of the Kena Upanisad.

Bhadräkāli, another popular form of the Devī of the Devimāhātmya first occurs in the Śāmkhya Uṛhya-Sūtra (II. 14.1) and the Manu-Samhitā (III. 89). The devotees are directed to make offerings to her. But the texts are silent about her power, origin, attributes and functions. In the Mundaka-Upanisad (I. 2.4) Kāli and Karāli are the names of two of the seven tongues of Agni. The Mārkandeya-Purāṇa (ch. 80) when describing the origin of Kāli from Candikā, refers to the relation of the goddess with Agni thus:  vā libvā bhavatah kāli kālanistha kari prabho. The number 'seven' seems, however to be significant and one can trace the 'Saptamātrikā' concept in this later Vedic tradition.

The Śvetāsvatara Upanisad (1.3) says: "The [Brahma-Vādins] endowed with meditation and yoga saw Śakti abiding as
non-deterrent from God, and concealed [from comprehension] by its own attributes (or by sattva, rajas and tamas)". The same text again speaks (6.8) of Brahman as possessing the highest Śakti (parā-śakti) in the various forms. Śaṅkara quotes this passage on Br. S. II. 1. 24 where he says 'Brahman, although one only, is owing to its manifold powers (Vicitra = śakti = yoga), able to transform itself into manifold, effects just as milk is (Kṣiradi-vat)'. But this Śakti is not comparable with the Purānic Śakti. Whereas Brahman is found endowed with different Śaktis, in the Purānic concept Śakti is the ultimate reality, the Supreme Principle. Śakti in the Śākta doctrine seems to hold the position almost equivalent to that of Brahman in the Upaniṣhads.

C. THE EPIC

The two great Indian epics Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are believed to have been completed by the beginning of the Gupta period and are regarded as contemporary with the early Purāṇas like Brāhmaṇa, Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Bhāgavata and Matsya. Both these epics contain a few references to female-deities. In the Rāmāyaṇa Umā is referred to as the consort of Śiva (7.4.30; 7.13.22; 7.78.110 ff). Umā of the Rāmāyaṇa has nothing comparable to 'Maḥiṣamardini Durgā' of the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa.

The cult of Śakti attained great importance in the Mahābhārata. Two complete hymns are addressed to her (IV. 6 and VI.23), in addition to the Ārya-stava in the Harivaṃśa (ViṣṇuParva, ch. III). In the Ārya-stava, the first three-four
verses stress is laid on the Aryan elements of the goddess (Āryā, Nārāyaṇī, Tribhuvanesṛī, Śrī etc.) and the following verses associate her with the hills, rivers and forests, domestic and wild animals, and the non-Aryan tribes like the Sābaras, the Barbaras and the Pulindas. Goddess kālī has been twice mentioned. Following the later Vedic tradition, she is also described as one of the seven tongues of Agni. Again, the goddess is mentioned in dreadful surroundings and her form is described as "Kālī raktāsyananayam raktamālānulepanām" (Kālī with red face, bloodshot eyes, wearing garlands of red flower, her body smeared with red sandal paste). She symbolises destruction: Kālī stī Fāḍū rajrodantvāḥ praviśva hasti niśe.

In the Mahābhārata we find various appellations given to the goddess such as Kumārī (maiden), Kālī (black or time-destroyer), Kapālī (wearer of skulls), Mahākālī (the great destroyer), Cāndī (Angry), Kātyāyanī (tutelary-deity of the Kātyāyana family), Karālī (frightful), Vijaya (victory), Kauśikī (tutelary-deity of the Kauśika family), Umā, and Kāntāravāsini (dwelling in the forest). She is also called Mahiśamardinī (destroyer of the buffalo-demon) and fond of wine and flesh, and a permanent resident of the Vindhya mountain. Yudhiṣṭhira, the elder brother of the Pāṇḍavas, eulogises (Durgā-stotra) her as one who had taken birth from Yaśodā and Nanda-Gopa. Arjuna has been advised by Kiṁśuṇa to recite the hymn in honour of Durgā.

Arjuna eulogies (Durgā-stotra) Durgā by saying Cāndī Candā namastubhyam- tarīṃ varavārpanī. She is called Absolute Brahman, cause of creation and destruction, Mohini (enchanting), Śrī.
(giver of prosperity), Janani (mother) and is given also other various names. Thus, some of the elements of the Devimāhātmya might be reasonably traced in the Mahābhārata. The most important information recorded in this epic, however, is connected with goddess Durgā who has been described as reliever from all distresses:

\[ \text{durgattāravase durge tasmāt durgā smṛtajanaḥ} ; \]
\[ \text{Kāntāresvavasaannam megnanāca mahārṇave} ; \]
\[ \text{dasyubhirva nīruddhanam tvām gatib parame orṇām} ; \]
\[ \text{jalapratarane caive kantavesvatavisu ca} ; \]
\[ \text{ve amaranti mahādevī na ca sidanti te narah} ; \]

"Oh Durgé! People give you appellation Durgā because you dispel distress who become tired in the deep forest, who sink in the great oceans, who become captivated by robbers, to them you are the ultimate shelter, who remember you at the time of crossing waters (river or ocean), never fall in danger". In the Mārkandeya Purāṇa also it is said that those who listen to the recitation of the Devī-māhātmya with devotion are rescued from all dangers and difficulties. It may, therefore, be reasonably held that the concept of Durgā, that we find in a more simplified form in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa, had developed by the 5th century A.D., when the Mahābhārata took its final shape.

**EARLY AND LATER PURĀNAS**

The early Purānic texts such as Brahmānda-Purāṇa, Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and Matsya-Purāṇa were completed
in the Gupta period. Some parts of those Puranas were, however, anterior even to the Mahabharata, according to Winternitz.

The Brahma-Purana, probably the earliest among the Puranas, deals with the placid aspects of the goddess. It records the account of burning of Sati, daughter of the Himalayas and wife of Siva. In one of her manifestations she is called Uma, following the later Vedic tradition. The description of Himalaya and her marriage with Siva is also found in the Vayu Purana. Her fearful aspect can be traced in the same Purana, when we find that Siva came to the goddess as representative of the gods and requested her to be born as Rudrani to safeguard the interests of the Brahmans, the pillars of the Aryan culture.

The Visnu-Purana, a purely sectarian text of the Vaisnavites, also could hardly overlook the steadily increasing influence of Saktism. The text enumerates the philosophical explanation of the goddess saying that she is the Cit Sakti (consciousness), Avidya (limits to pure consciousness) and Karma Sakti (Maya). But Visnu is represented as repository of all those powers. Thus the female-energy is subordinated to that of the male one. However, we find reference to various names of the goddess such as Arya, Durga, Vedagarbha, Ambika, Bhadrakali etc. Some of these names occur in the Devimahatmya. That the concept of a goddess killing a demon Mahisa was known to the author of the Visnu-Purana is evident from the occurrence of the appellation 'Mahisasuramardini', although the account of fight or confrontation between the goddess and the demons is
conspicuous by its absence.

The Bhagavata-Purana, again a Vaisnava text, contains a plenty of evidence concerning the popularity of the worship of Sakti. It contains a story that a chieftain of the Sudras, desirous of an issue, proceeded to offer a human victim to goddess Bhadrakali. Bhadrakali is one of the names of Devi Mahisamardini in the Devimahatmya. When the goddess disappears after the slaughter of the demon Mahisa, the Puranakara says: 60 tathye-tvuktva bhadrakali vadhuvantarthita orga i.e., Her image resembles Mahisamardini. That the worship of Bhadrakali was in vogue in Samatata region of Bengal since very early times is evident from the Deulbadi Sarvani Image Inscription. The image is designed as Sarvani in the inscription, but N.K. Bhattasli identifies the goddess with Bhadrakali on the basis of the description of a later Tantric text Saradatilaka-Tantra (composed in the 14th century A.D.). From the description in the Tantrasara (a mediaeval Tantrik text composed in Bengal), the goddess appears to be a dreadful deity. But Tantric Bhadrakali is not similar to Mahisamardini Durga. She is agnate of Kali. Some other names of the goddess occurring in the Devimahatmya are also found in the Bhagavata Purana. Those are Durga, Candika, Narayani, Ambika etc. The reference to human sacrifice to goddess Bhadrakali seems to suggest an incorporation of some non-Aryan elements in an early Puranic text.

The Matsya Purana relates the goddess with the two mountains, the Himalaya and the Vindhyas. The former is depicted as father of Devi (Parvati), while the latter is referred to as
her abode and lion as her vehicle. In this text we find mention of Ardhanarishvara, a composite image of Siva and his Sakti, Siva-Sakti juxtaposed in the half-male and half-female forms respectively. The detailed description of the images are given in the Matsya-Purana. It may be assumed that Ardhanarishvara symbolises a syncretistic attitude of the Saivas and the Saktas. It seems to indicate that by the date of the Matsya Purana (i.e. 4th century A.D. to 1100 A.D. as suggested by R. C. Hazra) the Saktas occupied a position equal to that of the Saivas and the Vaisnavas. The text follows the same story of the origin of goddess Kali as described in the Devimahatmya and portrays the dreadful aspect of Bhadrakali.

The Puranas composed from the 7th century A.D. to the 13th century A.D. contain numerous reference to various manifestation of the goddess. However, the tradition of portraying the goddess in her Mahisasuramardini form is generally followed. The Vamana-Purana (9th/10th century A.D.) and the Varaha Purana (c. 800 A.D. to c. 1100 A.D.) depict terrible aspects of the goddess that we find in the Devimahatmya.

From the Agni-Purana, composed probably in Eastern India between the 9th and 10th century A.D., it appears that Camunda, a form of the goddess found in the Devimahatmya, gained much popularity in Bengal. The text describes the image of the goddess with sunken eyes, fleshless skeleton body, three eyes, thin-belly and upward hairs, and holding skull, a pot and skin of tiger in her left, and trident and axe in her right hands. She
wears the ornaments made of bones and her mount is a corpse on which she is found riding. The description is similar to that of Kali found in the Markandeya-Purana (85:5-7) and Bhadrakali of the Tantrasara. The Bangarh Prasasti of Murttisivya of the reign of Nayapala (1027-43 A.D.) refers to goddess Carcika whose form and attributes are similar to those of Camunda known from the Agni-Purana, Kali of the Markandeya Purana and Bhadrakali of the Tantrasara. It appears that by the 10th/11th century A.D. Tantricism influenced the Puranic religion to a great extent. The occurrence of the name of goddess Carca (Carcika) in the Sian-Stone Inscription of the same period, found from Birbhum district (a renowned centre of Tantricism) seems to confirm the evidence of the Agni-Purana suggesting the popularity of the Tantric form of the goddess in Bengal. The Agni-Purana also deals with some Uptas (religious vows) pertaining to Devi that represent the rituals associated with the Cult of Mother-goddess, details about installation of Pratimas (images) and construction of temples of Devi.

In the Brahma Vaivartta Purana, composed in Bengal between the 8th and 16th century A.D., recognition is given to some prominent local female-deities like Manasa, Sasthi, Mangala-Candi or Candikka and kali, who gained much popularity in Bengal. The fact may be corroborated by their stone-representations of that period found in Bengal. Candi, Manasa, Sasthi, Kali were supposed to be different manifestations of Mother-goddess. Mediaeval poets of Bengal composed 'Kavyas' such as Candimangala, Manasa-mangala, Sasthimangala, Kalikamangala, Annadamangala
(Annada is a name of Annapurna i.e., Durga) in a Puranic fashion gloryfying the female divinities worshipped in rural Bengal. The Brahmandaivarta Purana explains the relationship between Manasa (the female snake deity of Bengal) and Siva as that of daughter and father. Manasa came to be recognised as one of the members of the Saivite family.

In Brahmanda Purana composed in Bengal in 13th-14th century A.D. Sati is the daughter of Himalaya and Menaka. She is also named Parvati who is identical with Ganga, the river-goddess. Brahma is referred to as appointed for the worship of Durga. Brahma prayed for victory of Rama against Ravana: Aum, Ravanas vadhasthavya ramesyanugrabhava ca / akale tu siva bodhastava devyah krtomaya / tasmadadvayrayuktas navamyamavesvadsubhe / ravanasya vadhah savadurcaivisyamahe vayam. The author has thus justified the worship of the goddess in the month of Asvina (in autumn). The Durga-worship was probably performed originally in the spring season. Although the Devimahatmya prescribes the worship in the autumn every year, it is referred to as akala (untimely worship). The reference to the worship of the goddess annually in the autumn occurs not only in the Brahmanda Purana, but also in the Kalika Purana composed in Eastern India. Thus the tradition of the Markandeya Purana was upheld in the later Puranic texts.

UPAPURANAS COMPOSED IN BENGAL

To get a closer view of the place of Mother-goddess in the religious life in medieval Bengal, we may consider the
information that can be deduced from the Upapuranas. At least three Upapuranas are known to have been composed in Bengal or its adjacent regions. Those are Devi-Purana (written somewhere in 78 Bengal, the place not exactly known), Kalika-Purana (written in 79 Kamarupa or the area adjacent to Bengal), Mahabhadrayana Purana (written at some parts of Bengal adjacent to Kamarupa).

DEVI-PURANA

Regarding the period of the composition of the Devi- 81 Purana R. C. Hazra is of opinion that "it is highly probable that the Devi Purana, as we have it now, comes down from the sixth century A.D. and most probably from its later half". So it can be safely assumed that the time when the great Sakti scripture 'Devi-mahatmya' was not yet composed or was in the process of being composed, Bengal produced such a text like the Devi Purana which deals with the exploits of Devi, who incarnated herself in the Vindhyas and was known as Vindhyavasini. It contains a lot of information regarding Eastern Indian Saktism such as original nature of the goddess, her relationship with other gods, iconography of Sakti images and the Sakti vows and worship, and all-abounding influence of Tantricism.

The Devi-Purana deals with a war-goddess who is not independent. She, being associated with Siva, was to kill the demon Ghora. Visnu approached Siva, on behalf of the gods, and the latter consoled them by saying that the goddess will incarnate herself in the Vindhyas with a lion as her vahana, and

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have Brahma, Visnu and Siva as her servants, the four Vedas as her door keepers and many unmarried female-deities as her attendants. Thus the great Puranic gods, who lent their energy to Devi in the Devimahatmya, have been reduced to a degraded status. It is said that in times of yore, Camunda, being sent by Siva, saved Visnu from the rage of Kalaghnirudra and his son Halahala. Visnu adored that goddess as the powerful Sakti able to create, protect and destroy the universe and the goddess being eulogised by Visnu, promised to help him whenever necessary.

Unlike the Devimahatmya, the Devi Purana associated Devi with Siva only. Besides, She is depicted as protectress of Brahma, Visnu and Siva. Her attendants are Jaya, Vijaya, Ajita and Aparajita. The goddess has been praised in the name of 'Mahisamardini', because the demon Ghora, killed by Devi, took the form of a Mahisa (buffalo).

The text prescribes her annual worship in the autumn (Sarat) by installation of an image of gold, silver, earth or wood and allows members of all castes including women to worship the goddess. Her mounts are said to be lion, monkey, bull, swan, peacock, Garuda, buffalo, elephant, lotus or a dead body.

Different chapters of this text deal with numerous names and manifestations of the goddess. Some of these are Durga, Sakambhari, Vindhyavasini, Katyayani, Kausiki, Gauri, Aparna, Kapali, Aparajita, Bhadrakali, Candi, Parvati, Narayani, Laksmi, Sarasvati, Ambika, Kali, Uma, Camunda, Bhavani, Tara, Vama, Mangala, Siva etc. It appears that the author of this text had knowledge of the earlier Puranic Mother-goddess. It refers to
some composite deities as Ardhanarisvara, Uma-Samkara, Uma-Mahesvara and Hari-Hara. Further, it may be noted that the central Goddess named as Durga is worshipped, according to the Devi Purana, along with eight forms of Candi, (ugracanda, Pracanda, Candorga, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa, Aticandika) and eighty-four Yoganis. Mention is also made of Koti-Yoganis. Of the eighty-four Yoganis the first one is Candika and the last one is Mahagauri.

A study of this text gives us to understand the supremacy of the female energy over the powerful Puranic gods. That Saktism had a close affinity with Saivism is clearly evident, whereas in the Devimahatmya, Devi is sometimes depicted as closely associated with Visnu.

However, the original character of Mother-goddess is twofold: 1) She is a war-goddess and 2) she is a goddess of vegetation.

1) Like the Devimahatmya, the Devi-Purana deals with the exploits and attributes of the goddess Vindhyavasini, undoubtedly a deity of the Vindhyan region. In the former text, Devi is sometimes called by the name of Vindhyavasini. The question may be raised as to how in a text written in Eastern India, the goddess of central India was exalted to such a high position. The reasons are not far to seek. The group of people inhabiting the Vindhyan region had their ethnic and cultural affinities with the people living in some parts of Bengal. Alternatively, it may be held that the abode of the Vindhyा mountain was traditionally
associated with the goddess without prejudice to her regional character. A different Puranic tradition that was more popular in Eastern India associates the great goddess with the Himalayas. Doubtless, the war goddess hailed from a hilly region.

One of the names of the goddess in the Devi-Purana is Sakambhari, indicating relation of the goddess with the vegetation world. Although the goddess makes no promise to her devotees that she would incarnate as Sakambhari to fill the world with sustaining vegetables, as the goddess Candi has done in the Devimahatmya, there are some passages in the Devi Purana, which indirectly indicate her aspect of productivity. It is said that Rudra, the giver of boon to his devotees and worshippers, had sent 'black-goddess Camunda' to protect all and to dissuade the fire: Prasavayam Camundam Kalanilasamaprabhan / Paksanaya tabasmakam hutasanamasamayaca (VI / 11). The goddess protected them only taking a moment: Sa trava ksamamatrena sa ca jvalasamam gata" (VI / 12). Then, Brahma and Visnu eulogised her by saying: Namaste Kalajaleuha-Ghoradiuta-prasamati / Nilasvandamaha kalanavamegha prabhavati" (VI / 19) —— "Oh, pacifier of frightful fire of universal annihilation! Oh; luminous fresh bluish cloud coming down to rain! Salutation to You!" Camunda, the fierce goddess, is none but raining cloud on whose grace both the poor peasants and rich cultivators have to depend for getting crops in abundance. She is the Indian war-goddess, killing all enemies of agriculture, subduing all elements harmful for peace and prosperity of mankind.
The Kalika Purana was probably composed in the 10th century A. D. or first half of the 11th century A. D. A study of this text would indicate the following: 1) The text is a Tantric one, as it is full of Tantric elements; 2) the chief goddess of this Purana is Kamakhya, a purely local female deity of Kamarupa; 3) the goddess is a consort of Siva, having a cordial relation with Visnu; 4) the goddess is not portrayed as war-goddess. The subject matter of the Kalika-Purana, although the ultimate aim is to extol the glory of goddess (Kamakhya), is totally different from that of the Devimahatmya, except that the goddess has her relation with the world of vegetation. It is said:

Utpannamankuran vijad-yathapomeghasambhayah!
prarohavati sajantumstathotpanna prarohayet!
Sak titih pratirupa ca sarvvesam bhvatirisvari!  
(VI. v. 66)

That is, "As germination of seeds is caused by rainfall, the nutrition and growth of this animal world have been caused by the goddess. She, all producing, is the creative force; She is fame, She is the goddess". The gratefulness of her devotees is thus expressed to the goddess, who always protects and nourishes the creation caused by herself. Her appellations Dharitri, Prthividevi, Vasundhara, Jaganmata, Jagaddhatri support the fact that she is Earth-goddess growing and nourishing the plants.
Although, the chief elements of the Devimahatmya are lacking in the Kalika Purana, the latter incorporates some peculiar features which may be characteristic of Eastern India. The text begins with the story of the birth of Kamadeva (god of love or lust). Most of the chapters deal with the lust (Kama) of the gods and goddesses for which occurred prolonged sexual intercourses leading to the growth of population. This is probably a way of representing the cult of fertility.

Candi of the Markandeya Purana may be traced in the present text. According to the Kalika Purana, the central goddess Durga is worshipped along with her associates, namely, eight forms of Candi and eighty-four Yogini's whose names are similar to those found in the Devi Purana.

MAHABHAGAVATA PURANA

R. C. Hazra assigns the date of the composition of this Upapurana to the 10th-11th century A.D. So it may be considered as a contemporary of the Kalika Purana. The traces of the Devimahatmya hardly occur in this text. Like the Kalika-Purana, it is also full of Tantric elements. The goddess is portrayed as a supreme primeval force but not as a war-goddess or a goddess of vegetation.

The Puranakara expresses the reason for the composition of a work like this in the following way: "Being unable of attaining mental satisfaction even after writing the eighteen
Puranas, Vyasa wanted to become the author of a Mahapurana that would deal with the praise of Bhagavati. Some information about the supremacy of the goddess in the region concerned might be considered very significant. Firstly, Krsna, the tutelary-deity of the Vaisnavas, is depicted as a manifestation of the great goddess. It is said that the goddess promised to be born as Krsna to destroy Kamsa, Duryodhana and others who were torturing the earth. Secondly, some previous texts record Parvati's (one form of the great goddess) severe austerities to obtain Siva as her husband. But in this text we find Siva as observing penance to obtain the goddess as his wife. This obviously indicates the superiority of the female divinity and for that matter, superiority of women folk in matriarchal society. Thirdly, the text associates the epic heroes like Rama and the Pandavas with the worship of the great goddess. They worshipped the goddess for their victory in war.

**Tantrasara**

Some elements of the concept related to Mother goddess found in Devimahatmya may be traced in a much later text of the Tantrasara composed in the 16th century A. D. in Bengal. The chief manifestation of the goddess of the Devimahatmya, Mahisamardini, has been referred to in the Tantrasara by the name of Katyayani, although she is none but ten-armed Mahisasura mardini Camunda or Ugracanda. Another aspect of the Mahisamardini in the Devimahatmya is Bhadrakali, who has striking resemblance with Camunda or Ugracanda. The Tantrasara draws a dreadful portrait
of the goddess Bhadrakali. It may, therefore, be held that the Tantric Sadhakas and scholars also accepted the text of the Devimahatmya, as an authoritative text of scripture on Sakti-Sadhana.

From the foregoing discussion it appears that the cult of Mother-goddess consolidated itself on a strong foundation in early mediaeval Bengal. The Markandeya Purana and especially its Devimahatmya section for the first time propounds the cult of Mother-goddess in all her glory and greatness. Although the female divinities were recognised since the Early Vedic period, it was in the Mahabharata that female energy of its male counterpart emerged as a divinity of much significance in the religious life of the people. In fact, the attributes and functions of Candi of the Markandeya Purana may be traced in the Great Epic. When we make an attempt to make a comparative study of Candi or Durga of the Markandeya Purana with the early and later Puranic female divinities, there remains little scope of doubt that the full-fledged image of Mother-goddess, the goddess of war and goddess of vegetation and productivity the creator, preserver and destroyer is available only in the Devimahatmya section of the Markandeya Purana. But it does not necessarily suggest that the other Puranakaras were totally ignorant about the emergence of Sakti as the great goddess. In fact, in the other Puranas, either early or late and even in some of the Upapuranas, we may trace partially some attributes and functions of the Mother-goddess which resemble closely that of Candi in the Markandeya Purana. It may, therefore, be reasonably suggested
that what the other Puranakaras were thinking about for a long time was given a final shape in the Markandeya Purana, the composition of which required a period stretching from the 5th - 6th to the 9th century A.D.

It is clear from our discussion made above that Devi Candi of the Markandeya Purana was essentially the Mother-goddess worshipped in Bengal. It is difficult to ascertain the exact place or country where the said Purana was finally composed. But there is least doubt that the goddess as described in the Markandeya Purana has the closest affinity with the goddess in her different forms as found in the Puranas and Upa puranas which are known almost certainly to have been composed in Bengal or in the territory adjacent to Bengal. Of course, in Eastern Indian Puranas and Upapuranas one may trace the image of goddess which was to some extent regional in character. Because, the forms and names of the goddess either in Gauda-Vanga or in Kamarupa suited the taste and environment of the people concerned. For instance, Kamakhya of Kamarupa or Manasa-Sasthi of Bengal were manifestations of the supreme goddess according to the needs of people of the countries concerned. Yet in Eastern Indian Puranas and Upa puranas we can hardly miss the delineation of attributes and functions of great Mother goddess as found in the Markandeya Purana.

The study of the Epics and the Puranas leaves little scope of doubt that Indian religious beliefs and practices accommodated both non-Aryan and Aryan elements. In fact, the authors of the Puranas took upon themselves the task of borrowing
aboriginal beliefs and giving them a sophisticated form. This is quite evident from the image of Mother-goddess in which we find a conglomeration of both pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian elements as also elitist Aryan concepts. Especially, the fearful and terrible aspects of the goddess or the rituals of Tantric nature comprising the use of wine, blood and flesh seem to have been borrowed from the aboriginal tribes. It is interesting to note that the Mother-goddess is alternately associated with Siva, and Visnu. Her association with Siva is found to be attached with pre-aryan and non-Aryan flavour, whereas her connection with Visnu brings in an Aryanised element in religious belief. Interestingly enough, the relation of Mother-goddess with both Siva and Visnu has been maintained althrough by the Puranakaras.

The study of the Puranas further gives us to understand a trend of syncretism in the religious life of the people. There is no denying the fact that Indian society was often disturbed by religious fundamentalism and factionalism on account of constant rivalry between different sects and cults. But the emergence of Mother-goddess as Supreme Energy (Adya Sakti) by an absorption of the powers derived from all Puranic divinities, ushers in a new chapter in Indian religion in which all sects, recognising the role of Sakti, came closer to each other under the banner of of Saktism of universal character. Besides, the concept of Ardhanarisvara that might remind one of Purusa-Prakrti of the Samkhya system of philosophy symbolises a synthesis between two rival sects. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable for us to hold that the emergence of the Cult of Mother-goddess represented
the true spirit of syncretism, especially in Bengal where the
god-fearing people are used to call 'god' by the name of
'mother'.

To a pious devotee of the Sakta cult, the Sakti is
really the formless absolute principle immanent in the whole
universe as the supreme and all-pervading consciousness
(Citirupena va krtamad-sthita jagat, Mark. p. 85/34). When she took a form personifying the three gunas in one, she
came to be known as Mahalakshmi. From this original form there
were emanations like Mahakali and Mahasaraswati, as it has been
indicated in the supplement to the Devimahatmya (Pradhanika
rahasya). In the Narayani-stuti of the Devimahatmya itself, the
Devi is said to have assumed different forms of Matrikas, Lakshmi,
Saraswati Narayani, Katyayani, Durga, Bhadrakali, Ambika etc. It
may be assumed that those were emanations from the transcendal
form (cf.Para prakriti in the Bhagavad gita). Again, in the
Devimahatmya (ch. x1 41-54), the Devi gives an account of her
various future manifestations in different ages for the purpose
of destroying the evil-doers. Yogamaya, Raktadantika, Sataksi,
Sakambhari, Durga, Bhima, and Brahmani are said to be the future
manifestations, incarnary forms in other words in different
ages and regions. The Devi has declared: "whenever (the world)
will face such troubles through the appearance of the demons, I
shall incarnate myself and destroy the enemies". Further in the
Arva-stava (Harivamsa, Visnu parva, ch.3) reference has been made
to the Antaryami (inner controller of the actions of an
individual). In the statement "his mind, conceptions and heart
may always be concentrated on her, she may protect him from all sins, and it behoves her to grant him her benediction. (Iyayi me bridayam devi ivyai chittam manastavi ! Raksha nom sarvapagebhvak prasadam kartumarhasti). In the Vaikriitika and Murti-rahasyas (supplements to the Devi mahatmya) concrete forms or image types of the great goddess are elaborately described with the purpose of indicating the Arca-form (concrete image, Sri Vigraha) to be worshipped by the devotee. One of the earliest image types appears to be Mahisasuramardini. Vasudeva was also conceived by a devotee of the bhagavata-cult in five forms viz. Para (Absolute, Transcendent), Vyuhā (emanatory form), Vibhava (incarnatory form), Antaryamin (inner controller at heart) and Arca (concrete image for worship). It may, therefore, be reasonably held that the devotees of the Vaisnavi Sakti (referred to in the Narayanistuti of the Devimahatmya) also conceived the Devi’s different manifestations on the same model. The Puranakara was primarily an exponent of the cult of bhakti.

In the Puranas, we may trace the beginning of the Tant 31 elements. Because, the Matrikas who are associated with the Devi in the Puranas are given more importance in the Tantras, According to the Markandeya Purana, the Matrikas who assisted the Devi in her fight with the demons were Brahmani (Sakti of Brahma), Mahesvari (Sakti of Mahesvara), Kaumar (Sakti of Kumara), karttikeya, Vaisnavi (Sakti of Visnu, Indrani (Sakti of Indra), Varahi, Narasimhi. Siva duti, and Camunda. While the Saktis of different gods came out of their bodies to help the Devi in her fight with the Asuras, Sivaduti and Camunda were
emanations from the Devi herself. In the subsequent ritual literature of the Hindus, the names of as many as sixteen Matrkas with Gauri in the beginning (Gauryadi, Sodasamatrka) are mentioned. Again, sixty-four Yoginis who formed the gana of the Mother-goddess are mentioned in the Devi Purana and the Kalika Purana. The worship of the divine mothers (matrkas) and the Yoginis was intimately associated with the Tantric form of Sakti-worship in which fear played the most prominent part.
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