CHAPTER - III

'PARSVADEVATAS' ASSOCIATED WITH SIVA

Section I: GAÑAPATI, A CULT-DEITY

Gañapatī, one of the Purānic gods, associated with Śiva is often recognized in Hindu Brahmanical faith as one of the five cult deities of Śaṅkara Pañchopāsana. Regarding the antiquity of the cult of Gañapatī there remains scope of doubt. In the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (Book X) may be traced the Gañesā-Gaṇātī:

Oṃ Vignarājāya vidmahe vakratunḍāya dhīmahi / tannodanti proghodayat. On this basis, it has been claimed by the Gañapatīya in the later period that the great god Gañesā was mentioned even in the Vedic texts. In the Purāṇas Gañesā is depicted as the leader or lord of the Gaṇas or followers of Rudra-Śiva, also known as Pramathas (imps). In the Atharvavedas Upanishad, Vināyaka, later in the Purāṇas, an alternative name of Gañapatī, is mentioned among the gods or spirit with whom Rudra is identified. As Gañapatī was considered the leader of the Śiva-Gaṇas, his closer relationship with Śiva seems to have been established in the Purānic mythology. Late Rakhaldas Bandopadhyaya discovered the remains of

the Siva temple at Bhumara on which may be found the representation of the Siva-Gapas. Most of the impish attendants of Siva are found to be short in stature, pot-bellied and fat-bodied. They are ox-headed, horse-headed or bird-faced (Syena). The face of a Rakshasa is found carved on the belly of some of them. Along with these Siva-Gapas is to be found the cult image of Gapapati in a niche of the Bhumara Siva temple dated in the 6th century A.D.

Pre-Aryan Concept:

It appears from the sculptural representation of the imps, referred to above, that the concept ofGapas and their leader Gapapati may be traced in the primitive belief in spirits. Originally, it was not Vedic but pre-Vedic in character. The Nishadas, the Austro speaking people, who are known to have settled long before the Indo-Aryans in different parts of India including Bengal (Gauda-Vanga) believed in animism or worship of spirits. The spirits in question, as pointed out by social anthropologists, were malevolent in nature, but, if they were

appeased by some rituals, they would not create any danger or difficulty in the life of the people on the earth. Such was, in fact, the nature of the Ganesávaras and Vinayakas, referred to in the Anudasanaparva (Ch. 150) of the Mahábhárata, who, being properly propitiated, removed all obstacles from the path of men.

It has been pointed out by R.G. Bhandarkar that the Gápesávara or Gágapati was originally an unfriendly or malignant spirit, but capable of being made friendly and beingnant by propitiatory rites. If that be so, the pre-Aryan and pre-Vedic concept of Gápesa-Gágapati was recognised in the religious beliefs of the original inhabitants of Bengal. The descendants of the original inhabitants, the Santals and the Oraons continue to worship the spirits named with the generic terms Bôngó and Néd respectively. Totem and taboo were quite in vogue among the aboriginal tribes of Bengal. We cannot rule out that an elephant was primarily a totem which, being given a human shape later achieved god-head.

Of course, this explanation is based upon the characteristic iconographic feature of the elephant-faced Puráníc god. In the Buddhist text Nidása which furnishes us with a curious record

of various religious beliefs prevailing in the early period, we find mention of those who were devoted to an elephant, a horse, a cow, a dog, a crow, Nāgas, Yakhas, Asuras, Gandharvas etc.\(^5\) It would not be unreasonable to hold, therefore, that some animals worshipped at the folk-level in the early period were later accommodated in the Purāṇas in the forms of deities.

Getty Alice and T.G. Aravamuthan have traced the Dravidian element in the image of the god Gānapati. Alice\(^6\) suggests that Gāṇeśa was originally a Dravidian deity worshipped by the aboriginal population of India who were Sun-worshippers. Aravamuthan\(^7\) agrees with Alice in tracing a symbol of night in Gāṇeśa mūṣikavāhana and had opined that Gāṇeśa, riding on his mount rat, was the Sun-god vanquishing the darkness of night. According to J.N. Banerjea,\(^8\) Gānapati was nothing but a combination of the iconographic types of a Yaksha and a Nāga.

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Hamsanarayan Bhattacharya, \textit{Hinduder Devi}, Vol. II,
Coomaraswamy also pointed out long ago that Ganașa was undoubtedly a Yaksha type and an elephant-headed Yaksha is to be found in an Amaravati coping. The pot-bellied trait of the Yakshas is prominent in Gapapati and he also possesses the head of a Naga in the sense of an elephant. Thus, iconographically the origin of the concept of Gapapati is traced in primitive folk-belief in the worship of Yakshas and Nagas already referred to above in the light of the Niddesa.

Conceptually, the worship of the spirits which seems to have been the original foundation of the cult of Gapapati may be traced in the religious belief of the Austric people. But so far as the representation of the god is concerned, the Dravidian element might have gradually crept into the concept associating the symbol of darkness or night with the god. The red-colour, generally the hue of the body of the god, seems to indicate his identification with the rising Sun. The admixture of Austric and Dravidian religious beliefs might have given rise to a red-coloured elephant-faced god riding on a rat. However, the emergence of the anthropomorphic form of Purānic Gapapati from the combination of such folk-beliefs in Yakshas and Nagas as prevailing in the 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D. seems to be a logical proposition.

Worship of Ganesa in North India:

The different Puranas like Siva, Linga, Varaha and Brahmanavaivarta along with the Agamas like Suprabhedagama furnish us with different accounts of the origin of Ganesa. The confusing accounts are summarised in the following words:

"Ganeśa, who is the same as Vignesvara, is considered to have been born solely to Śiva, solely to Pārvatī, and to both Śiva and Pārvatī; and also held to be Kṛishna in another form." 10

It is to be noted in this connection that in the late Purana like the Brahnavaiavarta which is believed to have been composed in Bengal, sometime in the 14th century A.D., Ganeśa is sometime described as one of the aspects of Kṛishna.

The beginning of the worship of Ganesa cannot be traced in the early Gupta period. No specific mention of the god is to be found in the Gupta records. Varahamihira in his Brihatasamhitā has enumerated the Puranic sects but does not refer to the Īśapatiyas. In the Chapter on Pratima-Lakshmana, the iconographic description of the god occurs in some of the manuscripts of Brihat Samhitā but it is regarded by some as an interpolation.

In the svargavarga-dhyāya of the amarkosha, usually assigned to the late Gupta period, the synonyms of Gana-pati-Vināyaka are put down in this way:

Vināyaka-Vighnarāja - Dwimātura-Ganādhīpah.  
Ayukadanta Heramba-Lambodara-Gajamanah

However, the earliest cult-image of Gana-pati appears to have been found in a niche of the Bhumara Siva Temple (6th century A.D.), referred to above. It appears that by the 6th century A.D., the cult of Gana-pati was systematised to a great extent. Of course, we have the evidence of some earlier images of Gana-pati. Alice Getty12 has, for example, reproduced one of the earliest sculptures representing a nude figure of Ganapāṇa made of spotted red sand stone discovered in Mathurā. Again, mention may be made of the terracotta plaque representing flying Ganapāṇa with a pot of sweetsmeats in one of his hands found on the wall of a brick temple of the Gupta period at Bhitargam. But these figures13 of the god do not actually represent the cult of Gana-pati as yet. On the Bhitargam temple Gana-pati is

found to be followed by other gāpas and, therefore, represents the leading gāpa of Śiva only. In the temples of Badami and Ellora also we find representation of Gopāpati with the gāpas. Therefore, the representation of the god separately and independently as an object of worship appears to be found for the first time in the Bhumara Śiva temple of the 6th century A.D. From these archaeological data, it would appear that the worship of Gopāpati in an anthropomorphic form had its beginning sometime in the late Gupta period. The god used to be worshipped by his devotees not only for the removal of difficulties and dangers but also for the attainment of success (siddhi) in life.

At a somewhat later period, Gopāpati turned to be the god per-excellence of the mercantile community. This is evident from an inscription found on a pillar at Ghatiala (Jodhpur, Rajputana) bearing the date V.S. 918 (862 A.D.). From this record it is learnt that a trade centre or a market place was established by the Pratihāra king Kakkuka at the village Rohinsakūpa. From two or three inscriptions found at Ghatiala, we learn the same and one of them expressly mentions that the Ābhiriṇas used to infest Rohinsakūpa and that Kakkuka, after this obstacle, established a centre of trade over there.14 This epigraphic evidence

Leaves no scope of doubt that the worship of Ganapati was popular among the members of the mercantile community only because of his character as the remover of all obstacles.

Cult of Ganapati in Bengal:

Some epigraphic records discovered so far in Bengal contain reference to the god Ganapati. An inscribed image of the year 1 of King Gopāla II was discovered from the village Mandhuk (Tippera district). The four-handed pot-bellied god with his vehicle rat is said to have been installed by a merchant named Jambhala mitra was apparently a Brahmanical divinity, Ganesa. But the inscription records after the Mahāyāna tradition in aspiration after enlightenment and well-being of all creatures headed by his parents. The Nārāyanapur image inscription (discovered near Chandpur, in Tippera district) of Mahipala I's, regnal year 4 records the setting up of an image of Vināyaka by a merchant Budhamitra, son of Jambhala mitra. It is not unlikely that both the donors of these images were primarily

followers of Buddhism. But the deity may be identified as Brahmanical one on iconographic ground although the same deity is recognised in the Mahāyāna Buddhist pantheon. 17 In the Balwa Copper Plate grant 18 of Mahipala I the name of a locality Ganesvāra seems to bear the impression that Gapapati was the presiding deity of this place. We are further informed that Jivadhārādevasarman was granted this place viz., Ganesvāra along with two other villages. The following passage in the above record "ganesvārāśameta grāma puahka riniṣṭva" puts forward the impression that there was a Ganesvāra temple in the centre of the locality inhabited by a community of Gapapati-worshippers.

A pillar 19 discovered from Paikore which was installed by the Chedi King Karna mention the god as 'bestower of success' in the following words 'Śri śri Gapapati (tat pra) ti (pālita) siddhi. This relic perhaps carries a mutilated image. The Kemauli plate 20 of Vaidyādeva is found attached to a copper-shaped metallic piece engraved with a small figure of Ganesā. In the Barrackpore Copper Plate grant 21 of Vijayasena an indirect reference to Ganesā may be traced.

17. B.T. Bhattacharya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography, Delhi, 1985, pp. 142-143.
21. I.S. p. 61 (verse 1, line 1).
We have to depend, of course, on the discovery of sculptures and images of the god made so far in Bengal. The images of Gapapati were discovered at places like Pāhārpur, Rajbād-dāngā, Bāngarh, Mālda, Bānkura, Tamluk, 24-Parganas and Dacca. Those are now preserved in different archaeological collections in the Museums in West Bengal and Bangladesh. A chronological sequence of the images discovered so far in north, south, east and west Bengal would help us to trace the development of the Gapapati-cult in Bengal. The images more or less conform to the following dhyaṇa of the Matsya Purāṇa (Ch. 260, verses 52-54):

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\begin{align*}
\text{Vināyakā pravakṣayām Gajavaktra trilochanām} / \\
\text{Lambodaraṁ Gaturbhujām Vyāla yajnopavītaṁ} / \\
\text{Dhaṭṭakarpasṛ bhavatpadamukadāśtrām prthudaraṁ} / \\
\text{Svadanteṁ deśīnake utpalāṅgopare tathā} / \\
\text{Modakam paraśuṅgaiva vāmataṁ parikalpayet} / \\
\end{align*}
\]

Several images of Gapesa in metal, stone and terracotta were found in Pāhārpur. One of them in grey sandstone is dated in the late Gupta period. It shows Gapapati seated, holding in his four hands a rosary, a radish, a trident and the

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end of a snake coiled round his body. A mouse is found to be the mount of the god on the pedestal. This image, no doubt, suggests that the worship of Ganesha had its beginning sometime in the 6th century A.D.

If we believe in the view, referred to above, that Gopapati was a combination of Yaksha and Naga, we may trace the cult of Gopapati in the form of Yaksha or Naga even in pre-Gupta Bengal. The torso of a Yaksha²³ wearing Upavita and another terracotta head of a Yaksha or Gana belonging to the Kushana or late Kushana period were discovered at Chandraketugarh (District 24–Farganas). Another torso²⁴ of a winged Yaksha wearing a knotted head-gear (śūrastrāṇa) was discovered at Tamralipti. These findings seem to suggest that at the folk-level the Gopas and their lord Gopapati used to be recognised in the religious beliefs prevalent in Bengal since very early times. Even though the cult of Gopapati may be traced in that of Yaksha or Naga, it is difficult for us to assume the beginning of the cult itself without having a full-fledged deity-form in some icons represented as per injunctions of the iconographic texts.

It would be rather more responsible, therefore, to hold that
the history of the cult of Ganapati had its beginning in Bengal
sometime towards the end of the Gupta period.

That the worship of Ganapati continued during the Post-
Gupta period is evident from the discovery of an octo-
army image of Ganesa\(^{25}\) discovered at Rājbadārīgā (Murshidabad). The
image is dated in the 7th-8th century A.D. The figure of the god
is represented as seated in Maharāja-līlā posture, having four
arms, each holding a particular attribute. Although the attri-
butes are not clearly distinct, it appears that the upper right
and left hands hold trident and radish and the lower right and
left hands hold modeka and a pot respectively. The trunk is long
one with a bend towards right touching modeka. The belly with
the sacred thread is very prominent. Below the right foot is
to be found the god's mount rat (mūshika). The halo behind the
image stands as an arch over the figure. Below on the left is
to be found a human skull which symbolises the Tantric rites
(vāmāchāra). It appears that Tantricism in Bengal which, in
course of time, absorbed in its fold the Mahāyāna form of Buddha,
also cast its influence on the representation of the Buddhist

\(^{25}\) S.R. Das, *Archaeological Discoveries from Murshidabad*,
Calcutta, 1971, p. 46.
gods and goddesses. Similarly, the cult of Ganapati might not maintain its pristine Paurāṇic purity under the growing influence of Tantrikism. It has been pointed out that Javanese specimens of Tantric form of the god follow the description occurring in some texts of Bengal. This form of Ganapati might have been exported from Bengal to the countries of the Far East.

The images of Ganesa discovered from Paharpur are dated in the post-Gupta-pre-Pala period. A sculpture of Ganesa (No. 5) made of spotted sand stone shows the god as seated with the mouse carved in relief at the pedestal. The hair is shown in matted curl bound in a knot at the top. The four hands of the god hold different attributes, the upper and lower right hands holding a radish with leaves and sweets respectively, while the upper left hand holds a bunch of lotuses and the lower left rests on the thigh. The coiled snake appears as passing over the bulging out abdomen from the right to the left. On the forehead of the god appears a lozenge-shaped mark representing his third eye. Another sculpture (No. 17) representing Ganesa also assigned to the pre-Pala period, is made of grey sand stone.

The god is shown as seated with four hands of which the upper left hands holds a trident, the lower left a snake appearing as a sacred thread on the body (Vyāla Yajñapavīta), the upper right hand holds a bunch of leaves and a lower right a rosary. There is a crude representation of the mount of the god on the pedestal. It is to be noted that the Pāśa and Aṇkuśa which are the characteristic attributes of Ganesa are conspicuous by their absence in the present sculpture. In this connection, we should not miss the significance of the attributes like trident (Trisūla) and snake often found to be held by Ganesa as his attributes in the post-Gupta-pre-Pāla period. These two attributes are generally associated with god Śiva and thus indicate the recognition of Ganesa as a god associated with Śiva.

For the Pāla period we have a terracotta figure of Ganesā,28 discovered from Bangarh. This terracotta figure shows the four-armed pot-bellied Ganesā as wearing a crown on the head and bangles on the arms. The god's upper right hand seems to hold a rosary and lower right a lotus, the upper left hand is broken and the lower left rests on the knee. Scholars have found the characteristics of Pāla art in the terracotta figure.

The 10th century-images of Ganesa are now preserved in the Asutoosh Museum, Calcutta and the Malda Museum. The specimen in the Asutoosh Museum, discovered from Mayada (24-Parganas), represents six-headed Ganesa standing on a lotus pedestal with his vehicle mouse. The specimen in the Malda Museum, discovered from Gazole (District Malda), shows eight-handed Ganesa standing on a lotus and holding in his right hands Pāsa, Ammuda and rosary (the third right hand is broken) and the left hands holding lotus, conch-shell and modaka (the first left hand is broken). An image of Ganesa, dated about 11th century A.D., is now preserved in the Indian Museum. It shows the six handed god dancing on the back of his mount and being accompanied by two musicians. Of the six hands, the right ones hold the tusk, axe and rosary and the left ones bear assurance pose, blue lotus and a pot of sweetmeats. A eight-handed image of dancing Ganesa on his rat-vehicle, dated 12th century A.D., is now preserved in the Indian Museum. Of his eight hands, the right ones hold axe, abhaya-posed and akshamālā, while the left ones hold creeper, snake and trunk (the second left hand is broken).

29. The present writer visited the Asutoosh Museum and the Malda Museum and notices the images referred to.

An unique five-faced and ten handed image of Ganesa, seated on a roaring lion, was discovered among the ruins of Rampal and later preserved at the Vaishnava monastery at Munshiganj (Dacca district). As pointed out by N.K. Bhattasali, the image entirely follows the dhyana of Heramba Gopapati as given in the Saradālatilakatantra (VII, p. 38). The god is seated in lelitaśaṅge over a roaring lion. He has five elephant heads, each with three-eyes. His hands with or without attributes are clockwise:

1) broken, 2) boon, 3) rosary, 4) reed, 5) taṅka, 6) tusk, 7) not-clear, 8) mouse, 9) protection, 10) sweetmeat.

This type of image is explicitly referred to in some South Indian texts noticed by T.A. Gopinath Rao. It has been suggested by some that the origin of the Gāpapatyas may be traced from the Seiva-Siddhāntas of South India. Six miniature images of Ganesa appear round the head of the main image. According to Dr. J.N. Banerjea, the miniature images of Ganesa represent the six sub-division of the Gāpapatyas sect, namely the worshippers of the six forms of the deity such as Mahā, Haridrā, Uchobhista, Navañīta, Svarpa and Sāntāna.


Forms of Gānapati and Gānapatyā sects:

In the Anuśasanaparva of Mahābhārata (Ch. 150, verse 25) Ganesvara (i.e., Gānapati) is identified with Vināyaka. In the Manavagrihyasutra (II.14) we find four forms of Vināyaka, namely, Salakatankata, Kushmandarājaputra, Uṣmita and Devayajana. In the Yajnavalkya Smṛti (I) may be traced six different aspects or forms of Vināyaka, namely, Mita, Sammita, Śāla, Kātankaṭa, Uṣmita and Devayajana. As we have already mentioned above, in the Amarakosha (svargavargadhyaya), we find the synonyms of Gānapati as Vināyaka, Tīghnarāja, Dwainātura, Gagadhipa, Ekapada, Hamsa, Lambodara and Gajānana. These names and forms of Gānapati seem to have come into vogue by the late Gupta period. From Anandagiri's Saṅkaradigvijaya and its commentary by Mādhava Vidyāraṇya and Dhanapati we come to know of the details about the encounter of the great monist teacher Saṅkarāchārya with the six subdivisions of the Gānapatyās, namely, Mahā, Haridra, Uchobhiṣṭa, Navanīta, Svarṇa and Santāna. 33 If we accept the interpretation of the six miniature images of Gapaśa found in the background of the central image discovered near Dacca, as given by Dr. J.N. Banerjee, it may be held that the subdivisions of Gānapatyā sect were not unknown in Bengal.

It appears that the sub-divisions of the Gānapatya sect appeared in accordance with different forms of Gānapati. It has been stated in the Saṅkara Digvijaya that each sub-division of the sect had its own leader. For example, Mahā-Gānapati sub-division was led by Giriṣṭhātra, Haridra by Gānapati-Kumāra and Uchchhīṣṭa by Heramba-sūtra. We have reasons to believe that the different forms of Gānapati which marked the sub-divisions actually represented different iconographic types as may be culled from the iconographic texts like Rūpasundara. Mahā-
Gānapati\textsuperscript{34}, who is described as one with ten arms, has in his hands a lotus flower, a pomegranate, a jewelled water vessel, the club, broken tusk, a sugar-cane, ears of paddy and the pāśa. The colour of this image has to be red, the figure of white-complexioned Śakti holding a lotus in her hand should be seated on the lap of the god. Haridra-Gānapati\textsuperscript{35} has three eyes, turmeric yellow colour and wears yellow clothing. He has four arms holding Fāśa, Aṅkusa, Mādaka and Danta. Uchchhīṣṭa Gānapati\textsuperscript{36} is represented by a seated image with three-eyes and with a body of red colour. It has four hands holding Fāśa, Aṅkusa, Mādaka and Danta. Navanīta Gānapati\textsuperscript{37} seems to

\textsuperscript{34} R.H.I. Vol. I, Part I, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 52.
correspond to Taruna Ganapati which has to be sculptured as a youth. The colour of this god has to be red. The god carries in his hands Fāsā, Ankuśa, wood-apple, Jambu-fruit, sesamum and bamboo sticks. Svarna-Ganapati\textsuperscript{38} appears to correspond to Urddhva-Ganapati. The colour of this god has to be golden yellow. He carries in five of his hands a Kalhāra-flower, ears of paddy, a bow made of sugar-cane, the arrow and a tusk. The associated sakti embraced by the god should be like the lightning. Santāna Ganapati\textsuperscript{39} appears to correspond to Bāla Ganapati sculptured like a child. The colour of the image is like that of the rising sun. The god has four arms holding a mango, a plaintain, a jackfruit and a sugar-cane.

However, it is not certain whether all the forms of Ganesā described above were recognised in Bengal, because the images of Ganesā discovered so far hardly correspond to the descriptions given above. Therefore, it is difficult for us to ascertain the exact nomenclatures of the Gālapatya sects prevalent in Bengal. Dr. J.N.Banerjea's assumption, however, regarding the existence of six Gālapatya sects on the basis of miniature forms of the god found along with the central image of Kāmpāl near Dacca does not seem to be unreasonable.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, p. 52
Bengali concept of Gapapati as reflected in the Purāṇas:

It has been suggested by scholars like Dr. R.C. Hazra and others that the Brihaddharma and the Brahmaśaivavarta Purāṇas were most probably composed in Bengal, as some stray references to the habits of the Brahmins of Bengal regarding their food have been referred to and thirty-six castes of Bengal are mentioned in those Purāṇas. So far as the date is concerned, it is suggested that those two Purāṇas in their present form cannot be dated earlier than the 10th century A.D. However, the early tradition as regards the religious beliefs and practices in Bengal seem to have been recorded in those two Purāṇas. It would not be unreasonable to derive the concept of Gapapati as prevalent in ancient and medieval Bengal from the Purāṇas in question.

In the Vedic or Epic literature, Gapapati or Ganesa is not distinguished from Śiva. But, in the Brahmaśaivavarta Purāṇa, Gapapati is represented as the deity distinguished from Śiva but related to him as his son. In the account that we find in the Brahmaśaivavarta Purāṇa about the birth of Gapesa, it is said that Ganesa who is the same as Vignesvara was born solely to

Śiva, solely to Pārvatī and to both Śiva and Pārvatī. He is also held to be another form of Krishna. Again, the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa explains the meaning of some of the names of this god in a very peculiar manner. It is said that 'Ga'⁴¹ in Gapapati stands for wisdom and 'na' for the salvation of soul and 'pati' or lord of these is Gapeśa, the Para Brahman. Again, 'Eka' in Ekadanta indicates the one only Supreme Being and 'Danta' indicates strength. So Ekadanta stands for the all-powerful Supreme Being. 'He' in Heramba represents helplessness or weakness and 'ramba' denotes the protection afforded to the weak. Hence, Heramba stands for the protector of the weak.

The name Lambodara suggests that by eating the food and cakes offered by Vishnu and Śiva, the belly of Gapeśa become dilated or expanded. Following this line of furnishing explanation of different names of the god, we may reasonably hold that Gapeśa denoted one and the same god who was 'Supreme Being', discharging different functions suggested by his different names. Even if it be considered that the names in question represented different aspects of the god, those can hardly be confused with different forms.

In the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Gauḍapāta occupies the most prominent place among the Śaiva deities. In Chapter 13 (verses 17-30) the method of worshipping Gauḍa is given in details. In addition to the Purānic evidence, we may also derive relevant data from the works of the Śrautaśāstra like Raghunandana. It appears that the god used to be worshipped with Pañchopāchāra (five kinds of offerings), Daśopāchāra (ten kinds of offerings) or Daśasopāchāra (sixteen kinds of offerings). The god is found to be invoked in verses 32 and 33 of chapter 13 in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa as one who removes all obstacles and grants all kinds of successes. It is said that even Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva, along with other gods, worshipped Gauḍa for removal of difficulties and for attainment of success (śiddhi). Success has been explained with reference to the ulterior goals of mankind i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Further, the expression "Śiddham śiddhi-Svarūpaṇoḥa śiddhidaśa śiddhi-Sādhanaḥ" (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Ch. 13, verse 45) reiterates that Gauḍa was the most prominent among all gods as the grantor of success to his devotees. It has been enjoined that Gauḍa should be worshipped initially before beginning the adoration of other gods and goddesses (Sarvādyaśāga pūjaṇaḥ - verse 48, Ch. 13 of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa).
In the Ganesa Kavacha-section of Chapter 13 in the Brahmanaiva-varta Purāṇa, it has been stated that the protecting mantras invoking Gapapati were first revealed in the Kauthuma-branch of the SamaVEDA. Those protective mystic syllables are prescribed to be used by the devotees of the god to save themselves from the influence of the evil and malevolent spirits and also that of the planets. The mystic syllable (mantra) in question of which the presiding deity is Lambodara is composed in the BrihatiChanda. The god is said to appear in different forms to protect his devotees, namely Lambodara in the east, VighnanaYaka in the east-south, Vighnasa in the south, Gajana in the south-west, Parvatiputra in the west, Sankarasvara in the west-north, Purushavarna Sri Krishna in the north, Ekadanta in the north-east, Heramba in the upper direction and Gapadhipa in the lower direction (verses 27-29 Ganesa Kavacha section of Ch. 13, Brahmanaiva-varta Purāṇa).

The detailed account in the Brahmanaiva-varta Purāṇa, as indicated above, leaves no scope of doubt that the cult of Gapapati was widely prevalent in Bengal. The popularity of the cult was further increased by the fact that Gapapati was considered to be the remover of evil influences cast by the
planets upon his devotees. In this connection our attention is
drawn to some Navagraha-panels in which the image of Ganesa is
found to be represented at one side of the panel. Such panels
have been discovered at Sundarban (24-Parganas), Gangarāmpur
(West Dinajpur) and Tanor (Rajshahi). A relief of the 11th
century A.D., discovered from Dāhanol (Dinajpur) shows from the
right Ganesa, Sūrya and the planets, Soma, Bhauma, Budha,
Bṛhaspati, Śaṇḍiśvara, Rāhu and Ketu in a row. The archaeo-
logical evidence confirms the Puranic statement with regard to
Gopāpati's particular role (Chapter 13, Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)
as the remover of evil influences cast by planets.

Although in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Ganesa is dis-
tinguished from Śiva and is represented as his son, some pieces
of archaeological evidence occasionally seem to represent
Ganesa either as the representative of Śiva or Śiva himself.
The composite panel of Saptamātrikās flanked on either by
the figures of Vīrdbhādra and Ganesa have been discovered in
Bengal. The representation of Ganesa by the side of the Mother-
goddesses or different aspects of Śakti seems to suggest his
identity with Śiva, as Śakti is always associated with Śiva.

42. Annual Report of the Varendra Research Society, 1932-33,
p. 4.
in the Tantras. Of course, an interesting specimen is a slab from Sonararang sculptured with the figures of Sūrya and Gaṇapati on the right and Sāpta-mātrikās on the left. Nava-grahas are just above Sūrya and at the top of them is figured an image of Śiva in veivāhika form. 44

Continuance of Gaṇapati worship in Bengal.

Gaṇapati or Gaṇapā has continued to be propitiated first by the family priests in a Hindu household on the occasions of Naṁittika karmas and Saṣākaras, before the main ceremony is begun. The mantra uttered by the priest on these occasions is Oṁ Gaṇeṣādi, paṇḍahesvaṭābhyāḥ namah i.e., "salutation to the five deities with Gaṇapā in the forefront". This was the characteristic of the Smārta-Paṇḍopāsakas who believed in each of the five devatas as an individual manifestation of the One Supreme Lord, the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. 45

Not only among the Paṇḍopāsakas but also among the women folk of Bengal, the cult of Gaṇapati has continued in the form of Vrataś (vow) associated with the god. In the


Brihaddharma Purāṇa we find reference to some such Vratas. 46

Vighnavrata is enjoined for those who desired to be relieved of all dangers and difficulties. This Vrata is undertaken, according to the Purāṇa, on the fourth day of the month of Phālguna and continue for consecutive five months. Again, it has been enjoined that the Vrata may also be undertaken on the fourth-day of the bright fortnight in the month of Asādha. In some cases, the vow, being once undertaken, is continued by the devotee for two years. In the Bengali almanac, mention is made of such Vratas as Siddhi Vināyaka Vrata or simply Vināyaka Vrata and Ganeśa-Chaturthi Vrata. Some folk-rituals are found to be practised on the occasion of Ganeśa Chaturthi Vrata. 47

Its performance spread over a number of days beginning from the fourth-day of the month of Bhādra. The remarkable feature of the rituals practised on the occasion of the Vrata is that the image of Ganeśa is replaced on the second day by Gaurī 48, who is represented by a bundle of plants. The feminine character of this ritual seems to have been associated with this Vrata due to its long practice among the women-folk. In connection with the Vināyaka vrata which commences in the month of Māgha on the day before that of the worship of Sarasvatī, Ganeśa is worshipped with Gaurī.

46. Brihaddharma Purāṇa, Uttarākhaṇḍa, Ch. 9.
47. D.P. Chatterjee, Lokāyata, a study in Ancient Indian Materialism, Delhi, 1959, pp. 232-233.
48. I.A. XXXV 60ff.
No temple dedicated to the god Gapesa is yet known to have been discovered in Bengal. It seems to indicate that Gapesa, inspite of his popularity, has not been accorded the position of major deity. However, the Hindu merchants have continued to offer special worship to the god for ensuring success on their business enterprise. This tradition Gapesa-worship among the members of the mercantile community seems to have been handed over from an early period. The Nārāyanpur Vināyaka image of the time of Mahipala I was installed by a merchant named Buddhamitra, son of Jambhalamitra. Although his own name and that of his father show Buddhist influence, he seems to have been a Brahmanical Hindu, as pointed out by Dr. D.C. Sircar, as there was hardly any difference between a Brahmanical Hindu and a Buddhist house-holder in Bengal during the 11th century A.D. In this connection it has been suggested by some that the worship of Gapesa was introduced by the mercantile community (Vanik-Sampradāya) but it is difficult to subscribe to this view, when we take into our consideration the account in the Brahmanālaya Purāṇa as regards the belief and practices of the Gānapatyas.

Section II: Kārṭtikeya, a Cult-Deity

The worshippers of Kārṭtikeya were never given a separate status like the devotees of the five Purāṇic deities namely, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sakti, Sūrya and Gāpapati. But it seems that Kārṭtikeya was recognised as a god at a much earlier date than Gāpapati. Because, as early as the second century B.C., Patanjali records in his commentary on Pāṇini’s Sūtra (V. 3.99) that the images of Śiva, Skanda and Viśākha were being made for worship at his time and that the Mauryas devised the expedient of replenishing their royal coffers by the selling of images (Apanya ityocayate tatreadam na sidhyati Śivah Skandan Viśākhah iti / Kim kāraṇā Mauryairhīranyārthīhīrarcāh prakalpitah / bhavet tāsu na syāt / yāstvetāh sampratipūjāarthāstāsa bhavivyati).

In another context, Skanda and Viśākha are regarded by Patanjali as laukika devataḥ or folk-divinities. It may be held reasonably that images of such folk-deities used to be made by a class of people as a means of livelihood in the time of Panini (Jīvikārthe Gāpya - V. 3.99), that is earlier than even the Maurya period.

The association of Skanda-Kārṭtikeya with the Śiva-Gaṇeśa, a close

connection between some of his followers and those of Kuvera and a parallelism between him and Kuvera reveal his laukika character. In the Epics we find a confused account of his origin. Skanda is generally regarded as the son of Śiva and Pārvatī but sometimes he is represented as the son of Agni and Gaṅgā.

From the Purānic texts it is learnt that the worship of Kārttikeya came to be established in modern South Bihar and North Bengal at an early period. The Vāyu Purāṇa (109.19; 11.54) mentions a tīrtha called Kārttikeya-Padam at Gaya. The name indicates that this was a place of pilgrimage sacred to Kārttikeya. The Agni-Purāṇa (116.23) discloses the existence of a tīrtha called Kakaśīlā at Gaya as sacred to Kārttikeya. Pupāravardhāna (North Bengal) is referred to as a tīrtha sacred to Kārttikeya in the Gaṇḍa Purāṇa (1.81.16). This place is identified with Skandanagarā mentioned in Sandhyakar Mandi's Rāmcharita. Kalhana in his Rājstārāhguṇī (IV 422) refers to

52. Ibid., p. 362.
53. Mahābhārata, Vanaprastha; Rāmāyaṇa, Adikānda
the famous temple of Karttikeya near Purāvradhana, Kumāratiṅka mentioned in the Narasimha Purāṇa (65.17) appears to be the same as Skandangaja near Purāvradhana. These Puranic data suggest that some strongholds of the cult of Karttikeya were established in eastern India. It is difficult to suggest a certain date, as the Purāṇas in question in all its parts cannot be dated with any amount of certainty.

Karttikeya worship in North India;

The Skandotpatti-Parvādhāya of the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata gives us to understand that a group of gods of like-nature was amalgamated into one entity. In the early centuries of the Christian era, god Karttikeya was known by different names such as Brahmanya or Subrahmanya, Skanda, Kumāra, Viśēkha, Mahāsena, Guha etc.

Copper coins of the 1st century A.D. attributed to Devasmitra and Vijayasmitra, kings of Ayodhya show as their reverse device a cock-crested column which might be connected with the worship of Skanda-Karttikeya. In the Brhat Sambhata (Ch. 57) Skanda-Karttikeya is described as Banbiketa i.e.

56. Ibid. p. 148.
holding a standard surmounted by a cock. The cock is also associated with the god in the Vispudharmottara and the Mahābhārata (III. 231.16). Therefore, the worship of Kārttikeya in North India may be traced back in the 1st century A.D. A cock-crested column of the 2nd century A.D. was discovered at Lalā Bhagat (Kanpur, U.P.). On the coins of Kusana king Huviska, we find representation of the three aspects of the deity namely Skanda Kumāra, Viśākha and Mahāsena. These coins put in circulation in the first half of the 2nd century A.D., seem to suggest that the god in question was quite popular by that time in Northern India.

In the Epic and Purānic account, Kumāra-Kārttikeya is regarded as the son of Śiva and Pārvatī who brought him into being for leading the army of the gods against the demon Tārakāsura. In the Bhagavad Gītā (Ch. 10) Lord Krishna says that he is Skanda among the warriors (Senārinām Skandah). So, the Yaudheyas, who were dependent on military profession (śayudhajīvī), were exclusive worshippers of Mahāsena Kārttikeya, the divine war-lord. The legend on some of their coins

are read as **Bhagavat Svamina Brahmanyadeva Devasya Kumārasya** i.e. (coin of) **Brahmanyadeva Kumāra**, "the worshipful lord". The coins were presumably issued by the Yaudheyas in the name of **Skanda-Kārttikeya**, who is mentioned as Brahmanyadeva Kumāra. Because, the god was regarded as the spiritual as well as temporal lord of the Yaudheya Ganarājya. From the Sabha Parvan (32, 4-5) of the **Mahābhārata** as well as the text of the **Mahāmayūrī**, it is learnt that **Rohitaka**; (modern Rohtak in East Punjab) the city of the Yaudheyas, was known as the favourite residence of **Kārttikeya** (Rohitake Kārttikeya Kumāro lokavirisutah – **Mahāmayūrī** v. 21).

The **Abbotabad inscription** of about 3rd century A.D. refers to a **Kumāra-sthana** or shrine of the god Kumāra (Kārttikeya). The **Bhilā seal inscription** (3rd-4th century A.D.) records that Mahārāja Vrishadvaja, the penetrator of the Vindhyas, made over his kingdom to the great lord Kārttikeya.

The **Bilsad stone pillar inscription** of Kumaragupta I (96 G.E. i.e. 415-416 A.D.) records how Dhruvaśarman made some additions

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to the existing temple of Brahmapyadeva Svami Mahasena. Those additions included the building of a gateway with a flight of steps, the establishment of a charitable hall or almshouse and the erection of the column with an inscription on it to record the pious acts. It appears, therefore, that Brahmapya was recognised as an epithet of god Karttikeya and Mahasena signifies that the god was regarded as the commander of a large army. In the much-multilated Bihar Stone inscription (line 9) of the time of Skandagupta may be traced references of Karttikeya and Divine Mothers. It suggests probably the role of Karttikeya as the guardian of the Mothers, the position which is often assigned to Gapapati and Virabhadra. Kumaragupta I is known from his coin-legends to have been Paramabagavata i.e. 'devotee of Vishnu'. Again, we have also to consider the representation of the cult-image of Karttikeya riding his mount peacock Paravani on the reverse of some of his gold coins. It appears to suggest that the Gupta king was also a worshipper of the god Karttikeya. It may be pointed out, in this connection, that it was during the reign of Kumaragupta I and Budhagupta that the Gupta rule was consolidated in North Bengal.

63. Ibid, p. 49, 51.
as it is evident from the discovery of a number of Copper-Plate grants of their time in Rajshahi, Bogra and Dinajpur districts. It would not be, therefore, unreasonable to hold that the cult of Karttikeya was imported in Pundravardhana, when it became a part and parcel of the Gupta empire. Of course, the Gupta rule continued in Pundravardhana till about the middle of the 6th century A.D., as suggested by the Damodarpur Copper Plate grant dated G.E. 224 (543 A.D.).

In the Aphead Stone inscription of Adityasena (line - 5) Karttikeya is referred to as the son of Hara (Siva) and as riding a peacock. Again, in the Saranath Stone inscription of Prakataditya (line - 9) reference is made to Karttikeya by way of comparison with the king in order to describe his virtue and prowess. So, in the post-gupta records found in Bihar and Uttar-Pradesh, even stray references to the god Karttikeya may be taken into our consideration to assume that the cult of the god was quite well-known by the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Most probably, about this time the cult came to be widely recognised in North Bengal.

64. G.B.I., pp. 41-64, 71-74.
Kārttikēya-worship in Bengal:

It has been suggested that medieval sculptures of Kārttikēya closely follow the Gupta examples of which a model may be traced on the coins of Kumāragupta I. If we try to realise the underlying historical implication of this iconographic study, we may assume that the cult of Kārttikēya came to be recognised in Bengal sometime during the Gupta period, as it has already been pointed out, although its wider recognition followed later.

The suggestion that the Gauḍa king Saśānaka, a devotee of Śiva, might have patronised the cult of the Śaiva deity Kārttikēya does not seem to be unreasonable. Because, from verse 422 of the 4th Taranga of Kalhana's Rājarānginī, it is learnt that Prince Jayāpīḍa, grandson of Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa, had rested for a while on a slab at the door of a temple of Kārttikēya in the vicinity of the city of Pundravardhana. It is generally believed that Jayāpīḍa visited

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Pupḍravardhana sometime in the first-half of the 8th century A.D. If that be so, it is quite probable that the temple in question was constructed sometime in the 7th century A.D. or more specifically during the rule of Sasānka.

As we have mentioned above, in Chapter 81 of the Pūrva-Khaṇḍa of the Gāruḍa Purāṇa there is a specific reference to the Kārttikeya tīrtha in Pupḍravardhana. In verse 15 of the said chapter it is stated: Pupḍravardhanakam tīrtham Kārttikeyaśahe.

About the date of the Purāṇa, it has been suggested by Kane that this work was composed sometime between the 6th and 10 century A.D. Dr. R.C.Hazra assigns the Purāṇa a date in the 10th century A.D. In any case, the Purāṇa in question was composed much earlier than Kalhana’s Rājatarangini.

In the Karotaya Mahātmya, a work of uncertain date, there is mention of a Skanda-temple. A mound known as

70. Gāruḍa Purāṇa published by Chaukhamba Vangavasi and Venkateswara Press.
74. J.A.S.B. 1878, p. 91.
Skanderdhōp, situated two miles from Mahasthan, is suggested to be the site of this Skanda-temple mentioned in the Rajatarangini and the Garuda Purāṇa. K.N. Dikshit has also held that the mound might contain the relics of a temple dedicated to the god Skanda-Kārttikeya. On this ground, it may be assumed that Skandamagāra, the town named after the god Skanda mentioned in Sandhyakarmāndi's Rāma-charita, was probably located round about the mound near Mahasthan (Bogra district).

That Varendri or North Bengal was an important seat of the worship of Kārttikeya seems to be evident from the Kolagallu inscription of Rastrakuta Khotīga (Saka 889 i.e. 967 A.D.). From this inscription it is learnt that Gadādhara, hailing from the village Tāḍa in Varendri, installed the images of Kārttikeya at Kolagallu (in modern Mysore) known as Kārttikeya Tapovana. The village Tāḍa wherefrom Gadādhara had come to the south is identified with Tārā.

76. R.G. Basak and Others (ed.), Rāma-charita, Rajshahi, 1939, 111. 9.
77. R.I. XXI.
lying at a distance of about 12 miles south-east of Dinajpur.
It may be derived from the epigraphic evidence that Gadadhara had been a follower of the cult of Karttikeya while residing in North Bengal. He probably went to the Kanarese country and settled over there at the request of the Rasahrkuta king.

In addition to the above, we may also point out that most of the images of Karttikeya found in Bengal were discovered in Varendra or North Bengal. However, it appears that the worship of Karttikeya was introduced in North Bengal sometime in the 7th century A.D. and continued till the 11th century A.D., when the author of the Ramacharita flourished.

**Evidence of the Bengal-epigraphs:**

The evidence that may be deduced from the epigraphs of Bengal does not clearly indicate the recognition of Karttikeya as a cult-god. Rather, stray references in some epigraphs seem to suggest that the god, being associated with Siva, was known as the source of valour, lustre and power. In the Garuda Pillar inscription of the time of Narayanaapala (854-908 A.D.), Kedaramisra is compared to god Karttikeya possessing

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lusture resembling that of the god (verse 11). In this connection, the god is referred to by his alternative name Guha. The Manahali Copper Plate grant of Madanapala describes Sūrapala, brother of Mahipāla II, as one who had the wealth of valour belonging to Skanda (Skanda pratāpaśrīyaḥ — verse 14). In the opening verse of the Barrackpore Copper Plate grant of the time of Vijayasena Kārttikeya and Gapapati are referred to in association with Dūrjati or Śiva. Kārttikeya is indirectly referred to by the mention of the Krauncha mountain. Again, in the Edilpur Copper Plate grant, Kesavaseno son of Lakṣehmanasena, is compared to Saktidhara born from Śādīśekha and Girijā. Kārttikeya is described as the god holding a spear (sakti) and also as a son of Śiva and Pārvati. In the Bhatera (Sylhet) Copper Plate grant (No. 2) of Raja Isāmādeva, Kārttikeya is referred to as Bahuleya as to Bahuleya born from Mahesā (Śiva). Whatever might have been the discrepancy in the Epic and Purānic accounts regarding the origin of god Kārttikeya, the epigraphs of Bengal leave no scope of doubt that in ancient Gauda-Vanga the god was supposed to have originated from the union of Śiva and Pārvati and was regarded as a Śiva god par excellence.

79. Ibid, p. 213.
80. I.B. p. 61ff.
Karttikeya-images in Bengal:

While the epigraphic records make no explicit reference to Karttikeya as the cult-god, some images found in Bengal seem to suggest the recognition of the cult during the early mediaeval period. All the images of the god discovered so far have not been dated. If we proceed, however, on the basis of the images dated so far, we may reasonably infer the date, when the worship of Karttikeya was popularised in Bengal. Further, the findspots of the images concerned would also suggest the areas or janapadas of Bengal where the worship of Karttikeya was popular.

In the Purāṇas we have dhyāna of both two-armed and four-armed god Karttikeya. In the Pratimālakhaṇa (Ch. 50) of the Agni Purāṇa it stands thus: skando mayuragah / svānī Śākho Visākhasāha dvibhujō vāḷerūpo dhrik, while in the Knilaśaśāhita (Ch. 7, verses 58–63) of the Śiva Purāṇa we find thus: Chaturbhujāya Sāntāya śaktukkutadharīṇga. The specimens of Karttikeya-images found so far in Bengal are either two-armed or four-armed.

An image of Karttikeya, dated in the 10th century A.D., was discovered in Dinājpur district. It is now preserved

in the Asutosh Museum (No. 224). This small but a highly finished image shows the god two-armed, seated astride a peacock and holding a śakti (spear) in his left hand and resting his right hand on the knee. An image of the god, dated in the 11th century A.D., was found from Kaligrām in Rajshahi district. This four-armed image is now preserved in the Asutosh Museum.

The image shows the god seated, holding śakti (spear) in his back right hand, showing the Varada-pose with the front right hand, giving protection with the back left and resting the front left on the knee. Another four-armed seated image of the god, stylistically dated in the 12th century A.D., was discovered from North Bengal and is now preserved in the Indian Museum. The god is found to be seated on his mount peacock in Maharājalī posture, holding spear and Viṣṇupāla in his two right hands and being accompanied by two female figures on either side. Although most of the images of Karttikeya, dated or undated, were discovered in North Bengal, some images of the god have been found in other parts of Bengal. As pointed out by N.K. Bhattasali, the only image in blackstone, found

84. Ibid, p. 124.
86. I.B.B.S. p. 147.
in the Dacca and Chittaganj divisions, was preserved in the
Veishnava monastery at Abdullapur in Dacca district. The two-
armed image shows the god seated on his mount in Mahārajaliśa
posture with abhayamudrā in his right hand and sakti in the
left. Again, Dr. Ashim Kr. Chatterjee noticed a two-armed
mediaeval image of Karttikeya seated on the peacock in a modern
temple at Raghunāthganj in Murshidabad district. As usual, the
image represents the god as ākṣṭidhara i.e. holding a spear in
one of his hands. There is no doubt that the stronghold of
Karttikeya worship was in Puppadarvangana. But that does not
necessarily suggest that it remained limited within that Jana-
pada only. The specimens found near Dacca and Murshidabad
indicate the expansion of the cult of Karttikeya in Vanga and
Rāgahā.

Probability of some sects among the Karttikeya-worshippers:

The images of Karttikeya discovered so far in Bengal
may be divided into two classes, namely, two armed image and
four-armed image. It is learnt from the Matsya Purāṇa that

88. Matsya Purāṇa, A.S.S. Poona, 1907, Ch. 260, verses 45-51.

(sthāpayet Svashtanagare bhujān dvādaśā kārayet / Chatur-
bhujāḥ sarvaghnāte syadvane grane dvivāhukah //
the two-armed god used to be worshipped in villages and forests, while the four-armed figure of the god used to be worshipped in towns. If this be the Purānic tradition, it may be reasonably held that the devotees of Kārttikeya were divided into two separate branches, viz. those settled in towns and cities and those belonging to the rural areas. In some of the Bengal specimens of Kārttikeya-image may be traced an attribute of Kumāra described in the Vishnudharmottara. The attribute is Kukkuta or cock. Kumāra is traditionally described in the iconographic texts as six faced (sāmukha) and four-armed, while Skanda, Visākha and Guha are described as having one face but four arms. The mount peacock is found to be present with Kumāra, but in cases of others this characteristic cognisance (lānchana) of the god is conspicuous by its absence. It would not be, therefore, unreasonable to hold that the extant images found in Bengal might be designated as either Skanda or Kumāra. It may, however, be pointed out in this connection, that the injunctions of the iconographic texts were not always faithfully followed by the sculptors of Bengal in giving representation of the god. As a result, variations from the

89. Vishnudharmottara, Venkateswara edition, III. 71. 3-7.
textural scheme of representation are often to be found. Incidentally, no twelve-armed image of the god, as referred to in the *Matsya Purāṇa* is known to have yet been discovered in any part of Bengal.

As pointed out by Hopkins, the god Kārttikeya was represented in four forms in Epic mythology namely, Skanda (associated with Rudra), Viśākha (associated with Uma) Śaṅkha (associated with Agni), and Naigamasya (associated with Gaṅgā). From the Epic mythology, it appears that some sects were formed centring round different forms of the god. Whatever that might be, those minor sects or branches were, in course of time, amalgamated into one and the same sect. It would not be unreasonable to hold that the combined sect of Kārttikeya worshippers, accommodating in itself the devotees of Skanda-Kumāra, Viśākha and Mahāsen, appeared in Bengal sometime during the Post-Gupta period, because those three forms of the god were prevalent in North India, as it is suggested by the evidence of Kusāna coins of the 2nd century A.D. However, in the early mediaeval period to which most of the images discovered in Bengal belonged,

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the worshippers of Karttikeya might be divided into two sects, namely, the worshippers of Skanda and those of Kumāra. But this distinction between the two sects might not have survived for a long period of time, because the cult of Karttikeya itself somehow maintained its precarious existence in the background of growing influence of the cult of Śiva from which the cult of Karttikeya could not remain dissociated for long. In fact, in the extant Purāṇas, the worship of Karttikeya is hardly recognised as a separate or independent cult.

The worship of Karttikeya appears to have gradually receded to the background in Bengal due to his association with the Mother-goddess. From a report of the Varendra Research Society, we are informed about an unique image of Ugra Tārā standing on a corpse and having Karttikeya, Brahma, Śiva, Vishnu and Ganapati on the conical top section of the rectangular stela. Again, the traditional clay image of Mahīśamurī, annually worshipped in Bengal, represents Karttikeya as one of the associate deities of the goddess. Further, the panel of Septamātrikās includes the figures of Kaumārī, the Sakti of Kumāra, suggesting that the goddess in question gained recognition separately. The pre-dominance of Sakti-worship in Bengal seems to have caused the decline of the influence of the cult of Skanda-Kumāra-Karttikeya.
However, the worship of Karttikeya has continued in Bengal till to-day. Clay-images of the god are worshipped atleast once a year by Hindu women on the last-day of the Bengali month of Karttika. Women generally worship the god with a desire to have their male progeny. It is interesting that the two-armed figure of the god mounted on a peacock has come to stay in Bengal. The tradition of the Brihatsamhita as regards the worship of Skanda has somehow or other continued in Bengal. The replacement of the four-armed Kumāra by two-armed Skanda may be regarded as a significant phenomenon in the socio-religious history of Bengal. As we have referred to the Matsya Purāṇa enjoys the worship of the four-armed god by the urban people. It appears that the urban people, mostly depending upon trade and industry, accumulated more wealth and, therefore, could afford to arrange for the worship of the god in his image-form every year, while the rural people, mostly depending upon agriculture, preferred to undertake the Karttika-vrata which involved no priestly function and, therefore, meant for less expenditure.
Karttikeya in the Purāṇas of Bengal:

The Brahmavaivarta and the Brihaddharmā Purāṇa reflect the religious life of Bengal, as it was composed even after the 12th century A.D. From the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (verses 27-36) it is learnt that Karttikeya was the son of Śiva, although he was recognised also as the adopted son of Krittikās (Pleiades). In Chapter 16 (verses 25 and 26) of the said Purāṇa, the god is referred to as Kumāra who reached Mount Kailāsa along with his mothers Krittikās. The god was received by a large number of goddess sent by Pūrga. It is significant that in verses 3-10 of Chapter 7 are mentioned different attributes of Karttikeya gifted by different gods, namely, Chakra (wheel) from Viṣṇu, Brahmastra from Brahma, Śula, Pānaka, Parāśu and Paśupata dhamu from Mahādeva, the chariot and coat of mail from Śūrya, Yamadāna from Dharma, Mahasakti from Rūtāsana or Agni and various other weapons from other gods. It is implied that god Karttikeya was destined to kill the demon named Tārakā who was responsible for uprooting the


The role of Karttikeya as the demon-killer is comparable to that of Siva known as the killer of the demon Tripura (Tripurārī). It appears from the Puranic account that the devotees of the god Karttikeya attempted to exalt him to a very high position in the Hindu pantheon by assuming that he represented the combined powers of the major and minor Puranic deities. It was quite in the fitness of things that the devotees of the god tried to realise through him the Supreme Being (Brahmayadeva).

The Brihaddharma Purāṇa enjoins the method of worship of god Karttikeya in Chapter 27 of the Madhyama Khaṇḍa.

Of course, we find a general recommendation of the procedure to be followed in worshipping all personal gods (Iṣṭadevātā).

It may be held reasonably that the particular procedure used to be followed also by the devotees of Karttikeya. In the Purva Khaṇḍa, it is recommended that the worship of the god is to be performed in the month of Kartika which is associated with the constellation named Krittika (Pleiades). From the dhyānavantra

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93. Cf. also Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa, 42, 45-46 (Tārakasya nihantā sa bhāṣkaraṁ bhavishtya).

94. Cf. also Matsya Purāṇa, 5, 26-27 (Apatyaṁ Krittikānāṁtu Karttikeyasthathā sūrtah).
(hymn used for meditation) it appears that the god is described as Kumāra, the giver of sons (Putradāyakam), two-armed, seated on his mount peacock and holding a spear as the killer of enemies (Satru hantāran). While paying obeisance to the god at the conclusion of the worship, the devotee describes him as the son of Rudra (Rudraputra), son of six Mothers (Sapmātur), mounted on peacock (Sikhīvahana), killer of demons (Dvaityadarpaśudana), holder of spear (Saktihastra), giver of protection (vara-prade) and one who is born for the protection of the sacrifices of the gods (Devānā Yajñarakshyarthamāyātā). This description gives us to understand the functions and attributes of Kārttikeya as visualised by his devotees in Bengal at the close of the Hindu period.

The worship of the god is said to be followed, according to the Purāna, through the symbols of trident, sword, bow, peacock and snake. The worshipper has to pay his obeisance to the goddesses like Pārvatī, Putrīkā, Sasthī, Gaūrī, Lakshmi, Gaṅgā, Kaumari, Sāvitrī and gods like Vāsudeva, Brahmā, Śiva, Vishnu, Sūrya and Agni. This is again followed by the Vedic sacrifices (Homa) which is conducted by the worshipper with the use of the mantra - Ōṃ kām Kārttikeyāya svāhā. After
the sacrifice is over, the glory of Karttikeya (Vratakathā) is recited from the Skanda-Purāṇa. In describing the glory of the god it has been said how Vasudeva whose children were often killed by Kamsa would get his son Krishna by worshipping Skanda-Karttikeya. Thus, from the Skanda-Purāṇa it appears that the god Skanda used to be worshipped by the devotees as the giver of children (Skandaasha Putrada).

Devotion of women-folk to Skanda-Karttikeya:

In the Brahme-Purāṇa95 as well as Skanda Purāṇa the god Skanda-Karttikeya is described as an erotic, amorous, pleasure-seeking and irresponsible youth. It has been suggested that this aspect of the god seems to have been derived from the Tamil conception of Murugan who appears as the god of love and rivalry. This is supposed by some to explain the popularity of the worship of Karttikeya among certain sections of the women-folk in Bengal.96 But it appears from the available data that the women-folk in Bengal were most attracted to the worship

95. Brahme Purāṇa, Vangavāsi Edition II, Ch. II;
     Skanda Purāṇa, Venkatesvara Edition VII, Prabhasaksetra-
     māhātmya, 215.2.

of Karttikeya with the desire to have progeny. The association of the god with Devasena Saśthi seems to be significant. In the Brahmavaivarta Purana (Prakiti Khanda, Ch. 25-26) is described as the consort of Skanda. From the same source we come to know that Saśthi is the giver of sons to the barren women (Apurtraya Putradāhana). From these data it appears more probable that women in Bengal worship the god Skanda-Karttikeya even today not as the god of love but as the giver of children.

Karttikeya is said to have been born, when the Krittika-constellation was ascendant. That is the reason why Karttikeya is worshipped on the last-day of the month of Karttika (Karttikeya Samkrānti). Among the women-folk, the worship of the god has turned to be a Vrata or vow in which the priests have hardly any role to play. While the Karttikeya-Vrata is observed on Karttika Samkranti, Skanda-Saśthī-Vrata is observed on the first-day of the month of Chaitra.

The participation of women in the worship of Karttikeya is found to have taken a queer form at some villages in Cooch-Bihar district. It is said that at the conclusion of the

worship of the god, women pray to the god for boons by singing and dancing. At the time of this function, no male is allowed to visit the place where women sometimes dance nakedly. This has a semblance of aboriginal rites and rituals devised for promoting fertility.

In spite of the fact that the cult of Kārttikēya is no longer widely prevalent in Bengal, in some districts like Murshidabad and Birbhum, annual fairs and festivals are held on the occasion of Kārttikēya-worship. All classes of people including the Muslims participate in the fairs and festivals.