CHAPTER II

CULT OF MOTHER GODDESS : AN EPIGRAPHIC STUDY

Purāṇic Brāhmaṇism developed centering round the chief five cult-deities, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya and Gaṇapati. The epigraphic records of Bengal, so far found and examined seem to suggest that these five cults (pañcōpāsanā) received, by stages, a cordial welcome in ancient Magadha and Baudā-Vaṅgas, since the fourth century A.D. that marked the stage of maturity in the process of Aryanisation with the beginning of expansion of Brāhmaṇical settlements. The expansion of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal is indicated by the occurrence of various names of god Viṣṇu in the epigraphic records such as Cakrāsvāmin (in the Śūśuniyā Rock Inscription of the 4th century A.D.), Govindāsvāmin [in the Baiqram Copper-Plate Inscription of the reign of Kumāragupta (c.A.D.447-48)], Svetāvarāhasvāmin [in the Damodarpur Copper-Plate Inscription of the reign of Budhagupta (c.A.D. 476 - 495)], Pradyumnesvara [ in the Gunaighar Copper-plate Inscription of the reign of Vainyagupta (c.A.D. 507)].

It was during the post-Gupta period that Lord Śiva received royal patronage in Bengal. King Vainyagupta declared himself as ‘one who took shelter at the feet of lord Mahādeva’ Bhagavanmahādevapādānudhyāto MahārājŚrī-Vainyaguptah. From the Ghugrahati Copper-plate of Samācāradeva (c.A.D. 594) it is known that he belonged to a family devoted to Śiva. It is, however, interesting to note that Lakṣmī, the female consort of
Viṣṇu used to be represented on the coins of the Gupta-post-Gupta period found in Bengal. This practice is known to have continued till the time of Devapāla, the Pāla king (c.A.D. 810-850).

The epigraphic records of the reign of Saśāṅka, king of Gauḍa, and of the post-Saśāṅka period, however, witness the growing popularity of Śaivism along with Vaiṣṇavism. Saśāṅka is described as Parama-māheśvara (Parama-daiva-Srī-Paramabhattāraka śrīśa Śrī mahāraja-dhirāja parama-māheśvara śrīsaśāṅkadevah) in the Egra Copper-plate (c.A.D. 600-625) found from Midnapore district. The two Medinipur copper plates of the reign of Saśāṅka begin with an invocation to both Viṣṇu and Śiva. The coins of Saśāṅka bear the image of Śiva on the obverse and that of Lakṣmī on the reverse. The introduction of the Purāṇic cult of Śiva in the 6th century A.D. seems to suggest the simultaneous acceptance of his Sakti, variantly named as Durgā, Śivā, Ambikā, Kālī etc. It is also known from the text of the Devī-Purāṇa written perhaps in some parts of Bengal in the 6th/7th century. A.D. that the female-deity in the form of Śiva's Sakti in various forms was well acquainted in Bengal.

That the Purāṇic religion was not limited within Bengal, but influenced the religious thoughts of the people in the neighbouring territories is evident from the Nidhanpur (Sylhet) Copper-plate of Bhāskaravarman (c.A.D. 600-650), King of Kāmarūpa. The grant was issued by Bhāskaravarman, when he was camping at Karṇasuvvara, Marshidabad (W.Bengal). The copper plate begins with an obeisance to Śiva Om Pranāmya
devam saśiśekharam priyam pinākim bhāsmakanair bibhusitam"

Again, the copper plate refers to various Purānic deities like Viṣṇu, Dharitrī, Indra, Gaṇeśa, Candra, Lakṣmī Hari, Śyāmā and Sūrya. In the post-Śaṅka period a record of the Khāḍga dynasty, the Deulbāḍī Image Inscription makes mention of Sarvāṇī.

Although the earlier epigraphic records of Bengal hardly make mention of the female divinities, a number of epigraphic records of Bengal dated from the 7th century A.D. to the 12th/13th century A.D. the land-grants, pillar-inscriptions, image-inscriptions, and stone inscriptions give us to understand that the Cult of Śakti (female-divinity) in different forms and with various names gained popularity in some Janapadas of Bengal in early mediaeval period.

To trace the history of the development of the Cult of the Mother-goddess, we have to classify the records in two ways: first, according to the findspots of the records in different political-centres/cultural regions of Bengal and second, according to the dates of the records. It would reveal a chronological development of the belief in the Cult of Mother-goddess region-wise. The comparative study of the regional history might indicate the time taken in the development of Śāktism in different part of Bengal. If we analyse the religio-cultural centres of ancient Bengal on the basis of the findspots of the epigraphic records, the main four centres which were more prominent than others are found to be Varendrī, Rāḍha, Vahga and Samatāṭa.
EPIGRAPHS OF VARENDRI

Varendri has yielded twenty copper-plates, one temple inscription, one pillar inscription and two stone inscriptions during the period from the 5th to the 13th century A.D. The early ten copper-plates, however, remain silent regarding the prevalence of the cult of Śakti. The records having some information regarding female-divinity are the following:— (i) Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription of the reign of Dharmapala (c.A.D. 807), (ii) Rādāl Garuda-pillar Inscription of the reign of Narayanapala (c.A.D. 861-917), (iii) Bangarh Prasasti of Mūrttisiva of the reign of Nayapāla (c.A.D. 1027-43), (iv) Amgāchi Copper-Plate Inscription of the reign of Vīgrahapāla III (c.A.D.1055), (v) Rāmqanj Copper-plate Inscription of Isvaraghosha (c.A.D.1075 (vi) Mādhāinagar Copper-plate Inscription of the reign of Lākṣmānasena (c.A.D.1204).

Among these six records four have been found from Dinajpur district, one from Malda and one from Pabna district. The first of this series, the Khālimpur Copper-plate was found near Khālimpur village, southeast of Gauda, close to the modern Bangladesh border just north of the Ganges. The land granted in this record is located in Vāghrataṭī-mandala within Pundravardhanabhukti. The grant was issued from Pātaliputra, (modern Patna).

Acquisition of four records from Dinajpur district which was earlier known as Bāngarh and Kōtivarsāvisaya, gives us to believe that there was an ancient political-culture centre in 'Kotivarsa' or 'Devikūta' (a place of Devī) that was recognised as one of the earliest Śaktapīthas in some early
mediaeval texts. From the discovery of a number of terracotta Mother-goddess figurines of the pre-Christian era in Bāṅgarh, we may reasonably inform that this region concerned had a long tradition of worshipping female-deity.

The Mādhāinagar plate of Laksmanasena is found from a village in the northern part of the Pabna district under the jurisdiction of the Raiganj P.S. close to the Karatoya river, about twenty-eight miles south of Bogra town. It may be pointed out in this connection that in some texts about Śākta-Pīthas the name ‘Karatoyātata’ finds special mention.

EPIGRAPHIC DATA FROM VARENDĪ

1) The Khālimpur copper-plate, issued in the 32 regnal year of the great Pāla king Dharmapāla gives us the information regarding the erection of a temple of Bhagavāna (lord) 'Nanna-Nārāyaṇa' by a feudal lord (Mahāsāmantādhipati) Nārāyanavarmā. Scholars are unanimous regarding the fact that Nanna-Nārāyaṇa is the name of lord Viṣṇu. Dharmapāla, being requested by Nārāyaṇavarmā, donated four villages for the maintenance of this temple. While describing the boundaries of the donated villages, the copper plant grant refers to a small shrine constructed for the goddess Kādamvarī: Uttareṇa Kādamvarī devakulī Kharjuravrksaśca (line 32). It is said that there is a small temple of goddess Kādamvarī on the northern boundary of the village mentioned above. The name of this goddess is rarely found in the epics and the Purāṇas.
(ii) Bādāl Garuda-Pillar Praśasti of the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla records that a Garuḍa pillar was erected during the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla, by his chief minister Gurava Miśra, at a village named Bādāl in Dinajpur district. The inscription carved on the Garuḍa pillar has a bearing on the cult of Viṣṇu. It further gives the information that the Pāla king Nārāyaṇapala granted some villages to a board of trustee for the purpose of maintaining expenditure, of thousand temples dedicated to lord Śiva. Apart from that various Purāṇic deities, both male and female, are found referred to in this inscription. (iii) Bāngarh Praśasti of Mūrttisiva of the reign of Nayapāla is considered as one of the most important documents relevant for reconstructing the early socio-religious history of Bengal. The following information may be called from this record. (a) There was a large Śaiva monastery at Bāngarh during the 10th century A.D; (b) Mahīpāla I, the Pāla king (c.A.D. 977-1027) made an endowment in favour of the Śaiva scholar Indrasiva; (c) Nayapāla (c.A.D. 1027-43) was initiated by "Śivamantra" and the Śaiva scholar "Sarvaśiva" was his religious preceptor; (d) Mūrttisiva was brother and disciple of Sarvaśiva; (e) Within the campus of the Śaiva monastery, there were numerous temples; (f) Viṣṇu is referred as disciple of Śiva; (g) Mūrttisiva was also well-versed in the Jaina Scriptures; (h) There were thousands of female dancers (devdāsī) dedicated to the god;
(i) The Buddhist and Jaina Scholars are mentioned as "Pāśaṇḍī";

(j) An invocation to the goddess Carcikā.

(iv) Āmghāchi Copper-Plate Inscription of the reign of Vigrahapāla (III) (c.A.D 1055) records donation of villages made by the King for the benefit of Khoduladevaśarman, a Brāhmīn of Sāndilya gotra. The villages are named as Visamapura and Dandatrahesvāra situated within Vra(br)ahmanigrāma-maṇḍala, Kotivarsavisaya, Pundravardhanabhukti.

(v) Rāmgaṇī (Dinajpur) Copper Plate Inscription of Iśvaraghośa (c.A.D 1075 AD.) records the donation of Land made by Iśvaraghośa to some Nibbokaśarmā. The donated village is named Digghasodik, and the grant was issued from the place mentioned as Dhakkari, the identification of which is still uncertain.

(vi) Mādhāinagar Copper Plate of the reign of Lakṣmanasena (C.A.D.-1204) begins with an eulogy of god Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu). This land-grant records that Govinda Devasarma, one Brāhmaṇa official, had received the donation of a village as fee for priestly work in the Aindṛi mahāsānti- sacrifice at the time of coronation-ceremony of the King. It furnishes us with the description of a composite image, describe as Gaurī(wife of Śiva) seated on the lap of the half-body of Pañcānana Śiva like lightning in the autumn-cloud, the other half of Śiva’s body being occupied by Hari (Viṣṇu). It seems to suggest cordial relationship of Sāktism with Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.
FORMS OF MOTHER-GODDESS IN VARENDRI

In the Khalimpur Copper Plate inscription, we find the names of the some female divinities such as Kādambarī, Rohinī (Wife of Candra), Svāhā (Wife of Agni), Sarvāṇī (Wife of Śiva), Bhadrā (Wife of Kuvera), Pulomā (Wife of Indra) and Lakṣmī (consort of Viṣṇu). The name of Lakṣmī occurs in the Bādāl Garuda-pillar Inscription of Nārāyanapāla, Amagāchi Copper-Plate of Vigrāhapāla (III) and Rāmganj Copper-Plate of Iśvaraghoṣa. Goddess Bhavānī (consort of Bhava, i.e. Śiva) finds mention in the Bāṅgarh Praśasti of Mūrttaśiva of the reign of Nayapāla and the Rāmganj Copper-Plate of Iśvaraghoṣa and in the Mādhaṇinagara Copper-Plate. Gaurī is found to be a part and parcel of Śiva in the Mādhaṇinagara grant. The occurrence of the name of the goddess Carcikā in the Bāṅgarh Praśasti of Mūrttaśiva is significant. Sarasvatī is mentioned in the Bāṅgarh Praśasti and the Bādāl Garuda-pillar Inscription. From the study of the above records it appears that except Kādambarī and Carcikā, the other female divinities are found in association with their male-consorts and thus seem to have held a secondary position.

Kādamvarī: From the reference to a shrine(dvākulikā) of goddess Kādamvarī, we may reasonably infer that the goddess in question gained popularity in Pundravardhana. Scholars are not unanimous about the identification of the goddess. Prof. Keilhorn thinks that Kādambarī was the wife of Balarāma (brother of Krisṇa), known as Kadamvara, A.K. Maitreya identifies her as Sarasvatī on the basis of a relevant passage quoted from the Medinikosa in which Bhāratī
is considered as a synonym of Kādamvari. The other synonyms of the word are Vārunī (wine), Parabhrta (female cuckoo), Sārikā (female parrot). Kālidāsa used the term in the sense of wine and Sukumar Sen is of opinion that probably the goddess was previously worshipped as the presiding deity of the vessel of wine, wife or sister of Varuna, and later on became identical with Sarasvatī. Niharranjan Roy holds the same view. The goddess also may be regarded as a local deity. That the goddess earned a wide popularity is suggested by the fact that her shrine is used as an indicator of a boundary.

**Carcikā**: The poet of Bāngarh Prasasti of Mūrttisiva has drawn an extremely abominable portrait of the goddess Carcikā:

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Om namascarccikayai Surasura-Sirah-Sreni-Patavasa-
Samajagat Pantu Visvakrtabhyacarcyascarca-caranarenayah|
damstra-Sandhi-nilinameka-Kavalam-Visvantadasnami Kim
Saptamvodhi-jalani-hastasusire-guptani Kim pivate|
ityahara -daridratakulataya susyattanumvibhrati
Kalpante nr-Kapala-mandanaavidhih payajagacarccika||
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The fleshless skull-garlanded goddess is described as being distressed with hunger and thirst and thinking how she could gobble the whole universe and suck the oceans contained in her palms. The poet makes his prayer for appeasement of the frightful goddess who alone could protect the universe.

The description of Carcikā resembles that of goddess kamunda found in different texts. In the Agni-Purāṇa (50:21-23) we find the following description: Cāmundā is
with red and sunken eyes, fleshless like skeleton, thin-bellied, with upward hairs, holding tiger-skin and bowl (or skull), and sword, trident, chopper in her hands. Her mount is a corpse and her ornaments are bone-made. The narration resembles with that of Bhadrakāli in the Tantrasāra (p.363) and of Kāli in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa (88:5-7). D.C. Sircar is of opinion that Carcikā is different from Cāmūndā, because in the list of Astamātrkās (Eight Mothers), these two deities are mentioned separately. However, it may be assumed that Carcikā is more fearful than of Durgā, the great goddess. Her terrible form leaves little doubt about her Tāntric character. In this connection, we may refer to an image of goddess "Carcikā", collected from Dinajpur district and now in the Rajshahi Museum (Bangladesh).

Bhavānī: Bhavānī, wife or consort of Bhava (Siva), is referred to in the Rāmganj Copper Plate of Isvaraghoṣa, where Sadbhāvā, mother of Mahāmandalika Isvaraghoṣa is characterized as Lākṣmī, Bhavānī and Sītā (wife of Rāma); Bhavānī ṭiva parā mūrttyā sīteva pativrata" (verse 4). Again we find reference to temple of goddess Bhavānī in the Bāngarh Prasasti of Murttiśiva, where it is stated bhavanamidamvetvasanna-Sambhurbhavanyah Smaratu nija-Vivāhāgāra (Verse 27) i.e. that Siva becomes amazed at the sight of the temple of Bhavānī and remembers the elegance of his own marriage-venue. Although the goddess is generally introduced as wife of Śiva, her independent status is substantiated by the separate temple made for her worship. The name of the goddess Bhavānī also
finds mention in the *DeviPurāṇa* (33:96), a text composed in the 6th-7th century A.D., as identical with Aparājitā: Aparājitābhavānīm Svastināmena Vācayet.

**Lakṣmī:** As Sakti or female-consort of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī or Śrī has been referred to in almost all Bengal epigraphic records. The *Khālimpur Copper Plate* of Dharmapāla, found from Malda, contains a comparison between Deddādevī, mother of Dharmapāla, with Lakṣmī, the beloved of Viṣṇu (Murāri)-'Murāri Polarkṣmīrīva' (Verse 5). Similarly, Rallādevī, wife of Someśvara, is found in the *Bādāl Garuda Pillar Inscription* of the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla, compared with Lakṣmī; Haririva Lakṣmyāh. Sadbhāvā, mother of Iśvaraghoṣa, is compared with Lakṣmī on account of her devotion to her husband: Sadbhāvā nāmā tasyābhud bhāryā padmeva śārnqinah (verse 4) in the *Rāmagni Copper Plate Inscription*. Lakṣmī is named here as Padma probably due to her association with lotus (Padma). The *Amgachi Copper Plate Inscription* of Vigrahapāla III records the story of the emergence of goddess Lakṣmī from the ocean at the time of churning following the account in the *Mahābhārata* (Ādiparvan, 18:35, 45).

The goddess Lakṣmī has long been recognised as the goddess of wealth and prosperity. But in the Purāṇas she is introduced as Sakti or female-consort of Viṣṇu. In Bengal, she is popular in her twofold aspects: as a giver of crops and wealth and as wife of Nārāyaṇa. Of course these two aspects might he overlapping with each other. In Bengal, she is worshipped daily as a domestic deity, Grhalakṣmī for which the service of a brahmin priest is not required. Lakṣmī,
the domestic deity of Bengal is to be distinguished from the Purānic goddess of the same name. Lakṣmī who is worshipped on an earthen pitcher (ghata) by every housewife of Bengal represents the goddess of agriculture. The folk divinity of the agrarian society was accommodated later in the Purānic pantheon.

Sarasvatī: Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and speech, is mentioned in the Bādāl Garuda pillar inscription as co-wife of Lakṣmī (verse 21). This aspect is often mentioned in the Purāṇas. Again, the poet of the Bānargh Praśasti of Murttisiva, named Śrīkanṭha, prays for the grace of goddess Sarasvatī for the successful composition of the Praśasti mātassarasvatī Krtonjaliresa murdhni (verse 4, line 1).

The history of goddess Sarasvatī may be traced in the Vedic period where she was conceived of as the great river-goddess and the greatest among the goddesses. Later on, in the age of the Brāhmaṇas she became Vākdevī (goddess of speech). Still later, in the Purāṇas she emerged as the goddess of learning. Earlier, she was referred to as wife of Brahmā, but in almost all the Purāṇas she is mentioned as Saktī of Viṣṇu. Her mounts also vary such as lion, peacock, duck, ram etc. In Bengal, she is not referred to as Saktī of any male divinity, either Brahmā or Viṣṇu, but is represented as an independent goddess.

Sarvāṇī: The name Sarvāṇī as one of the appellations of the great goddess is found in the Mārkandeya-purāṇa (85|9-10). The Brahmaśvaivartta Purāṇa (prakṛti-khaanda 57|2) enlists her name as one of the sixteen names of goddess Durgā. From the
Deulbadi Image Inscription of the 7th century A.D., one can derive the popularity of the goddess in the Samata region. That the goddess occupied a place of prominence in Varendri is evident from the comparison of Deddadevi, mother of Dharmapala, with Sarvāṇī: Sarvāṇīva Sivasya (verse -v)

Gaurī : The goddess Durgā is named Gaurī in some Purānic texts for her fair complexion. Gaurī is popularly known as daughter of Himālaya and wife of Śiva. The other names of the same goddess are Umā, Pārvatī, Śailajā , Śailaputri, Śailatanujā etc. She is known in Bengal by all these names since early times. In the Madhainagar Copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena (A.D.1204) she is described as seated in the lap of Pañcānana (i.e. Śiva), occupying half of his body - vasyānke Sāradamvudorāsī tādillekheva Gaurī Priyā dehārdhena . This description reminds one of Ardhanārīśvara form of Śiva-Śakti which earned popularity during the Sena period. In the Deopara Prasasti of Vijayasena (c. A.D. 1096-1159) and Najhati Copper plate of Vallālasena (c.A.D 1170) there are references to Ardhanārīśvara. The image of the Devī seated on the left lap of Śiva is found from different places of Bengal remains now preserved in the collections of different Museums. The Kālikā Purāna (45|149-182) furnishes a description of Śiva with his beloved Gaurī. As already pointed out above, the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla refers to the female consorts of different gods such as Rohini of Candra, Pulomā of Indra , Svāhā of Agni Bhadrā of Kuvera. It is doubtful whether those female divinities were ever regarded as different forms of the great Mother goddess representing her various aspects.
In Varendri the female-deities both Vaiṣṇavite (Lakṣmī Sarasvatī) and Śaivite (Bhavānī, Gaurī, Sarvāṇī) appear to have commanded respect and devotion of both the rulers and the ruled in Bengal. An independent status of Mother-goddess may be traced in Kādamvarī (Khālimpur Copper plate) and Carcikā (Bāngarh Praśasti of Murttisīva). If the latter is considered a Tāntric deity, it indicates the expansion of Tāntricism side by side with Purāṇic bhakti cult in Varendri in the 10th/11th cent A.D.

**EPGRAPHHS OF RĀDHĀ**

The epigraphic records containing some information, direct or indirect, regarding the cult of goddess are found in the Rādhā. Those are the following:-(1) Two Medinipur Copper plates of the reign of Saśāṅka (c.AD. 608), (2) Irdal Copper Plate of the reign of the Kamboja king Nayapāla (c.A.D. 1043), (3) Sian Stone Inscription of the reign of Pāla king, Nayapāla or his son Vigrahapāla III (c. 10th/11th century A.D.) (4) Bhuvanesvara Praśasti of Bhatta Bhavadeva of the reign of Harivarmadeva of Varmanā dynasty (c.A.D. 1077-1127) (5) Paikore Image Inscription of Vijayasena (c.12 Century A.D.) (6) Barrackpur Copper-Plate of Vijayasena (c.A.D. 1158) (7) Naihati Copper-Plate of Vallālasena (c.A.D. 1170)

The Medinipore plates were issued for Tavira, identified with the modern village of Debra lying about fifteen miles southeast of Midnapore town. The Irdal plate was found at the disposal of a local Jamindar of Balesvar district (Orissa). The actual findspot is not yet known. The village of
Chattin donated in this grant was in ancient Dandabhukti mandala (Midnapur District) located in Vardhamâna bhukti. The Sian stone inscription was found from dilapidated mausoleum of Makhdum Shah Jalal in the Shahajapur area of the village Sian near Bolpur, district Birbhum, in a very distorted condition. The Bhuvaneswara Prâasti was found in the temple of Anantanârâyaâa at Bhuvaneswar, Orrissa. The Paikore image inscription of a single line engraved on a stone pillar surmounted by a figure of Manasâ (‘the serpent goddess’) was found in a very distorted condition discovered at the village of Paikore, district Birbhum. The Barrackpore plate was found in a village near Barrackpur Cantonment in the district of 24-Parganas about ten miles north of Calcutta. The grant was issued from Vikramapura and recorded the donation of land in the Khâdiviâaya, in the 24-Parganas area. The exact location of the village has not been determined. The Naihati plate was found on the west Bank of the river Bhagirathi near the village of Naihati, lying in the Katwa subdivision, district Burdwan. It records transfer of land in the village of Vallahittha which lies six miles west of the find spot in the Uttara Râdha Mandala lying in the Vardhamâna bhukti.

EPIGRAPHIC DATA FROM RÂDHA

The copper plates found from the Râdha region, two from Midnapur, one from 24 Parganas, one from Burdwan and one from Baleswar (Orissa) are related with land grant. The Prâasti found at Bhuvanâsavaar temple is primarily an eulogy of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva but incidentally contains references to the Purânic
deities. The other one is an inscription engraved on stone (Sian) and still another inscription is found engraved on an image of Manasā (paikore).

The Sian stone Inscription found from Birbhum contains a lot of significant information:

(a) From line 22 to line 63 the record gives a vivid description of the religious activities of the king including erection of various temples at different places especially those made for lord Siva with his ganaš, bearing different names as Hetukeša, Kṣeṣvēvara, Ghaṇṭīśa Bhairava, Vaidyanātha, Varākṣēvara, Vaṭesvara, Mātaṅgesvara and Sadāsīva. Royal patronage was also extended to the cults of Viṣṇu (named Uccadeva, Vaikuṇṭha,) Surya (Candraṅgū), Vighnanāyaka (Gaṇesā) Candra and Navagraha.

(b) Reference is made to the temple of goddess Carca, also called Jaganmātā (mother of the universe).

(c) Mention is made of Nava-Candikā (line 27). Temples looking like mountain seems to have been established for nine Candikās.

(d) Erection and establishment of the images of 64 Yoginīs surrounding Bhairava named Ghaṇṭīśa (line 35); construction of high stone pinnacle on the temple of a goddess named Piṅgalāryā.

**FORMS OF MOTHER GODDESS IN RĀDHA**

The occurrence of the names of the Purānic goddesses like Mahī (Prithvī), Himāsailājā (daughter of Himalaya), Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Mahāgaurī, Mahālakṣmī, Ardhanārīśvāra in the epigraphic records of Rādha suggest that the rulers as well as the ruled in the Rādha region and the adjacent areas of Orissa
(Balesvar, Bhuvanesvar) were well acquainted with the above mentioned female deities.

The Medinipore Copper plate of Śaśānka refers to Mahi (earth goddess) as associated with Viṣṇu. Bhāgyadevi, wife of the Buddhist Kamboja king Rājyapāla has been compared with the daughter of Himālaya  Śeṣvīva himāśailajā in the Irda Copper plate of Nayapāla. Similarly, a generous lady like Vilāsadevi, queen of King Vijayasena and mother of Vallālasena, is likened with Lakṣmī (wife of Viṣṇu) and Gaurī (Śakti of Śiva) in the Naihati Copper plate. In the Bhuvanesvar Praṣāsti of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva composed by the poet Vācaspati, the fame, celebrity and eloquence of the king Harivarmadeva of the Varman dynasty are derived from Mahāgaurī and Mahālakṣmī and Sarasvatī respectively. Caṇḍī, the great war goddess referred to in Mārkandeya Purāṇa, is said to have been present in the battlefield to fight on behalf of such a great king. The Ardhanārīśvara form of Śiva-Śakti is referred in the opening verse of the Naihati Copper plate of Vallālasena.

But the most informative record of Rādha region is, no doubt, the Sian stone Inscription in which mention is made of female deities of Tāntric character such as Carca (most probably a shortened form of Carcikā), Pīṅgalāryā (not identified) and sixty-four Yoginis. The erection of temples for "Nava Caṇḍikā" (nine Caṇḍikās) substantiates the wide popularity of the goddess of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa in this region. An image of Nava Caṇḍikā is found from Porsha, Dinajpur district. A description of Nava Durgā is found in the Bhavisya Purāṇa.
Carçā: In line 40 of the *Sian Stone Inscription* it is stated that the king (like Indra) caused the erection of a stone pinnacle on the stone temple originally established by Mahendrapāla (Pratihāra king of the 9th - 10th century AD.). It appears that the temple of goddess Carçā had been constructed at least one hundred years before the date of the *Sian* record by ruler from outside Bengal. Mihira Bhoja, father of the founder of the temple is described in another copper plate as Paramabhaqavatībhakta i.e. ‘great devotee of the goddess’. However, Carçā or Carcikā is one of the Eight Mothers.

The opening verses of the *Rāngarh Praśasti* of Murttisiva begins with an obeisance to and description (dhyānamantra) of goddess Carcikā. In both the *Sian Inscription* and the *Rāngarh Praśasti*, the Śākta centres are found to be closely associated with and situated in large Śaiva monasteries.

Pīṅgalāryā: In line 63 of the *Sian Stone Inscription* reference is made to the erection of a stone pinnacle on the temple of goddess Pīṅgalāryā. The goddess may be identified with Bhadrakāli who is described in the Śāradā-ṭilaka Tantra (22|93) as adorned with mud coloured (yellowish brown) matted hair. Alternatively, it may be suggested that the goddess was a local Tāntric divinity.

Sixty-four Yoginīs: The *Sian Inscription* records the installation of images of sixty-four Yoginīs by the king in his own city(line 35). The worship of sixty-four Yoginīs is considered as a part of the Tāntric ritual. In some Purānic texts sixty-four Yoginīs are associated with eight mothers (Astamātrikās), each mātrikā, an emanation from Candi
or Durgā, having her aspects manifested through eight Yoginis. The tradition of worshipping sixty-four Yoginis and Kotī (crore) Yoginis along with the central goddess Durgā is prescribed in the Devī Purāṇā and the Kālikā Purāṇā. The ruins of the temple of sixty-four Yoginis are found in Jabalpur. The Hirapur temple of Khajuraho, the Vaital deul of Bhuvanesvara and the temple of Ranipur Jharial dedicated to those Tāntric goddesses deserve mention in this connection. But the Sian Record does not mention the exact location of the temple of sixty-four Yoginis.

The installation of a golden pitcher on the temple of Jaganmātā at Attahasa (district Birbhum) by the king seems to be significant. Attahasa finds mention in the list of Sākta-Pithas in some mediaeval texts. It is said to be the place of Devī Phullarā with her Bhairava Viśveśa and the pītha is said to be sanctified by Ostha (the upper lip) of Devī. It appears from the Sian Stone Inscription that the history of this Sākta-Pīṭha in Rādha may be traced as early as the 9th - 10th century A.D.

Manasā: An inscribed image of Manasā was discovered from the village of Paikore in district Birbhum. The inscription is fragmentary, as in the record some words are found missing. However, the inscription reads as follows: Rājena ŚrīVijaysenena. Scholars are unanimous that the king mentioned is Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty, who caused the erection of the image of Manasā. Some scholars are of opinion that south Indian snake deity Maṅcāmmā had come to be called Manasā in Bengal. The Senas who were Karnāta Kṣatriyas might
have imported this goddess from South India. But the fact remains that since Pre-Aryan times the serpent deity used to be worshipped by the aborigines in Eastern India. That the goddess acquired, in course of time, a place of honour in the eyes of the elite class is quite evident from the mediaeval Bengali ballad known as Manasā- maṅgala. Thus, from the epigraphic data it appears that not only Purānic female deities like Lakṣṇī, Sarasvatī and Gaurī, but also the Tāntric goddesses like Carcā, Piṅgalāryā, Caṇḍikā and sixty-four Yōginīs and the folk goddess like Manasā had their place of honour in the religious belief of the Rādha.

**EPIGRAPHS OF VAŃGA**

Very few epigraphic records of the Pāla dynasty are found in the Vaṅga region because of the political dominance of the contemporary Candras and Varmaṇs. The early epigraphs dated from the 6th century A.D. to the 11th century A.D. are land grants to the Brāhmaṇas. Two records found in Vaṅga appear to be more relevant than others. Those are (1) Sāmalavarman plate from Vajrayoginī (c. A.D.1127-37) and (2) Caṇḍi image inscription of the reign of Lakṣmanasaṇa (c. A.D. 1182).

**FORMS OF MOTHER-GODDESS IN VAŃGA:**

(1) The Sāmalavarman Plate has been recovered from the village of Vajrayoginī under the jurisdiction of the Munshiganj police station, about 16 miles south of Dacca town. In this record king Sāmalavarma appears to have made a gift to Bhimadeva for the benefit of the Buddhist deity Prajñāpāramitā. The purpose of this land donation on the part
of a king of Varman dynasty who is known to have been inclined to Brâhmanism, is to make his tutelary deity Vâsudeva to be pleased, as it records Rhaçavantam vâsudevabhâttâraka muddisâya. It is probably the only land-grand of the 12th century A.D. recording an endowment for the service of a female divinity. However, an image of the above-mentioned deity has been collected from the Raghurampur excavation near Dacca. That the area was a renowned Buddhist-Tântric centre since an early period is evident from the name Vajrayogini, originally the name of a Buddhist goddess. According to Benoytosh Bhattacharya, the village must have derived its name from the temple of Vajrayogini which was at one time situated there.

The Buddhist Tântric text Sâdhanamâlâ describes goddess Prajñâpâramitâ as an embodiment of the Mahâyâna scripture of the same name which was, according to the tradition, restored from the nether regions by Nâgârjuna in the 2nd century A.D. Nine Sâdhanâs in the Sâdhanamâlâ describe her form, mantras and procedure of her worship. The findspot of this record was situated near the ancient site of the Vikramapura monastery where there were thirty-five centres for studying Prajñâpâramitâ (Scripture).

(2) Candi Image Inscription of the reign of Laksmanasena:

The unique inscribed image of goddess Candi was found in the ruins of Rampal in Dacca District and was later installed in a temple at Farasganj, district Dacca.
The inscription records that the installation of the image was begun in the 3rd year of the reign of Laksmanasena by the Adhikrt Dāmodara and was installed next year by his younger brother Nārāyaṇa, son of Mālatidevi. The year of the installation is, therefore, 1174 A.D.

The inscription designates the goddess as Caṇḍīdevī. But the scholars identify her as Bhuvaneśvarī on the basis of the description given in the ŚāradātilakaTantra. Two other inscribed images of Caṇḍi of the reign of Laksmanasena are found in the Decca region and illustrated by N.K. Bhattasali. Both images bear the name Caṇḍikā and Caṇḍi. Evidently the people of Vaṅga-janapada cherished special devotion for the war goddes of the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa.

**EPITAPHS OF SAMATATA**

No Pāla- Sena epigraphic record is to be found in the Samatata region comprising Śrīhatā, Comilla and Chattagram probably due to the long ascendancy of the Candra and Deva rulers. The copper plates found in this area belong to the Rāta, Khadga, Candra and Deva dynasties. From an analysis of these records it appears that Buddhism predominated in the region as the kings issuing the copper-plate grants introduce themselves as ParamaSauqata. That the Purānic Brāhmaṇism was no less important is evident from the royal land-grants to the Brāhmaṇas, construction of Viṣṇu temple and growing popularity of Saivism. A queen of Buddhist Khadga dynasty caused to gild in gold the image of the Purānic goddess Sarvāṇi(female consort of Śiva) in the 7th century A.D. Paramasauqata Śrīcandra donated lands to six thousand
Brāhmaṇas, his grand son Laḍahacandra caused the construction of Anantānārāyana (a form of Viśnu) and his son introduced himself as devotee of Śivabhāṭṭāraka and erected temple or image of Nartṭesvara Śiva. The royal patronage to a Buddhist deity Durgottārā is known from only a record of early 13th century A.D.

The records having bearing upon Samatāta throw some light on the cult of Mother Goddess. Those are:

1) Nidhanpur Śāsana of Bhāskaravarmā, King of Kāmarūpa (c.A.D. 600–650);
2) Kailān Copper-Plate of ŚrīdhāranaRāta (c.A.D 673);
3) Sarvāṇi Image Inscription of Prabhāvatī, queen of Devakhadga (c.A.D.658–673).
4) Bhagna-Śālavana Vihāra of Abhinavamrgāṅkadeva (c.A.D.775–800)
5) Paścimbhaq Copper-Plate of Śrīcandra (c.A.D.930).
6) Mainamati Copper-Plate of Laḍahacandra (c.A.D.1006).
7) Mainamati Copper-Plate of Govindacandra (c.A.D.1020–55).
8) Mainamati Copper-Plate of Raṇavaṅkamalilla Harikāladeva (c.A.D.1221)

INFORMATION FOUND IN THE RECORDS:

1) Nidhanpur Śāsana of Bhāskaravarmā:-

The grant was issued from Karṇasuvarna, situated in modern Murshidabad district. It records transfer of a large tract of land, known as the Mayuraśāmal Agrahāra in the Candrapura Vishaya, lying in the area to the south of Sylhet town, where the plate was recovered. The land was however donated to 205 Vedic Brāhmaṇas.
This copper plate of the King of Kamarupa records his patronage to the Puranic deities and respect for the epic heroes. We find reference to the Puranic deities like Siva, Indra, Kama Deva, Dharma (Surya), Visnu and some of his incarnations, Prthivī (the Earth Goddess), Ganesa, Chandra, Brahma. The influence of the Puranic Brahmanism in the area concerned at an early date is confirmed by the account of Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang who witnessed the existence of only seventy Buddhist monasteries side by side with Brahmanical temples numbering above three-hundred. Two Puranic female-deities mentioned in the record are Lakshmi and Syama.

2) Kailan Copper-plate of Sridharonarata: The land grant was found at a distance of eighteen miles south-west of Comilla town. The grant was issued from Devaparvata, which is identified with the ruins lying on the southern end of the Lalmai-Moinamati hills.

The record informs us that Mahasandhi-Vigrahika Jayanātha requested the King to grant twenty-five pātakas of land of which a part was to be given to thirteen Brahmanas, a part to the Buddhist monastery, and a part was to be retained by Jayanātha himself. The King declares himself as ParamaVaisnava. The plate is adorned on its top with an engraved image of 'Gajalakshmi' standing on a full-blown lotus.

3) Sarvani Image Inscription of the reign of Devakhadga: This inscribed image had been discovered among other relics in the ruins of the village of Deulbadi under the Chauddagram police station in Tipperah district, about
twenty miles south of Comilla. An octo-alloy statuette of the Sungod and some Lingas (one of them inscribed) were found along with this image.

The inscription on the pedestal of the image designates the goddess as Sarvānī and gives us an interesting information that the image was gilt with leaves of gold by queen Prabhāvatī, wife of the Buddhist King Devakhaḍga. The image is now preserved in the Rajshahi Museum.

4) Bhaṅga Śālavanavihāra of Abhinavamṛgāṅkadeva: This is a record of land-transfer found from Śālavana Vihāra. The name of the place wherefrom the grant was issued has not yet been ascertained. Morrison, however, thinks that the issuing centre should be other than Karmānta, the eastern administrative centre. In this grant, goddess Lakṣmī is twice mentioned.

5) Paścimbhaṅg Copper-plate of Śrīcandra: The plate is a document of land-donation (1,000 square miles) made for the benefit of six thousand Brāhmaṇas by one Buddhist King Śrīcandra who introduces himself as Paramaśaṅgata. Not only that, the King is known to have patronised the installation of images of the Purāṇic deities like Agni (Vaiśvānara), Śiva (Yogēśvara), Jaimāni (or Jaiminī), and Mahākāla (Śiva in his destructive form) in eight temples (maṭha) of which four were made for the foreigners and four for the Vangālas (Bengalees).
It contains the names of Purānic female deities such as Indra (wife of Indra), Bhavānī (wife of Bhava i.e. Śiva), Lakṣmī (consort of Viṣṇu), Sarvānī (Durgā or Cāndī) by way of drawing comparison with the mother of the king Śricandra.

6) **Mainamati Plates** of Govindacandra and Ladahacandra: These plates of the Candra dynasty were found in course of an excavation of the shrine known as Charpatra-Mura in the Lalmai-Mainamati hills. The plate of Govindacandra records a land-grant in the Peranātana Viṣaya lying somewhere in the neighbourhood of the hills. Ladahacandra’s plate transfers land in the Sripattikeraka Viṣaya in the Samatata- mandala.

Following the prevalent tradition, these plates record royal patronage to the Purānic deities like Śrīkaṇtha(Śiva), Svabhu, Vidhātā(Probably Brahmā), Achyuta(Viṣṇu), Mahēśvara, Natesvara(Śiva), Mahāsena(Kārttikeya), Indra, Sūrya and Krisṇā. The female consorts of the chief male divinities also find mention. Homage is paid to Durgā, Rudrāṇī, Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Vasundhāra, Gaṅgā, Śiva and Śrī.

7) **Mainamati copper plate** of Raṇabaṅkamalla HariKāla deva: The plate was found somewhere along a road about five miles west of Comilla town. The place of issue is not mentioned. The beneficiary of the land-grant was the Vihāra of the goddess Durgottārā, which was located in the city of Pāṭṭikera, and the donated land has been tentatively identified with the village of Bejabadi which lies near the western foot of the Lalmai-Moinamati hills.
It records land grant for the temple and monastery of the goddess designated 'Durgottarā' by the King's chief minister who was a follower of 'Sahajadharma' (probably Sahajiyā cult, a later Eastern Indian development of Tāntric Buddhism). The name 'Durgottarā' can hardly be traced in any Purānic, Tāntric or Buddhist text.

FORMS OF MOTHER GODDESS IN SAMATAṬA

An analysis of the copper plates and image inscriptions found from Samataṭa- region gives us to understand that the Epic-Purānic beliefs represented by various divinities did spread in this region. The female divinities, both Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite, were equally acceptable to the people. The Purānic goddesses, both independent and dependent on their respective male consorts, are mentioned in the copper-plates. Almost all Samataṭa-records contain references to the goddesses like Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Śyāmā, Vasundharā, Gaṅgā (the river- goddess), Indrāṇi, Rudrāṇi, Sarvāṇi and Śrī.

Śyāmā : Among the goddesses mentioned above, Śyāmā is supposed to be a form of Durgā or Kālī, the great goddess of the Devīmāhātmya. In the Nidhanpur Plate of King Bhāskarvarmā, his mother is compared to Kārttayugīva Śyāmādevī (the goddess Śyāmā of Kṛta or Satyayuga), that is, 'the good behaviour, honesty and holiness of the Kārttayuga (Satyayuga) took the form of Śyāmādevī'. When the complexion of the goddess is blue, she is called 'Śyāmā'.

She is described in the Skanda Purāṇa (Prabhāsakhaṇḍa 9/47) and Kurma Purāṇa (Purvabhāga 12/99) as having two arms, three
eyes and her complexion having likeness to bluish lotus.

Sarvāṇī: Goddess Sarvāṇī seems to have been a popular form of the goddess in Samataka region. N.K Bhattasali has identified Sarvāṇī with Bhadrakāli on the basis of 57 ŚāradātilakaTantra. But one of the names of Mahiṣamardini Caṇḍī is Sarvāṇī according to the Mārkandeya Purāṇa(85/9-10).

The iconographic attributes of Sarvāṇī seem to represent her as a war-goddess.

That the people of Samataka was much acquainted with the goddess Sarvāṇī is evident from the Paścimbhāg Copper-plate of Śricandra, where the mother of the king is compared with Sarvāṇī along with other prominent Purāṇic female deities. The war goddess is also represented by the names of Durgā, Sarvāṇī, Syāmā (Kāli emanated from Durgā), Bhavāṇī and Rudrāṇī known to us from the Samataka records. Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Vasundharā, who are known from the epigraphs of Samataka seem to have been associated with Viṣṇu.

The practice of making of donation of land as endowment for the service of a goddess, although rare, is not unknown. From the Sāmalavarma Plate of Vajrayoginī (c.A.D. 1127-1137) we come to know the news of land-donation made to the temple of Prajñāpāramitā, the prominent Buddhist deity. Again, the Mainamati copper-plate of Ranaṃkamalla Harikāladeva is a document of land grant made to one Buddhist Tāntric deity 'Durgottārā'.

Durgottārā: As we have no textual reference of the goddess 'Durgottārā' we may assume that the goddess might be a composite form of Durgā, the chief Brāhmaṇical goddess and
Tārā, the principal Buddhist female deity. Such a synthesis between Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism was not unusual. Again, the name 'Durgottārā' might be a shortened form of 'Durgottārinī - Tārā' of the Buddhist Tāntric text Sādhana-māla.

**EPIGRAPHS OF MAGADHA**

Apart from the four prominent janapadas or political-cultural centres of Bengal, some important records were found from adjacent regions included in the present state of Bihar. During the Pāla hagemony over Eastern India those places were included in one and the same political-cultural region. The following records deserve a close scrutiny.

1) **Uddandapur Brass Image Inscription** of the reign of Nārāyaṇapāladeva (c. A.D. 854-908).

2) **Nalanda Stone Image Inscription** of Gopāla II (c. A.D. 940-960)

3) **Gaya Kṛṣṇadvārikā Temple-Gate Inscription** of the reign of Nāyapāladeva (c. A.D. 1038-1055).

**FORMS OF MOTHER-GODDESS IN MAGADHA**

1) **Pārvatī**: **Uddandapur Brass Image Inscription**; A small brass image bearing a votive inscription on its back was discovered in Bihar town and is now preserved in the Vangya Sahitya Parisat Museum, Calcutta. The inscription reads -ॐ Deva-dhā [rmney] am Śrī-Nārāyaṇapāla-deva-rājye Samvat 54, Śrī - Uddandapura-Vāstavya Rāṇaka Uchapatra Thārūkasya. "The pious gift of Thārūka son of the Rāṇaka Ucha(Utṣa), (dedicated) in the year 54 of the reign of illustrious Nārāyaṇapalādeva."

The brass image is identified with that of Pārvatī and the gift of this image was known to be made by an inhabitant
of Uddandapura, Bihar, named Rāṇaka Uchaputra Thāruka.

2) Vāgīśvarī: Nalanda Stone Image Inscription of Gopāla II:—

A small slab of stone was discovered from Nalanda containing an inscription of which line-2 is considered significant for the present study. It refers to Śrī Vāgīśvarī bhattārikā suvarna vṛihi-saktā "i.e the idol of the goddess of learning endowed with corns of gold."

Scholars are not unanimous regarding the exact interpretation of the term 'Suvarna Vṛihi-Saktā'. Some are of opinion that suvarna-vṛihi stands for 'rich corn-field,' 'golden vessel', because there was a custom of decorating idols with golden vessels in ancient India. It may, however, be reasonably assumed that the idol of the goddess had been decorated with golden pea shaped as wheat or barley or golden leaf (like Sarvāṇī image of Tipperah).

The image has been identified by some with the Buddhist Tāntric goddess Vāgīśvara, on the basis of the description given by Bloch. It is known from his description that the four-armed divinity, seated on the back of a lion in ardhaparyāṇka posture, carries an axe or a club-like object in the two hands whereas the other two are engaged in pulling off the tongue of two demons with the aid of a pair of forceps. The description leaves no scope of doubt that the goddess is not associated with the 'world of learning'. In the Tantrasāra, we find a goddess of similar nature. An image of Vāgīśvarī had been found from Nanoor in Birbhum district, which is recognised as an ancient centre of Buddhist Sahajiyā cult. Thus it may be held that side by side with the
expansion of Purānic cults, Buddhist Tāntric deities also got recognition and popularity in some places of Eastern India.

3) Mahā-nilasārasvatī: Gaya Kṛsnadvārikā Temple Gate Inscription of the reign of Nayapāladeva: The inscription (Praśasti) is found engraved on a stone tablet, now fixed on the gate of Gaya Kṛsnadvārikā temple. The Praśasti, which furnish an account of the nobility of the illustrious family of the King Nayapāladeva, repeatedly mentions names of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmi, Sarasvatī and Mahādeva. It refers also to a deity named 'Urunilapadmā,' whose identification is problematic, as we have no textual reference to this name.

However, in some Buddhist texts the name 'Nilasārasvatī' or 'Mahā-nilasārasvatī' occurs and we have no way but to recognise the identification of 'Urunilapadmā' with this goddess. Nilasārasvatī represents a variant of Tārā. It is believed that one can earn knowledge on logic and Āgamas only by meditating on Nilasārasvatī who is a goddess of knowledge to the Buddhist Tantrayānists.

From the records of Varendri, it appears that the female divinities like Rohinī, Svāhā, Sarvāṇi, Bhadrā, Pulomā and Lakṣmī, whose names have been used in the epigraphs by way of comparison with some noble ladies belonging to the royal family to emphasize upon faithfulness to their respective husbands seem to have been quite well-known as Purānic deities in the early mediaeval period. But the two divinities Kādambarī and Carcikā appear to have been more prominent than others. Because, these two goddesses are not introduced as female-consorts of some male divinities. From the records of
the Rādhā region, not only the Purānic goddesses like Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaurī, but also Tāntric goddesses like Carcā or Carcikā, Piṅgalāryā, Nava-Caṇḍikā and 64-Yoginīs, in addition to the folk goddess Manasā are known to have consolidated their position in the territories lying to the west of the Bhāgirathī. The epigraphic records of Vaṅga region seem to suggest that the Buddhist Prajñāpāramitā and Brāhmaṇical Caṇḍī or Caṇḍikā were simultaneously worshipped in the territory lying east of the Bhāgirathī. Again, from the epigraphic records of Samataṭa region we have significant mention of Indrāṇī, Bhavānī, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Vasundhārā, by way of comparison. On the other hand, we have mention of the female divinities like Durgā, Rudrāṇī, Durgottārā, Śyāmā, Sarvāṇī, who seem to have represented the Mother-goddess with her great glory, in south-east Bengal. The goddesses, mentioned above, seem to have gained wide acceptance from the seventh to the thirteenth century A.D.

The epigraphic records of Bengal and Bihar suggest no doubt that the Purānic beliefs began to spread in Eastern India since the 4th century A.D. In the beginning, Viṣṇu and Śiva held the ground, most probably due to the patronage of the ruling class. Viṣṇu had represented the religious belief of both the rulers and the ruled. In course of time, however, the female-consorts of both Viṣṇu and Śiva came to be recognised. While Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Vasundhārā and Śrī came to be recognised as the female consorts of Viṣṇu, Durgā, Bhavānī, Rudrāṇī and Sarvāṇī, were looked upon as different names of the consort of Śiva. Naturally, those female-
divinities were given a position of more importance in comparison with others like Rohini (Wife of Candra), Pulomā or Indrāṇi (Wife of Indra), Svāhā (wife of Agni), Bhadrā (wife of Kuvera), who belonged to the second category and were recognised as minor divinities. It appears that there was a third category to which belonged folk divinities like Manasa, usually worshipped in the villages. Therefore, the epigraphic records throw a new light on the categorisation of the female-deities. Besides, side by side with the Purānic goddesses, some Tāntric female-divinities like Carcikā, Piṅgalāryā, Candikā and Yoginī seem to have been gradually emerging in the religious belief of the people. In early mediaeval Bengal the Tāntric goddesses of the Hindu pantheon had close affinity with the Buddhist Tāntric goddess like Tārā, sometimes called Durgottārā. The transformation of the Mahāyāna faith into Tāntric Buddhism led to the emergence of the goddess like Tārā. Besides, there were Prajñāpāramitā, Vāgīśvarī and Mahānīlasarasvatī, who received liberal patronage from the Buddhist rulers of Eastern Bengal. A chronological view of the available epigraphic data would suggest that by way of gradual development the Purānic goddesses assumed the Tāntric character. It would not be unreasonable, to hold that the Purānic goddesses having fearful aspect, came to be recognised in the Tāntric texts.

It is generally assumed, as it has been already pointed out, that the benevolent aspect of the goddess represented by Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Śrī, Vasundharā etc. were associated with Viṣṇu and the fearful aspects of the goddess represented by
Rudrāṇī, Bhavāṇī, Sarvāṇī, Cāṇḍī, Śyāmā or Kālī, and Durgā were associated with god Śiva. In this connection, we would like to refer to the evidence of the Bunaighar copper-plate grant of Vainyagupta (6th Century A.D.) and the Deopara Praśasti of Vijayasena (11th Century A.D.). In both these records mention is made of Pradyumnesvara, that is, a combined form of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Reasonably enough, both the benevolent and the fearful aspects of the goddess associated with Hari and Hara respectively might be combined to form one and the same Mother goddess. In the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa, the great Goddess is represented in both of her benevolent and fearful aspects. As a benevolent goddess she grants to her devotees prosperity, victory, knowledge, abundance of crops and vegetation, happiness and peace, whereas the fearful aspect of the goddess represents her as a war-goddess bearing the names of Cāṇḍī, Cāmundā, Kālī, Rudrāṇī etc. to carry on an all-out war against the demons through the ages. Therefore, the epigraphic records of Bengal and Bihar, especially those assigned to a period stretching from the 7th century to 13th century A.D., in a way spell out the different aspects and forms of the Mother-goddess strictly according to the Brāhmaṇical-Purāṇic belief. It is interesting to note that the same period witnessed the emergence of the Mother-goddess, a representation of both benign and fearful aspects, in the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa that was given the present form by the 9th-10th century A.D.
References:


2. Varendri consisted of Northern Bengal including Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Bogra districts; Rāḍha consisted of Midnapore, Birbhum, 24-paraganas, Nadia, Murshidabad districts; Vaṅga included Dacca, Vikrampur and Faridpur area; Samatata consisted of Srihatta, Comilla, Chittagong and Tipperah regions.


4. Ibid., p.36 (No.35 of the list).


9. Majumdar, N.G., Inscriptions of Bengal, Pp. 140-57

10. IR, Vol. III, p. 106


12. GL, p. 29.


15. If we take the identification of the Vyāghrataṭimandala with Devagrama in district Nadiya (West Bengal), it would not be out of place to point out in this connection that the village Devagrama was recognised as one of the Sākta-Pīthas in a medieval text Pithanirannaya where it is mentioned as 'Kālipītha' or 'Kālighāṭ'.


18. HAB, p. 553.


21. RV. 2/41/6


30. Ibid., p. 68.


33. Sircar, D.C., op. cit., p. 118.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 93.

*DHI*, p. 503

37. Skanda-p., *Kasikhandā* 83/33; *Devī-p.* Chs. 50, 87; *Kālikā-

p. 63/35-42.


40. *SP*, Pp. 21, 37


Pp. 303-304.


43. *IBBSDM*, Pp. 42-43

44. *IBI*, Introduction, p. 17


47. Ibid., Pp. 196-197.


50. Ibid.

51. IBBSDM, P. 143-44; Kundu, Sambhunath, op. cit., pp. 274-76.


53. Ibid., p. 43.

54. Bhattacharya, D.C., 'The Moinamati Copper Plate of Ranabahkamalla Hari-Kaladeva', IHO, IX, 1933, p. 204.


57. IBBSDM pp. 203-205, PL LXX.

58. IB1, p. 307.


60. Sen, B.C., op. cit., Introduction, XXIII; CB1, pp. 187-188; GL, p. 86; Martin, Eastern India, vol. I, pl. XV, fig. 4.

61. E1, XXXVI, p. 84; CB1, pp. 150; GL, pp. 110; ASR, Vol. iii, PL XXXII.

62. Sen, B.C., op. cit., Introduction XXIII.
63. Kundu, Pambhunath, op. cit., p. 309.

64. Das Gupta, N. N., Banglaya Baudhadharmā (Beng.), Cal., 1355 B.S., p. 138.
