

CHAPTER - IV

GROWTH AND  
POPULARITY OF SUN  
WORSHIP IN EARLY  
BENGAL

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The lands comprised within early Bengal find no mention at all in the Vedic Saṁhitās. The horizon of the earliest Āryan singers is apparently limited to the region extending eastwards only as far as Bhagalpur. Further, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*<sup>1</sup> refers to the Puṇḍras, an ancient Bengal tribe, as *dasyus* or outlandish barbarians who lived in large numbers beyond the borders of Āryandom. The *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*<sup>2</sup> that probably refers to the Vaṅgas, another early Bengal tribe, do so in contemptuous terms. Thus, it is quite clear that Bengal was outside the zone of Āryan culture even in the later Vedic period. The state of things was not very different even in the *Sūtra* period. The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*<sup>3</sup> prescribes a penance for those who visit, among other countries, Puṇḍra and Vaṅga representing north Bengal and east Bengal. Even the Jaina *Sūtras* also represent the people of Rādhā as uncultured and almost savage. The linguistic and ethnological evidences render it highly probable that Bengal was, until the period represented by the *Sūtras*, mostly peopled by non-Āryan races. It may be presumed that they had a developed culture of their own even though it was non-Vedic and non-Āryan.

Religious practices in early Bengal included the reverence and worship, observances and beliefs of the original inhabitants of the different settlements of Bengal.<sup>4</sup> Some idea of this lost history may be had from a critical study of the practices of the present primitive tribes of Bengal, as there has been no revolutionary change in their

religious beliefs and practices since time immemorial. Incidentally, an attempt has also been made to understand the position of the Sun as a folk god among the Brāhmaṇical womenfolk and the different tribal communities in present-day Bengal in Appendix B.

The antiquity of Sun worship in early Bengal is obscure. However, the earliest definite reference to the worship of the god in this land occurs in the *Ārṣeya Upaniṣad* that may be dated in the fourth century B.C. In this *Upaniṣad*,<sup>5</sup> the Puṇḍras and the Sumhas are described as the Sun worshipping tribes. In the Epics, the country of the Puṇḍras who may be regarded as low caste<sup>6</sup> corresponds with Bengal and Bihar. The Gupta epigraphs and the Chinese records place the territory of the Puṇḍras – then styled Puṇḍravardhana – in north Bengal.<sup>7</sup> Puṇḍranagara, the capital city of the Puṇḍras, is proved by epigraphic evidence to have been situated in the Bogra district of northern Bengal. The country of the Sumhas roughly correspond to a portion of or to *Rādhā* which lies to the west of the Ganges, including Tamruk (Midnapore) and the districts of Hooghly and Burdwan. The non-Āryan *Puṇḍras* and *Sumhas* believed in the worship of the Sun as the highest reality.<sup>8</sup> This view of *Brahman* held by the Puṇḍras and the Sumhas was shared by Bharadvāja, as is alleged by the sage Gautama. It is deserving of note that the Bharadvājas were specially connected with Pūṣan – a Sun god. Most probably, they had been the spokesperson of the class of peoples most likely non-Āryan who believed in the supremacy of the Sun god. It can now be safely said that the worship of the Sun as the Supreme reality prevailed in Bengal at least since the later Vedic period among the dominant tribes of north and west Bengal. However, whether the worship in human form was prevalent in those days is very difficult to say at the present state of our knowledge.

Sun worship was no less popular in pre-Gupta period. From inscription as well as the extant terracotta figures, plaques, seals and sealing, we can draw a comprehensive picture of the adoration of the Sun god. Profound knowledge about the Vedic literature in ancient Vaṅga is strongly reflected from a Chandraketugarh seal (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.).<sup>9</sup> It is said therein that “by his banners Śiva is (recognizable as) the knower of Brahma (or a Vedic philosopher).” Evidently, it was in the pre-Gupta ancient Vaṅga that Brāhmaṇas besides Maga Brāhmaṇas, started coming into ancient Vaṅga under royal patronage and settling there permanently.<sup>10</sup> Of the Brāhmaṇical deities, Agni, Sūrya, Indra, Śiva and his Śakti, Kārttikeya, Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā and Viṣṇu were widely worshipped in ancient Vaṅga.<sup>11</sup> It seems that the Magians from Irān were not responsible for the first introduction of the image of the Sun god in India because indigenous representation of the god riding on a chariot drawn by horses is evident from the reliefs discovered at Bodhi-Gayā, Bhājā, Lālā Bhagat and Mathura.<sup>12</sup> The early indigenous representation of the Sun god in image form may be traced in some terracotta plaques from Bengal of the Suṅga-Kuṣāṇa period.

A terracotta<sup>13</sup> from Tamluk (Pl. 1a) belonging to c. 2nd century B.C. represents a standing winged figure with long stalks of full-blossomed lotus in his hands. He wears a wide repousse torque (*kaṇṭhī*), a *śirastraka*, round-shaped earrings, armlets and beaded bracelets. He has a thick waistband and two wings beside the upper parts of the arms. Cluster of plantains are displayed on either side of the lower part of the stela. In addition, a pitcher-like object with ear of corn shooting from is found on the pericarp of the petalled lotus.

The most interesting feature of the image is the delineation of the wings. The association of wings with Sūrya originally occurs in the *Ṛgveda*. Here he is depicted as the fine-looking winged celestial bird *Garutmān* in some of the hymns.<sup>14</sup> *Suparṇa* (well winged) is no other than the Sun itself. According to Yāska, the *Suparṇa* is ‘*Divyo divijah*’ (one who is ‘originated in the sky’). “The learned call (this Āditya) as Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa and Agni. He is bedecked with divine wings and characterized by beautiful movements...”.<sup>15</sup> Full-blown lotuses in the hands of the figure are also highly significant. Lotus is connected with the Sun because it blooms only while the Sun shines. Iconography associated the lotus with the Sun because it resembled the bright Sun. Lotus is recognized as a Sun-symbol since early times and stands for the creative force i.e. the producer of all (*Savitṛ sarvasya prasavitṛ*).<sup>16</sup> A full-blown lotus (*vikaśita-padma*) is regarded principally as a Sun-symbol.<sup>17</sup> According to Banerjea,<sup>18</sup> association of lotus with the Sun is fully established by the Purāṇas, which enjoin the execution in solar sculpture of a twelve-petalled lotus. The round-shaped *karṇa -bhūṣaṇas* seem to resemble *Sūrya-mukhī* (*helianthus annuus*) flower, which has been traditionally been associated with Sun worship in Bengal. The plantain tree is traditionally connected with the Sun worship, which is evident from its employment in the *Māgha-maṇḍal Sūrya-vrata* as the symbolic representation of the Sun god.<sup>19</sup>

It is, thus, clear that the winged figure represents the Vedic Sun god Sūrya. It also shows that the Sun worship was introduced in ancient Vaṅga during the post-Maurya and pre-Gupta period under strong Brāhmaṇical influence. This is eloquently reflected in the Kharoṣṭhī and Kharoṣṭhī -Brāhmī Inscriptions found in different parts of lower West

Bengal.<sup>20</sup> Prevalence of Sun worship is evident from a good number of such winged figures found in ancient Vaṅga.<sup>21</sup>

The association of lotus in Indian art with *Śrī* (prosperity) or *Lakṣmī* from 2<sup>nd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the representation of lotus in the hands of Sūrya led to some alleged connection between their iconic elements and the growth of some sort of *Sūrya-Śrī* cult. Incidentally, we may refer to a terracotta plaque found from Chandraketugarh, which depicts a winged female figure. She is standing on the petalled lotus with stalks of lotuses in her two hands. Leaves and buds of lotuses are sprouting forth in different directions from her headgear. "She seems to have been represented as a deity of wealth or fertility having been essentially associated with Sūrya - the Sun god".<sup>22</sup>

The representation of Sūrya as a winged human figure<sup>23</sup> is, no doubt, innovative. However, it was not a new one in the context of greater Indian art as such. In the sculptural panels (2nd century B.C.) of Bhārhut<sup>24</sup> (Sanchi), we find beautiful winged human figures in Chunar red sandstone. In fact, the basic idea of identifying the Sun god with the celestial bird *Garutmān* (*divyaḥ sa Suparṇaḥ Garutmān*) came from the *R̥gveda* (1.164.46). Interestingly, winged figures are also found in the Art of West Asia<sup>25</sup> and Persia<sup>26</sup> during the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. As an example, we may refer to the royal seal<sup>27</sup> (first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.) of Shaushatar, the king of Mitanni, which depicts a hybrid figure with outspread wings, spoked wheel-face and tail of a bird. No doubt, the figure represents the Sun as a bird. The currency of the concept of Sunbird as well as of the Indo-European language among both the Mitannians and the Vedic Āryans points to some sort of connection between them. It is also well known that the Indian sub-continent had cultural contact with the west from very early times. However, it is deserving of note

that there is a considerable time-gap between the above-mentioned royal seal of Shaushatar depicting the Sunbird and the winged Tamluk Sūrya. Probably, this time-gap contributed in building up the foundation of an art-movement that culminated in the mass-productions of art objects in India with the emergence of the Imperial Mauryas. The difference in time may also be further explained away. The Vedic rites and rituals had dominated the Āryan society in its earlier phase so greatly that there was very little scope for image-worship. However, the anti-establishment trend in customs and practices swept across the country with the rise of the Imperial Mauryas and the image worship gained predominance over the Vedic rites and rituals. This was reflected in the iconic representations of the time - both the Buddhist and Brāhmanical ones. The cross-cultural connections as further reflected in the Hellenic and Hellenistic art<sup>28</sup> of the time gave the momentum for a creative artistic activity. In this, the two prominent factors - the indigenous formulae drawn from the *Vedas*, the *Purāṇas*, etc. and the foreign influence - had played a vital role. The Tamluk terracotta winged Sūrya is the product of the time and of the experiences that these two classes of people had lived in and developed over the years.

It is quite clear that the Sun worship in ancient Vaṅga developed along an indigenous line in which the Sun god appeared in the form of a winged god. The indigenes lay in the additional attributes like those of the *maṅgal-ghaṭa* with sprouting leaves, plantain tree, etc. These additional attributes attest to the local socio-economic needs and practices of the society of ancient Vaṅga, which was predominantly an agrarian one.

Another terracotta Sūrya (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. /A.D.) from Chandraketugarh, 24-Parganas shows the god seated on the chariot drawn by four horses, which is unique in Bengal. He is flanked by two female figures. An animal-faced giant, the symbol of darkness, is shown as being trampled down under the rolling wheel of the celestial car. The god has a circular halo behind his head and wears a turbaned crown and a garland with a pendant.

The sacred thread consisting of three strands on the image in question is also discernable on the figure of Agni hailing from Chandraketugarh. As already mentioned, the Vedic rites and sacrifices, which were in vogue in ancient Vaṅga, played a vital part in the enactment of the *Yājñic* rituals. In the Ṛgvedic hymn,<sup>29</sup> Sūrya is identified with Agni. The sacred thread of Sūrya may have the same ritualistic implications as in the case of *agnitraya* in the iconic representation of Agni.<sup>30</sup> Aruṇa appears for the first time in Bengal as the charioteer of the Sun god in this very image. The two female attendants flanking the Sun god may be identified as Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā. The artistic cohesion and religious emphasis of the entire iconic composition clearly shows that the religious orientation in ancient Vaṅga was undeniably in keeping with the performances of Vedic rites and rituals 'in the midst of a number of Brāhmaṇical deities who were visualized in the growing Paurāṇic ambience'.

The god is riding in this specimen on a toy-cart drawn by four horses. On the Indo-Greek and Kuṣāṇa coins, such representations have also been found. Four horses drawing the Sun's chariot also occur in the Bodh-Gayā railing-image (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.), the Bhājā sculpture (Pune, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.), the Lālā Bhagat relief (Kanpur, U.P.) 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) and the Sūrya relief of Anantagumphā cave of Khaṇḍagiri group of

Jaina shrines (Orissa, 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.).<sup>31</sup> In the *Rgveda*, Sūrya is described as “moving on a car drawn by one, by several or by seven fleet and ruddy horses” (I.115, 3-4; VII.60, 3; VII.63, 2, etc.). Evidently, no particular significance is attached in the *Rgveda* to number four in respect of the horses of the Sun god’s car. According to Cunningham, the four horses resemble the representation of Helios – the Greek Sun god. The Greek impact in solar iconography of Bengal does not seem to be unexpected in view of the discovery of the images of foreign deities like Janus (the Roman God of Beginnings) and Athena in the land of ancient Vaṅga in the Pre-Gupta era”.<sup>32</sup> This resemblance is, however, superficial because the features of the Sun god along with Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā and the chariot are Indian in character. Characteristic features of the Kuṣāṇa period are also traceable in the image under review in its round-shaped turban-like headdress and elaborate nimbus. Thus it may be said now that the foreign cultures like the Hellenic and Kuṣāṇa ones have already arrived and made their impact felt in the Bengal solar iconography, though the religious spirit emphatically revolves round the *bhakti* element.

One of the most significant findings about the Chandraketugarh terracotta Sūrya is that the god, though largely resembling in many iconographic features with the Bodh Gayā, Bhājā, Lālā Bhagat or Anantagumphā Sun images, appears as an independent deity along with his attendants and thus seems to have been object of worship with utmost devotion, while those four images of Sūrya were depicted as accessory decorative figures in the religious architecture of the heterodox or other Brāhmaṇical sects. A few more words need to be said about the greater but apparent similarity particularly between the Sūrya relief from Bhājā Vihāra<sup>33</sup> near Pune, Western Ghāṭs and the Chandraketugarh terracotta Sūrya. The Bhājā Sūrya is a part of a unique relief and as such depicted in a

spirit more characterized by the narrative instinct of the sculptor than any sort of a pronounced impulse of *bhakti*. The Chandraketugarh Sun-relief, on the other hand, demonstrates the deep-rooted element of the *bhakti* cult that was literally sweeping the country during the pre-Gupta period.

A terracotta seal<sup>34</sup> (c.1st century A.D.) from Hadipur (North 24 Parganas) displays on one side a male figure in rigid *samapādashānaka* pose. The figure holds in his right hand the heavy stalk of fully petalled lotus. Another smaller lotus appears beneath the elbow of the right hand and a lotus-bud on the other side of the larger petalled lotus. The left hand is placed akimbo. The figure is flanked by lotus plants on its right side and a banana plantain on its left side. A horse is standing in an east-west direction behind the plantain tree. The figure is bedecked with a headdress of the type of Kausia cap and earrings. A square-shaped small symbol is found on the right shoulder. Interestingly, it wears a close fitting jacket gathered at the anklets and soft-padded boots. Since the figure holds the stalk of the lotus in one of his hands and wears a northerner's dress (*udīcyaveśa*), it could be taken as the image of Sūrya belonging to the formative stage.

Tunic and boots in solar iconography occurs for the first time in ancient Vaṅga in this specimen. The northerner dress of the Sun god indicates the coming of the Irānian Sūrya (Mitra) in ancient Vaṅga. Further, this should have happened during the time of the settlement of the immigrants from the north-west. This is further corroborated by the fact that a pot-shred carrying an inscription refers to a Maga Brāhmaṇa (*Jayanto- Makatah eko vastrah dvijah*)".<sup>35</sup>

Apart from the lotus motif, this sort of dress (*udīcyaveśa*) is solely worn by the Sun god. This is evidenced by a good number of Sun images represented in coins, stones and terracotta from northwestern India in the post-Maurya and pre-Gupta period. The *Bṛhat-saṁhitā* (57.46-47) lays down that he should be clad in the fashion of a northerner, (his body) from the feet up to the breast being covered (*kuryādudīchyaveśam guḍham padaduro yavat*). The *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* (Ch, 67.2.16) of a later date says that he (the Sun god) should be covered with a coat mail and should wear a northerner's dress, his waist girdle representing *yaviyanga* (*avyaṅga*). Banerjea thinks that writers of such texts highlight in this way the alien origin of this variety of Sun cult, which was introduced into India in the beginning of the Christian era or even earlier. The Sun image under discussion bears close resemblance to MIIRO (Irānian Mithra) in respect of the extended right hand and the hand placed akimbo. ELIOS (Helios), the Sun god, appears on the reverse of coins of the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka. A coin type of Huviska depicts on the reverse a solar deity with radiate nimbus, which makes a gesture of blessings and looks like MIIRO (ian Mithra) without his sword.<sup>36</sup>

The display of the horse in the image is quite significant. The *Ṛgveda* often describes Sūrya as riding on a car drawn by one, by several or by seven fleeting and ruddy horses.<sup>37</sup> In one verse (RV. 7.77.3), he is depicted as a white brilliant stallion brought by Ūṣā. All the solar gods are inalienably connected with the horse. Therefore, it is evident that the deity is no other than the Sun god himself. Thus, an intermediary stage emerges in the development of the solar images from a winged one to the *udīcyaveśī* along with the horse. The display of altogether three lotuses may indicate that the devotee

or the sculptor felt like demonstrating the Indianness of the solar iconography in view of unavoidable absorption of alien traits. The flow of the same impulse in the successive period is evidenced by the representation of three lotuses in each of the two hands in the Kashipur (North 24 Parganas, West Bengal) Sun image of the late Gupta period. The display of the plantain tree, which is associated with the Sun worship, points to the vitality as well as the efforts of the regional traits to survive even in the face of the foreign ones. The Hadipur terracotta serves as one of the best examples of the *udīcyaveśa*-type of Sūrya in its very nascent stage in ancient Vaṅga.

The worship of the Sun-deity had also infiltrated largely into the various strata of the society in early Bengal.<sup>38</sup> Side by side with the anthropomorphic representation, the aniconic representation of the Sun god and its worship might have also been practiced during this period in Bengal.<sup>39</sup>

A terracotta tablet (early 4th-5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) discovered from Harinarayanpur<sup>40</sup> (South 24 Parganas) represents the solar deity as standing and holding two full-blossomed lotuses in two hands by their stalks. He is endowed with a flat-cap-like headdress and bejeweled with long earrings, necklace and torque. He is also clad in a coat, trousers and boots. Two pillar-like objects are also engraved in the relief. These remind us of the Sūrya pillar of the second cent. A. D. from Nagarjunakonda and may, therefore, be taken as portraying the Sun in addition to his iconic representation.

It appears that in India, the Sun god anthropomorphically have been visualized in two forms. The first one originated with a concept of the Sun as a beautiful celestial winged bird *Garutmān* (*divyaḥ sa suparṇa Garutmān*) by the Ṛgvedic seers. The other, which is also based on the *Ṛgveda*<sup>41</sup> envisaged the Sun god as riding a chariot drawn by

horses. Here the divinity is conceived as being flanked by his two consorts - Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā. The four-horsed terracotta Sūrya from Chandraketugarh clearly attests to the developed concept of Sūrya that was current in early Bengal in the 1st century A.D.

From the early centuries of the Christian era, the solar cult in northern India seems to have developed along a definite line. The north Indian form came to be reoriented largely by the East Irānian style of Sun worship, which is testified by the images of the divinity in both stone and terracotta, hailing from different parts of northwestern and eastern India. This reoriented form constitutes the third concept in the field of the solar iconography. The terracotta image of Sūrya portrayed on the Hadipur Seal is to be taken as falling within this third form in its very nascent stage in ancient Bengal. The northerner's dress (*udīcyaveśa*) happens to be the greatest feature of this form of solar iconography. The stress is mainly laid on the close covering of the god's body with a coat of mail and his wearing the *avyāṅga* and the boots (*upānat-pinaddha padayugalam* of later texts) together with such other attributes as lotus-flowers with stalk, a crown, ornamented earrings, long necklace etc.

The intimate connection of the east Irānian mode of Sun worship with the remodeled solar cult in northern India is further heightened by Varāhamihira. He lays down (*Bṛhat saṁhitā*, Ch. 59, V.19) that it was the Magas who were entitled to install ceremonially the images of Sūrya in temples.<sup>42</sup> That the Maga Brāhmaṇas were held in high esteem and reverence also by the people of ancient Bengal is evidenced by a fragmentary Kharoṣṭhī inscription in a terracotta potsherd<sup>43</sup> from Chandraketugarh (North 24 Parganas) of c. late last or early 2nd century A. D. The Inscription<sup>44</sup> has been read by B. N. Mukherjee as "*ja'adha Makatreke vajtra dvr (I) je dhadh (e)...* (=Jayanto- Makatah

*eko vastrah dvijah*)". It has been suggested about a victorious Brāhmaṇa from Maka called Vastra (Vajtra) and the victory is relating to the theological discourses.<sup>45</sup> That the Sun worshippers were not used to accept discomfiture at the hand of the proponents of other sects is evident from the fact that Śāṅkarāchārya had to face the Sun-worshippers in the Deccan. In view of the discovery of *udīcyaveśī* Sūrya images in early Bengal as well as of the relevant reference in contemporary inscription, it may be said that the victorious Brāhmaṇa was no other a than a Maga priest who must have come to Bengal and install ceremonially the images of the Sun god. Interestingly, the inscription in question was written in the Kharoṣṭhī language only while the others found in ancient Vaṅga are mostly written in the Brāhmī and Brāhmī-Kharoṣṭhīscript. This also points to the introduction of the northerner type of solar icons in Bengal by its new settlers who had brought the Maga priests along with them or invited them in the succeeding ages to officiate in Sun worship.

In the innovatory process of solar iconography, the Sun-image illustrates the next significant stage not only in early Bengal but also in other places of the country. The switchover began with denuding the torso of the god of the *udīcyaveśa* without sacrificing the artistic beauty. The lower part of the *udīcyaveśa* as well as the booted feet lost its significance before the high-pitched tempo of a total Indianised version of the icon. This very style constitutes the final stage in the evolutionary process of the iconic representation of Sūrya in ancient Vaṅga. The composite figure showing the Sūrya image of the 5th century A.D. from Indian Museum and the Kashipur (North 24 Parganas) Sūrya image of the 7th century A.D.- all exhibit slow but steady shedding off of the northerner's dress, though the *avyaṅga* (waist-girdle) and the booted feet are retained in

all the cases. The next stage in the evolution of solar icons was greater amplification and embellishment of the Sun-figure and the depiction of more number of his attendants. As an example, we can cite the bluish basalt stone-image of Sūrya (C. 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) found at Deorā in the district of Bogra.<sup>46</sup>

No punch-marked nor cast-coins have yet been discovered in Bengal similar to those of the Uddehika and Pāñcāla Mitra chiefs like Sūryamitra and Bhānumitra, which shows on their reverse the Sun-disc on a pedestal, though the pre-Gupta Sun-images in terracotta are not unknown. Under this perplexing circumstance, it is not possible to say definitely whether the anthropomorphic illustration of the Sun in ancient Bengal was followed by its adoration in emblematic form as was current in many other places of the country where a wheel, a round golden plate, a lotus flower, etc. were generally employed in the performance of the Vedic rituals. Anyway, the Sun god seems to have enjoyed, like Indra and Agni, wide popularity in ancient Vaṅga, possibly among the various strata of the society during the Post-Mauryan and Pre-Gupta period. This becomes evident from the wide availability of contemporary terracotta icons of the god in lower West Bengal. In an agriculture-based society, the importance of the Sun worship could not have been of lesser degree indeed. It is said in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (54.5) that the oblation offered to Agni is received by the Sun who in turn gives birth to rain. Rain produces food and the food (so begotten) sustains the people.

Archaeological materials also demonstrate that the image worship of the god developed in early Bengal in accordance with an idea of divinity as found in Chandraketugarh in the form of a winged deity. The indigenously is discernable in such attributes as the *maṅgal ghaṭa* with sprouting leaves, plantain tree, etc., as seen

above. The extension of the Kuṣāṇa Empire towards east and the associated business activities perhaps led to the founding of urbanized settlements by the immigrants from the Kharoṣṭhī-using region of the northwest India. It is interesting to note that the tradition introduced by the Maga Brāhmaṇas in fashioning Sun images in early Vaṅga continued to guide in its later representations. Ancient Vaṅga played a great role not only in the evolutionary process of the solar iconography in Bengal, but also in establishing the cult finally in its land in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. Early Vaṅga could also successfully introduce Sun worship amongst its heterogeneous groups of people.

## II

### UNDER THE GUPTAS

Sun worship, which was very much popular in ancient Vaṅga during the post-Maurya and pre-Gupta period, did not die out with the passage of time. On archaeological evidences, we can definitely say that the popularity of Sun worship in ancient Vaṅga extended further into the other parts of Bengal in the early days of the Gupta age.<sup>47</sup>

The Guptas were prominent followers of Brāhmaṇism and at the time of their reign, Purāṇic Brāhmaṇism was emerging and starting to spread all over India. In this very period, principal Purāṇas like the *Vāyu*, *Viṣṇu* and *Matsya* were composed and Purāṇic gods and goddesses were being worshipped. The age witnessed the granting of land to Brāhmaṇas, various Brāhmaṇical sacrifices, the vogue of worship of Purāṇic deities and the founding of new settlement of Brāhmaṇas. Bengal remained under the Gupta rule up to the middle or the end of the sixth century, the centre of this region of their realm being the *Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti*. Commercial prosperity in this land reached its pinnacle in this very age. As a part of the political and economic unity of the

Gupta Empire, Bengal was affected by the strong-flowing stream of religion and culture from all over India. The epigraphic records of the Gupta period found in north Bengal at places like Dhanāidaha,<sup>48</sup> Baigrām,<sup>49</sup> Kalāikuri,<sup>50</sup> Dāmodarpur,<sup>51</sup> and Pāhārpur<sup>52</sup> contain names of a large number of Brāhmaṇas settled in Bengal. Of them, some belonged to the Ṛgvedic School and others to Yajurvedic or Sāmavedic schools. Most of these Gupta epigraphs record grants of lands to the Brāhmaṇas; the purpose of a grant used to be the performance of the *Agnihotra* rites or the *Pañcha-mahāyajña* sacrifices or construction and renovation of a temple for the regular daily service and worship of the deity. In the sixth century, the current of Vedic religion and culture had reached the easternmost borders of Bengal. We learn from the Nidhanpur Copper Plate inscription (648 A.D.) of Bhāskaravarma that during the reign of Bhūtivarmā, more than two hundred Brāhmaṇa families belonging to various *gotras* and Vedic *Śākhās* were settled in Pañcakhaṇḍa village in Śrīhaṭṭa district. The Lokanātha edict of the seventh cent. A.D. reveals that in Samataṭa, the jungle had been cleared for a new settlement and all who resided there were Brāhmaṇs versed in the four *Vedas*.

With the spread of the Vedic Brāhmaṇism everywhere in Bengal, the cult of Vedic Sun god Savitā was brought in by the Brāhmaṇas along with their daily programme of rituals and prayers. Every twice-born householder is enjoined to perform the *Sandhyopāsana*, a form of Sun worship by muttering the *Gāyatrī Mantra* with facing towards the east in the morning and the north-east in the evening.<sup>53</sup> It is also prescribed to offer an *arghya* to the Sun.<sup>54</sup> As the *Sandhyā* was to be performed in accordance with the method laid down in the *Gṛhyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras* every day by every Brāhmaṇa, it

may be presumed that the worship of the Sun in its spiritualized form was a very significant aspect of societal life in the Gupta era too.

References are found in the Gupta inscriptions to the worship of the Sun god.<sup>55</sup>

The earliest inscriptional evidence for the worship of the Sun in early Bengal comes from Puṇḍravardhana. In the Jagadishpur (Rajshahi) copper plate of 123 Gupta era (447 A.D.) issued from Purṇakauśikā, the headquarters of Śṛṅgaveravīthī, it is mentioned that three residents - Kṣemārka, Bhoyila and Mahīdāsa - had permanently donated lands for the construction of a temple for the thousand-rayed god (*Sahasraraśmi*) Sūrya and also for the expenses for supply of the offerings and oblations consisting of rice, milk and sugar (boiled together), and other charitable deeds, and lastly for the counter-reformation of *khaṇḍa-phutṭa* as well as for the supply of perfume, incense and oil etc.<sup>56</sup>

The temple of the *Sahasraraśmi* (the Sun) was established in the village named Gulmagandhikā adjacent to the Jaina Vihāra.<sup>57</sup> in *Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti*. The inscription also mentions the name of *Sāmbapura* where the temple was situated. Sāmba, the son of Kṛṣṇa by Jāmbavatī, is connected with the worship of the Sun in many late Purāṇas.<sup>58</sup> *Sāmbapura* is another name of *Mūlasthāna* (present Multan in Sind) where Sāmba constructed a Sun temple at Candrbhāgā (modern Chenub in the Punjab), brought eighteen families of the Magas from Śākadvīpa for the office of the priest of the temple and worshipped the Sun god to get cured of leprosy. The import of the Maga Brāhmaṇas into India by Sāmba from Śākadvīpa is also referred to in the Govindapur (Gayā District) stone inscription of poet Gaṅgādhara dated the Śaka year 1059 (=1137-38 A.D.).<sup>59</sup> It seems from the name of the place mentioned in the Jagdishpur inscription that Sāmba myth was well established in the tradition of Bengal at least from the Gupta period.

The Jagadishpur copper plate is an important religious document. Here the temple construction and the solar worship by means of the oblations of rice, milk and sugar, perfume, incense, lamp etc. before a Sun-image is done by the indigenous peoples of India – probably the Vaiśyas. Besides Irānian Magas, the Indians of even orthodox tradition were not far behind in following the practices of worship of the Sun in image and in temple. The name of the Sun god for whom the temple was constructed is purely indigenous i.e. *Sahasraraśmi* and not Irānian Mithra. Thus by the middle of the fifth century A.D. a full-fledged solar sect with all the paraphernalia of a temple, image, priesthood, rites and procedures had come into vogue and Sun worship was widely practiced in this part of Bengal. Thus, the literary evidence of the *Mahābhārata* for the existence of a sect of *Sauras* is corroborated by the epigraphy. The inscription under discussion supplies us the earliest evidence for the existence of a Sun-temple in Bengal by the middle of the fifth century A.D. This monument of the Sun-cult was a result of the collective effort of three residents – a fact that shows that there had been a group of followers of the Sun-sect in *Punḍravardhana-bhukti* as early as the first half of the fifth century A.D. Since the indigenous name of *Sahasraraśmi* is used in it, it appears that there has been indigenous tradition of Sun-temples – a fact that has also been brought to light by the Indor Copper Plate Inscription<sup>60</sup> of Skandagupta (465-466 A.D.), which is next in point of importance to the Jagadishpur Copper Plate as mentioned above.

It appears that from the Gupta period onwards, the Sūrya worship of a purely northern culture brought into India by Irānian and Scythian invaders became very widespread in Bengal. This deity was not related to the Vedic concept of Sūrya, but rather to the idea and ritual of a Sūrya of popular belief. In this connection it may be

pointed out here that the Govindapur inscription<sup>61</sup> (Gayā, Bihar) dated Śaka era 1059 (=1137 A. D.) mentions two brothers Manaratha and Daśaratha belonging to the family of Bharadvāja of the Maga Brāhmaṇa origin. Manaratha's son Gaṅgādhara had married a daughter of Jayapāṇi, an official of the king Gauḍa.

There is sculptural evidence to testify to the wide prevalence and the nature of the Sun worship in the Gupta period onward. The earliest Sun images in India belonging to the Gupta period have been discovered from Kumarpur<sup>62</sup> and Niyamatpur,<sup>63</sup> both in the Rajshahi district, north Bengal, which is roughly the Puṇḍravardhana of ancient times. In both the sculptures, the god is accompanied by his two attendants, Daṇḍī and Piṅgala. The Kumarpur relief shows the god wearing long tunic, flat and low head dress, while in the Niyamatpur relief, the god is dressed in a flat cap and a long tunic fastened to the waist by a belt. In the Kumarpur relief, there are seven horses of the Sun's chariot, which marks a departure in the subcontinent from the custom of Kuṣāṇa artists to provide the *Sūrya-ratha* with only two or four horses. The *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>64</sup> speaks of seven horses and one *cakra* for the chariot of the Sun god. In all the iconographic texts of India, the number of horses in the Sun's chariot is given as seven. In the Niyamatpur relief, the horses are conspicuous by their absence. The wheel of the chariot, the two female attendants of the god and his consorts are absent in both the above images. Most probably, the sculptors of these icons followed a text like the *Bṛhat-saṃhitā*, which even in the middle of the 6th century A. D. described the Sun god alone without any reference to his chariot, horses or attendants.<sup>65</sup> A remarkable innovation is the scarf or belt introduced for the first time in these two images. Both the Sūrya images unmistakably reveal the glittering traces of the iconographic features of the Kuṣāṇa period in dress and

general characteristics. It may be reasonably held that the Sauras or the devotees of Sūrya meant these images from north Bengal for worship of the god. However, in the light of the above, it appears that even in the midst of dominant alien influences in the solar iconography, gradually there began a conscious endeavour for idealization and Indianization of the Sun images in the early Gupta age.

An early 5<sup>th</sup> century terracotta seal of a ruler with the epithet “Laḍhapeya, the sustaining Elephant”<sup>66</sup> from Chandraketurah contains, along with the figure of Agni, the figure of a deity identified as that of Sūrya, which also significantly associates him with agriculture. Sūrya instills life in us and that is why it is known as *Savitṛ*.<sup>67</sup>

Widespread prevalence of the Sun cult all over Bengal from the late Gupta period is substantiated by a number of inscriptions as well as by the discovery of numerous stone sculptures. Indigenous elements in solar iconography are found to have proceeded further in the late Gupta times. The Sun image from Deorā (Bogra)<sup>68</sup> definitely shows some development in the iconic type of Sūrya. However, not much removed in point of date from the Bhumārā<sup>69</sup> (Nagod, Madhya Pradesh) solar relief, it introduces many new specialties not present in the latter. The Bhumārā Sūrya was an accessory figure inside one of the '*caitya*' windows in a Śiva temple, while the Deorā Sūrya seems to have been the most important object of worship in a shrine for the god. The Deorā Sūrya image is clothed in a '*dhoti*' tied round the waist by a girdle with a sword hanging by his left side. The boots on his legs are only partially perceptible. The Kuṣāṇa dress has disappeared and the image is given a complete indigenous character.

The way of treating the horses and the two demons in the Kashipur Sūrya<sup>70</sup> image remind us of the technique of the Chandraketurah terracotta plaques. Further, the display

of three full-blown lotuses in each of the two hands of the same sculpture is found to have followed the tradition set by the above-mentioned first century terracotta seal from Hadipur (North 24 Parganas). Representation of more number of lotuses was perhaps aimed at highlighting the preponderance of the indigenous element in the concept of the solar image. However, it is to be admitted that the Deorā or Kashipur Sun-images seem to be the products of the continuing art-tradition introduced in ancient Vaṅga in the fashioning of Sun-icons by the Maga Brāhmaṇas.<sup>71</sup>

In the Kuṣāṇa period, the Sun images were of two types – seated and *bhadrāsana*. Gupta age witnessed a new more variety of the standing type. Seated images of the Sun god are indeed very rare. However, the early Bengalis were not very averse to represent the Sun god in this rare posture. A miniature bronze Sun image of seated type belonging to the 7th or 8th century A.D.,<sup>72</sup> was found along with an inscribed image of the goddess Sarvāṇī set up by Prabhāvatī, the queen of the Buddhist Devakhaḍga, from some ruins in the village of Deulbāḍī, Comilla. The image follows the Deorā composition in many of its details. We may deduce some important information of Sun worship from the Deulbāḍī icon. No doubt, the Sun god received worship from the Buddhists and that too sometimes simultaneously with Brāhmaṇical deities like Sarvāṇī (Umā or Durgā), the devoted wife of Śiva. The latter fact definitely points to some sort of syncretism in the society. Most probably, the *rogahartā* aspect of Sūrya was responsible for his wide acceptance among the people of different creeds. Secondly, it is also beyond doubt that in addition to worship in temple, the images of the god was also adored by individuals in their houses.

As regards the sociological aspect, the Sun cult had a wide following. The Brāhmaṇas of orthodox Vedic tradition, the Vaiśyas etc. were associated with the solar cult. The connection of the foreigners like the Irānian Magas with the cult of the Sun god needs no further mention. The solar cult was spreading in all the directions of early Bengal as is evident by the finds of the images as well as the inscriptions.

### **Between post-Gupta and pre-Pāla Period:**

Sun worship was not confined only to Puṇḍravardhana or Vaṅga but equally in vogue in Vardhamāna-bhukti i.e. *Uttara-Rādhā* and *Daṇḍabhukti-maṇḍalas*. The Mallasārul Copper Plate inscription<sup>73</sup> (of Vijayasena) of the time of Gopacandra (Regnal Year 3 i.e. 543 A.D.) from Vardhamāna-bhukti refers to *Lokanātha-dharma*, which is identified with the Sun god. The inscription begins with an invocation to Śrī Lokanātha.<sup>74</sup> The epigraph is attached with a seal that bears in relief a standing two-armed figure with a *cakra* in the background. Scholars are not unanimous regarding the identification of the deity represented on the seal. D. C. Sircar<sup>75</sup> holds that Vijayasena was, in all probability, a Buddhist and the *cakra* or the wheel, therefore, represents the *Dharma-cakra* or the wheel of Law and the deity appearing in front of the *cakra* is Śrī Lokanātha i.e. the Buddha. However, Sukumar Sen is of opinion that the seal of Vijayasena actually depicts an effigy of Dharma Sūrya with the wheel of time (*Kāla Cakra*) in the background and emblems of horse in front. Dr. Sen<sup>76</sup> has also suggested that Lokanātha in Bengal appeared in the role of a god around whom the *bhakti* movement got an impetus. However, the identification of the god in question ought to be

considered in the religious background of the sixth century Bengal. The Gupta rule in Bengal from the middle of the fourth to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., no doubt, patronized the Vedic as well as Purāṇic religion. The Buddhist trend in the religious life of Bengal was ushered in under the patronage of the Pālas sometime about the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Therefore, it would be rather hazardous to conclude that a seal of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. from ancient *Rādhā* should represent a Buddhist symbol or deity. Of course, we have to bear in mind that the effigy of the god in front of the wheel bears resemblance neither with any Buddhist deity nor with any Brāhmaṇical god. In spite of that, it is no less significant to study the seal along with the first two lines of the inscriptions where *Śrī Lokanātha* has been equated with *Dharma*. There is least doubt that *Dharma* was recognized for long as the Sun god by the Niṣādas or the Austric-speaking original inhabitants of Bengal.<sup>77</sup> Besides, the *Dharmamaṅgala Kāvya*s, which were composed at a later date in Rādhā, record the earliest tradition of worshipping the Sun god with the name of *Dharma*.<sup>78</sup> Vijayasena, to whom the Mallasāru seal belongs, started his career as a feudatory under Mahārāja Vainyagupta who was a devotee of Śiva and later shifted his allegiance to Gopacandra. It may, therefore, be held that he was a resident of Bengal for quite a long time and had an opportunity to be conversant with the religious tradition of this country. It is no wonder that he should have upheld the worship of *Lokanātha-dharma* associated with the Brāhmaṇical belief. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the Mahāyāna god *Avalokiteśvara* was named *Lokanātha* in Bengal and was associated with the primitive god *Dharma* in course of time. The synthesis thus forged, it is believed, contributed ultimately to the growth of the concept of *bhakti* centering round Sūrya.

We have already noted the familiarity of Bengal with the Sāmba legend in respect of Sun worship. The tradition of Sāmba's disease and cure after wooing the solar deity is again found to have played an important role in the first half of the seventh century A.D. when the key person in Bengal was Śaśānka, the first historical ruler of Gauda. The Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsang portrayed Śaśānka as a persecutor of the Buddhists. While traveling in Magadha in 637-38 A.D., he noted<sup>79</sup> that in recent times, Śaśānka had cut down the Bodhi tree at Gayā and ordered the taking away of the Buddha image in a nearby shrine. He also added that on hearing the execution of his order, Śaśānka was seized with fear, his body produced sores and his flesh peeled off causing his death. An echo is heard in the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, a later text of a Buddhist writer, of the story of Śaśānka's destruction of the Bodhi tree and his consequent death. The same story of Śaśānka's disease is preserved in medieval genealogical (*Kulajī*) works of Bengal Brāhmaṇas.<sup>80</sup> According to the tradition preserved among the *Nadiā Vaṅga Grahavipra Samāja* as well as the *Varendra Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇas*, twelve Brāhmaṇas living on the banks of the Sarayū river were brought by king Śaśānka to Gauda in order to cure himself of an incurable disease by offering sacrifices to the planets (*graha-yajña*). According to this tradition, Śaśānka was healed and rewarded the Brāhmaṇas who then settled in Gauda at his request. These Brāhmaṇas, known as *Grahavipra* and settled in Rādhā and Vaṅga, came to be divided into several sections according to the places of their residence. Given the authenticity of the *Kulajī* texts, it may safely be said that the *Grahayajña*, a component part of the solar religion, was immensely popular in Bengal in the seventh century A.D. as a means of cure from disease so much, so that a great king and a devotee of Śiva like Śaśānka found it advisable to resort to it. The legend also points to the

occasional immigration of the Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇas to Bengal from Upper India, who presumably popularized the worship of the Sun-images and the nine planets by taking advantage of the people's belief in the Sun as the remover of all diseases ('*samasta-ro-gāṇām harttā*').

In addition to the worship of the nine planets, the Sun god continued to receive adoration in the form of *Dharma* as well. The god finds a very reverent mention as the *Dharma* in the Mallasārul Copper Plate and the Nidhanpur inscription<sup>81</sup> of Bhāskara-varman, issued from Karṇasuvarna<sup>82</sup> sometime after the death of Harṣavardhana in 647 A.D. Herein Bhāskaravarman has been compared with *Bhāskara* (*Bhāskaramiva tejasām nilayam*) and his rise has been equaled with that of the '*Bhuvanapati*' i.e. the Sun.<sup>83</sup> The king, like Sūrya who takes away darkness from the world, spread the eternal light of the *Āryadharmā* by removing the accumulated darkness of the *Kaliyuga*.

### III

#### Pāla Period: Epigraphic evidences

The stream of the Vedic religion became gradually stronger during the rule of the Pāla-Candra-Kambojas, though they were ardent followers of Buddhism. In fact, all the Pāla kings were prominent patrons of Brāhmaṇas, Brāhmaṇical images and temples and therefore, made grants of lands for them to enhance their own virtue and renown. Prabhāvatī, the queen of the Buddhist Devakhaḍga, set up an image of the goddess Sarvāṇī (Durgā) with which was found a seated bronze image of Sūrya. A number of inscriptions from the Pāla and Candra age inform that from different parts of India such as Lāṭa (South Gujarat),<sup>84</sup> Madhyadeśa, Kroḍaṅja (Kolāṅcha), Muktāvastu and especially central India, Brāhmaṇas of various *Gotra-pravara* and various Vedic branches as well as

Brāhmaṇas observing the Vedic sacraments came to settle in Bengal. We are also told that many of the Brāhmaṇas who were granted land were most erudite in the *Vedas* and their six branches and proficient in the execution of the Vedic sacrifices and similar rituals. Reference may be made to the Munger inscription of Devapāla, the Badal Pillar inscription<sup>85</sup> as well as the Bhagalpur Copper Plate inscription<sup>86</sup> of the time of Nārāyaṇapāla and the Bāṅgaḍh inscription of Mahīpāla. Mention is made in many inscriptions of the Vedic sacrifices and the *homa* oblation. In this period, Purāṇic grandeur outshone that of this Vedic religion and tradition. The climate of the Vedic religious ritual pervaded the Candra period as well. There are a number of distinct references to the Brāhmaṇas of the different branches of the *Vedas* and to the Vedic oblations and sacrifices. It would seem that the royal officer of the Buddhist Candra and Kamboja regimes called *ritvika* or family priest - was, in fact, a celebrant of the Vedic oblations and sacrifices.

That the Sun god was regularly and devotedly worshipped by a large number of orthodox Brāhmaṇas by means of *Sandhyopāsanā* is beyond any doubt. Sun god and his worship find frequent mention in the contemporary inscriptions too. In some cases, it is mentioned directly while in many more cases his greatness is suggested by way of his comparison with some contemporary dignitaries. This comparative reference is immensely indicative of his respectful position in the mind of the people as well. In verse 8 of the Bāṅgaḍh (Dinajpur) Copper Plate Inscription of Mahīpāla I (988-1023 A.D.), Gopāladeva, son of Rājyapāla and Bhāgyadevī, has been equated with the Sun, the repository of luminosity, produced by the eastern mountains (*'tasmāt Pūrvakṣitighrānnidhiriva'*).<sup>87</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Ṛgvedic description (I.50.4-

8) of the Sun as the source of the light has been repeated here. The Gayā (Kṛṣṇadvārikā Temple) stone Inscription of the time of Nayapāladeva (1038-1055 A.D.) refers to Viśvāditya, son of Śūdraka, as prosperous and endowed with blazing personality as the Sun high up in the sky and sending terrific heat.<sup>88</sup> In another place, the splendour of *Bhāskara* has been attributed to Viśvāditya possessed of unending qualities (*'tejasvitā bhāsvati'*). Atmospheric aspect of the Sun becomes prominent here again. In the contemporary Bāṅgaḍh Praśasti of Mūrti-Śiva, 'Bhānu' (the Sun) shining above the lofty shrine of the Mūrti Śiva has been described as a golden pitcher.<sup>89</sup> The form of the Sun as a red round orb combined with his role as the rain-giver has certainly contributed to such depiction.

In Verse 1 of the Sian (Birbhum) Stone Inscription (approx. 1043 A.D.) Sūrya has been described as the right eye of Viṣṇu (*'pravodhanidre jagatām yasyonmīlanmīlane'*).<sup>90</sup> Analogous descriptions are also found in Verse 2 of the Kamauli copper Plate of Vaidyadeva. In the Vedic literature,<sup>91</sup> Sūrya has been described as the eye of Mitra and Varuṇa as well as the soul of all – movable and stationary.<sup>92</sup> However, here the inscription refers to the Sun as the eye of such a deity who, in the *Ṛgveda*, appears as an insignificant aspect of the former. This small epigraphic data is extremely important in understanding the relative position of both Sūrya and Viṣṇu in the contemporary society. It is evident that in the eleventh century itself began the process of eclipse of Sūrya by Viṣṇu, whose cult seems to have become most popular in Bengal, at least during the last two or three centuries of the Hindu rule, if we are to judge by the number of cult images which mostly belong to this period. Presumably, the Sun cult was growing inwardly weak because of various factors<sup>93</sup> and consequently being subjected to aggression of

Vaiṣṇavism that perhaps did not like the separate existence of the parent cult, especially in view of the latter's championing by the priests of the foreign origin.

However, the inscription in question gives us some tremendously important hints about the popularity of Sun worship in the *Rādhā-janapada*. It appears from Verse 17 that the king had made a gift of a chariot for a certain shrine of the solar deity. Here is a reference to something similar to a moving victory-pillar given by the king (“*Viśrāmārthamivaiṣa jangama-jayastambho vabhau yo'rpitaḥ*”). The term ‘*viśrāmārtham*’ probably implies that when tired, the horses of the Sun's chariot will take rest for a while at the peak of the temple.<sup>94</sup> Anyway, the ‘*ratha*’ might have been presented for the annual solar car-festival (‘*Rathayātrā*’) an account of which is found in the *Sāmba P.* (34.14 ff). We learn from the *Skanda P.* (Ch. 43 Verse 33) that at Ujjayinī, the *Rathayātrā* was performed twice in a year, one known as *Āṣāḍī* held in the month *Āṣāḍha* and the other called *Kārtikī* held in the month of *Kārttika*. On these two occasions, a great fair was held at the temple and people from different parts of the country took part in it. Something similar might have been in vogue in this case as well. In another verse (No.46), we get an indirect reference to a gigantic temple of the Sun god because this religious structure has been conceived as the palace of Sūrya where he would stay abandoning the abode of the heaven.<sup>95</sup> In addition, there are also references to the offering of golden lotus for the Navagrahas and silver lotus for the Sun (i.e. *Caṇḍāṃśu*).<sup>96</sup> The gift of lotus made of a precious metal like silver and the use of gold in making the images of Sūrya as well as the Navagrahas presuppose the fact that the god and the nine planets were worshipped by a section of wealthy people. Gold and silver find mention in the *Sāmba P.*<sup>97</sup> as the materials for the Sun images, other five being copper, earth, stone,

wood and paint. *Yājñavalkya* has also prescribed the use of silver as one of the materials for making the images of the Navagrahas. Therefore, the Sian inscription gives a good deal of information concerning Sun worship in the *Rādhā* region.

Towards the end of the Pāla period, Sun worship gained immense popularity among the Brāhmaṇa rulers of Gayā. The Gayā Gadādhara Temple Inscription<sup>98</sup> of the time of Nayapāla begins with “*Om̐ namo Mārtaṇḍāya*” and the first verse is devoted to the Sun as well. The founder of the temple apparently was a *Parama-saura*. Similarly, when the issuer was a follower of Śiva, he assumed the title *Parama-Maheśvara* as we come across the case of Vijayasena of the Deopara Praśasti, which begins with the salutation to Śiva, i.e. ‘*Om̐ om̐ namaḥ Śivāya*’. The Madhainagar Copperplate of *Parama-Vaiṣṇava* Lakṣmaṇasena commences with ‘*Om̐ om̐ namo Nārāyaṇaya*’. It is known from the Gayā Akṣayavaṭa Temple Inscription of Viśvarūpa Viśvāditya (a feudatory of the Pālas) incised in the regal year 5 of Vīrahapāla III (1043-70 A.D.), which begins with adoration to Śiva, informs that the image of *Śuklabhānu* (Sūrya) was installed in the temple of the *Prapitāmaheśvara* (Brahmā) at Gayā together with the icons of *Gaṅgeśa*, *Kanakeśvara*, *Ambujabhava*, *Viśvarūpeśvara*, *Gaṅgeśa*, *Gadādhara*, *Ḡḍhreṣa*, *Sujanārdana* and *Vaṭeśa*.<sup>99</sup> It is evident that the Sun god was looked upon absolutely as equal to the gods of the major cults and worshipped by other sects as well.

The Gayā Śitalā Temple Inscription<sup>100</sup> of Yakṣapāla<sup>101</sup> of the time of Govindapāla (1161 A.D.-1165 A.D.) also begins with “*Om̐ namaḥ Sūryāya*”, and here also the first verse is dedicated to the Sun god - “*Viṣaya-madhutkara-pūrṇa prāṇinikāyālīm̐ viśva-śatapattram/ aṣṭāśā-dala-ramyām prakāśayannavatu vo Bhānuḥ*” (V.1). On the ground cited above, it can safely be concluded that Yakṣapāla was also a *Parama-saura*.

*Sūryavandanā* in the *Maṅgalācaraṇa* and *Sūrya-praṇāma* as we come across in the present inscription seems to have been popular since the days of the *Ṛgveda*. The inscription in question also refers to the construction of a temple where the images of *Maunāditya*, *Sahasraliṅga*, *Kamalārdhāṅgīna-Nārāyaṇa*, *Someśvara* (twice), *Phalgunātha*, *Vijayāditya* and *Kedāreśvara* were installed.<sup>102</sup> Of the names of the gods just mentioned, *Maunāditya* and *Vijayāditya* appear to be other names of *Sūrya*.

In the Mainamati Plate of Govindacandra (1020 -1055 A.D.) of the contemporary Candra dynasty, the king has been described as shining as the *Pracaṇḍaraśmi Sūrya*.<sup>103</sup> In the Ramganj Copperplate of Īśvaraghoṣa (1040 - 1080 A.D.), a contemporary of Vighrahapāla III, Balaghoṣa, Dhavalaghoṣa and Mahāmaṇḍalika Īśvaraghoṣa – all three have been described as (well-known/veritable as) the Sun.<sup>104</sup> It appears that this royal family endeavoured to depict them as belonging to the solar race. In the Bhuvaneśvar Inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva (1073 -1127 A.D), minister of Harivarmandeva of the Varman dynasty, Bhavadeva, the founder of the family, has been described as a giver of fruit like the Sun (*kalaśya dātāpi tāpanapratimaḥ* - Verse 5).<sup>105</sup> In the Kamauli Plate of Vaidyadeva,<sup>106</sup> *Sūrya* has not only been described as the right eye of Hari, but also used at several places as the object of comparison under different names such as ‘*Bhānu*’ (Verse 10), ‘*Arkadeva*’, ‘*Mārttaṇḍa*’( “*sākṣāt divaspativikramah*,” verse 14) or ‘*dinapati*’ (“*ūjirtairdinapatiḥ*, verse 19). The inscription further informs that the Pāla king Vighrahapāla was born in the family of the Sun, the right eye of Hari (*etasya dakṣiṇadriśo vaṁśe Mihirasya jātavān pūrvam*). We have already noticed in the Sian inscription (Supra, p. 109) the similar epithet about the Sun.

The Kamauli Plate leads us to presume that the Pāla kings had belonged to the solar dynasty.<sup>107</sup> In the *Rāmacarita* (I. 4) of Sandhyākara Nandī, Dharmapāla is described as 'the light of Samudra's race' (*samudra-kula-dīpa*) i.e., descended from the ocean.<sup>108</sup> However, both the records belong to the very end of the Pāla age; naturally, very little weight may be given to the theories put forward by them about the origin of the Pāla Royal family. Besides, the membership of the solar or lunar dynasty was usually claimed for most of the contemporary dynasties and there is nothing distinctive about it. Nevertheless, the *Samudra* theory of origin is certainly a novel one, a distant echo of which may also be heard in an old Bengali text called *Dharma-Maṅgala* of Ghanarāma.<sup>109</sup> It tells about the exile of Dharmapāla's queen Vallabhādevī to forest because of sonlessness, where her relationship with the ocean gave birth to a son.

According to Tāranātha, Gopāla was succeeded by a son who was begotten by Nāgarāja Sagarapāla, the sovereign of the ocean, on his younger queen.<sup>110</sup> This is evidently another version of the Pāla origin from *samudra* or ocean. R.D. Banerji in his endeavour to interpret '*Samudra-kula*' rationally says that the Pālas came from the sea.<sup>111</sup> However, reconciliation has been attempted between the two different traditions of *Samudra* and *Sūrya* origin by holding that *Samudra-kula* means *Sūrya-kula* or solar race to which Samudra, the son of the mythical king Sagara, belonged.<sup>112</sup>

In the 11th - 12th centuries A.D., the Vedic religion made a great headway under the patronage of the Varman and Sena rulers. The beginnings of the transformation had become quite evident towards the end of the Pāla and Kamboja era. From the second half of the eleventh century, the descendants of the Buddhist Pāla kings gradually took to Brāhmaṇism. More and more Brāhmaṇs<sup>n</sup> emigrated from the Central regions. In the

inscriptions and the literature of the times, the Brāhmaṇical ideals along with several sacrifices are very clear, as is the effort to diffuse them throughout the social and religious spheres.

The Bhuvaneśwar Inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva, minister of the Varman King Harivarman (1073-1127 A.D.),<sup>113</sup> refers to hundred villages inhabited by the Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedic lore. The Belava (Bhagalpur) Copper Plate (1142 A.D.) of Bhojavarman (1137-1145 A.D.)<sup>114</sup> refers to the grant of land in Puṇḍravardhana to the Brāhmaṇas who hailed from *Uttara Rādhā* and were attached to the study of the Vedas. The Varman rulers are known to have been great patrons of three Vedas.

In the inscriptions belonging to the Sena rulers, we find references to the Brāhmaṇas belonging to the Vedic *Śākhās* like *Kauthumī*, *Āśvalāyana*, *Kānva* and *Paippalāda*. The Barrackpore (24-Parganas) Copper Plate grant (1159 A.D.) of Vijayasena<sup>115</sup> records the donation of lands in the Khāḍi Viṣaya of *Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti* to the priests who performed *Kanakatulā Puruṣa Mahādāna* on behalf of the chief queen Bilāsadevī on the day of lunar eclipse. The Naihati Copper grant of Vallālasena<sup>116</sup> (1159 -1179 A.D.) records the donation of land to *Ācārya Vāsudevaśarman* for supervision of *Hemāsya Mahādāna* on the bank of the river Gaṅgā during a solar eclipse. The Tarpandighi (Balurghat, South Dinajpur) Copper Plate grant<sup>117</sup> (1181 A.D.) of Lakṣmaṇasena records the donation of a village in Varendrī to *Ācārya Īśvara Devaśarman* as fee for his service in the *Hiraṇyasya Mahādāna*. Again, the Madhainagar (Pabna district) Copper plate grant (1204 A.D.) of Lakṣmaṇasena<sup>118</sup> records donation of land made by the king for use of the priest who seems to have acted as the supervisor or the proprietary for *Aindri Śānti*. Therefore, it is evident that most of the Sena records were

land grants made to the Brāhmaṇas on some specific occasions of rites and rituals. Anyway, there is no room for doubt that the Sun god received adoration from those orthodox Brāhmaṇas by traditional way of *Sandhyopāsanā* along with the muttering of *Gāyatrī*. In *Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva*<sup>119</sup> of Halāyudhamiśra, it is found that the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal were very much unwilling to study the Vedic *mantras* with much curiosity and solemnity. Nevertheless, the special command over the Vedas attributed to the family of Guravamiśra speaks quite differently. The Sun god began to be worshipped according to the Vedic injunctions in the natural solar form, as the repository of light, heat and all energies that sustain the living world. With the gradual expansion of the Brāhmaṇical settlements in Bengal, there remains little scope of doubt that the cult of the Sun god in its Vedic form made its appearance. In addition to the Brāhmaṇas, the upper-caste Hindus, at least to some extent, had Vedic sacrifices performed and the Vedas recited, mainly due to the inspiration and assistance of ritualistic Brāhmaṇs who had come from the west.<sup>120</sup>

Abundantly available are the references - both direct and indirect - to Sun worship in inscriptions during the Sena period. In verse 8 of the Barrackpore (District 24-Parganas) Copper Plate of Vijayasena, dated in the year 62 (=1158 A.D.), Vijayasena has been described as the dazzling Sun on the top of the Golden mountain - "*kanakagiriśirovarti-mārtaṇḍatejāh*." In verse 5, Hemantasena has also been described as having become like the Sun an object of veneration for the (three) worlds - "*Raviriva jagatam mānanīyo babhūva*".<sup>121</sup> The Naihati Copper grant of Vallālasena<sup>122</sup> (1159-1179 A.D.) refers to the performance of the *Hemāsya Mahādāna Yajña* by Vilāsadevī, mother of Vallālasena on the bank of the Ganges on the occasion of a solar eclipse. We learn

from the Sanokhar Inscription of the regal year 9 of Vallālasena, incised on a copper case that the case was gifted by the chief priest of the temple for the setting up of a Sun-image.<sup>123</sup>

Viśvarūpasena (son of Lakṣmaṇasena) and his son Sūryasena were staunch devotees of Sūrya and it was in this period that Sūrya worship was further enhanced. The affiliation of these two kings to the solar cult in addition to the religious faith of their predecessors is quite significant. Viśvarūpasena is said to have been seriously sick or made captive, resulting in his abdicating the throne in 1210 A.D. in favour of Sūryasena and again ascending the same five years later.<sup>124</sup> The possibility of prolonged and severe ailment of Viśvarūpasena seems to be most probable, which impelled him to profess the cult of Sūrya who has been described in the Bairhaṭṭā image inscription as the remover of all diseases (*"samasta-roḡānām hartā"*).<sup>125</sup> The Madanapādā (Faridpur) Copperplate (1220 A.D.)<sup>126</sup> and the Calcutta Sahitya Parisat Copper-plate of Viśvarūpasena<sup>127</sup> as well as the Edilpur (Faridpur district) Copperplate of Sūryasena<sup>128</sup> begins with an invocation of the God Nārāyaṇa, the Sun and the Moon. In these inscriptions, the Sun god is described as the "friend of lotus-beds, the source of deliverance of the three worlds withheld in the prison of darkness and the wonderful bird of the tree of the Vedas, soaring high up on his two alternately expanding white and black wings, of which one is white and the other black (i.e. the two fortnights)". Suchlike description of the Sun represents the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa line of Sun worship that was going on parallel with his worship in image. The kings' preference for this mode of Sun worship may be seen as indicative of a strong undercurrent against the prevailing practice of worshipping the god anthropomorphically. It is worth mentioning that Viśvarūpasena has described himself as

a devout worshipper of the Sun god (*Parama-saura*) in his two inscriptions. Even the *Parama-Vaiṣṇava* Lakṣmaṇasena has been described as *Parama-Saura* in the Madanpādā inscription. Evidently, it is nothing but a traditional attempt to associate one's predecessor with his own religious faith. Sūryasena, like his father, has also identified himself as the *Parama-saura*. Both of them have been described as “*Senakula-kamalavikāśa-bhāskara*”.

### **Varman-Sena Age: *Literary evidences***

Sun worship finds ample references in the contemporary religious and secular literary texts. There are many eulogical verses around the Sun in the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa*, an anthology compiled by the Buddhist abbot Vidyākara who appears to have flourished in Bengal towards the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The position that the anthologist accorded to the section (no. 7) on Sun immediately after those on Śiva (Sections 4 & 5) and Viṣṇu (Section 7) shows that he considered the Sun to be one of the chief divinities of Hinduism. There is also abundant evidence in inscriptions and literary texts that by his time the Vedic worship of the Sun had grown into an important cult, strengthened by influences from the Sun worship of Persia. The four verses, which Vidyākara quotes, all refer to the Sun at sunrise, which is the time when all Hindus, regardless of sect, address their prayers to the heavenly body. More verses on the Sun are found in the non-religious sections such as in Section 9 on ‘Summer’ and Section 27 on ‘Sunset’. With a view to illustrating the concept of Sūrya as held by a few poets, though belonging to different ages, all the four verses mentioned in the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa* are as follows.<sup>129</sup>

a) “The sharp-rayed Sun, driving with horses  
over and below the endless world,  
whose disc thereby moves swiftly as a whirling brand,  
I pray may aid you by his casting out all darkness  
with his shafts of light as warlike  
as burning spears of gold”. ***Rājśekhara*, verse no.148**

b) I praise the disc of the rising Sun,  
red as a parrot's beak sharp-rayed,  
friend of the lotus grove  
an earring for the goddess of the east. ***Vidyā*, verse no. 149**

c) Praise to the Sun,  
a gem in the serpent's hood that is the Eastern Hill,  
a golden flower in the sapphire-tree of heaven:  
a farewell bowl for the captain-saint  
who sets out to cross the sea of transmigration. ***Varāhamihira*, verse no. 150**

d) The Sun grows steadily from its watered root  
by reason of the ambrosia poured from her moon-bowl by Night  
as by a gardener girl desiring a new garden,  
in fact, the world.

As it grows from its trench,  
The Eastern Mountain's ring of peaks,  
red as fresh coral, may it bring you joy,  
this first sprout of the tree of day. ***Mayūra* verse no. 151**

A number of verses of different poets on the Sun occur in the *Devapravāha* (Section on gods) of the *Sadukti-karnāmṛta* (1206 A.D.),<sup>130</sup> an anthology compiled by Śrīdharadāsa under the patronage of Lakṣmaṇasea. This, no doubt, points to an important position of the Sun god in the prevailing religious horizon. In a verse (V.16.1) of Umāpatidhara, a fellow poet of Jayadeva in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena, quoted in the *Sadukti-karnāmṛta* (1206 A.D.), salutation has been made to the east filled with fragrance, which constitutes a clear reference to *Sūryapraṇāma*, a popular mode of Sun worship since the Ṛgvedic age. Another verse (IV.6.5) of the same poet says eulogizing the Sun that *Bhagavāna Sūrya* who beautifies all his lotuses simultaneously along with waking all up, is to be worshipped, even though he is heated.<sup>131</sup> Dhoyī, a court-poet of Lakṣmaṇasena, refers in his *Pavana-dūta* to the Sun temple at (Trivenī), while directing the messenger wind to salute the Sun god ('*Raghukulaguru*') and offer water to him on the bank of the river Ganges before departing from there.<sup>132</sup> Halāyudha, a well-known writer in the history of the *Smṛti* digests of Bengal and a contemporary of Lakṣmaṇasena, has showered a eulogy of the Sun god in the *Maṅgalācarana* of his *Brāhmaṇa-sarvasya* thus: "I eulogize the *bharga* (*tejaḥ*) of Savitā that gives light, like a lamp, to the three worlds - *bhū*, *bhavaḥ* and *svaḥ*. May the Sun god do good to us, who is the ornament of the sky, the cause of the three *kālas*, full of Vedas and the way to obtain the *trivargas*<sup>133</sup> (three objects of worldly existence) - *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. I adore the Gāyatrī Devī who is venerable in the three worlds and who is saluted three times even by *Trilocana* (Śiva) himself".<sup>134</sup>

Describing the advent of Sūrya along with the causes of his worship in his work, Halāyudha says, “Savitā is coming. What is the form of the Savitā? Possessing qualities of *śṛṣṭi* etc. How is he coming? By a chariot. What sort of chariot? Made of gold. While coming, what is he doing? Observing the people in the world. Witnessing all the actions of men who do lots of virtues and vices - visible and invisible - in the workplace of the world. Engaging the deities and the mortals in their affairs. Being engaged in their work at Sunrise, people gratify the gods and in return, the latter give rain. Coming everyday to this land, the god Savitā repeatedly helps in this cooperation between man and deity. Coming with whom? Along with the night. What sort of night? With black or gloomy night.”<sup>135</sup> As virtuous acts are not performed at night, hence the nighttime has been called black or full of gloom. This means: the god Savitā who is the impeller of the actions of gods and men and who everyday appears witnessing the virtuous and sinful acts of mortals located in the workplace of the world, I worship him.

According to the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*.<sup>136</sup> the Sun worshippers gain recovery from different kinds of illness. In this regard, it has been said in this text: “Brahmā said: after taking a bath at the three periods of the day (i.e. dawn, noon and Sunset), if you adore the Sun devotedly along with *mantra*, you will be cured from ailments. If you devotedly worship the Sun god for one year with all the sixteen items of the ritual<sup>137</sup> by muttering the hymn – ‘*Om hring namobhagavate Sūryāya paramātmāne svahā*’, you are sure to get rid of disease. I am giving you this wonderful armour<sup>138</sup> of the Sun. Out of fear, ailment never comes close to the possessor of this armour as the snakes fearfully run away at the sight of *Garuḍa*. Disclose this *kavaca* only to your own disciple who is of a pure heart and of an intense devotion to his preceptor. In the event of offering this *kavaca*

to other's disciple of a wicked nature, the giver will have to court a sure death. The seer of this *kavaca* named *Jagadvilakṣmaṇa* is Prajāpati, its metre is Gāyatrī and the Sun himself is the god. It is made use of for removal of all types of ailments and for attainment of beauty. As soon as one is endowed with this *kavaca*, he attains holiness. It is the embodiment of every essence and the destroyer of all kinds of sin... He who suffers a severe leprosy, whose flesh peels off, who is an eyeless *mahābranī*, who is attacked with tuberculosis, acute pain and many a disease, will undoubtedly be cured from his ailment and enjoy the virtue of bath-taking at all the places of pilgrimage, in case he listens to this hymn for one month, eating *haviṣāṇna* (boiled sunned rice and *ghee*).<sup>139</sup>

In this connection, the *Bṛhadharma Purāṇa*<sup>140</sup> says, "He who worships the Sun would be healthy, wealthy and prosperous and repair to the holy immortal feet. He who worships the Sun repeatedly with utmost devotion and eat only at night. will go to the heaven." The same Purāṇa provides us with some important information about the priests who played an important role in the spread of Sun cult in India. It is mentioned here that the Devala Brāhmaṇas who immigrated to India from Śākadvīpa has been known as the Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇas and the descendants of some Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇa father and Vaiśya mother are called the *Grahavipras* or *Gaṇakas*.<sup>141</sup> These *Grahavipras* officiated in the religious ceremonies. A reference to these Brāhmaṇas is also found in a verse in the *Āryasaptaśatī* where the *grahaśānti* (propitiation of planets by sacrifices etc.) has been beautifully described in connection with a deep attachment of a lady-love for her lover.<sup>142</sup> Besides, the *gaṇaka* (astrologer) class was very skilled in astrology and used to tell one's fortune by drawing lines on the ground with a piece of chalk. However, they were very much ill famed in the society for their hypocritical nature - so much so that

they have even found a mention in a verse in the *Āryasaptaśatī* while describing the deceitfulness of the lover towards his lady-love.<sup>143</sup> Naturally, these astrologers who are even called *kaitavid*<sup>144</sup> (master fraud) were not at all an object of honour everywhere in the society and usually looked upon as *patita* (fallen, degraded or outcast) because they had given up the Vedic religion and got excessively attached to astrology. A branch of this class who were known as *Agradānī Brāhmaṇa* were also regarded as *patita* because they used to receive first gift of the funeral ceremony from the *Śūdras*.

## Worship through Images:

In addition to the epigraphic evidences, a large number of the images of the Sun god have been found in Bengal during the 8th to the 12th century A. D., indicating the great popularity of Sun-cult and consequently the growth and development of Sun-images.

### 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

Three images of the solar divinity are known to belong to the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., all-datable in its second half. Based on their find spots, we can safely say that the worship of the god in image form was prevalent in *Varendrī* and some parts of *Uttar Rādhā*. Continuation of earlier fashion and appropriation of newer trends are clearly noticeable in their iconography. The terracotta *Sūrya*<sup>145</sup> from *Pāhārpur* represents the god with a halo, seated as cross-legged and holding full-blown lotuses into uplifted hands, which reminds us of the god on the *Bodh-Gayā* railings. The relief from *Bhadrakālī* (Hooghly)<sup>146</sup> with a clear sign of emphasis on flatness not only echoes the two-dimensional art of *Bhārhut* but

also depicts the deity (Pl. 10a) in full anthropomorphic form ignoring the prescribed rule of the *Matsya Purāṇa*. Another feature in this sculpture not very uncommon in Pāla sculptures is the representation of the deity inside a shrine with minor niches within itself shaped as *caitya*. The appearance of the *caitya* windows in solar iconography is quite natural in view of the fact that the Pāla kings were ardent patrons of Buddhism. The temple design in the sun-icon indicates the popularity of temple-concept in the worship of the Sun god. Sūrya and his two attendants Daṇḍī and Piṅgala are represented as wearing a pair of pointed boots, as it would be seen in the sun-icons belonging to the Pāla Bengal. The chariot and horses along with the charioteer vanish from the scene. The god holds a lotus in each hand, the petals of which facing the viewer are open while those of the upraised flower are closed. This style of Sūrya image does not tally with that of the earlier images of the Gupta period when sometimes the divinity held three flowers instead of two in each hand. The third 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. image<sup>147</sup> in grey sandstone comes from Naogāon, Rajshahi. Occurrence of only three Sun images in the three districts of early Bengal along with the possibility of two being used as icon for worship leads us to presume that the anthropomorphic worship of the god had yet not developed on an organized and wide-spread scale because of the strong Brāhmanical concept of the Sun worship as visualized in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa discussed earlier and comparative weakness of the champions of the solar icons. The absence of the female attendants in the Sun images also speaks of its distance from Tāntrik philosophy.

### **9<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.**

The ninth century witnessed greater popularity of the icon-worship of the Sun probably

because of a wider belief in his curative aspect as well as a stable government and liberal religious policy under the Pālas. However, out of the 26 ninth century AD. images noticed hitherto, all the 25 of known provenance hail from Puṇḍravardhana – four <sup>148</sup> from Rajshahi, one from Bogra,<sup>149</sup> three from Dinajpur<sup>150</sup> and 16 from Malda.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, it is quite reasonable to think that image-worship of the solar deity became more popular not only in the district of Rajshahi but also extended to new areas like the districts of Dinajpur and Malda, the last showing comparatively a tremendous vogue of images in the Sun-cult. Wonderful growth of Sun images in comparison to the previous century and greater extension of their find spots might have been due to the spread of the icon-worshippers in different areas and increased belief in the *rogaharttā* concept of the Sun god. The tradition of Sun worship as noticed among the Puṇḍras in the *Ārṣeya Upaniṣad* of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. probably played a prominent role in the ever-increasing popularity of the anthropomorphic worship of the god in the Puṇḍravardhana. Anyway, it is interesting to note that out of 16 Sun images from Malda, 11 came from Gāzole and the rest from Bamangola and Habibpur and all these areas are very close to the district of Dinajpur. With these facts in our hand, we are inclined to presume that a large area in Puṇḍravardhana comprising Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Māldā was emerging as a dominating zone of Sun-cult, its centre being located in the first-named district. It may also be mentioned in this connection that in three of the Gāzole images<sup>152</sup> previously mentioned, neither the Sun god nor his attendants wear any boots – a feature which is extremely rare not only in Bengal but also in the whole of India excepting the South. Generally, Sun images in north and east India are found with booted legs as an essential component of the *udīcyaveśa* or the deity's feet are left uncarved in accordance with the injunction of

the *Matsya Purāṇa*, which prescribes deterrent punishment for such violation. Even the attendant gods and goddesses are similarly represented. Perceptibly, the artists must have followed some iconographic text of South India for those three bootless images. May be, some time in the ninth century A.D. there developed a settlement of the Sun-worshipping people in the Gāzole area where some followers of the Southern tradition of the solar cult preferred to inhabit because of like-mindedness in cult-affiliation. Non-availability of Sun-idols from Rādhā, Vaṅga or Samataṭa may be attributed to the pre-dominance of orthodox Hinduism in those regions.

During the Buddhist Pāla rule in Bengal, the people at large remained within the fold of Brāhmaṅical religions. It appears that Pāla art and culture flourished not only on the patronage of the court but also of the active interest of the rich individuals and exigencies of religious cults.<sup>153</sup> Regarding the execution of a piece of sculpture, the person or persons under whose patronage it was being executed, had nothing to suggest. It was the artists who from time to time within the principles of image making became successful, as suggested by Bhattacharyya<sup>154</sup> in converting an image into a perfect piece of art. This is equally true in cases of some of the excellent pieces of sun-icons. It is, however, difficult to say whether the sun-priests simply enjoined to adhere to the texts strictly or allowed the sculptors to have the liberty while making the images. There is, however, little doubt that for the artistic exuberances including the execution of the sun images during the Pāla-Sena periods, there was any place for the people at large. 'That was basically the art of the higher classes of the influential groups of the contemporary socio-economic order.' We have little evidences of the art of the common people during

these centuries in respect of Sūrya icons until in later centuries when the Sun worship was relegated to the status of folk-religion.

High boots prevail in most of the images of the Sun god as well as his attendants though they are mostly clothed in *dhoti*. A transparent *uttariya* with fluttering ends sometimes adorns the central deity by passing over his arms. Sūrya is endowed with a *kirīṭa* (diadem) which is flat at the top and frequently armed with a sword by his left side – a warrior feature that first made its appearance in the Kashipur sculpture.<sup>155</sup> The god is frequently attended by Piṅgala and Daṇḍī only. Pot-bellied Piṅgala usually carries a pen in his right hand and an inkpot in the left while the *āyudhas* and the posture of Daṇḍī's hand often vary. The left hand of Daṇḍī is sometimes represented as endowed with *śula* or resting on a staff or placed on the hip while the right hand is raised to exhibit the *abhaya-mudrā*. However, in almost all cases, both these attendants of the Sun god are adorned with *Karaṇḍa-mukuṭas*.<sup>156</sup> Mahāśvetā (Pṛthivī) makes a frequent appearance in front of Sūrya, exhibiting *abhaya* with her right hand and holding *akṣamālā* (rosary) and *kamaṇḍalu* (water-pot) in the left or holding *akṣamālā* in the right hand and *kamaṇḍalu* in the left one. Two consorts of the Sun god, Saṁjñā (Sareṇu or Rajñī) and Chāyā (Nikṣubhā) enter the iconographic scene, though in a very few images. They are represented as carrying lilies and flywhisks or showing *abhaya-mudrā* with their right hands and placing the left on the hip. Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā in archer pose are also seldom represented. Aruṇa usually seated at the base or in the middle is shown with reins of the horses in his left hand and whip in the right. Sūrya's ornaments consist of necklace, bangles, earrings and a jeweled girdle. He is found in a pearl *upaviṭa* in the images from Tanor, Rajshahi and Shanail, Bogra (Pl. 7a). The Bogra image of the god also depicts him

with a circular *tilaka* on the forehead. Twisted rolls of hair fall on shoulders and over forehead in the images of Tanor, Rajshahi and Shanail. In a few images, horses are depicted as galloping to right and left in groups of three with the seventh horse in the middle against a wheel whose spokes are shaped like lotus. Piṅgala and Daṇḍī are nimbate in the images of Tanor and of an unknown place, both in the district of Rajshahi. In an image from Rajshahi, there is an oval *prabhāvalī* behind the head with a beaded border. In another image from Rajshahi (Pl. 17a), two kneeling worshippers are depicted with seven horses between them while in the image from Thakurgaon (Dinajpur) there is a kneeling figure of a worshipper at the base. In an image from Ramchandrapur (Biral, Dinajpur) *Kīrttimukha* appears at the apex leading us to the conclusion that the image seems to have been made towards the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The back slab is invariably rounded at the top and plain except for occasional depiction of a foliated border and a lotus at the apex with flying *vidyādhara* on either side. Anyway, increased presence of female attendance shows some sort of readiness of the icon-worshippers to accept the Tāntric philosophy to some extent. Growth of their sectarian devotion or *bhakti* to Sūrya might have contributed to comparative development of the Sun's personality in many a respect. Anthropomorphic concept of the god was heading for greater indianisation despite some ongoing alien traits, as is evidenced from the depiction of dress, ornaments *tilaka* and *prabhāvalī* and treatment of horses. The element of *bhakti* for the god is traceable in the desire of the donors to have their sculptures carved at the pedestal.

### 10<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

Out of the 16 images of the Sun god identified as belonging to the 10<sup>th</sup> century

A.D., all but two have again come from Puṇḍravardhana and their distribution against individual district is as follows: Rajshahi<sup>157</sup> – 3, Bogra<sup>158</sup> – 1, Rangpur<sup>159</sup> – 1, Dinajpur<sup>160</sup> – 2, Malda<sup>161</sup> – 4, Faridpur<sup>162</sup>-1, Bankura<sup>163</sup> – 1, Hooghly<sup>164</sup> – 1, and 2 in VRM<sup>165</sup> most probably from Rajshahi or some adjoining area. Puṇḍravardhana in this century also maintained its position as the centre of Sun worship. Though image making for the Sun god appears to have come down, its worship witnessed further extension in new areas such as Rangpur in north Bengal, Faridpur in Vaṅga and Bankura in Rāḍhā. It seems that some of the Sun worshipping people inhabiting probably in Rajshahi district were shifting to other places because of professional or commercial necessity or/and the curative aspect of the Sun god was gaining ground in the psyche of the people of new areas impelling them to worship the Sun-deity in image form. In iconographic horizon, a few new trends became very popular in the subsequent times. The back slab, though still largely rounded at the top, turned into a pointed one in a few cases and this trend seems to have begun from the Rajshahi or neighbouring areas. Depiction of garland-bearing Vidyādhara on either side below the lotus at the apex is still not very common. *Prabhāvalī* has also started finding a place behind the head of the god, though on a very small scale. Pedestal of *saptaratha* type seems to be much more popular than the other forms. Sūrya's standing in *samapādashānaka* on a *padmapītha* is not very uncommon now. The only Sūrya image in Bengal standing in *tribhaṅga* is a product of this century. Piṅgala, Daṇḍī, Aruṇa and Mahāśvetā are seen accompanying the Sun god in most of his representations. The arrow-shooting Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā also appear in company of the god in a number of icons while the god's consorts Saṁjñā and Chāyā are very seldom represented. High boots, sometimes ornamented, and *dhoti* in the body of Sūrya as well

as his attendants go on being employed as before. *Upavīta* and *uttarīya* very often adorn the god. There might be sometime a jeweled *kaṭibandha* encircling the waist of the god, from which dangles a sword at his left. Necklace, circular earrings or *patrakuṇḍalas* in his elongated ears and a high *kirīṭa* with a flat top continue to beautify the divinity in addition to twisted locks of hair falling over the forehead and on shoulders. The representation of the seven horses on the pedestal with the fourth one from the left placed within a wheel and others galloping away to right and left in groups of three is an established practice now. The fashion of the throne back comes into the scene via an image from Godagari, Rajshahi.<sup>166</sup>

### 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D

That Sun worship gained much more popularity in the 11th century A.D. than in the previous one is evidently clear from the discovery of more number of images. Out of forty-one<sup>167</sup> images with known date (11th century A.D.) and provenance. 15 hail from Rajshahi<sup>168</sup> or neighbouring areas, 2 from Bogra, 1 from Pabna, 6 from Dinajpur, 6 from Malda (Habibpur - 2), 1 from Jalpaiguri, 1 from Coochbehar, 4 from Dacca (Vikrampur – 3) and 1 from Comilla. However, from literary texts and other sources, we have come to know about several Sūrya images of unidentified dates and meager details from districts and regions such as Rajshahi (8), Dinajpur (37), Malda (4), Bogra (5), Jalpaiguri (1), Coochbehar (1), Dacca (17), Faridpur (2), Comilla (6), Noakhali (1), Murshidabad (1), Birbhum (8), Burdwan (3), Bankura (2), Purulia (1), Hooghly (5), 24 Parganas (4), Midnapore (2), Barisal (1), East Bengal (11), north Bengal 12 and Bengal (14). They might have belonged to last two or three centuries of the early Bengal and are a clear indication of increasing popularity or extent of Sun worship in ancient times in this part

of India. Anyway, it may be safely presumed that in 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., Rajshahi maintained its position as the principal centre of Sun worship followed by Dinajpur and Malda and at least some new areas came under the sphere of the solar cult. Presumably, Vikrampur was an important centre of Sun worship in the Vaṅga region.

We may now look into the solar iconography of this century (Pl. 18a). During the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. the decorative impulse and other details in respect of costume and attitude almost recall the Viṣṇu icons of the same age all over northern India in spite of some regional traits.<sup>169</sup> In this later Pāla age, we come into acquaintance with various anthropomorphic and theriomorphic impressions as accessory to the main divinity. The back slab is invariably pointed at the top except for infrequent cases. At the apex is mostly the *Kīrttimukha*, spewing out floral scrolls through the corners of its lion-mouth. The top may seldom be decorated with a lotus, a floral sign or an umbrella as well. Below it on either side is seen a flying *gandharva*, sometimes along with consort, each carrying a garland with folded hands. Very frequently is found the *makara*-headed throne back supported by two pilasters with *kinnara* musicians to right and left. The decorations of back slab may also consist of *gaja-siṃha* motif on either side. Sometimes we notice the figures of kneeling devotees at the extreme right and left or some portion of the base. The pedestal is mostly of *Saptaratha* or *Navaratha* type. Sūrya is frequently represented as standing in the usual pose on a lotus, which in the Koṭālīpārā<sup>170</sup> or Bhitargarh image<sup>171</sup> issue from the *agni-kunḍa* (sacrificial fire-pit). The representation of *agni-kunḍa* in a Sun-icon may be an indication of growing importance of sacrificial ceremony in the religious sphere. Subsidiary figures except Aruṇa and Mahāśvetā may also have individual footrest.

The figure of Sūrya is usually carved partly in the round. The god goes on as represented in *samabhaṅgasthānaka* on a *padmāsana*, holding in each hand, a full-blown lotus by the stalk. He is accompanied by Daṇḍī, Piṅgala, Aruṇa, Mahāśvetā, Saṁjñā, Chāyā, Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā. This indicates the full development of the god's iconographic traits as well as the journey of standardization. Aruṇa is frequently seated on the head of a *makara* with legs hanging down on two sides of the animal whose snout is held in his left hand and carrying in his right hand a whip raised high. A swan or a peacock may unusually replace the *makara*. Sometimes Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā may not be represented at all or if depicted, may not be in the archer pose. Piṅgala who invariably stands to the right of the god is found to his left in an exceptional case.<sup>172</sup> On the left stands Daṇḍī, exhibiting the *abhaya* or holding a broken sword in his right hand and the left hand placed on the hip or on a staff or holding a staff or *sūla* or a sword. Sūrya is in *udīcyaveśa*, his torso very frequently being clad in short tunic and sometimes bare except for scarf and *upavīta*. The god and his attendants are all clad in *dhoti* and wear high boots.

Behind the head of the god, there is an oval or semi-oval and sometimes ornamental *prabhāvalī* with two borders, one plain and the other decorated with flower petals. In this period, we make our real acquaintance with idealized carvings of the *prabhāvalī* or nimbus behind the main deity. The celestial fire behind the main deity is arranged in the rare flamboyance of foliated patterns. The waist is generally encircled by a jeweled *kaṭibandha*. All wear a profusion of ornaments on the neck, ears, arms and wrists. In two sculptures,<sup>173</sup> the Sun god is seen as wearing *vanamālā*, which is characteristic of Viṣṇu. This marks the beginning of Sūrya's assimilation with Viṣṇu. In a few Sun-icons, eight planets are also engraved, which, no doubt, emphasizes the

planetary aspect of the god and thus unconsciously starts the process of reducing the great Sun god to the status of a mere *graha* to be worshipped during *grahayajña*. The *yajñopavīta*, which is usually worn by the god, is replaced by a cord tied in the middle of the chest into knots like a *channavīra*, which is characteristic of Kṛṣṇa. Sūrya wears an *uttarīya* as usual. The head of the god is adorned by a tall *kirīṭa-mukuṭa* topped by an *āmalaka* (Pl. 17b). Headgears of Daṇḍī and Piṅgala consist of *karaṇḍa-mukuṭas* in the Deopara (Rajshahi) Solar relief.<sup>174</sup> However rare, a row of ringlets is still visible on the forehead below the crown and a pair of twisted rolls of hair falls on both the shoulders. The representation of seven horses with one placed in the centre within the *ekacakra* of the Sun's chariot and the rest placed in the group of three galloping away to right and left came to be an established pattern by this time. In the Sun-icon from Joypurhat (Bogra),<sup>175</sup> the god stands within a temple suggested by a three-lobed arch resting on a pair of pillars but the arch is not crowned by *āmalaka* (Pl. 15b).

Sūrya is armed, as before, with a sword that hangs by his left side from a baldric, which passes over the thighs right to left. In addition to the sword, the god also sometimes keeps a dagger in his waistband. A bejeweled dagger on each side may also be seen. The frequent endowing of sword or dagger to the Sun god jointly or in greater number is quite compatible with the prevailing political situation of early Bengal, which may be briefed there. In 1019 A.D., Kalachuri Gāṅgeya occupied Tīrabhukti, which was recaptured by Mahīpāla I in 1024 A.D. The same year, South Bengal had to face an invasion by the Colas. The incursion that was inflicted upon Bengal by Kalachuri Karṇa was paid back with a strong resistance in 1041 A.D. and ultimately there brought about a treaty between the two at the intermediacy of Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna Atīśa. Again, in 1043,

a Pāla king, this time Vigrahapāla, is seen having entered into a conflict with Kalachuri Karṇa. In 1055, Jātavarman put an end to the rule of the Candra dynasty to introduce their royal line in Vikramapur. Five years later, started the feudatory rule of Sāmantasena in Rādhā-janapada. In 1071, the Pāla king Mahīpāla II lost his life in the people's revolt, which ultimately led to the founding of *Kaivarta-rājya* in Varendra under Divyok. The year 1100 A.D. witnessed the defeat and killing of Kaivarta king Bhīma and restoration of Varendra by the Pāla king Rāmapāla. In the light of the above facts, it may safely be said that for almost the whole of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. there prevailed a warlike situation in Bengal leading to a good deal of political ups and down and under the prevailing condition, the necessity of more and more weapons must have left a tremendous impact in the psychology of the people. This might have largely impelled the people to conceive the Sun god already in *udīcyaveśa* more as the representation of a militarily well-equipped ruler and probably to raise him to the status of an Emperor. he was provided with *makara*-headed throne supported by ornamented pillars and *kinnara* musicians for his royal entertainment.

It is deserving of note that a good number of Sun images from Vaṅga show eleven Ādityas engraved on them. This is, no doubt, a conscious attempt to depict and worship of Sūrya as one of the Ādityas, however important he may be, and not forgetting his other eleven counterparts. This indicates the unquestionable acceptability of one god Sūrya being put into question and distantly foreshadows his decline when emphasis would be laid upon the '*ekāntikā*' worship of the '*īṣṭadeva*' due to the advent of monotheistic ideas from the South.

## 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.

Thirty-five images<sup>176</sup> are found to have definitely been the products of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and their distribution<sup>177</sup> against the find-spots is as follows: Rajshahi: 12<sup>178</sup>; Rajshahi or adjoining area 8; Bogra: 1; Dinajpur: 1; Māldā: 5<sup>179</sup>; Jalpaiguri: 1, Coochbehar: 2 and Dacca: 5. However, many of the images referred to in different sources without any date must have also belonged to this era of early Bengal. Rajshahi again emerged as an important centre of Sun-cult in Bengal and region wise, the cult is found to have been more popular in Puṇḍravardhana than in its other three counterparts namely Rāḍhā, Vaṅga and Samataṭa. Sun worship in Vaṅga mainly revolved round Dacca and its adjoining area. The solar cult was, of course, not that unpopular in the *Rāḍhā-janapada* but here the Sun god was quickly being assimilated into the concept of *Dharmathākura* who was one of the most popular folk-deities in this region, originally possessing some of the solar attributes.

The iconographic elements of the Sun-deity are not that different from those of the previous century (Pl. 17b). The back slab, which is invariably pointed at the top, is largely richly decorated. There is the *Kīrttimukha* sign at the top except for very exceptional depiction of lotus etc. Below on each side is a garland carrying flying Vidyādhara, sometimes accompanied by his consort. Very often, we come across the throne back with *makara* device having two pilasters on which *kinnara* musicians or geese seldom appear on either side. The centaur-upon-elephant design (*gaja-simha*) is frequently exhibited on the two perpendicular sides of the piece. The rampant lion has between his jaws what appears to be the stalk of a lotus. Sometimes the god and some of his attendants may be found as standing within the alcove of a temple suggested by a trefolio arch, supported by a pair of richly carved pillars and topped by *āmalaka* (Pl.

18b). The pedestal is of mostly *Saptaratha* type, though the *Navaratha* form is not that uncommon. Male and female worshipper or donor couple (Pl. 17b) may also occur on either side of the pedestal. Even the name of donor or the artisan may be found as engraved.

The deity stands in *samabhaṅga* pose as usual on a *padmāsana*. He is always accompanied by his attendants: Daṇḍī and Piṅgala, Charioteer Aruṇa and miniature Mahāśvetā, two consorts Saṁjñā and Chāyā and arrow-shooting Ūṣā and Pratyūṣā. The *prabhāvalī* behind Sūrya's head is usually semi-oval or oval and has double borders, one plain and the other decorated with flower petals. A mass of flames (Pl. 19b) behind the back of Sūrya frequently rises as high as the top of his crown. Aruṇa is usually sitting on the head of a *makara*, clutching the proboscis of the animal with his left hand.

The god keeps wearing a *kirīṭamukuṭa* topped by an *āmalaka*. However, the god is once seen adorned with *kaṇḍa-mukuṭa*<sup>180</sup> that is indicative of subordination in status. The deviation from *kirīṭamukuṭa*, which is textually exclusive for Nārāyaṇa, to *Kaṇḍa-mukuṭa*, however singular a case it may be, is probably an indication of a question about the relative status of the Sun god in a society predominantly under the impact of Vaiṣṇavism, which really eclipsed the Sun-cult some decades after. Piṅgala is sometimes seen as wearing *Jaṭāmukuṭa*,<sup>181</sup> which is prescribed for Brahmā and Rudra. This could be viewed as an endeavor to take Piṅgala who is identifiable with Agni, out of the secondary rank in a Sun-icon by raising him to the status of Brahmā and Rudra. It may also be seen as an effort on part of one of the principal attendants of Sūrya to carve a separate position for himself. In some cases, Daṇḍī is also endowed with *Kaṇḍa-mukuṭa* in place of *Kirīṭa*. The change towards inferior type of headgear for the Sun god or his attendant or

allotment of *Jaṭāmukuta* for Piṅgala, in all probability, points to the downward course of the solar cult.

In the Sun-relief from Badhair (Tanor, Rajshahi),<sup>182</sup> there appears on the forehead of the god a lozenge-shaped *tilaka*, which is characteristic of Buddha signifying 'nobility'. The employment in a solar image of some symbol marked down for the deities of other sects undoubtedly aims at establishing the borrower as having the same position as that of the other dominant cult-gods. The *trivalī* mark, which is characteristic of Viṣṇu, is found incised on the throat of the god in the icons from Rajshahi,<sup>183</sup> which again strengthens our supposition about the ongoing process of permanent 'solar eclipse' by Viṣṇu. Ringlets of hair, though seldom, continue to appear on the forehead under the rim of the crown and on either shoulder.

The god and all his companions are invariably in *udīcyaveśa*, though *dhoti* or *śārī* covers their lower body. Unlike some past time when there was a strong tendency to keep the upper body of the deity bare along the indigenous line, the torso of the god is now mostly covered by a tunic or armour, the outlines of which intertwine to form a knot on the breast. Some weapon in possession of the divinity has come to be almost an established feature by this time. As before, he is generally girt with a sword, which hangs along his left side and it is not infrequently that a dagger is also thrust into the waistband on the right. Warlike situation and resultant defensive mentality perhaps largely contributed to the greater use of tunic or armour in the torso instead of keeping it bare as well as the usual possession of offensive weapons.

In the Sūrya figures of the Pāla and Sena periods, the religious outlook of the northern and Irānian regions is retained, but in the meditation and interpretation of the

solar divinity, it would seem that the Vedic and Brāhmaṇical religious concepts had merged.<sup>184</sup> Concerning the iconographic features of the Sun god in the early and late Pāla period, the opinion of J. N. Banerjea may be mentioned here. The treatment of the broad sword hanging on the left side of the central deity, the parabolic '*prabhāvalī*', the 'kulaḥ' caps on the heads of Daṇḍī and Piṅgala, absence of any elaborate decoration, the separate '*prabhā*' (halo) and the absence of the two queens - all these features may indicate a Sun-icon as belonging to the early or middle Pāla period.<sup>185</sup> The profuse ornamentation of the relief, the pointed stela with the '*Kīrttimukha*' design on the top centre (absent in the earlier group), the arrangement in several parallel layers of the companions (shown in different sizes) of the main deity, the Indianised crowns ('*kaṇḍa-mukūṭas*') of Daṇḍī and Piṅgala, definitely date a Sun-relief in the late or early Sena period.<sup>186</sup> These are characteristic of the fully developed type of solar icons in Bengal. The practice of occasionally recording the name of the donor, sometimes along with those of his father and grandfather, or the name of the sculptor along with even that of his preceptor, somewhere on the pedestal, starts from the ninth century A.D. and continues throughout the succeeding ages of early Bengal.

### Syncretic outlook in Saura Cult:

With the fuller development of *bhakti* element in religious thought, there came up different independent sects around different deities. As time passed, there was a fusion of different, often rival cults resulting in a composite image. Either this was because of a craving for the ideological compromise among the rival philosophy of different sects, promotion of good will and religious tolerance or different cults simply merged with one

another, as different members of the same family worshipped different deities. Besides, approved *Smṛti* works like some of the *Dharmaśāstras* and the *Manu-* and *Yājñavalkya-smṛtis* did not advocate the cause of any cult in particular. Therefore, among many a follower of the authoritative *Smṛti* works, was developed a liberal attitude towards matters of religious faith. Many of the persons of higher order, usually Brāhmaṇas known as *Smārtas*, evolved a kind of worship described as *Pañcāyatana-pūjā*, in which the principal deities of the five approved Brāhmaṇical Hindu cults were the objects of veneration. *Pañcāyatana-pūjā* stands for the worship of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā (Pārvatī), Sūrya and Gaṇeśa. They are worshipped in their lithomorphic forms, which are: for Viṣṇu the *śalagrāma*-stone, for Śiva the *liṅga-* (*bāṇaliṅga*), for Durgā (Pārvatī) *svaṇṇarekhā-*, for Sūrya the *sūryakānta-* and for Gaṇeśa the *svaṇṇabhadra*-stone. Before those, sacred *mantras* are murmured and incense, rice-grains and flowers are offered to them. During the Sena-Varman rule in Bengal when Brāhmaṇical religion was greatly governed by the *Smṛti*, *Pañcopāsanā* became very popular. Lakṣmaṇasena, Viśvarūpasena and Sūryasena were all staunch Vaiṣṇavas but they were equally respectful to Sadāśiva. Indeed, Viśvarūpasena and Sūryasena were also devotees of Sūrya. In all his endeavors, Jayadeva was publicly known as a devout Vaiṣṇava, but in fact, he was a *Smṛti*-versed Brāhmaṇa votary of the *Pañcādevatā*. He not only created panegyric for *Rādhāmādhava*, but also composed hymns of praise for Mahādeva as well as verses on the yogic means of salvation.<sup>187</sup> Most probably, the poet Dhoyī was also a votary of *Pañcopāsanā* like Jayadeva.<sup>188</sup> Most of the Sena kings were also followers of *Pañcopāsanā*, as is evidenced by simultaneous show of reverence to Nārāyaṇa, Maheśa and Sūrya in a few of their inscriptions as well as reference in the *Pavana-dūta* (verse 28)

to installation of both the *Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa* and Mahādeva images in temples in Suhmadeśa.<sup>189</sup> The poet Vidyāpati was not at all the great Vaiṣṇava, nor a votary of Sahajiyā, but that he was a *Smṛti*-versed Brāhmaṇa devotee of the *Pañcādevatā* as well as a worshipper of Śiva, *Gaṅgā* and *Umā*.<sup>190</sup> It is clear from the above that during the last centuries of the Hindu rule in early Bengal, Sūrya received worship as a constituent cult-deity of *Pañcopāsanā* from a large number of followers of this religious system.

The trend of rapprochement between different sects is best illustrated by the syncretic images. Features of the Sun god are traceable in the images of various cult deities. The resplendent body of the Sun had to be trimmed by his father-in-law Viśvakarmā to enable his daughter Saṁjñā, the principal consort of Sūrya, to bear her husband's company, and this, perhaps, resulted in the development of many weapons, attributes, etc. of other Brāhmaṇical Hindu deities. The *Gāyatrī mantra* itself is conceived by orthodox Brāhmaṇas as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, in the morning, midday and evening respectively, each of which deity shines resplendent within the flaming solar orb. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Sūrya is invoked thus: "Brahmā's, Śiva's and Viṣṇu's bodies are the same as the body of the resplendent Sun whose real nature is threefold indeed, may he be gracious!" Another invocation runs thus: "Adoration to Sūrya, who is the base of meditation, and who is one with Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva."<sup>191</sup> It must be hymns such as the above, which were the basis of the development of composite figures in later periods.

The close connection of Sūrya with Viṣṇu, or Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa is well known. A black chlorite specimen<sup>192</sup> depicts the Sun god in *padmāsana* endowed with four hands. In front of the bare-footed god are seated Mahāśvetā and Aruṇa driving a seven-

horsed chariot. While in his upper hands, the god carries a pair of lotuses, the lower right and left hands hold the *śaṅkha* and *cakra* respectively. The example appears to be a syncretic icon combining the elements of Sūrya with those of Viṣṇu. The composite icons with the features of Sūrya and Śiva are comparatively few. One such can be recognized in a 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. image found at Manda (Rajshahi), in which Sūrya and Śiva are the constituents and which has been tentatively identified as '*Mārttaṇḍa-Bhairava*' by K. C. Sarkar.<sup>193</sup> The compromising spirit between the sects of Sūrya and Brahmā<sup>194</sup> is revealed by the Ms. *Puṣkara-Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa*. An 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. sculpture<sup>195</sup> from Mahendra (Kushmandi, West Dinajpur) depicting the composite figure of Sūrya with Brahmā is available in the Varendra Research Museum. The deity in this case has six arms. In two of its hands, two lotuses are held, while the others display *varadamudrā*, *akṣamālā*, *abhayamudrā* and *kamaṇḍalu*. The increased number of hands, its solar features, the rosary and water-vessel – the well-known emblems of Brahmā in two of its hands, make it a composite icon.

Apart from Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, reconciliation and rapprochement between rival gods and their creeds is also traceable from the direct association of *Bodhisattva Lokeśvara* with Hindu cult divinities including the Sun god. A fragmentary relief<sup>196</sup> of medieval Bengal depicts a 10-armed Sūrya-Lokeśvara now preserved in the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University. Of the extant four hands, a pair of right and left hands holds two full-blown lotuses. The other pair holds the *akṣamālā* and an indistinct object. The god wears *jaṭāmukuta* in one head. A seated miniature of the two-armed *Dhyāibuddha Amitābha* appears on the crest of the image. The image has tentatively been identified as a combined representation of Sūrya and Lokeśvara.<sup>197</sup>

Sometimes, separate images of gods belonging to rival sects were grouped together with a view to promote the religious tolerance among different sectaries. The worship of such images in-group was also prevalent in Bengal. An inscribed slab of the 26<sup>th</sup> year of Dharmapāla is carved with figures of Sūrya, Viṣṇu and Śiva (or *Bhairava*), each sitting side by side.<sup>198</sup> Sūrya at the extreme right is shown holding two lotus-flowers, one in each of his hands and wearing boots on his feet. Viṣṇu, in the extreme left, has four hands holding *śaṅkha*, *cakra*, *gadā* and *padma*. Śiva (or *Bhairava*)<sup>199</sup> is shown in the middle. It seems that the main god of the worshipper was Śiva to whom the inscription is dedicated.

There are instances of borrowing and incorporating some deities by the Buddhists from the solar cult, which may be taken as the sign of the growing popularity, if not of assertion and encroachment, of the Sun cult upon Buddhism. One of the four most important forms of Buddhist Avalokiteśvara-Lokanātha seen in Bengal is *Siṃhanāda-Lokeśvara*, the healer of Leprosy,<sup>200</sup> who took the form and features of Sūrya. Three-faced, borne by seven boars and a truncated demon as the charioteer, kneeling in an archer's pose in the chariot, the important Vajrayāna goddess Mārīcī is the Buddhist counterpart of the Brāhmaṇical Sūrya.<sup>201</sup> It is interesting to note that while the Buddhists in their desire to prove the superiority of their own gods humbled Brāhmaṇical gods such as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaurī, Gaṇeśa, Indra etc., the Sun god never became the target of their attack. The borrowing of solar concept in creating and fashioning of Lokeśvara and Mārīcī as well as the lack of sectarian animosity reflected through icons shows harmony and amity between the two creeds. The frequent hostile attitude of the Brāhmaṇical champions towards the Buddhists and the unreverential indifference of the

former towards the solar priests of foreign origin and non-Vedic practices might have brought these two cults very close to each other. That is why the followers of Buddhism, probably, made the Buddha the brother of Sūrya (*Āditya-Bandhu*), and had no objection to worshipping him also. This might have been the policy also of the adherents of Jainism. Moreover, the Sun-worshippers too might have liked such an alliance, for Buddhism was then the dominant religion of a great part of the country.<sup>202</sup> Appearances of small figures of gods such as Trinity, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya etc. on the top of a few solar images remind us of the presence of parental *Dhyāi<sup>n</sup> Buddhas* in the Buddhist icons.

There were enthusiasts in every religion to champion and fight for their own. There was no dearth of mutual hostility between the various sects of *Brāhmaṇism*. There were rivalry and jealousy between diverse Indian sects. The sectarian animosities found vent through the milder channel of fabrication of mythological stories and construction of interesting images in illustration thereof.

## IV

### Navagraha Worship

Navagrahas (nine planets) came to be worshipped as a component part of the solar religion. They also formed a non-sectarian object of worship. However, they are not mentioned in any inscription of the Gupta period. Presumably, their worship became prevalent in the post-Gupta period and occupied a place of great popularity and importance in medieval time not only among the Hindus but also to a certain extent among the Buddhists. This particular ceremony is known as *Grahayāga* or *Svastyāyana*.

Neither in the Vedic nor in the Epic literature do we find reference to this *Grahayāga*. However, in the *Matsya*, *Agni* and some other *Purāṇas* as well as in the *Yājñavalkya-Smṛti* there are elaborate rules for the performance of *Grahayāga* to appease the Navagrahas. In Chapters 231 and 232 of the *Viṣṇudharmattora (Khaṇḍa 1)* there are references to various kinds of actions which bring people under the influence of the *grahas* and encourage them to exert their influence as well as symptoms of persons influenced by different kinds of *grahas* along with treatment of such persons by means of herbs, mantras etc.<sup>203</sup> *Yājñavalkya*<sup>204</sup> says that a man, desirous of peace, prosperity, ample rains (for his crops), long life and nourishment, should perform '*Grahayajñas*', which should also be performed by a man who likes to harm his enemies. *Grahasānti*<sup>205</sup> or *Grahayajña*<sup>206</sup> was performed before launching on a military campaign. It was also occasioned to pacify evil influence of planets likely to inflict misfortune and danger as well as to avoid inauspicious happenings in religious performances. The planets were worshipped on some other occasions also. Along with the constellations, they were drawn in a circle on the ground and propitiated on the ceremonial ablution called *puṣyusnāna*.<sup>207</sup> In order to make predictions about rainfall and crops, an astrologer went to a place north or east of the city or village and drew on ground planets and constellation and worshipped them.<sup>208</sup>

Navagrahas images were made of different materials. Their figures were also to be drawn on canvas in their respective colour or in *maṇḍalas* made of scented paste (sandal-wood-paste). The Navagrahas also found lithic representation. In most cases, the Navagrahas, usually standing and rarely seated, were carved in a row, either on a single slab of stone serving as an architectural piece in the medieval temples (e.g. in a panel on

a doorframe) or on lintels over the entrance doorway and sometimes on the *torana* of a Sūrya temple. According to Manomohan Ganguly,<sup>209</sup> the introduction of these images in the temples was invariably meant to ensure prosperity to their founders and to prevent any evil happening to the temples themselves. They were also carved on sculptures of other deities as subsidiary deities. Perhaps slabs carved with the Navagrahas were also used for regular worship.

Besides accompanying the Sun god, the Navagrahas are also depicted on the *prabhāvalī* of the *Kalyānasundara* or *Śiva-vivāha*<sup>210</sup> and the so-called 'Mother and Child' images. One image of *Śeṣaśayana-Viṣṇu* from Bengal also contains this panel of deities. Separate representations of any particular one of the nine planets are extremely rare.

The earliest reference to the *Grahaṃjñā* in early Bengal is found in connection with Śaśāṅka's disease as mentioned in late genealogical works of Bengal Brāhmaṇas.<sup>2181</sup> According to the tradition preserved among a section of the Grahavipra (also called Śākadvīpī) Brāhmaṇas, twelve Brāhmaṇas living on the banks of the Sarayū river were brought by king Śaśāṅka in order to cure himself of a fatal ailment by offering sacrifices to the planets (*grahaṃjñā*). Śaśāṅka was cured and rewarded the Brāhmaṇas who then settled in Bengal. Planets like *Ravi*, *Candra*, *Budha* etc. are indirectly referred to in many inscriptions from Bengal. However, specific mention of Navagraha worship is found in the Sian (Birbhum) Stone Inscription (approx. 1043 A.D.).<sup>212</sup> In verse 55, mention is made of the offering of golden lotus by a king for the icons of the Navagrahas ("*cakre yo haimam Navagrāmbhojam*" - Verses 54, 55). The gift of golden lotus for the image of the *Navagrahas* takes it for granted that the worship of the nine planets gained

immense popularity in the *Uttara Rādhā* in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. especially among a section of affluent people. It may also be presumed that the donor, like Śaśāṅka, must have been cured of some fatal disease, which inspired him to incur a great expenditure for the worship of the Navagrahas out of deep gratitude. It is difficult to identify the king who made the gift of the golden lotus. However, he might have been Nayapāla (1027-43 A.D.) or his son Vigrahapāla III (1043-70). During the Sena-Varman age, one of the major mental focuses was the meditation and concepts entrenched in astrology. There were bathing and eating in respect of lunar days following the injunctions of planets and stars as well as pilgrimages to suit such occasions, oblations, sacrifice and penance. The moon was believed to preside over an eclipse.<sup>213</sup>

The introduction of the *Grahapūjā* everywhere in India is attributed to the Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇas. With their appearance in this country, the worship of the Sun became widespread and simultaneously the worship of the Navagrahas centering round the lord of the planets Sūrya came into vogue. The Śākadvīpī Brāhmaṇas are known as 'Grahavipra' in the *Bṛhadādharmā Purāṇa*. It is surprising that these Brāhmaṇas many of whom were skilled in astrology came to be reproached as *Brāhmaṇas* of a very low grade under the names of *Bhojaka*, *Daivajña* and *Agradānī*. On the other hand, they have respectfully been mentioned as *Paṁktipavana* in the *Samvatsarasūtra* (2/13) of the *Bṛhat-saṁhitā*. Probably the chauvinism of the indigenous Brāhmaṇas largely contributed to such reprehensible position of the Maga Brāhmaṇas in the society.

The Navagraha-panels, discovered so far in Bengal, are dated between the eighth and the 12th century A.D., which goes to confirm the literary evidence that suggests the late appearance of the ritual known as *grahayāga* in the religious life of the people. The

find-spots of the panels are distributed over a wide stretch of territory extending from Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Malda in north Bengal to the Sundarbans in 24 Parganas district in the southern part of Bengal. Thus, it is evident that all the *graha* images in panels and separate representations are from north and West Bengal and none from the East. Therefore, we can safely say that worship of Navagraha images was more popular in north and West Bengal.

## Method of Sun Worship in Bengal

Because of scarcity of information in both literary and epigraphic materials, it is very difficult to give an account of the methodology of Sun worship in early Bengal. However, there is no room for doubt that it used to follow largely the Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic line. Very probably, the Vedic way of Sun worship through the recitation of the hymns and the offerings was prevalent among the orthodox section of the Brāhmaṇas and other higher classes. *Sandhyopāsanā* as a form of Sun worship must have been practiced by the conservative Brāhmaṇas, a large section of whom had come from northern and western part of India. That *Sūrya-namaskāra* was also in vogue is testified by the Gayā Sitalā Temple Inscription.<sup>214</sup> All the four verses on the Sun incorporated in the *Subhāṣita-ratnakoṣa* refer to the Sun at sunrise, which shows that it was at the dawn that many Hindus, irrespective of sect, addressed their prayers to the Sun.

The employment of flowers, incense, garlands, lamps etc. in the worship of the Sun that began from the Epic period was also followed in early Bengal as is evidenced by the Jagadishpur copper plate (447 AD.) which refers to donation of lands for a temple of the Sun god and for the expenses to be incurred in connection with the supply of

offerings, oblations consisting of rice, milk and sugar (boiled together), as well as for the supply of perfume, incense and oil etc. Image worship of the Sun god at home and in temple was undoubtedly popular. The Vedic *homa* forms an important part of the worship; the *mantras* to be used are either Vedic or Purāṇic or both.<sup>215</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Sun cult was also influenced by the Tāntric cult, which was becoming quite popular since the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards. The method of initiation under Tāntric influence involved the choice and preparation of the ground, selection of spiritual preceptors and disciples, offer of *arghya* to the Sun with the *mahāmantra*, drawing of a *maṇḍala* with the figure of a twelve-petalled lotus in it. performance of *homa* and of *tattvanyāsa* and *mantranyāsa*, worship of the quarter-guardians to whom fish, meat etc. are offered.<sup>216</sup> The *mantras* with Tāntric symbolism are employed at every step. The drawing of *maṇḍala*, the performance of various kinds of *mudrās* and *nyāsas* are in accordance with the Tāntric philosophy. The methods of performing *abhicāra* rites and *bījas* in *mantras* and practice of *yoga* have also been given and six acts viz. *vaśīkaraṇa*, *ākarṣaṇa*, *māraṇa*, *uccāṭana*, *vidveṣaṇa* and *stambhana* etc<sup>217</sup> are also mentioned. The Sun-cult appears to have adopted Tāntric practices in the later stage of the later Purāṇas. However, as noticed earlier, Sun worship remained free from the concept of a female principle as the cause of the universe so characteristically developed in the Tāntric philosophy.

The Sun was worshipped at dawn, noon and Sunset. Annual worship and annual car-festival were performed with the use of the Vedic and Purāṇic *mantras*. Seven different *saptamī tithis* as well as twelve *śukla-saptamīs* were also observed.

## Sun-sect:

The existence of a Sun-sect in Bengal may be traced since the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In the *Ārṣeya Upaniṣad*,<sup>218</sup> the non-Āryan Puṇḍras and the Sumhas who are described as regarding the Sun as the highest reality, were, no doubt, the earliest class of the staunch *Sauras*.

The deep-rooted element of *bhakti*, which is the basis of a sect and which was prevailing vigorously in the country in the pre-Gupta period, is pronouncedly demonstrated in the terracotta Sūrya from Āndraketugarh. As parts of the Gupta Empire, Puṇḍravardhana, Rādhā and Vaṅga certainly came within the main current of the *bhakti*-movement in north India. The Jagadishpur inscription<sup>219</sup> shows that the construction of the Sun-temple and worship by means of the oblations of rice, milk, sugar, perfume, incense, lamp etc. is done by the indigenous people of India – the Vaiśyas. It was the cult of *bhakti* that contributed to the adoption of the temple tradition.<sup>220</sup> The solar shrine in question was the result of a collective effort of three residents – Kṣemārka, Bhoyil and Mahīdās. Thus, by the middle of the fifth century A.D. a full-fledged Sun-sect with all the paraphernalia of a temple, image, priesthood, rites and procedures had come into vogue in Bengal.

The development of the Sun's personality in many respects was because of the growth of the sectarian devotion or *bhakti* to Sūrya. The element of *bhakti* for the god is traceable in the desire of the donors to have their images carved on the pedestal. Elaborate rules and regulations for making the Sun-images and temples and for other constituents of the solar ritual were actually products of a sectarian Sun-cult. The

sectarian character of the solar cult is evidenced by the emergence of a special class of priests known as the Magas and the Bhojkas or the Yājakas. The Brāhmaṇas who were known as Ācāryas in Bengal, were the main section of the *Sauras*.<sup>221</sup>

Historical evidence regarding the existence of a separate Sun-sect in medieval Bengal comes from the inscriptions of Viśvarūpasena and Sūryasena who call themselves *Paramasaura*.<sup>222</sup> From the beginning of the Gayā Gadādhara Temple Inscription<sup>223</sup> and the Gayā Śitalā Temple Inscription of Yakṣapāla<sup>224</sup> with “*Om namaḥ Sūryāya*” and the dedication of the first verse to the Sun god, it appears that the issuers of these two inscriptions were *Paramasaura*. Some epigraphic records on the pedestal of the Sun-images suggest that the images of the god were sometimes set up for his worship under the patronage of some leading persons of a locality. Obviously, the images were set up by the *Sauras* and for the *Sauras*. The existence of the *Saura* sect may thus be derived indirectly from the available records. Most of the innumerable images of the Sun god found in Bengal were definitely meant for worship by the *Sauras*.

The concentration of the find-spots of the solar icons in the district of north and east Bengal seems to suggest that the *Sauras* or the devotees of the Sun god mostly settled in those parts of Bengal. Further, the dating of most of the Sun-images from the seventh to the 13th century A.D. clearly suggests the increasing number and importance of the *Sauras* during this long span of time. However, the sect of the Sun was not very popular, which emerged under the impact of the indigenous tradition of *bhakti* and the Magian tradition of Sun worship. It seems that at a later period, the *Sauras* assumed a syncretic approach, as is best illustrated by the syncretic images.

## ARKAKṢETRAS IN BENGAL:

The existence of a few *Arkakṣetras* may also be traced in ancient Bengal. The 'stotra' of a Sun god called *Citrāditya*<sup>225</sup> includes the names of all the important images of Sūrya in India. A few of them, which may have been prevalent in Bengal, are *Muṇḍīrasvāmī*, *Mandāra* and *Sāmba* in *Varddhamāna*. *Muṇḍīra* at the confluence of *Gaṅgā* and *Sāgara* is said to have been one of the three centres of Sun worship of Magian type, other two being situated in *Indravana* in the east<sup>226</sup> i.e. Multan and *Kālpriyā* respectively. The *Gaṅgāsāgara-saṅgama* referred to in the *Skanda Purāṇa*<sup>227</sup> as the place where the morning Sun remained as *Muṇḍīrasvāmin* may apparently suggest that the confluence of the river *Bhāgirathī* and the *Sāgara* (Bay of Bengal) was some times recognized as one of the places of Sun worship. *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>228</sup> also refers to the greatness of the *Gaṅgāsāgara-saṅgama*. However, from the *Padma Purāṇa*<sup>229</sup> we come to know of the *Gaṅgāsāgara-saṅgama* near *Puruṣottomakṣetra* (modern Puri). *Mandāra* in *Puṇyavardhana* (*Puṇḍravardhana*, north Bengal) can not be precisely identified. However, there is a hill called *Mandāra-Giri* in the *Banka* sub-division of the district of *Bhagalpur*, at the foot of which there is a beautiful tank called *Pāpahāriṇī*, where people come to bathe from a long distance on the last day of the month of *Pauṣa*.<sup>230</sup> The fact of taking bath in a tank on *Pauṣa-saṁkrānti* reminds us of the Sun worship and *Sūrya-kunḍa*. May be after the name of this *Mandāra* in *Bihar*, there might have developed a centre of Sun worship in *Puṇḍravardhana*. Whatever may be the case, there is no room for any doubt that *Puṇḍravardhana* was the most important region of Sun worship in Bengal throughout the ancient period, as is evidenced by the reference to the *Puṇḍras* as the Sun-worshipping tribe in the *Ārṣeya Upaniṣad* as well as the discovery of large number of Sun images from different parts of this region since the early Gupta age down

to the end of the period under review. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think about the existence of *arkakṣetras* in early north Bengal. Varddhamāna is identified as the present Bardhankoṭi in Dinajpur.<sup>231</sup> Large number of Sun images of different types and periods have been discovered from this district. Most probably, the legend of Sāmba's cure by Sun-worship contributed to the popularity of the Sun god by the name of *Sāmba* in this area. It is from this district that the Bairhaṭṭā Sūrya image inscription has been found, which has described the god as the remover of all diseases. We have already seen from the Jagadishpur inscription that the temple of the 'Sahasraraśmi (the Sun) was situated in *Sāmbapura* in *Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti*. It appears that based on the healing aspect of Sūrya, the god named Sāmba became highly popular in Vardhamāna, which in course of time developed into an *Arkakṣetra*.

## Notes and References

1. VII.13.18.
2. III.1: Tr. A. B. Keith. Oxford. 1909. 101. 200.
3. I, 1, 2, 13-15.
4. *HBP*, p. 386.
5. Quoted by Belvalkar, S.K. and Ranade, R.D., *History of Indian Philosophy*, Poona, 1927. vol. II, p. 298.
6. MacDonnell, A.A. and Keith, A.B., *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects, Vol. I*, London, p. 536. cf. *KB*, VII.28, *SSS*, XV.26, *BDS*, I.2.14.
7. *HB-I*, p. 20.
8. *SWAI-S*, p. 173.
9. Mukherjee, B.N., *Kharoṣṭhī and Kharoṣṭhī Brāhmī Inscriptions in West Bengal (India)*

(Published as Indian Museum Bulletin, vol. XXVI), Calcutta, 1990, p. 51, Sl. No. 21.

10. Basu, S.K., *DIPGV*, p. 22.
11. Ibid, p. 21.
12. *DHI*, pp. 432-433.
13. Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-80.
14. *RV*, 1. 164. 46.
15. *RV*, 1.164.46.
16. *DHI*, p. 136.
17. Coomaraswami, A.K., *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Cambridge, Mass. 1935.
18. *DHI*, p. 138.
19. Deb, Chittaranjan, *Vāṅglār Pallīgīti*, Calcutta. p.181.
20. Mukherjee, B.N., *op. cit.*
21. There are some similar winged figures in the collections of the Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art, Kolkata, which point out their significant relationship with this particular mould from Tamluk. Their Accession Numbers are T6236, T8264 and T8838.
22. Mukherjee, Ranjana, "A winged figure from Tamluk", *Journal of the V.R.M.*, Khaṇḍa no. 7, 1981-82, p. 95.
23. Coomaraswami, A.K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Boston, 1927, pl. V, no. 16; V.S. Agarwala, *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, pls. IX, X & XI; Biswas, S.S., *Terracotta Art of Bengal*, Delhi, 1981, p. 79, pl. (a).
24. Coomaraswami, *op. cit.*, pl. XII, no. 41, pl. XVI, no. 55.
25. Parrot, A. *Sumer, The Dawn of Art*, New York, 1961, p. 138, fig. 167A.
26. Grishman, R. *Persia: from the Origins to Alexander the Great*, London, 1964, p. 198,

fig. 246.

27. Parrot, A. *op. cit.*, p. 335, fig. 416.

28. Charbonneau, J., Martin, R. & Willard, F., *Classical Greek Art*, London, 1972, p. 23,  
fig. 21.

29.10.88.6.

30. Basu, S.K., *DIPGV*, p. 83.

31. *JISOA*, XVI, pp. 51-56. B. Rowland. however, believes that the figure of the Sun at Bodh-Gayā and Bhājā are represented in 'an allegorical capacity with reference to Buddha's solar character': see *Art and Architecture of India*, p.54. In a recent article published in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, 2004 Meena Telim in her paper 'Vedic gods in Buddhist Sculptures' says that the Bhājā Sun 'is a relief of Mitra (Persian) with all his characteristics, which is mistaken as a relief of the Sun god of the Vedic pantheon' (*ibid.* p. 200). Again, in connection with Bodh-Gayā Sun-image, Telim suggests that this figure is not the Sun god of the Vedic pantheon but 'could be king Ajātaśatru sculptured on the basis of characterization depicted in the Buddhist scriptures' (*ibid.* p.204).

32. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

33. Coomaraswami, *op. cit.*, p. 67, fig. 24.

34. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46, Sl. No. 8.

35. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 90, 94.

36. *DHI*, p. 437.

37. 1.115, 3-4, 7.60.3, 7.63.2 etc.

38. cf. a second century A.D. seal from Berachampa as noticed by B.N. Mukherjee with  
the symbol of Sun engraved on it along with an advice to the seafarers.  
Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 57. Sl. 51, pl. XLII. Fig.63.
39. *Ibid*, pp. 55-56, Sl. N0. 39, pl. XXXIII, fig. 37A.
40. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
41. RV.1.115.3-4; 7. 60.3; 7.63.2 etc.
42. *DHI*, p. 431.
43. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p.44, Sl. No. 4, Pl. XVII, Fig.4.
44. It is now in the collection of the Bhuvan Art Gallery and Museum, Calcutta.
45. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Sl. No. 4, Pl. XVII, Fig.4.
46. Saraswati, S.K., *Journal of Department of Letters*. Vol. XXX. 1938, p. 22, fig. 5;  
*DHI*, p. 435.
47. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
48. *CBI*, pp. 42- 43.
49. *Ibid*, p. 50.
50. *EI*, XXXI, p. 57.
51. *Ibid*. XV, p. 130, 35.
52. *EI*. XX, p. 61.
53. *AGS*, III.7.4-6; *SGS*, II.9.1.
54. *MGS*, I.2.1-2.
55. *CH*, III.28n, 71, 218.
56.                   “gulmagandhike bhagavataḥ sahasraraśmeḥ  
                          Kārtikadevakule cha hali-charu-satra

*Pravarttanāya khaṇḍa phutṭa-pratisaṃskāra-  
karaṇāya gandha dhūpatailopayogāya  
śaśvatkālopabhogyakshayanīvyā apratikara  
khilakshetrasaya kulyavāpamekat  
kṭva dātum.....”* verse 13-12 .

Sircar, D.C., *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1973, p. 61.

57. The oldest Āryan religion in Bengal was Jainism, and prior to the Gupta period, Jainism had become well established and widespread, especially in northern Vaṅga.

58. *Bhaviṣya P.*, 139; *Sāmba P.*, 3, 24, 26; *Brahma P.*, 20.

59. *EI*, Vol. II, 1893, p. 338.

60. Indore Copper Plate inscription of Skandagupta records a perpetual endowment (*Abhagnayoga*) given by Devaviṣṇu, a Brāhmaṇa of orthodox Vedic tradition, for the purpose of maintaing a lamp in the temple of the god Savitṛ, i.e. Sun god. According to the condition of the donation, the guild of the oilmen of Indrapura had to supply two ‘palas’ of oil daily from the interest accruing from money already deposited. Fleet, J.F. (Ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol.III, London, 1888, p. 70.

61. *EI*, II, 1893, p. 330.

62. *ESB*, p. 12; *DHI*, p. 435; *HB-I*, pp. 521-22.

63. *HB-I*, pp. 521-22; *DHI*, p. 435; *ESB*, P. 12, fig. 1.

64. *Matsya P.*, 261.1-4.

65. The terracotta Sūrya from Bogra, which is a remarkable piece of Gupta sculptural art, has no consort or attendant depicted and, as the pedestal is lost, the presence of the horses or the chariot cannot be ascertained. *BSHI*, pp. 188-189, pl. 161.
66. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Sl. N0. 4.
67. *AB*, 4.2 - *prano vai sabitā*.
68. *ESB*, pp. 21-22, fig- 5; *DHI*, pp. 435, 36; *HB-I*, p. 523.
69. Banerjee, R.D., 'The Temple of Śiva at Bhumarā', *M.A.S.I.*, No. 16, p. 13, pl. XVIa.
70. *ESB*, p.12; *JISOA*, XVI, pp. 80-81.
71. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
72. *ESB*, p. 30; *JISOA*, XVI, p. 81; *IBBS*, p.172. pl. I.IX; *HB-I*, p. 457.
73. *CBI*, p. 87.
74. *Jayati Śrī Lokanāthah yah pusam Sukṛta-Karmaphalahetuḥ Satya- Tupaḥ-Maya-mūrtirloka dvaya-Sādhanā dharmah*.
75. *Select Inscriptions*. Vol. I. University of Calcutta, 1942, p. 359, fn.5.
76. Sen, Sukumar, *Vaṅga Bhūmikā*, Calcutta, 1974, p.319; *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī*, Visva Bharati, 1972, p. 39.
77. Bhattacharyya, A.T., *Sun and Serpent Worship*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 28.
78. Sen, Sukumar & Mandal, Panchanan (ed.). *Rūprāmer Dharmamaṅgal*, Burdwan. B. S. 1351; Introduction.
79. Watters, T., *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Ed. T.W. Rhys Davids and S.W. Bushell, vol. II, London, 1904-5, p. 115; Beal, S (Tr.), *Buddhist Records of Western Countries*, London, 1906, p. 274, II. 118, 121- 22.

80. Vasu, N. N., *Vaṅger Jātīya Itihāsa, Rājanya-Kāṇḍa* (in Bengali), IV. 88, 90.  
*Mahādeva-kārikā* quoted by Umesh Candra Sharma; *Kulapañjī* by Rāmadeva.
81. *Jayati jagadekavandhurlokadvitayasya sampado hetuḥ Parahitamūrtirdṛṣṭa phalānumeya sthitir- dharmah* - *E.I.*, Vol., XII, pp. 65-79; Vol., XIX, pp. 115-25; *Kāmrūpāsānāvalī*, pp. 11-17.
82. Kānsonā, now called Rangamati in the district of Murshidabad, on the right bank of the Bhagirathi, six miles south of Berhampore in Bengal and once the capital of Śāsāṅka.
83. *Bhuvanapatirivodayanuraktomaṇḍalo yathāyathamicitā karanikaravitarāṅkulitakali timira- sañcatayā prakāṣitāryadharmā- lokaḥ...* - Verses 35-37.
84. This region has been famous for Sun temples throughout the ancient period of Indian History - Sankalia, H. D., *Archaeology of Gujrat and Kathiawar*, pp. 59-60. It is worth mentioning that the organized group of silk weavers who built a noble and unequalled temple of the Sun god in 437 A.D. at Mandasor came from Lāṭa. cf. Mandasor stone Inscription in Fleet, *CI*, Vol. III, pp. 79-88.
85. *EI*, II, p. 160.
86. *CBI*, pp. 164-169.
87. *JASB.*, LXI, pp. 77-87; *E.I.* XIV, p. 324; *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 91-100; *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*, B.S. 1305, pp. 167-72; *CBI.*, p. 200.
88. *'yastunṅābhyudayāśrito Raviriva proudhah pratāpodayaḥ'* - Verse 10 - *JASB.* LXIX, pp.190-95; *Gauḍalekhamālā*, p. 113; *CBI*, p. 143; *EI*, XXXVI, pp. 84 - 91.
89. *'yanmoulaou kalasena kim sa bhagavān Bhānuḥ śirobhūṣaṇam.* Sircar, D.C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.

90. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekh Tāmrasāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.
91. *RV*, I. 115.1; VI.51.1; VII.61.1; 63.1; X.37.1; *TS*, I.4.43; II.4.14.
92. *Ibid*, I.115.1.
93. These factors have been discussed in details in Chapter VI.
94. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekh Tāmrasāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., p.115.
95. “*yaḍīya ruchi lobhitah sa bhagavannābhaḥ pānthatām tyājediti vichintayanniyatamāhi.....v. 46.*”
96. “*rājatam ravim cakre yo haimam Navagrāmbhojam*”- Verses 55.
97. 30.1-2.
98. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 81 ff.
99. Kundu, S. N., *Prācīn Vaṅge Paurāṇic Dharma O Deavabhāvanā* (in Bengali), Burdwan University, Burdwan, 1996. p. 349; *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 89 ff.
100. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 92 ff; Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions*, II. p. 104.
101. 1075-84 A.D.: son of Viśvarūpa and a Brāhmaṇa feudatory under the Pālas.
102. “*Maunāditya-Sahasraliṅga- Kamalārdhāṅgīna-Nārāyaṇa dvi Someśvara- Phalgunātha-Vijayādityāhvayānaṁ kriti; sa (pra) sādamaeīkaraddiviṣadām Kedāradevasya khyātasottaramānasasya khananaṁ satraṁ vaṭe cākṣaye*”||.
103. *Pracaṇḍaraśmeriva caṇḍamojaḥ*- verse 55. PIHC. p. 23. pt. I. p. 36; Sircar, D.C., *Epigraphic Discoveries of East Pakistan*, p. 40.
104. *IB*. pp. 149-57.
105. *IB*, Vol. III, pp. 25-35; *CBI*, p. 350; Kielhorn, *EI*, VI, pp. 203-207; *JASB.*, Vol. VI, pp. 88-97.
106. *E.I.*, II, p. 350; *Gauḍalekhamālā*, p. 127; *CBI*, p. 370.

107. This tradition is also recorded in *Pag Sam Jon Zane*. cf. *JASB*, 1898, p. 20. In a *Champū-kāvya* called *Udayasundarī kathā*, composed by Soddhala, a poet of Gujarat in the eleventh century A.D., and published in the Gaekwad Oriental Series, Dharmapāla is said to have belonged to the family of Māndhātā (p. 4). As Māndhātā is a well-known mythical king of the solar race, this reference supports the view that the Pālas belonged to the solar race.
108. *Rāmacarita*, p. IX.
109. Quoted in Banerji, R.D., *Bāṅgālār Itihāsa*, Part I, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (in Bengali), p. 168, f.n. 18.
110. Tāranātha, *Geschichte des Buddhismus in Indien*, German translation by A. Schiefner, pp. 208-9. Tāranātha tells us that this successor was Devapāla, but according to Buston (*History of Buddhism*, translated by Dr. B. Obermiller, Heidelberg 1932, p.156), he was Dharmapāla.
111. *Pālas of Bengal* [Memoirs of the (Royal) Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. V, No. 3], Calcutta, 1915, p. 46.
112. This view, originally propounded by Mr. Prabhas Candra Sen, has been restated at some length by Mr. J. C. Ghosh (*IHQ*. IX. 484-85).
113. *JASB*, Vol. VI, pp. 88-97; *EI*, Vol. VI, pp. 203-07; *IB*, pp. 25-41; *CBI*, pp. 350-353.
114. *CBI*, pp. 236-240.
115. *IB*, p. 57.
116. *Ibid*, p. 71.
117. *Ibid*, p.106.
118. *Ibid*.

119. Vidyānanda, Tejacandra (Ed.), *Brāhmaṇa Sarvasvam* of Halāyudha, Calcutta, 1290 B.S., pp. 12-13.
120. *HBP*, p. 442.
121. *EI*, XV, p. 275-86; *IB*, Vol. III, pp. 57-67; Bhandarkar, D.D., *Inscriptions of Northern India*, No.1682; *Pālas of Bengal*, p. 105; *Sāhitya*, 128 B.S., p. 81ff.
122. *IB*, p.71.
123. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXX, p. 78ff.
124. Sircar, D. C., *Pāl-Sen Yuger Vaṃśānucarit*, 1982, Calcutta, 1982, p. 135.
125. *ASIAR*, 1930-34, p. 257
126. *JASB*, Vol. 65, 1896, Part I, pp. 8-9; *IB*, Vol. III, p. 140; *Indian Historical Quarterly*, IV, p. 760; *CBI*, p. 312.
127. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. I. March 1926. pp. 78-86; *IB*, Vol. III, pp. 177-180.
128. *JASB* (N.S.), Vol. X, 1914, p. 99; *IB*, Vol. III, p. 118; *CBI*, p. 334. *Ibid*, p. 9; *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. II, 1926, p. 81.
129. Daniel, H.H. Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyākara's Subhāṣita-ratnakoṣa*, Cambridge, 1965. Section 7.
130. Banerjee, S.C., (Ed.), Calcutta, 1965.
131. Bandopadhyay, Suresh Candra. *Saṃskṛit Sāhitye Bāṅgalīr Avadān* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1369 B.S.
132. Dhoyī. *Pavana-dūta*, Verse 30.
133. *Kumārasambhava*, 5.38.
134. *Brāhmaṇa-sarvasyam, Maṅgalācaram*. Ed. Bhattacharya. Calcutta, 1958, p. 1.

135. Ibid.
136. The *Purāṇa* is believed to have started in 8th Century A.D. and come to present form in 15/16th cent. A.D.
137. *āsanam svāgatam pādyāmarvyamācamānīyakam madhuparkācamasnānam vasanābharaṇāni ca gandhapuṣpe dhūpadīpou naivedya vandanam*. Apte, V. S., *The Students' Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 1988, p. 570.
138. The mystical syllable is considered as a preservative like armour.
139. *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Gaṇeśa Khaṇḍam, Unaviṃśa Adhyāya*, pp. 250-251.
140. It is believed to have been compiled in Bengal in the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.
141. Tarkaratna. Panchanan (Ed.), *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, Calcutta, 1396 B.S., *Uttara Khaṇḍa*, Chapter XIII, p. 340.
142. Chakravarty, Jahnvi Kumar. *Āryasuptaśatī O Gauḍavaṅga* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1378 B.S., verse no. 331, p. 221.
143. Ibid. verse no. 648, pp. 297-98
144. Ibid, p. 57.
145. Dikshit, K.N., *Excavations at Pāhārpur*, Delhi, 1938, p. 60.
146. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar. 'History of the Sūrya Image in Bengal', *Folklore*, December 1967, p. 424-25.
147. *SVRM*, p. 257, VRM 2324.
148. *SVRM*, pp. 235, 238, 240, 256.
149. *SVRM*, p. 239.
150. *SVRM*, pp. 254, 256; *DM*, p. 73.
151. *MMC*, pp. 15-20.

152. Malda Museum Nos. RSR-15, 16, 27; Bhattacharya, Malay Shankar, *Art in Stone: A Catalogue of Sculptures in Malda Museum*, Malda, 1982, pp. 18-20.
153. cf. Bhattacharya, P.K., *Iconography of Sculptures*, Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum, Darjeeling, 1983, p. 2.
154. *Loc. Cit.*
155. This feature occurs in the ninth century C.D. in the Rajshahi and Bogra images only.
156. The *Karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* is prescribed for all the gods other than Brahmā and Rudra who are endowed with *jaṭāmukuṭa* and Nārāyaṇa who should exclusively wear *kirīṭa-mukuṭa*. It is a short and small *karaṇḍa* (basket)-shaped crown, indicating subordination in status. This is characteristic of various kinds of goddesses and minor deities. *EHI*, pp. 29-30.
157. *SVRM*, pp. 261, 264; *MMC*, p. 20.
158. *SVRM*, p. 259.
159. *Ibid.* p. 258.
160. *DM*, p. 74.
161. *MMC*, pp. 16, 17, 19.
162. *IBBS*, p. 173.
163. Dasgupta, Chittaranjan. *Āchārya Jogeshcandra Purākrīti Bhavan, Descriptive Catalogue*, (in Bengali), Bishnupur, 1390 B.S., pp. 35-36.
164. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, 'History of the Sūrya Image in Bengal'. *Folklore*, December 1967, p. 427.
165. *SVRM*, pp. 250, 253.

166. Ibid, p. 264.
167. *BSHI*, pp. 185-197, 363-371.
168. Naogāon: 9; Niyamatpur-3; Godagari: 3.
169. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 426.
170. *HB-I*, p. 457.
171. Bhattacharya, P.K., *op.cit.*, p. 11, pl. II, fig.4.
172. *BSHI*, pp. 182, 366.
173. Koṭālipārā image, *HB-I*, p. 457 and a Faridpur image.
174. *SVRM*, p. 246.
175. Ibid, p. 259.
176. *BSHI*, pp. 185-195, 363-371.
177. Ibid.
178. Tanor – 2.
179. Gāzole -1, Bamangola -1.
180. *SVRM*. p. 252.
181. Sun images from Baria, Manda. (Rajshahi) and Deopara-Godagari (Rajshahi)  
*SVRM*, pp. 242, 245.
182. *SVRM*. p. 242.
183. Sun images from some unknown place in Rajshahi and Badhair. Tanor (Rajshahi).  
*SVRM*. pp. 241, 242.
184. *HBP*, p. 424.
185. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 82.
186. Ibid.

187. Kundu, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
188. *Ibid*, p. 79.
189. *Ibid*.
190. Sastri, H.P., *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal*, Calcutta.
191. 'Brāhmi Māheśvarī caiva Vaiṣṇavi caiva te tanuḥ / Tridhā yasya svarūpantu  
Bhānorbhāsvān prasidatu' Bibliotheca Indica Edition, Ch. 109, V. 71.
192. *SVRM*, pp. 247-248, pl. 240, VRM 654; *AR-VRS*, 1925-26, p. 9; *BSHI*, p. 193.
193. Sarkar, K. C., "A New Form of Sūrya from Varendra", *IHQ*, vol. VI, No. 1, March  
1930, pp. 465-70.
194. Chatterjee, A., *Padma-Purāṇa - A Study*, pp. 193-94. The *Śāradātilakam*. XIVA.2,  
emphasizes the syncretic character of the worship of the Sun.
195. *AR-VRS*. 1932-33, pp. 15-16, pl.1, fig.1; *DHI*, p. 550, pl. XLVII.3.
196. *DHI*, pp. 547-548, pl. XLVIII.3; Bhattacharyya, Dipak Candra, *Iconology of  
Composite Images*, p. 25, fig. 20.
197. *DHI*, pp. 547-548.
198. Aunadale, N. 'Pāla Inscription in the Indian Museum. *JPASB*, Vol. 4, 1968, p. 101.
199. Majumdar, R.C., *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 334.
200. *HBP*, p. 438.
201. *Ibid*, p. 440.
202. *SWAI-P*, p. 71.
203. Hazra, R.C., *op. cit.* p. 171.
204. *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (Bombay Ed.), 1892, p. 89.
205. *Bṛhat-saṁhitā*, XLII.37.

206. Ibid, XLIII. 14; XLVII. 29.
207. Ibid, XLVII.26, 29. *Puṣya* is the eighth lunar mansion or *Nakṣatra*.
208. Ibid, XXIV. 6.
209. Datta, Kalidas, 'Two Saura images from the District of 24-Parganas', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, March, 1933.
210. Representation of the wedding of Śiva with Pārvatī.
211. Vasu, N. N., *Vaṅger Jātīya Itihāsa, Rājanya-Kāṇḍa* (in Bengali), IV. 88. 90.  
*Mahādeva-kārikā* quoted by Umesh Gandra Sharma; *Kulapañjī* by Rāmadeva.
212. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekḥ Tāmraśāsanādir Prasāṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.
213. *Bṛhat- saṁhitā*, V.19-20.
214. *EI*. Vol. XXXVI, p.92 ff; Sircar. D. C., *Select Inscriptions*. II. p. 104.
215. *Sāmba P.*, 30.18, 32.12; 37.19.
216. Ibid, 39.41.
217. Ibid, Ch.I. 47-83. cf. Chakravarti, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 38-44, 80-82.
218. Quoted by Belvalkar, S.K. and Ranade, R.D., *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 298.
219. Sircar. D. C., *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, p. 61.
220. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 361.
221. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 77.
222. Mitra, Haridasa, 'Sadāśiva Worship in Early Bengal', *JASB*, Vol. 29, 1933, p. 205.
223. *EI*. Vol. XXXVI, p. 84f
224. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 92 ff; Sircar, D. C., *Select Inscriptions*, II, p. 104.
225. *Skanda Purāṇa, Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa*, Ch. 133, p. 508 ff.

226. Ibid, Ch. 27, Verse 52.

227. VII, 1, 139, II.

228. XXII.11.

229. *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chaps. 19, 21 and 22.

230. Dey, N. L., *The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India*, (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.),

New Delhi, 1971, p. 125.

231. Ibid. p. 25.