

CHAPTER - IV

**GROWTH AND
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The lands comprised within early Bengal find no mention at all in the Vedic *Samhitas*. The horizon of the earliest Aryan singers is apparently limited to the region extending eastwards only as far as Bhagalpur. Further, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*¹ refers to the Puṇdras, an ancient Bengal tribe, as *dasyus* or outlandish barbarians who lived in large numbers beyond the borders of Aryandom. The *Aitareya Aranyaka*² that probably refers to the Vangas, another early Bengal tribe, do so in contemptuous terms. Thus, it is quite clear that Bengal was outside the zone of Aryan culture even in the later Vedic period. The state of things was not very different even in the Sutra period. The *Baudhāyana Dharmasutra*³ prescribes a penance for those who visit, among other countries, Pundra and Vanga representing North Bengal and East Bengal. Even the Jaina Sutras also represent the people of Radhā as uncultured and almost savage. The linguistic and ethnological evidence render it highly probable that Bengal was, until the period represented by the *Sutras*, mostly peopled by non-Aryan races. It may be presumed that they had a developed culture of their own even though it was non-Vedic and non-Aryan.

The earliest history of the religious practices in Bengal was that of the reverence and worship, observances and beliefs of the original inhabitants of the different settlements of Bengal.⁴ 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 being nurtured since time immemorial. This very study has been done in Appendix B in course of our discussion to show the position of the Sun as a folk god among the Brahmanical womenfolk and the different tribal communities in present Bengal.

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,⁵ the Puṇdras and the Sumhas are described as the Sun worshipping tribes. In the Epics, the country of the Puṇdras who may be regarded as low caste⁶ corresponds with Bengal and Bihar. The Gupta epigraphs and the Chinese records place the territory of the Pundras – then styled Puṇdravardhana – in North Bengal⁷ Pundranagara, the capital city of the Pundras, is proved by epigraphic evidence to have been situated in the Bogra district of Northern Bengal. The country of the Suhmas roughly correspond to a portion of or to *Rādha* which lies to the west of the Ganges, including Tamruk (Midnapore) and the districts of Hooghly and Burdwan. The non-Āryan *Puṇdras* and *Sumhas* believed in the worship of the Sun as the highest reality.⁸ This view of *Brahman* held by the *Pundras* and the *Sumhas* was shared by Bharadvāja, as is alleged by the sage Gautama. It is deserving of note that the Bharadvajas were specially connected with Pusan – 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.

Pre-Gupta Period: 187 B.C. – 320 A.D.

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. There was no dearth of profound knowledge about the Vedic literature in ancient Vanga, as is strongly reflected in a legend in a 1st century A.D. Chandraketurah seal⁹ saying that “by his banners Siva is (recognizable as) the knower of Brahma (or a Vedic philosopher).” Based on these inscriptional evidences we are strongly inclined to hold the view that it was in Pre-Gupta ancient Vanga and certainly not in the Gupta period as it is generally believed that the streams of the Brahmanas besides Maga Brahmans, started coming into the land of ancient Vanga under royal patronage and settling there permanently.¹⁰ The source materials clearly indicate that an interesting state of polytheistic belief was prevailing and deities of Brahmanical faith, of Buddhist religion, and of local origin were adorned and worshipped in a spirit of peaceful co-existence. However, there was a complete preponderance of Brahmanical deities over other gods and goddesses that were definitely not enjoying royal patronage or popular support but at the same time were not certainly suppressed under any sort of fanatic attempts. Of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses, Agni, Surya, Indra, Siva and his Sakti, Karttikeya, Ganesa, Laksmi, Ganga and Visnu were widely worshipped in the land of ancient Vanga.¹¹ It seems that the Magians from Iran were not responsible for the first introduction of the image of the Sun god in India because there was an indigenous art tradition of representing the god riding on a chariot drawn by horses, as it is evident

from the relieves discovered at Bodhgaya, Bhaja, Lala Bhagat and Mathura.¹² The early indigenous tradition of representing the Sun god in his anthropomorphic form may be traced in some terracotta plaques of the Sunga-Kusana period found in different parts of Bengal. In fact, those terracotta plaques may be considered as the earliest remains indicating the beginning of the anthropomorphic Sun worship in Bengal.

A terracotta¹³ 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. The figure is bedecked with a wide repousse torque (*kanthi*), a *sirastraka*, round-shaped earrings, armlets and beaded bracelets. It also wears a thick waistband and has two wings beside the upper parts of the arms. Cluster of plantains are displayed on either side of the lower part of the stela and 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 Surya originally occurs in the *Rigveda* where he is depicted as the fine-looking winged celestial bird *Garutman* in some of the hymns¹⁴ *Suparna* (well winged) is no other than the Sun itself. According to Yaska, the *Suparna* is '*Divyo divijah*' (one who is 'originated in the sky'). "The learned call (this Aditya) as Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Agni. He is bedecked with divine wings and characterized by beautiful movements..."¹⁵ Full-blown lotuses in the hands of the figure are also highly significant. In the Indian poetic convention, the 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 (*Savitri sarvasya prasavitri*).¹⁶ A full-

blown lotus (*vikasita-padma*) is regarded principally as a Sun-symbol.¹⁷ According to Banerjea,¹⁸ association of lotus with the Sun is fully established by the Puranas, which enjoin the execution in solar sculpture of a twelve-petalled lotus. The round-shaped *karna-bhusanas* seem to resemble *Surya-mukhi* (*helianthus annuus*) flower, which has been traditionally been associated with Sun worship in Bengal. That the plantain tree is traditionally connected with the Sun worship is evident from its employment in the *Maghamandala Surya-vrata* as the symbolic representation of the Sun god.¹⁹

It is, thus, clear that the winged figure represents the Vedic Sun god Surya at its embryonic stage of iconic development. It also shows that the Sun-worship was introduced in ancient Vanga during the Post-Maurya and Pre-Gupta period under strong Brahmanical influence quite in keeping with the verb and think-tank of the society which is so eloquently reflected in the Kharosthi and Kharosthi-Brahmi Inscriptions found in different parts of lower West Bengal.²⁰ The Sun-worship was quite prominently prevalent during this period, as is evident from a good number of such winged figures found from different parts of ancient Vanga.²¹

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

associated with Surya - the Sun god". The winged goddess with leaves and buds shooting out of her head-gear may be taken as representing the cult of fertility and prosperity".

The representation of Surya as a winged human figure²³ is, no doubt, innovative with some attributes seemingly drawn from the existing local beliefs, faiths, customs and practices of the land. However, it was not a new one in the context of greater Indian art as such. In the 2nd century B.C sculptural panels of Bharhut²⁴ (Sanchi), occur beautiful winged human figures in Chunar red sand stone. There is no room for doubt that the basic idea of identifying the Sun god with the celestial bird *Garutman* (*divyah sa Suparna Garutman*) came from the *Rigveda* (1.164.46). Interestingly, winged figures are also found depicted in the Art of West Asia²⁵ and Persia²⁶ during the 15th century B.C. As an example, we may refer to the royal seal²⁷ datable to the first half of the 2nd 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 Aryans 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 Surya. Probably, this time-gap acted as the most powerful historical force in building up the foundation of an art-movement that culminated in the mass-productions of art objects in different parts of 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 Aryan society in its earlier phase so

greatly that there was very little scope for image-worship. With the anti-establishment trend in customs and practices sweeping across the country with the rise of the Imperial Mauryas, the image worship gained predominance over the Vedic rites and rituals. We find it reflected in the iconic representations of the time - both the Buddhist and Brahmanical ones. The cross-cultural connections as further reflected in the Hellenic and Hellenistic art²⁸ of the time gave the momentum for creative artistic activity in which the two prominent factors - the indigenous formulae drawn from the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, etc. and the foreign influence - had played a vital role. The Tamluk terracotta winged Surya 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 Vanga developed along an indigenous line in which the Sun god iconically appeared in the form of a winged god. The indigenusness of the artistic novelty lay in the additional iconographic attributes like those of the *mangal-ghata* with sprouting leaves, beautifully shaped plantain tree, etc. In addition, these additional iconographic attributes do attest to the local socio-economic needs and practices of the society of ancient Vanga, which was predominantly an agrarian one.

Another terracotta Surya of 1st 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 typical of the period and a garland with a pendant.

The sacred thread thrown across the right shoulder of the bare-bodied figure is very significant from religious point of view. It consists of three strands, which are met with in the figure of Agni hailing from the same Chandraketurgh region. As already mentioned, there were Vedic rites and sacrifices in vogue in ancient Vanga with the emerging Brahmanical deities playing a vital part in the enactment of the *Yajnic* rituals. In the Rigvedic hymn,²⁹ we find Surya as identified with Agni. The sacred thread of Surya may be taken as having the same ritualistic implications as is seen in the case of *agnitraya* in the iconic representation of Agni.³⁰ Aruna appears for the first time in Bengal as the celestial charioteer of the Sun god in this very iconic representation, which points to the development of his personality because of sectarian devotion. The two female attendants flanking the Sun god may be identified as Usa and Pratyusa. The artistic cohesion and religious emphasis of the entire iconic composition clearly shows that the religious orientation in ancient Vanga was undeniably in tandem with the performances of Vedic rites and rituals in the midst of a number of Brahmanical deities who were visualized in the growing Pauranic ambience.

The god is found here riding on a toy-cart drawn by four horses. On Indo-Greek and Kusana coins, such representations have also been found. Four horses drawing the Sun's chariot also occur in the Bodhgaya railing-image (1st century B.C.), the Bhaja sculpture (Pune, 1st or 2nd century B.C.), the Lala Bhagat relief (Kanpur, U.P.) 2nd century A.D.) and the Surya relief of Anantagumpha cave of Khandagiri group of Jaina shrines (Orissa, 1st century A.D.).³¹ In the *Rigveda*, Surya 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 noticed in the *Rigveda* to number four in

respect of the horses of the Sun'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 Vanga in the Pre-Gupta era".³² This resemblance is, however, superficial because the features of the Sun god along with Usa and Pratyusa and the chariot are Indian in character. Characteristic features of the Kusana 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 Kusana ones have already arrived to have 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 Surya is that the god, though largely resembling in many iconographic features with the Bodh Gaya, Bhaja, Lala Bhagat or Anantagumpha 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 Surya were depicted as accessory decorative figures in the religious architecture of the heterodox or other Brahmanical sects. A few more words deserve to be said about the greater but apparent similarity between the Surya relief from Bhaja Vihara³³ near Pune, Western Ghats and the Chandraketugarh terracotta Surya. The Bhaja Surya 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, pronouncedly demonstrates the deep-rooted element of the *bhakti* cult that was literally sweeping the country during the pre-

Gupta period. The Bhaja image represents the god for the art of the art's manifestation where the Chandraketugarh terracotta gives shape to the god in a spirit of mass obsession where the icon and the icon worshipper become identified with other, as is seen in a Rigvedic hymn (X.117) where the identity is desired between the worshipper and the worshipped.

A beautiful terracotta seal³⁴ datable to c. 1st century A.D. from Hadipur (North 24 Parganas), displays on one side a male figure in rigid *samapadasthanaka* pose. The figure holds in his right hand the thickset stalk of fully petalled lotus while 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 along with a square-shaped small symbol 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 (*Udicyavesa*), it could be taken as the image of Surya belonging to the formative stage when non-Indian features of solar iconography were slowly but steadily penetrating into the mainland from the north-western India.

The employment of tunic and boots in solar iconography occurs for the first time in ancient Vanga. In the Northerner dress of the Sun god, we can visualize the coming of the Iranian Surya (Mitra) in the land of ancient Vanga. 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 Brahmana .³⁵

Apart from the lotus motif, this sort of dress (*udicyavesa*) is solely worn by the Sun god. This would be borne out to by a good number of Sun images represented in coins, stones and terracotta from northwestern India in a period contemporaneous with the Post-Maurya and Pre-Gupta period. The *Brihat-samhita* (57.46-47) that gives one of the earliest descriptions of Surya images lays down that he should be clad in the fashion of a Northerner, (his body) from the feet up to the breast being covered (*kuryadudichyavesam gudham padaduro yavat*). The *Vishnuudharmottara-purana* (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* (*avyyanga*). According to Banerjea, 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 (Iranian Mithra) both compositionally and artistically 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 Kusana king Kaniska. A coin type of Huviska depicts on the reverse a solar deity with radiate nimbus making a gesture of blessings and looking like MIIRO (Iranian Mithra) without his sword.³⁶

The display of the horse on the left side of the deity behind the plantain tree deserves special review. The *Rigveda* often describes Surya as riding on a car drawn by one, by several or by seven fleeting and ruddy horses.³⁷ In one verse (RV. 7.77.3), he is depicted as a white brilliant stallion brought by Usa. All solar gods are inalienably

connected with the horse. Therefore, it is evident that the deity is no other than the Sun god himself. Thus, we find an intermediary stage in the development of the solar images from a winged one to the *udicyavesi* along with the demonstration of the horse, the next stage of a horse-drawn chariot being in the offing. The display of altogether three lotuses may indicate the urge of the devotee or the sculptor to demonstrate emphatically the Indianness of the solar iconography in view of unavoidable absorption of alien traits. The same impulse might have kept flowing down to the icon-makers of the successive period, as is evidenced by the representation of three lotuses in each of the two hands of the Kashipur (North 24 Parganas, West Bengal) Sun image of 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 *udichavesy*-type of Surya in its very nascent stage in ancient Vanga.

The worship of the Sun-deity had infiltrated largely into the various strata of the society in early Bengal. In this connection, we would like to refer to a 2nd century A.D. seal³⁸ from Berachampa (North 24 Parganas) with a legend in Kharosthi and Kharosthi-Brahmi. The seal exhibits a boat with a mast carrying a banner and above it a round object depicting the Sun in the sky. The associated legend says, “*Bhajotha dijre (or jri) ssudhrdho (=Bhajatha dvijeshu udadhau)*” meaning "you take resort into the Brahmins (while) at sea. It is significant to notice the display of the Sun on the seal along with an advice to the seafarers for taking resort unto the Brahmins while at sea.

The aniconic representation of the Sun god and its worship was also perhaps practiced during this period in Bengal side by side with the anthropomorphic

representation. Incidentally, mention may be made of a 3rd century A.D. terracotta seal³⁹ found in Chandraketurah. The seal displays a standing female figure with an ornate headdress, the right hand being akimbo and the left hand pointing to a staff rising from a water reservoir. The staff is flanked by two lotuses. In the *Rigveda* (4.13.5), Surya finds is described as the pillar of the sky. In addition, the Surya pillar from Nagarjunakonda of the 2nd century A.D. has also come to our notice. Therefore, the staff may be taken as standing for the column of the sky representing the Sun.

Theriomorphic representation of Surya was not, probably, unfamiliar in ancient Vanga in the Pre-Gupta era, as is traceable from a terracotta seal.⁴¹ The said seal shows a lotus as rising from a pond and two galloping horses turning their heads to a person who rides on one of them. Based on the equestrian beside the full-blown lotus and a legend *Dhesido (desitah)* in Kharosthi in left field, it may be said that the rider was instructed (*desitah*) to protect the tank from defilement since it was perhaps exclusively used for religious purpose as well as for the growth of lotus flowers only. In the *Rigveda*,⁴² it is emphatically enjoined to dig ponds or tanks for having full-blown lotuses in addition to the provision of pure drinking water.⁴³ The second horse might have symbolically depicted the Sun god.

An early 4th-5th century A.D. tablet in terracotta discovered from Harinarayanpur⁴⁴ (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 wearing a coat, trousers and boots. Two pillar-like objects of cylindrical shape are engraved in the relief. These remind us of the Surya pillar of the second cent. A. D. from

Nagarjunakonda and may, therefore, be taken as portraying the Sun in addition to his iconic representation. The concept of Surya pillar seems to have been well known to the artists of ancient Bengal in the 3rd/ 4th century A.D. In that case, we notice an uninterrupted flow of art style into ancient Vanga from different parts of India in the subsequent ages and various experimentations and reorientations in them in course of time.

It appears that in India, the Sun god in anthropomorphic representation have been visualized in two forms. The first one originated with conceptualizing the Sun as a beautiful celestial winged bird *Garutman (divyah sa suparna Garutman)* by the Rigvedic seers. The other, which is also based on the *Rigveda*⁴⁵ envisaged the Sun god as riding a chariot drawn by horses. Here the divinity is conceived as being flanked by his two consorts - Usa and Pratyusa. The four-horsed terracotta Surya from Chandraketugarh clearly attests to the developed concept of Surya that was current in early Bengal in the 1st century A.D. However, this iconographic pattern was in no way a secluded one, rather a widely accepted phenomenon of the period, which is proved by the early images of the god from different parts of India such as Bodhgaya, Bhaja, Lala Bhagat and Anantagumpha. In all these compositions of more or less similar features, the god is represented as moving on a chariot drawn by four horses and flanked by Usa and Pratyusa.

From the early centuries of the Christian era, the solar cult in Northern India seems to have advanced along a definite line. The North Indian form came to be reoriented largely by the East Iranian 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 Surya portrayed on the Hadipur Seal as reviewed earlier is to be taken as falling within this third form in its very nascent stage in ancient Bengal. The Northerner's dress (*udicyavesa*) happens to be the greatest feature of this form of solar iconography. The stress is laid emphatically on the close covering of the god's body with a coat of mail and his wearing the *avyanga* and the boots (*upanat-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 Iranian mode of Sun worship with the remodeled solar cult in Northern India is further heightened by Varahamihira's laying down (*Brihat-samhita*, Ch. 59, V.19) that it was the Magas who were entitled to install ceremonially the images of Surya in temples.⁴⁶ The Maga Brahmins were held in high esteem and reverence also by the people of ancient Bengal, as is evidenced by a fragmentary Kharosthi inscription in a terracotta potsherd⁴⁷ from Chandraketurgarh (North 24 Parganas) of c. late last or early 2nd century A. D. The Inscription⁴⁸ has been read by Prof. B.N. Mukherjee as "*ja'adha Makatreke vajtra dvr (I) je dhadh (e)... (=Jayanto-Makatah eko vastrah dvijah)*". Prof. Mukherjee thinks that the inscription seems to refer to a victorious Brahmin from Maka called Vastra (Vajtra). Can he be taken as a Maga Brahman who won victory in religious debates?⁴⁹ That the Sun worshippers were not used to accept discomfiture at the hands of the proponents of the other sects in theological discourses, is evident from the fact that Samkaracharya had to face the Sun-worshippers in the Deccan, whom he found as divided into six sub-sects. In view of the discovery of *udicyavesi* Surya images in early Bengal as well as of the

contemporaneousness of the epigraphic reference, it may be safely said that the victorious Brahmin was no other than a Maga priest who must have come to Bengal and install ceremonially the images of the Sun god. This view would be further strengthened by the fact that the *udicyavesa* type of Sun icon gained preponderance over the winged type of an instant early phase. This changeover indicates that the new re-orientation in Sun worship in ancient Bengal could take place only when the vigorous participation and assistance of the Maga Brahmanas was available. These Sun worshipping priest must have been invited and settled down in the land in time by the new settlers who themselves had migrated to Bengal from the northwestern province where the Kharosthi alphabet was mainly used.⁵⁰ Interestingly, the inscription in question was written in the Kharosthi language only while the others found in ancient Vanga are mostly written in the Brahmi and Brahmi-Kharosthi script. 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 the Sun god.

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 *udicyavesa* without sacrificing the artistic beauty. The lower part of the *udicyavesa* 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 *Surya* in ancient Vanga. The composite figure showing the *Surya* image of the 5th century A.D. from Indian Museum and the Kashipur (North 24 Parganas) *Surya* image of the 7th century A.D.- all exhibit slow but steady shedding off of the

Northerner's dress, the *avyanga* (waist-girdle) and the booted feet being retained in all the cases. There has been appreciable alteration in the fashioning of the *avyanga* since the days of the Harinarayanpur *Surya* image. Nevertheless, that has been done in consistence with the overall representation of the icon as well as the emerging religious guidelines, which were available to the icon-makers in codified forms in the subsequent times. The next stage in the evolution of solar icons was greater amplification and embellishment of the Sun-figure and the depiction of more of his attendants. As a good example, we can cite the bluish basalt stone-image of *Surya* (C. 6th century A.D.) found at Deora in the district of Bogra.⁵¹

No punch-marked nor cast-coins have yet been discovered in Bengal similar to those of the Uddehika and Panchala Mitra chiefs like *Suryamitra* and *Bhanumitra*, 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. Whatever may be the case, the Sun god seems to have enjoyed like *Indra* and *Agni*, wide popularity in ancient Vanga, possibly among the various strata of the society during the Post-Mauryan and Pre-Gupta period, as is 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 *Bhavisya Purana* (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.

Besides showing the popularity of Sun worship, archaeological materials also demonstrate that the worship of the god in image form developed in early Bengal along a native line in which the divinity made his appearance in the form of a winged deity. The indigenes in the creative innovation is discernable in such attributes as the *mangal ghata* with sprouting leaves, plantain tree, etc. adorning the central god. These additional attributes give a clear proof of the socio-economic needs and practices of the people of ancient Vanga, which were predominantly agrarian in nature. Bengal also came to be developed into one of the important sites, as evidenced by images and inscriptions, to keep pace with the iconic experiments that were going on in the northwest region of the country. The extension of the Kusana Empire in eastern India and the associated business activities led to the founding of urbanized settlements by the immigrants from the Kharosthi-using region of the northwest India. It is interesting to note that the tradition introduced by the Maga Brahmanas in fashioning Sun images in olden Vanga continued to be the major guiding force in its later representations. It is also deserving to admit of the great role that ancient Vanga had played not only in the evolutionary process of the solar iconography in this part of country, but also in establishing the cult under discussion finally in its land in the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods. Early Vanga became one of the fertile lands in the contemporary India for the successful introduction of the Sun worship amongst its heterogeneous groups of people. In addition, with a rich cultural heritage, it also served as the much-needed anvil for the mass production of solar icons in the subsequent times.

II

Gupta Period

Sun worship, which was very much popular in ancient Vanga 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 popular wind of Sun worship blowing across in ancient Vanga wafted further into the far-flung parts of greater Bengal in the early days of the Gupta age.⁵² Sun worship that was introduced in Bengal in the pre-Gupta period, was consolidated on a firm foundation during the Gupta rule in Bengal because of a favourable situation.

Greater part of India that was added in the Gupta Empire became subject to its economic system as well. This infusion of political and economic life gave great impetus to religious and cultural intermingling. The Guptas were prominent followers of Brahmanism and at the time of their reign, Puranic Brahmanism was emerging and starting to spread all over India. In this very period, principal *Puranas* like the *Vayu*, *Visnu* and *Matsya* were composed and Puranic gods and goddesses were being worshipped. The age witnessed the granting of land to Brahmanas, various Brahmanical sacrifices, the vogue of worship of Puranic deities and the founding of new settlement of Brahmanas. There is good evidence that Brahmanical ideals were more influential in this era in the number of ordinary householders who bought land and gave it to the Brahmanas for the foundation of religious institutions.⁵³ 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 *Pundravardhana-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. Brahmans had arrived to various parts of Bengal and settled as permanent residents. The epigraphic records of the Gupta period found in North Bengal at places like Dhanaidaha,⁵⁴ Baigrām,⁵⁵ Kalāikuri,⁵⁶ Damodarpur,⁵⁷ and Paharpur⁵⁸ contain names of a large number of Brāhmaṇas settled in Bengal. Of them, some belonged to the *Rigvedic* 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 *Pañchamahāyajña* sacrifices or construction and renovation of a temple along with the provision of funds 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 Bhaskaravarma that during the reign of Bhutivarma, more than two hundred Brāhmaṇa families belonging to various *gotras* and Vedic *Śākhās* were settled in Pancakhanda village in Srihatta district. The Lokanatha edict of the seventh cent. A.D. reveals that in Samatata, the jungle had been cleared for a new settlement and all who resided there were Brahmans versed in the four *Vedas*. Thus, in this era Vedic religion and culture had spread throughout Bengal through the numerous waves of Brahmanas.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, to the common person the extent of Puranic religion and culture was much more significant; the Brahmanical Hindus were generally votaries of either Visnu.⁶⁰ or Siva.⁶¹

With the spread of the Vedic Brahmanism everywhere in Bengal, the cult of Vedic Sun god Savitā was brought in by the Brahmanas along with their daily programme of rituals and prayers. Every twice-born householder is enjoined to perform

the *Samdhyopasana*, a form of Sun worship by muttering the Gayatri *Mantra* with facing towards the east in the morning and the north-east in the evening.⁶² It is also prescribed to offer an *arghya* to the Sun.⁶³ As the *Samdhya* was to be performed in accordance with the method laid down in the *Grihyasutras* and *Dharmasutras* every day by every Brahmana, 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.⁶⁴ The earliest inscriptional evidence for the worship of the Sun in early Bengal comes from Pundravardhana. In the Jagadishpur (Rajshahi) copper plate of 123 Gupta era (447 A.D.) issued from Purnakausikā, the headquarters of Śringaveravīthī, it is mentioned that three residents - Kshemarka, Bhoiyala and Mahidasa - had permanently donated lands for the construction of a temple for the thousand-rayed god (*Sahasra-rasmi*) Surya 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 *khanda-phutta* as well as for the supply of perfume, incense and oil etc.⁶⁵

The temple of the '*Sahasraraśmī* (the Sun) was established in the village named Gulmagandhika adjacent to the Jaina Vihara.⁶⁶ in *Pundravardhana-bhukti*. The inscription also mentions the name of *Sambapura* where the temple was situated. Samba, the son of Krisna by Jāmbavatī, is connected with the worship of the Sun in many late Puranas.⁶⁷ *Sambapura* is another name of Mulasthana (present Multan in Sind) where Samba constructed a Sun temple at Candrabhaga (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

Brahmanas into India by Samba from Sakadvipa is also referred to in the Govindapur (Gaya District) stone inscription of poet Gangadhara dated the Saka year 1059 (=1137-38 A.D.).⁶⁸ It seems from the name of the place mentioned in the Jagdishpur inscription that Samba myth was well established in the tradition of Bengal at least from the Gupta period.

The Jagdishpur 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 Vaisyas. Besides Iranian 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. *Sahasrarasmi* and not Iranian 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 *Mahabharata* 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 *Pundravardhana-bhukti* as early as the first half of the fifth century A.D. Since the indigenous name of *Sahasrarasmi* 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.

It is highly deserving of note that among the inscriptions testifying to Sun worship in India, the Jagadishpur copper plate (447 A.D.) happens to be the earliest one, the next in point of time being the Indor Copper Plate Inscription of Skandagupta (465-66 A.D.). This clearly shows to what level the Sun worship was popular among the people in early Bengal and to what extent the tradition of Sun image and temple was deep-rooted in their psyche.

As parts of the Gupta Empire, Puṇḍravardhana, Rādha and Vaṅga were definitely brought within the main current of the *bhakti*-movement in North India. From the Gupta period, the Surya worship of a purely northern culture brought into India by Iranian and Scythian invaders became very widespread in Bengal. This deity was not related to the Vedic concept of Surya, but rather to the idea and ritual of a Surya of popular belief. By this time, the Sakadvipi Brahmanas seem to have spread all over Bengal. There is also inscriptional evidence that these Brahmanas were related to the Bengal Brahmanas. The above-mentioned inscription from Govindapur in Gaya district, Bihar dated Saka era 1059 (=1137 A. D.) says that two brothers Manaratha and Dasaratha belonging to the family of Bharadvaja of the Maga Brahmana origin, were induced to accept jobs under the King Varnamana of Magadha. Manaratha's son Gangadhara, a counsellor and friend of Rudramāna of Magadha, had composed the edict. Gangadhara had married a daughter of Jayapāṇi, an official of the king Gauda.

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 Kumarpur⁶⁹ and Niyamatpur,⁷⁰ both in the Rajshahi district, North Bengal, which is roughly the Puṇḍravardhana of ancient times. In

both the relieves, the god is accompanied by his two attendants, Dandi and Pingala. 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 Kusana artists to provide the *Surya-ratha* with only two or four horses. The *Matsya Purana*⁷¹ 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 *Brihat-samhita*, 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.⁷² A remarkable innovation is the scarf or belt introduced for the first time in these two images. Both the Surya relieves unmistakably reveal the glittering traces of the iconographic features of the Kusana period in dress and general characteristics. It may be reasonably held that the Sauras or the devotees of Surya 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 nationalization of the Sun images in the early Gupta age. The peculiarity of the features of the Kumarpur Surya with no parallel in any other school or period of Indian art, the kind and quality of the material used, as well as the crude, coagulated and unsophisticated appearance of the example, all combine to suggest that it is probably the work of a local artist who was remotely touched by the art

idiom of Mathura.⁷³ The emergence of a local school of art for the Sun images points to the wide prevalence of the image-worship of the god in the society.

An early 5th century terracotta seal of a ruler with the epithet “Ladhapeya, the sustaining Elephant”⁷⁴ from Chandraketugarh contains, along with the figure of Agni, the figure of a deity identified as that of Surya, which also significantly associates him with agriculture. Surya instills life in us and that is why it is known as *Savitri*.⁷⁵ At the break of day, people begin their day's works. Therefore, he is called the life of living being like Agni.

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 Deora (Bogra)⁷⁶ definitely shows some development in the iconic type of Surya. However, not much removed in point of date from the Bhumara⁷⁷ (Nagod, Madhya Pradesh) solar relief, it introduces many new specialties not present in the latter. The Bhumara Surya was an accessory figure inside one of the '*caitya*' windows in a Siva temple, while the Deora Surya seems to have been the most important object of worship in a shrine for the god. The number of attendants and associates has increased in the Deora image, for in addition to Dandi and Pingala, Aruna in the middle and the arrow-shooting Usa and Pratyusa are on two sides. He 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 Kushan dress has disappeared and the image is given a complete indigenous character. The Deora image belongs to the

Gupta age,⁷⁸ when the full-fledged image of the god with all his attendants might have been imported in Bengal.

The way of treating the horses and the two demons in the the Kashipur Surya⁷⁹ 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 cent. 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 admitted that the Deora or Kashipur Sun-images seem to be the products of the continuing art-tradition introduced in ancient Vanga in the fashioning of Sun-icons by the Maga Brahmanas.⁸⁰

In the Kusana period, the Sun images were of two types – seated and *bhadrasana*. 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.,⁸¹ was found along with an inscribed image of the goddess Sarvvani set up by Prabhavati, the queen of the Buddhist Devakhadga, from some ruins in the village of Deulbadi, Comilla. The image follows the Deora composition in many of its details. We may deduce some important information of Sun worship from the Deulbadi icon. No doubt, the Sun god received worship from the Buddhists and that too sometimes simultaneously with Brahmanical deities like Sarvvani (Uma or Durga), the devoted wife of Siva. The latter fact definitely points to some sort of syncretism in the society. Most probably, the *rogahartta* aspect of Surya 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 god was also adored by individuals in their houses in image form.

As regards the sociological aspect, the Sun cult had a wide following. The Brahmanas of orthodox Vedic tradition, the Vaisyas etc. were associated with the solar cult. The connection of the foreigners like the Iranian 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. However, in comparison to Vaisnavism and Saivism it was given a subordinate position and considered a minor cult.

Between post-Gupta and pre-Pala Period

Sun worship was not confined only to Pundravardhana or Vanga but equally in vogue in Vardhamana-bhukti i.e. *Uttara-Radha* and *Dandabhukti-mandalas*. The Mallasarul Copper Plate inscription⁸² (of Vijayasena) of the time of Gopachandra (Regnal Year 3 i.e. 543 A.D.) from Vardhamana-bhukti refers to *Lokanatha Dharma*, which is identified with the Sun god. The inscription begins with an invocation to Śrī Lokanātha.⁸³ 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. Sircar⁸⁴ 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. Sen⁸⁵ 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 cent. Bengal. The Gupta rule in Bengal from the middle of the fourth to the middle of the 6th century A.D., no doubt, patronized the Vedic as well as Puranic religion. The Buddhist trend in the religious life of Bengal was ushered in under the patronage of the Palas sometime about the middle of the 8th Century A.D. Therefore, it would be rather hazardous to conclude that a seal of the 6th century A.D. from ancient *Radha* 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 Brahmanical god. In spite of that, it is no less significant to study the seal along with the first two lines of the inscriptions where *Sri Lokanath* has been equated with Dharma. There is least doubt that Dharma was recognized for long as the Sun god by the Nisadas or the Austric-speaking original inhabitants of Bengal.⁸⁶ Besides, the Dharmamaṅgala Kāvya, which were composed at a later date in Rādha, record the earliest tradition of worshipping the Sun god with the name of Dharma.⁸⁷ 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 Gopachandra. 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 Brāhmaṅical 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, contributed ultimately to the growth of the concept of *bhakti* centering round Sūrya.

We have already noted the familiarity of Bengal with the Samba legend in respect of Sun worship. The tradition of Samba'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 Sasanka, the first historical ruler of Gauda. The Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsang portrayed Sasanka as a persecutor of the Buddhists. While traveling in Magadha in 637-38 A.D., he noted⁸⁸ that in recent times, Sasanka had cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya and ordered the taking away of the Buddha image in a nearby shrine. He also added that on hearing the execution of his order, Sasanka was seized with fear, his body produced sores and his flesh peeled off causing his death. An echo is heard in the *Aryamañjuśrmūlakalpa*, a later text of a Buddhist writer, of the story of Sasanka's destruction of the Bodhi tree and his consequent death. The same story of Sasanka's disease is preserved in medieval genealogical (*Kulajī*) works of Bengal Brahmanas.⁸⁹ According to the tradition preserved among the *Nadiya Vanga Grahavipra Samaja* as well as the *Varendra Sakadvipi Brahmanas*, twelve Brahmanas living on the banks of the Sarayū River were brought by king Sasanka to Gauda in order to cure himself of an incurable disease by offering sacrifices to the planets (*graha-yajna*). According to this tradition, Sasanka was healed and rewarded the Brahmanas who then settled in Gauda at his request. These Brahmanas known as *Grahavipra* and settled in Radha and Vanga, came to be divided into several sections according to the places of

their residence. Given the authenticity of the *Kulaji* texts, it may safely be said that the *Grahayajna*, 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 Siva like Sasanka found it advisable to resort to it. The legend also points to the occasional immigration of the Sakadvipi Brahmanas 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-rogaṇām hartā*').

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 inscription⁹⁰ of Bhāskara-varman, issued from Karnasuvarna⁹¹ sometime after the death of Harsavardhana in 647 A.D. Herein Bhaskaravarman has been compared with *Bhaskara* (*Bhaskaramiva tejasām nilayam*) and his rise has been equaled with that of the '*Bhuvanpati*' i.e. the Sun.⁹² The king, like Surya who takes away darkness from the world, spread the eternal light of the *Āryadharmā* by removing the accumulated darkness of the *Kaliyuga*.

III

Pala Period: Epigraphic evidences

The stream of the Vedic religion became gradually stronger during the rule of the Pala-Candra-Kambojas, though they were ardent followers of Buddhism. In fact, all the Pala kings were prominent patrons of Brahmanas, Brahmanical images and temples and therefore, made grants of lands for them to enhance their own virtue and renown. Prabhavati, the queen of the Buddhist Devakhadga, set up an image of the goddess

Sarvani (Durga) with which was found a seated bronze image of Surya. A number of inscriptions from the Pala and Candra age inform that from different parts of India such as Lata (South Gujarat),⁹³ Madhyadesa, Krodanjan (Kolāñcha), Muktvāvastu and especially central India, Brahmanas of various *Gotra-Pravara* and various Vedic branches as well as Brahmanas observing the Vedic sacraments came to settle in Bengal. We are also told that many of the Brahmanas 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 Devapala, the Badal Pillar inscription⁹⁴ as well as the Bhagalpur Copper Plate inscription⁹⁵ of the time of Nārāyaṇapāla and the Vangar inscription of Mahipala. Mention is made in many inscriptions of the Vedic sacrifices and the *homa* oblation. In this period, Puranic 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 Brahmanas 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 Brahmanas by means of *Samdhyopasana* 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 Bāṇagada (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 Pūrvakṣitighrānmidhiriva'*).⁹⁶ It is worth mentioning that the Rigvedic description (I.50.4-8) of the Sun as the source of the light has been repeated here. The Gayā (Kriṣṇadvārikā Temple) stone Inscription of the time of Nayapāladeva (1038-1055 A.D.) refers to Visvāditya, son of Śūdraka, as prosperous and endowed with blazing personality as the Sun high up in the sky and sending terrific heat.⁹⁷ In another place, the splendour of *Bhāskara* has been attributed to Visvāditya possessed of unending qualities (*'tejasvitā bhāsvati'*). Atmospheric aspect of the Sun becomes prominent here again. In the contemporary Bāṇagada Prasasti of Mūrti-Śiva, 'Bhanu' (the Sun) shining above the lofty shrine of the Mūrti Śiva has been described as a golden pitcher.⁹⁸ 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 yasyonmīlan-mīlane'*).⁹⁹ Analogous descriptions are also found in Verse 2 of the Kamauli copper Plate of Vaidyadeva. In the Vedic literature,¹⁰⁰ Sūrya has been described as the eye of Mitra and Varuṇa as well as the soul of all – movable and stationary¹⁰¹ However, here the inscription refers to the Sun as the eye of such a deity who in the *Rigveda* appears as an insignificant aspect of the former. This small epigraphic data is extremely important in understanding the relative position of both Surya and Visnu in the contemporary society. It is evident that in the eleventh century itself began the process of eclipse of Surya by

Visnu, 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.¹⁰¹ and consequently being subjected to aggression of Vaisnavism 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 *Radha-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 jamgam-jayastambho babhou yo'rpitah*”). 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. Anyway, the ‘*ratha*’ might have been presented for the annual solar car-festival (‘*rathayatra*’) an account of which is found in the *Samba P.* (34.14 ff). We learn from the *Skanda P.* (Ch. 43 Verse 33) that at Ujjayini, the *rathayatra* 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 way to the heaven.¹⁰² In addition, there are also references to the offering of golden lotus for the images of ‘*Chandamsu*’ as well as for the icons of Surya and the

Navagrahas made of silver.¹⁰³ An epithet like '*Chandamsu*' (hot-rayed) used for the Sun god in an epigraph from Birbhūm (the *Uttar Rādha*) seems to be quite befitting in view of the terrific heat that the deity pours down heavily there. The gift of lotus made of a precious metal like gold and the use of silver in making the images of Surya as well as the Navagrahas presuppose the fact that the god and the nine planets were worshipped by a section of wealthy people and that too so intensely as to insist on themselves to incur huge expenditure lavishly. Gold and silver find mention in the *Samba P.*¹⁰⁴ as the materials for the Sun images, other five being copper, earth, stone, wood and paint. Yajñavalkya 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 *Rādha* region.

Towards the end of the Pala period, Sun worship gained immense popularity among the Brahmana rulers of Gaya. The Gayā Gadādhara Temple Inscription¹⁰⁵ of the time of Nayapāla begins with "*Om namo Mārtaṇḍāya*" and the first verse is devoted to the Sun as well. The founder of the temple seems to have been a *Parama-saura*, if we are to take into account the practice immensely popular in ancient times to begin the text of an inscription with adoration to the deity the issuer is intensely devoted to. For example, we may refer to the Deopara Inscription of *Parama-Māheśvar* Vijayasena and the Naihati Copperplate of *Parama-Māheśvar* Vallalāsen that begin with '*Om om namaḥ Sivaya*'. Similarly, the Madhainagar Copperplate of *Parama-Vaiṣṇava* Lakṣmanasena commences with '*Om om namo Narayanaya*'. It is known from the Gayā Akṣayavata Temple Inscription of Viśvarūpa Viśvāditya (a feudatory of the Palas) incised in the regal year 5 of Vīgrahapāla III (1043-70 A.D.), which begins with adoration to Siva, informs that the

image of *Śuklabhānu* (Sūrya) was installed in the temple of the *Prapitāmaheśvara* (Brahma) at Gaya together with the icons of *Gāthesh*, *Kanakesvara*, *Ambujabhava*, *Visvarupesvara*, *Gangesa*, *Gadadhara*, *Gridhresa*, *Sujanardana* and *Vatesa*.¹⁰⁶ 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 Sitalā Temple Inscription¹⁰⁷ of Yakṣapala¹⁰⁸ of the time of Govindapāla (1161 A.D.-1165 A.D.) also begins with “*Om namah Sūryāya*” and here also the first verse is dedicated to the Sun god - “*Viṣaya-madhutkara-pūrṇa prāṇinikayalim visva-śatapattam/ aṣṭāśā-dala-ramām prakāśayannavatu vo Bhānuh*”. On the ground cited above, it can safely be concluded that Yaksapala was also a *Parama-Saura*. In addition to the *Sūryavandanā* in the *Maṅgalācharaṇa*,¹⁰⁹ the inscription also refers to *Suryapranama*,¹¹⁰ which originated as a mode of Sun worship as early as the *Rigvedic* age and gained popularity in later Hinduism. There is no room for doubt that it was still a popular form of the worship of the Sun in the age under review. The inscription in question also refers to the construction of a temple where the images of *Mounāditya*, *Sahasraliṅga*, *Kamalārdhāṅgī-Nārāyaṇa*, *Someśvara*, *Phalgunātha*, *Vijayāditya* and *Kedareśvara* were installed.¹¹¹ Of the names of the gods just mentioned, *Mounāditya* and *Vijayāditya* appear to be other names of Sūrya. In the light of the above facts, it would be reasonable to identify the Brāhmaṇa tributary princes of Gayā as *Saura* because of their intense devotion to the Sun god.

In the Mainamati Plate of Govindacandra (1020 -1055 A.D.) of the contemporary Chandra dynasty, the king has been described as shining as the *Pracandaraśmi* Sūrya.¹¹² In the Ramganj Copperplate of Isvaraghosa (1040 - 1080 A.D.), a contemporary of

Vigrahapala III, Balaghosa, Dhavalaghosa and Mahamandalika Isvaraghosa – all three have been described as (well-known/veritable as) the Sun.¹¹⁴ 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 tāpanapratimah* - Verse 5).¹¹⁵ In the Kamauli Plate of Vaidyadeva,¹¹⁶ Surya 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*’, ‘*Mārtaṅḍa*’ (“*sākṣāt divaspativikramah*,” verse 14) or ‘*dinapati*’ (“*ūjirtairdinapatih*, verse 19). The inscription further informs that the Pala king Vigrahapala was born in the family of the Sun, the right eye of Hari (*etasya daksinadriśo vamse Mihirasya jātavān pūrvam*).

The Kamauli Plate leads us to presume that the Pala kings had belonged to the solar dynasty.¹¹⁷ In the *Rāmācharita* (I. 4) of Sandhyākara Nandi, Dharmapala is described as ‘the light of Samudra's race’ (*samudra-kula-dipa*) i.e., descended from the ocean.¹¹⁸ 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 Pala 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-Mangala* of Ghanarāma.¹¹⁹ It tells about the exile of Dharmapala’s queen Vallabhadevi to forest because of sonlessness, where her relationship with the ocean gave birth to a son.

According to Tārānātha, Gopāla was succeeded by a son who was begotten by Nāgarāja Sagarapāla, the sovereign of the ocean, on his younger queen.¹¹⁹ This is evidently another version of the Pala origin from *samudra* or ocean. R.D. Banerji in his endeavour to interpret '*Samudra-kula*' rationally says that the Pālas came from the sea.¹²⁰ However, reconciliation has been attempted between the two different traditions of *Samudra* and *Sūrya* origin by holding that *Samudra-kula* means *Surya-kula* or solar race to which Samudra, the son of the mythical king Sagara, belonged.¹²¹

Varman-Sena age: Epigraphic evidences

In the 11th - 12th centuries A.D., the Vedicism 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 Pala and Kamboja era. From the second half of the eleventh century, the descendants of the Buddhist Pala kings gradually took to Brahmanism. More and more Brahmanas emigrated from the Central regions. In the inscriptions and the literature of the times, the Brahmanical 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 Bhatta-Bhavadeva, minister of the Varman King Harivarman (1073-1127 A.D.),¹²² 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.)¹²³ refers to the grant of land in Puṇḍravardhana to the Brāhmaṇas who hailed from *Uttara Rādha* 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 Vijayasena¹²⁴ records the donation of lands in the Khādi Viṣaya of *Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti* to the priests who performed *Kanakatula Puruṣa Mahādāna* on behalf of the great Bilāsadevī on the day of lunar eclipse. The Naihati Copper grant of Vallālasena¹²⁵ (1159 - 1179 A.D.) records the donation of land to *Ācāriya Vāsudevasarman* for supervision of *Hemāsya Mahādāna* on the bank of the river Gaṅgā during a solar eclipse. The Tarpandighi (Balurghat, South Dinajpur) Copper Plate grant¹²⁶ (1181 A.D.) of Lakṣmanasena records the donation of a village in Varendri to Ācārya Īśvara Devaśarman as fee for his service in the *Hiranyasya Mahādāna*. Again, the Madhainagar (Pabna district) Copper plate grant (1204 A.D.) of Lakṣmanasena¹²⁷ 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 Brahmanas by traditional way of *Samdhyopasana* along with the muttering of Gayatri. In *Brāhmaṇa Sarvasva*¹²⁸ 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 Guravarmiśra speaks quite differently. Even if we accept the allegation as true at the end of the 12th century A. D., it would be unreasonable to hold that the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal deviated from the daily practice of remembering three times the *Gāyatrī*-hymn. 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 Brāhmanical 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 Brahmanas, 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 Brahmans who had come from the west.¹²⁹

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*".¹³⁰ The Naihati Copper grant of Vallālasena¹³¹ (1159-1179 A.D.) refers to the performance of the *Hemāsya Mahādāna Yajna* by Vilasadevi, 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.¹³²

Visvarupasena (son of Laksmanasena) and his son Suryasena were staunch devotees of Surya and it was in this period that Surya 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. Visvarupasena is said to have been seriously sick or

made captive, resulting in his abdicating the throne in 1210 A.D. in favour of Suryasena and again ascending the same five years later.¹³³ The possibility of prolonged and severe ailment of Visvarupasena seems to be most probable, which impelled him to profess the cult of Surya who has been described in the Bairhatta image inscription as the remover of all diseases (“*samasta-roganam hartta*”).¹³⁴ The Madanapada (Faridpur) Copperplate (1220 A.D.)¹³⁵ and the Calcutta Sahitya Parisat Copper-plate of Visvarupasena¹³⁶ as well as The Edilpur (Faridpur district) Copperplate of Suryasena¹³⁷ begins with an invocation of the God Narayana, 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 Satapatha Brahmana line of Sun worship that was going on parallel with his worship in image. The kings’ preference for this mode of Surya worship may be seen as indicative of a strong undercurrent against the prevailing practice of worshipping the god anthropomorphically. It is worth mentioning that Visvarupasena has described himself as a devout worshipper of the Sun god (*Parama-saura*) in his two inscriptions. Even the *Parama-Vaisnava* Laksmanasena has been described as *Parama-Saura* in the Madanpada inscription. Evidently, it is nothing but a traditional attempt to associate one’s predecessor with his own religious faith. Suryasena, like his father, has also identified himself as the *Parama-saura*. Both of them have been described as “*Senakula-kamalavikasa-bhaskara*”.

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 *Subhasitaratnakosa*, an anthology compiled by the Buddhist abbot Vidyakara who appears to have flourished in Bengal towards the first quarter of the 12th cent. A.D. The position that the anthologist accorded to the section (no. 7) on Sun immediately after those on Siva (Sections 4 & 5) and Visnu (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 Vidyakara 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 Surya as held by a few poets, though belonging to different ages, all the four verses are being quoted here.¹³⁸

148. "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". *Rajasekhara*

149. 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. *Vidya*

150. 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. *Varahamihira*

151. 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. *Mayura*

A number of verses of different poets on the Sun occur in the *Devapravaha* (Section on gods) of the *Sadukti-karnamrita* (1206 A.D.),¹³⁹ an anthology compiled by Sridharadasa under the patronage of Laksmanasea. This, no doubt, points to an important position of the Sun god in the prevailing religious horizon. In a verse (V.16.1) of

Umapatidhara, a fellow poet of Jayadeva in the court of Laksmanasena, quoted in the *Sadukt-ikarnamrita* (1206 A.D.), salutation has been made to the east filled with fragrance, which constitutes a clear reference to *Suryapranama*, a popular mode of Sun worship since the Rigvedic age. Another verse (IV.6.5) of the same poet says eulogizing the Sun that *Bhagavana Surya* who beautifies all his lotuses simultaneously along with waking all up, is to be worshipped, even though he is heated.¹⁴⁰ Dhoyi, a court-poet of Laksmanasena, refers in his *Pavana-duta* to the Sun temple at (Triveni), 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.¹⁴¹ Halayudha, a well-known writer in the history of the Smriti digests of Bengal and a contemporary of Laksmanasena, has showered a eulogy of the Sun god in the *Mangalacharana* of his *Brahmana-sarvasya* thus: "I eulogize the *bharga (tejah)* of Savita that gives light, like a lamp, to the three worlds - *bhu, bhavah* and *svah*. May the Sun god do good to us, who is the ornament of the sky, the cause of the three *kalas*, full of Vedas and the way to obtain the *trivargas*¹⁴² (three objects of worldly existence) – *dharma, artha* and *kama*. I adore the Gayatri Devi who is venerable in the three worlds and who is saluted three times even by *Trilochana* (Siva) himself".¹⁴³

Describing the advent of Surya along with the causes of his worship in his work, Halayudha says, "Savita is coming. What is the form of the Savita? Possessing qualities of *stati* 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 Savita 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".¹⁴⁴ As virtuous acts are not performed at night, hence the nighttime has been called black or full of gloom. This means: the god Savita 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 Purana*,¹⁴⁵ the Sun worshippers gain recovery from different kinds of illness. In this regard, it has been said in this text: "Brahma 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 ritual¹⁴⁶ by muttering the hymn – '*Om hring namobhagavate Suryoya paramatmane svaha*', you are sure to get rid of disease. I am giving you this wonderful armour¹⁴⁷ 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 *Garuda*. 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 *Jagadvilaksmāna* is Prajapati, its metre is Gayatri 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 *havisanna* (boiled sunned rice and *ghee*).¹⁴⁸

In this connection, the *Brihadharma Purana*¹⁴⁹ 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 Purana 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 Brahmanas who immigrated to India from Sakadvipa has been known as the Sakadvipi Brahmanas and the descendants of some Sakadvipi Brahmana father and Vaisya mother are called the *Grahavipras* or *Ganakas*.¹⁵⁰ These *Grahavipras* officiated in the religious ceremonies. A reference to these Brahmans is also found in a verse in the *Aryasaptasati* where the *grahasanti* (propitiation of planets by sacrifices etc.) has been beautifully described in connection with a deep attachment of a lady-love for her lover.¹⁵¹ Besides, the *ganaka* (astrologer) class was very skillful 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 *Aryasaptasati* while describing the deceitfulness of the lover towards his lady-love.¹⁵² Naturally, these astrologers who are even called *kaitavavid*¹⁵³ (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 *Agradani Brahmana* were also regarded as *patita* because they used to receive first gift of the funeral ceremony from the *Sudras*.

Images:

In addition to the epigraphic evidences, we have several images of the Sun god that much more strongly indicates the growth and development of the Sun-cult god from the 8th to the 12th century A. D. and even later. The number of images of the Sun god, dating from the Pala and Sena periods, is very large.

8th Century A.D.

Three images of the solar divinity are known to belong to the 8th 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 *Varendri* and some parts of *Uttar Radha*. Continuation of earlier fashion as well as advent of new ones is clearly noticeable in their iconography. The terracotta Surya¹⁵⁴ from Paharpur 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 Bodhgaya railings. The relief from Bhadrakali (Hooghly)¹⁵⁵ with a clear sign of emphasis on flatness not only echoes the two-dimensional art of Bharhut but also depicts the deity (Pl. 10a) in full anthropomorphic form ignoring the prescribed rule of the *Matsya Purana*. Another feature in this sculpture not very uncommon in Pala 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 Pala 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. Surya and his two attendants Dandi and Pingala are represented as wearing a pair of pointed boots, as it would be seen in the Sun icons belonging to the Pala 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 Surya 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 8th century A.D. image¹⁵⁶ in grey sandstone comes from Naogaon, 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 Brahmanical concept of the Sun worship 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 Tantrik philosophy.

9th 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 Palas. However, out of the 26 ninth century AD. images noticed hitherto, all the 25 of known provenance hail from Pundravardhana – four¹⁵⁷ from Rajshahi, one from Bogra,¹⁵⁸ three from Dinajpur¹⁵⁹ and 16 from Malda.¹⁶⁰ 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 *rogaharta* concept of the Sun god. The tradition of Sun worship as noticed among the Pundras in the Arseya Upanisad of the 4th century B.C. probably played a prominent role in the ever-increasing popularity of the anthropomorphic worship of the god in the Pundravardhana. Anyway, it is interesting to note that out of 16 Sun reliefs from Malda 11 came from Gazole 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 Pundravardhana comprising Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Malda 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 Gazole images¹⁶¹ 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 *udicyavesa* or the deity's feet are left uncarved in accordance with the injunction of the *Matsya Purana*, 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 Gazole 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 Radha, Vanga or Samatata may be attributed to the pre-dominance of orthodox Hinduism in those regions, where Satapatha Brahmana concept of the Sun as a golden plate might have been in much vogue.

To comprehend the undercurrent a little more of the prevailing thought in the Sun-cult, a bit deeper dig might be made into the contemporary solar iconography. There is no room for doubt that the Bengali artists, nay the devotees did not follow in all respect the iconological determination and arrangement of any contemporary text in fashioning the image of the Sun god. Whether the Sun-priests also followed the suit of the icon-makers as well as the idol-worshippers or they themselves dictated the iconological psyche of the former is difficult to say with certainty. Anyway, a conscious endeavour for predominance in solar iconography is quite noticeable between the champions of alien and indigenous Sun cult and in this, the former emerged little more successful though the latter also succeeded in making their presence felt to some extent. 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. Surya is endowed with a *kirita* (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.¹⁶² The god is frequently attended by Pingala and Dandi only. Pot-bellied Pingala usually carries a pen in his right hand and an inkpot in the left while the *ayudhas* and the posture of Dandi's hand often vary. The left hand of Dandi is sometimes represented as endowed with *sula* or resting on a staff or placed on the hip while the right hand is raised to exhibit the *abhaya mudra*. However, in

almost all cases, both these attendants of the Sun god are adorned with *Karandamukutas*.¹⁶³ Mahasveta (Prithivi) makes a frequent appearance in front of Surya, exhibiting *abhaya* with her right hand and holding *aksamala* (rosary) and *kamaandalu* (water-pot) in the left or holding *aksamala* in the right hand and *kamandalu* in the left one. Two consorts of the Sun god, Samjna (Sarenu or Rajni) and Chaya (Niksubha) enter the iconographic scene, though in a very few images. They are represented as carrying lilies and flywhisks or showing *abhaya-mudra* with their right hands and placing the left on the hip. Usa and Pratyusa in archer pose are also seldom represented. Aruna 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. Surya's ornaments consist of necklace, bangles, earrings and a jeweled girdle. He is found in a pearl *upavita* 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 relieves, 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. Pingala and Dandi 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 *prabhavali* 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) *Kirttimukha* appears at the apex leading us to the conclusion that the image seems to have been made towards the end of the 9th 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 *vidyadhara* on either side. Anyway, increased presence of female attendance shows some sort of readiness of the icon-worshippers to accept the Tantric philosophy to some extent. Growth of their sectarian devotion or *bhakti* to Surya 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 *prabhavali* and treatment of horses. The element of *bhakti* for the god is traceable in the desire of the donors to have their relieves carved at the pedestal.

10th Century A.D.

Out of the 16 images of the Sun god identified as belonging to the 10th century A.D., all but two has again come from Pundravardhana and their distribution against individual district is as follows: Rajshahi¹⁶⁴ – 3, Bogra¹⁶⁵ – 1, Rangpur¹⁶⁶ – 1 Dinajpur¹⁶⁷ – 2, Malda¹⁶⁸ – 4, Faridpur¹⁶⁹-1, Bankura¹⁷⁰ – 1, Hooghly¹⁷¹ – 1, and 2 in VRM¹⁷² most probably from Rajshahi or some adjoining area. Pundravardhana 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 Vanga and Bankura in Radha. 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 Vidyadharas on either side below the lotus at the apex is still not very common. *Prabhavali* 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. Surya's standing in *samapadasthanaka* on a *padmapitha* is not very uncommon now. The only Surya image in Bengal standing in *tribhanga* is a product of this century. Pingala, Dandi, Aruna and Mahasveta are seen accompanying the Sun god in most of his representations. The arrow-shooting Usa and Pratyusa also appear in company of the god in a number of icons while the god's consorts Samjna and Chaya are very seldom represented. High boots, sometimes ornamented, and *dhoti* in the body of Surya as well as his attendants go on being employed as before. *Upavita* and *uttariya* very often adorn the god. There might be sometime a jeweled *katibandha* encircling the waist of the god, from which dangles a sword at his left. Necklace, circular earrings or *patrakundalas* in his elongated ears and a high *kirita* 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.¹⁷³

11th 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-one¹⁷⁴ images with known date (11th century A.D.) and provenance, 15 hail from Rajshahi¹⁷⁵ from Rajshahi 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 Surya 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 11th 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 Vanga region.

We may now look into the solar iconography of this century (Pl. 18a). During the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. the decorative impulse and other details in respect of costume and attitude almost recall the Visnu icons of the same age all over northern India in spite of some regional traits.¹⁷⁶ In this later Pala 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 *Kirttimukha*, 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-simha* 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. Surya is frequently represented as standing in the usual pose on a lotus, which in the Kotalipada¹⁷⁷ or Bhitargarh image¹⁷⁸ issue from the *agni-kunda* (sacrificial fire-pit). The representation of *agni-kunda* in a Sun-icon may be an indication of growing importance of sacrificial ceremony in the religious sphere. Subsidiary figures except Aruna and Mahasveta may also have individual footrest.

The figure of Surya is usually carved partly in the round. The god goes on as represented in *samabhangasthanaka* on a *padmasana*, holding in each hand, a full-blown lotus by the stalk. He is accompanied by Dandi, Pingala, Aruna, Mahasveta, Samjna, Chaya, Usa and Pratyusa. This indicates the full development of the god's iconographic traits as well as the journey of standardization. Aruna 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 Usa and Pratyusa may not be represented at all or if depicted, may not be in the archer pose. Pingala who invariably stands to the right of

the god is found to his left in an exceptional case.¹⁷⁹ On the left stands Dandi, 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 *sula* or a sword. Surya is in *udicyavesa*, his torso very frequently being clad in short tunic and sometimes bare except for scarf and *upavita*. 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 *prabhavali* 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 *prabhavali* 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 *katibandha*. All wear a profusion of ornaments on the neck, ears, arms and wrists. In two sculptures,¹⁸⁰ the Sun god is seen as wearing *vanamala*, which is characteristic of Visnu. This marks the beginning of Surya's assimilation with Visnu. 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 *grahayajna*. The *yajnopavita*, 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 Krisna. Surya wears an *uttariya* as usual. The head of the god is adorned by a tall *kiritamukuta* topped by an *amalaka* (Pl. 17b). Headgears of Dandi and Pingala consist of *Karanda-mukutas* in the Deopara (Rajshahi) Solar relief.¹⁸¹ 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),¹⁸² 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 *amlaka* (Pl. 15b).

Surya 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. In 1019 A.D., Kalachuri Gangeya occupied Tirabhukti, which was recaptured by Mahipala I in 1024 A.D. The same year, South Bengal had to face an invasion by the Cholas. The incursion that was inflicted upon Bengal by Kalachuri Karna 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 Atish Dipankar Srijnana. Again, in 1043, a Pala king, this time Vighraha Pala, is seen having entered into a conflict with Kalachuri Karna. In 1055, Jatavarman put an end to the rule of the Chandra dynasty to introduce their royal line in Vikramapur. Five years later, started the feudatory rule of Samantasena in Radhanjanapada. In 1071, the Pala king Mahipala II lost his life in the people's revolt, which ultimately led to the founding of *Kaivarta-rajya* in Varendra under Divyok. The year 1100 A.D. witnessed the defeat and killing of Kaivarta king Bhima and restoration of Varendra by the Pala king Ramapala. In the light of the above facts, it may safely be said that for almost the whole of the 11th 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 *udicyavesa* 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 Vanga show eleven Adityas engraved in them. This is, no doubt, a conscious attempt to depict and worship Surya as one of the Adityas, however important he may be and to take care of not forgetting his other eleven counterparts. This indicates the unquestionable acceptability of one god Surya being put into question and distantly foreshadows his decline when emphasis would be laid upon the '*ekantika*' worship of the '*Istadeva*' due to the advent of monotheistic ideas from the South.

12th Century A.D.

Thirty-five images¹⁸³ are found to have definitely been the products of the 12th century A.D. and their distribution¹⁸⁴ against the find-spots is as follows: Rajshahi: 12¹⁸⁵; Rajshahi or adjoining area: 8; Bogra: 1; Dinajpur: 1; Malda: 5¹⁸⁶; 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 Pundravardhana than in its other three counterparts namely Radha, Vanga and Samatata. Sun worship in Vanga mainly revolved round Dacca and its adjoining area. The solar cult was, of course, not that unpopular in the *Radha-*

janapada but here the Sun god was quickly being assimilated into the concept of *Dharmathakur* 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 *Kirttimukha* sign at the top except for very exceptional depiction of lotus etc. Below on each side is a garland carrying flying *Vidyadhara*, 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 *amalaka* (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 *samabhanga* pose as usual on a *padmasana*. He is always accompanied by his attendants: Dandi and Pingala, Charioteer Aruna and miniature Mahasveta, two consorts Samjna and Chaya and arrow-shooting Usa and Pratyusa. The *prabhavali* behind Surya'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 Surya frequently rises as high as the top of his crown. Aruna is usually sitting on the head of a *makara*, clutching the proboscis of the animal with his left hand.

The god keeps wearing a *kiritamukuta* topped by an *amlaka*. However, the god is once seen adorned with *karandamukuta*¹⁸⁷ that is indicative of subordination in status. The deviation from *Kiritamukuta*, which is textually exclusive for Narayana, to *Karandamukuta*, 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 Vaisnavism, which really eclipsed the Sun-cult some decades after. Pingala is sometimes seen as wearing *Jatamukuta*,¹⁸⁸ which is prescribed for Brahma and Rudra. This could be viewed as an endeavor to take Pingala who is identifiable with Agni, out of the secondary rank in a Sun-icon by raising him to the status of Brahma and Rudra. It may also be seen as an effort on part of one of the principal attendants of Surya to carve a separate position for himself. In some cases, Dandi is also endowed with *Karandamukuta* in place of *Kirita*. The change towards inferior type of headgear for the Sun god or his attendant or allotment of *Jatamukuta* for Pingala, in all probability, points to the downward course of the solar cult.

In the Sun-relief from Badhair (Tanor, Rajshahi),¹⁸⁹ 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 *trivali* mark, which is characteristic of Visnu, is found incised on the throat of the god in the icons from Rajshahi,¹⁹⁰ which again strengthens our supposition about the ongoing process of permanent 'solar eclipse' by

Visnu. 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 *udicyavesa*, though *dhoti* or *sadi* cover 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 Surya figures of the Pala and Sena periods, the religious outlook of the northern and Iranian regions is retained, but in the meditation and interpretation of the solar divinity, it would seem that the Vedic and Brahmanical religious concepts had merged.¹⁹¹ Concerning the iconographic features of the Sun god in the early and late Pala 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 '*prabhavali*', the 'kulah' caps on the heads of Dandi and Pingala, absence of any elaborate decoration, the separate '*prabha*' (halo) and the absence of the two queens - all these features may indicate a Sun-
icon as belonging to the early or middle Pala period.¹⁹² The profuse ornamentation of the relief, the pointed stela with the '*kirttimukha*' 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 ('*karanda-mukutas*') of Dandi and Pingala, definitely date a Sun-relief in the late or early Sena period. 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 guru, 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 *Smriti* works like some of the *Dharmasastras* and the *Manu-* and *Yajnavalka-Smritis* did not advocate the cause of any cult in particular. Therefore, among many a follower of the authoritative *Smriti* works was developed a liberal attitude towards matters of religious faith. Many of the persons of higher order, usually Brahmanas known as *Smartas*, evolved a kind of worship described as *Panchayatana puja*, in which the principal deities of the five approved Brahmanical Hindu cults were the objects of veneration. The principal object of worship in it was usually in the form of an aniconic emblem that symbolized all the five cult deities. During the Sena-Varman rule in Bengal

when Brahmanical religion was greatly governed by the *Smriti*, *Pancopasana* became very popular. Laksmanasena, Visvarupasena and Suryasena were all staunch Vaisnavas but they were equally respectful to Sadasiva. Indeed, Visvarupasena and Suryasena were also devotees of Surya. In all his endeavors, Jayadeva was publicly known as a devout Vaisnava, but in fact, he was a *Smriti*-versed Brahmana votary of the *Pancadevata*. He not only created panegyric for *Radhamadhava*, but also composed hymns of praise for Mahadeva as well as verses on the yogic means of salvation.¹⁹⁴ Most probably, the poet Dhoyi was also a votary of *Panchopasana* like Jayadeva.¹⁹⁵ Most of the Sena kings were also followers of *Pancopasana*, as is evidenced by simultaneous show of reverence to Narayana, Mahesa and Surya in a few of their inscriptions as well as reference in the *Pavana-duta* (verse 28) to installation of both the *Laksmi-narayana* and *Mahadeva* images in temples in Suhmadesa.¹⁹⁶ The poet Vidyapati was not at all the great Vaisnava, nor a votary of Sahajiya, but that he was a *Smriti*-versed Brahmana devotee of the *Pancadevata* as well as a worshipper of *Siva*, *Ganga* and *Uma*.¹⁹⁷ It is clear from the above that during the last centuries of the Hindu rule in early Bengal, Surya received worship as a constituent cult-deity of *Pancopasana* 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. From the parings of the resplendent body of the Sun, which had to be trimmed by his father-in-law Visvakarma to enable his daughter Samjna, the principal consort of Surya, to bear her husband's company, many characteristic weapons, attributes, etc. were made for the other Brahmanical Hindu deities. The *Gayatri mantra* itself is conceived by

orthodox Brahmanas as Brahma, Visnu and Siva, in the morning, midday and evening respectively, each of which deity shines resplendent within the flaming solar orb. In the *Markandeya Purana*, Surya is invoked thus: “Brahma’s, Siva’s and Visnu’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 Surya, who is the base of meditation, and who is one with Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.”¹⁹⁸ 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 Surya with Visnu, or Visnu as Narayana is well known. A black chlorite specimen¹⁹⁹ depicts the Sun god in *padmasana* endowed with four hands. In front of the bare-footed god are seated Mahasveta and Aruna 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 *sankha* and *cakra* respectively. The example appears to be a syncretic icon combining the elements of Surya with those of Visnu. The composite icons with the features of Surya and Siva are comparatively few. One such can be recognized in a 12th century A.D. image found at Manda (Rajshahi), in which Surya and Siva are the constituents and which has been tentatively identified as ‘*Marttanda-Bhairava*’ by K. C. Sarkar.²⁰⁰ The compromising spirit between the sects of Sūrya and Brahmā²⁰¹ is revealed by the Ms. *Puṣkara-Māhātmya* of the Padma Purāṇa. An 11th century A.D. sculpture²⁰² from Mahendra (Kushmandi, West Dinajpur) depicting the composite figure of Surya with Brahma is available in the V. R. M. Museum. The deity in this case has six arms. In two of its hands, two lotuses are held, while the others display *Varada-mudra*, *aksa-mala*, *abhaya-mudra* and *kamandalu*. The increased number of hands, its solar features, the

rosary and water-vessel – the well-known emblems of Brahma in two of its hands, make it a composite icon.

Apart from Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, reconciliation and rapprochement between rival gods and their creeds is also traceable from the direct association of *Bodhisattva Lokesvara* with Hindu cult divinities including the Sun god. A fragmentary relief²⁰³ of medieval Bengal depicts a 10-armed Surya-Lokesvara now preserved in the Ashutosh Museum. Of the extant four hands, a pair of right and left hands holds two full-blown lotuses. The other pair holds the *aksamala* and an indistinct object. The god wears *jatamukuta* in one head. A seated miniature of the two-armed *Dhyani-Buddha Amitabha* appears on the crest of the image. The image has tentatively been identified as a combined representation of Surya and Lokesvara.²⁰⁴

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 26th year of Dharmapala is carved with figures of Surya, Visnu and Siva (or *Bhairava*), each sitting side by side.²⁰⁵ Surya at the extreme right is shown holding two lotus-flowers, one in each of his hands and wearing boots on his feet. Visnu, in the extreme left, has four hands holding *sankha*, *cakra*, *gada* and *padma*. Siva (or *Bhairava*)²⁰⁶ is shown in the middle. It seems that the main god of the worshipper was Siva 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 Avalokitesvara-Lokantaha seen in Bengal is *Simhanada-Lokesvara*, the healer of Leprosy,²⁰⁷ who took the form and features of Surya. Three-faced, borne by seven boars and a truncated demon as the charioteer, kneeling in an archer's pose in the chariot, the important Vajrayana goddess Marici is the Buddhist counterpart of the Brahmanical Surya.²⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that while the Buddhists in their desire to prove the superiority of their own gods humbled Brahmanical gods such as Brahma, Visnu, Siva, Gauri, Ganesa, Indra etc., the Sun god never became the target of their attack. The borrowing of solar concept in creating and fashioning of Lokesvara and Marici 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 Brahmanical 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 Surya (*Aditya-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.²⁰⁹ Appearances of small figures of gods such as Trinity, Visnu, Ganesa, Karttikeya etc. on the top of a few solar images remind us of the presence of parental *Dhyani 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 *Brahmanism*. 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 *Puranas* as well as in the *Yajnavalkya Smṛiti* there are elaborate rules for the performance of *Grahayaga* to appease the Navagrahas. In Chapters 231 and 232 of the *Visnudharmattora* (*Khanda* 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.²¹⁰ Yajnavalkya²¹¹ says that a man, desirous of peace, prosperity, ample rains (for his crops), long life and nourishment, should perform '*Grahayajnas*', which should also be performed by a man who likes to harm his enemies. *Grahasanti*²¹² or *Grahayajna*²¹³ was performed before launching on a military campaign. It was also occasioned to pacify evil asterism portentous 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 *Pusya-snana*²¹⁴ In order to make predictions about rainfall and crops an astrologer went to a place north or east of city or village, drew on ground planets and constellation, and worshipped them.²¹⁵

Navagrahas images were made of different materials. Their figures were also to be drawn on canvas in their respective colour or in *mandalas* 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 Surya temple. According to Mr. Manomohan Ganguly,²¹⁶ 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 an appendix. Perhaps slabs carved with the Navagrahas were also used for regular worship.

Besides accompanying the Sun god, the Navagrahas are also depicted on the *prabhavali* of the *Kalyana-Sundara* or *Siva-vivaha*²¹⁷ and the so-called 'Mother and Child' images. One image of *Sesasayana-Visnu* from Bengal depicted the group too. Separate representations of any particular one of the nine planets are extremely rare. Of the panels, a few bear signs of their original position as architraves, but most of them were independent object of worship.

The earliest reference to the *Grahayajna* in early Bengal is found in connection with Sasanka's disease as mentioned in late genealogical works of Bengal Brahmanas.²¹⁸ According to the tradition preserved among a section of the Grahavipra (also called Sakadvipa) Brahmanas, twelve Brahmanas living on the banks of the Sarayū River were brought by king Sasanka in order to cure himself of a fatal ailment by offering sacrifices to the planets (*grahayajna*). Sasanka was cured and rewarded the Brahmanas 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.).²¹⁹ In verse 55, mention is made of the offering of golden lotus by a king for the icons of the Navagrahas made of silver ("*cakre yo haimam Navagrāmbhojam*"- Verses 54, 55). The gift of golden lotus for the silver image of the *Navagrahas* takes it for granted that the worship of the nine planets gained immense popularity in the *Uttara Radha* in the first half of the 11th century A.D. especially among a section of affluent people. It may also be presumed that the donor, like Sasanka, 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 Nayapala (1027-43 A.D.) or his son Vigrahapala III (1043-70). During the Varman-Sena 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.²²⁰

The introduction of the *Grahapuja* everywhere in India is attributed to the

Sakadvipi Brahmanas. 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 Surya came into vogue. The Sakadvipi Brahmanas are known as 'Grahavipra' in the Bengal Purana (i.e. *Brihaddharma Purana*). It is surprising that those Brahmanas many of whom were skilled in astrology came to be reproached as *Brahmanas* of a very low grade under the names of *Bhojaka*, *Daivajna* and *Agradani*. On the other hand, they have respectfully been mentioned as *Pamktipavana* in the *Samvatsara sutra* (2/13) of the *Brihat-samhita*. Probably the chauvinism of the indigenous Brahmanas largely contributed to such reprehensible position of the Maga Brahmanas 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 *grahayaga* 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 Worship

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

Puranic 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 Brahmanas and other higher classes. *Samdhyopasana* as a form of Sun worship must have been practiced by the conservative Brahmanas, a large section of whom had come from Northern and Western part of India. That *Surya-namaskara* was also in vogue is testified by the Gayā Sitalā Temple Inscription.²²¹ All the four verses on the Sun incorporated in the *Subhasitaratnakosa* 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 Puranic or both.²²²

Sun cult was also influenced by the Tantric cult, which was becoming quite popular since the 7th-8th 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 *mandala* 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.²²³ The *mantras* with Tāntric symbolism are employed at every step. The

drawing of *mandala*, 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*, *ākaraṇa*, *māraṇa*, *uccāṭana*, *vidveśana* and *stambhana* etc²²⁴ are also mentioned. The Sun-cult appears to have adopted Tāntric practices in the later stage of the later Purāṇas. However, Sun worship remained free from the concept of a female principle as the cause of the universe so characteristically developed in the Tantric 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 Puranic *mantras*. Seven different *saptami tithis* as well as twelve *sukla-saptamis* were also observed.

Sun-sect

The existence of a Sun-sect in Bengal may be traced since the 4th century B.C. In the *Arseya Upaniṣad*,²²⁵ the non-Aryan Puṇdras and the Sumhas who are described as the Sun worshipping tribes 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 Surya from Chandraketugarh. As parts of the Gupta Empire, Puṇdravardhana, Rādha and Vaṅga certainly came within the main current of the *bhakti*-movement in North India. The Jagadishpur inscription²²⁶ 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

Vaisyas. It was the cult of *bhakti* that contributed to the adoption of the temple tradition.²²⁷ The solar shrine in question was the result of a collective effort of three residents – Ksemarka, Bhozil and Mahidas. 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 Surya. 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 Brahmanas who were known as Acaryas in Bengal were the main section of the *Sauras*.²²⁸

Historical evidence regarding the existence of a separate Sun-sect in medieval Bengal comes from the inscriptions of Viśvarūpasena and Sūryasena who call themselves *Parama-saura*.²²⁹ From the beginning of the Gayā Gadādhara Temple Inscription²³⁰ and the Gayā Sitalā Temple Inscription of Yakṣapāla²³¹ with “*Om namah Sūryāya*” and the dedication of the first verse to the Sun god, it appears that the issuers of these two inscriptions were *Parama-Saura*. 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.

ARKAKSETRAS IN BENGAL

The existence of a few *Arkaksetras* may also be traced in ancient Bengal. The 'stotra' of a Sun god called *Citrāditya*²³² 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 east²³³ i.e. Multān and Kalapriya respectively. The *Gaṅgāsāgara-samgama* referred to in the *Skanda Purana*²³⁴ as the place where the morning Sun remained as *Muṇḍīrasvāmīn* 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. *Matsyapurana*²³⁵ also refers to the greatness of the *Gaṅgāsagar-samgama*. However, from the *Padma Purāṇa*²³⁶ we come to know of the *Gaṅgāsāgara-samgama* near *Puruṣottomakṣhetra* (modern Puri).

Mandāra in Punyavardhana (Pundravardhana, 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 *Pausa*.²³⁷ The fact of taking bath in a tank on *Pausa-samkranti* reminds us of the Sun worship and *Surya-Kunda*. May be after the name of this Mandara in Bihar, there might have developed a centre of Sun worship in Pundravardhana. Whatever may be the case, there is no room for any doubt that Pundravardhana was the most important region of Sun worship in Bengal throughout the ancient period, as is evidenced by the reference to the Pundras as the Sun-worshipping tribe in the *Arseya Upanisad* 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 *arkaksetras* in early North Bengal. Varddhamana is also identified as the present Bardhankoti in Dinajpur.²³⁸ Large number of Sun images of different types and periods have been discovered from this district. Most probably, the legend of Samba's cure by Sun worship contributed to the popularity of the Sun god by the name of *Samba* in this area. It is from this district that the Bairhatta Surya 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 '*Sahasraraśmī* (the Sun) was situated in *Sambapura* in *Pundravardhana-bhukti*. It appears that based on the healing aspect of Surya, the god named *Samba* became highly popular in Varddhamana, which in course of time developed into an *Arkaksetra*.

Thus, Sun worship had continued in early Bengal since the pre-Aryan times down to the end of the so-called Hindu rule. The Vedic as well as the Puranic form of Sun worship was prevailing side by side, though the latter stream was much more popular. Image of Surya came to be made since the second century B.C. and largely proliferated in the Pala-Sena age. Sun-temple in Bengal is reported from the middle of the fifth century A.D. Sun-sect also existed throughout the ancient period along with probable solar centres in Pundravardhana and *Gangasagar-samgama*.

Notes and References

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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., *Kharosthi and Kharosthi Brahmi 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, *Vangalar(a) Palligiti*, Calcutta, p. 181.
20. Mukherjee, *KKBI*.
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 VRM*, Khanda no. 7, 1981-82, p. 95.
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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.

32. Base, *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. 94.1.

36. *DHI*, p. 437.

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

38. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 57. Sl. 51, pl. XLII. Fig.63; Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

39. *Ibid*, pp. 55-56, Sl. N0. 39, pl. XXXIII, fig. 37A.

40. Gupta, S. M., *Surya, the Sun God*, Calcutta, pl. 26.

41. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 45, Sl. N0. 8, pl. XIX, fig. 8A; Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

42. *RV*, 10.142.8.

43. *Ibid*, 9.110.5.

44. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

45. *RV*.1.115.3-4; 7. 60.3; 7.63.2 etc.

46. *DHI*, p. 431.

47. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p.44, Sl. No. 4, Pl. XVII, Fig.4.

48. It is now in the collection of the Bhuvan Art Gallery and Museum, Calcutta.

49. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Sl. No. 4, Pl. XVII, Fig.4.

50. *Ibid*, p.10.

51. Saraswati, S.K., *JDL*, Vol. XXX. 1938, p. 22, fig. 5; *DHI*, p. 435.
52. Basu, *DIPGV*, p. 92.
53. Ray, *HBP*, p. 305.
54. *CBI*, pp. 42- 43.
55. *Ibid*, p. 50.
56. *EI*, XXXI, p. 57.
57. *Ibid*. XV, p. 130, 35.
58. *EI*, XX, p. 61.
59. Ray, *HBP*, p. 404.
60. The rulers of the Gupta period normally used the title 'Great Devotee of the Supreme Lord' (*Parama-bhagavata*) as an appellation of themselves, and so it would seem that they were all initiated into Vaisnavism.
61. At the beginning of the sixth century, Saivism had been adopted by the court of the Emperor Vainyagupta and had spread throughout eastern Bengal. In the seventh century, two eminent Saivas were the king of Gauda, Sasanka, and the king of Kamrupa, Bhaskaravarma. Another Brahman king of this century, Lokanatha of the Bharadvaja *gotra*, was probably a Saiva too. It is clear that under the patronage of many kings and royal families the acceptance and spread of Saivism in Bengal was made easy.
62. *AGS*, III.7.4-6; *SGS*, II.9.1.
63. *MGS*, I.2.1-2.
64. *CH*, III. 28n, 71, 218.

65. “*gulmagandhike bhagavatah sahasrarasmeh*
Kartikadevakule cha bali-charu-satra
Pravarttanaya khanda phutta-pratisamskara-
karanaya gandha dhupatailopayogaya
sasvatkalopabhogyakshayanivya apratikara
khilakshetrasaya kulyavapamekat
kritva datum.....” verse 13-12 .

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

66. The oldest Aryan religion in Bengal was Jainism, and prior to the Gupta period, Jainism had become well established and widespread, especially in northern Vanga.

67. *Bhavisya P.*, 139; *Samba P.*, 3, 24, 26; *Brahma P.*, 20.

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

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

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

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

72. The terracotta Surya 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.

73. *SVRM*, p. 236.

74. Mukherjee, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Sl. NO. 4.

75. *AB*, 4.2 - *prano vai sabita*.

76. *ESB*, pp. 21-22, fig- 5; *DHI*, pp. 435, 36; *HB-I*, p. 523.

77. Banerjee, R.D., 'The Temple of Siva at Bhumarā', *MASI*, No. 16, p. 13, pl. XVIa.
78. *ESB*, p. 30; *D.H.I.* p. 436.
79. *ESB*, p. 12; *JISOA*, XVI, pp. 80-81.
80. Basu, *DIPGV*, p. 93.
81. *ESB*, p. 30; *JISOA*, XVI, p. 81; *IBBS*, p.172, pl. LIX; *HB-I*, p. 457.
82. *CBI.*, p. 87.
83. *Jayati Śrī Lokanāthah yah pusam Sukrita-Karmaphalahetuh Satya-Tapah-Maya-murtirloka dvaya-Sādhano dharmah//.*
84. *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I., University of Calcutta, 1942, p. 359, fn.5.
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86. Bhattacharyya, A.T., *Sun and Serpent Worship*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 28.
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88. 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.
89. Vasu, N. N., *Vanger Jatiya Itihasa, Rajanya-Kanda* (in Bengali), IV. 88, 90. *Mahādeva-kārikā* quoted by Umesh Chandra Sharma; *Kulapañjī* by Rāmadeva.
90. *Jayati jagadekavandhurlokadvitayasya sampado hetuh Parahitamūrtirdṛiṣṭa phalānumeya sthitir-dharmah'* - *E.I.*, Vol., XII, pp. 65-79; Vol., XIX, pp. 115-25; *Kāmrūpsāsanāvalī*, pp. 11-17.

91. 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 Sasanka.
92. *Bhuvanapatirivodayanuraktomaṇḍalo yathāyathamicitā karanikaravitarāṅkūlitakali timira- sañcatayā prakāṣitāryadharmā- lokah...* - Verses 35-37.
93. This region has been famous for Sun temples throughout the ancient period of Indian History - Sankalia, H. D., *Archaeology of Gujarat 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 Lata. cf. Mandasor stone Inscription in Fleet, *CII*, Vol. III, pp. 79-88.
94. *EI*, II, p. 160.
95. *CBI*, pp. 164-169.
96. *JASB*, LXI, pp. 77-87; *E.I.* XIV, p. 324; *Gaudalekhamala*, pp. 91-100; *Sahitya Parisat Patrika*, B.S. 1305, pp. 167-72; *C.B.I.*, p. 200.
97. 'yastunhḡābhyudayāśrito Raviriva proudhah pratāpodayah' - Verse 10 - *JASB*, LXIX, pp.190-95; *Gaudalekhamālā*, p. 113; *CBI*, p. 143; *EI*, XXXVI, pp. 84 - 91.
98. 'yanmoulaou kalasena kim sa bhagavān Bhānuh śirobhūṣaṇam. Sircar, D.C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.
99. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.
100. *RV*, I. 115.1; VI.51.1; VII.61.1; 63.1; X.37.1; *TS*, I.4.43; II.4.14.
100. *Ibid*, I.115.1.
101. These factors have been discussed in details in Chapter IV, Section III.
102. "yadīya ruchi lobhitah sa bhagavannābhah pānthatām tyājediti

vichintayanniyatamāhi..

103. “*rājatam ravim chakre yo haimam Navagrāmbhojam*”- Verses 54, 55.
104. 30.1-2.
105. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 81 ff.
106. Kundu, S. N., *Prachin Vange Pauranik Dharma O Devabhavana* (in Bengali), Burdwan University, Burdwan, 1996, p. 349; *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 89 ff.
107. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 92 ff; Sircar, D. C., *Select Inscriptions*, II, p. 104.
108. 1075-84 A.D.: son of Visvarupa and a Brahmana feudatory under the Palas.
109. An auspicious introduction in the form of a prayer at the beginning of a work of composition.
110. Salutation and meditation to *Surya* and *Savitri*.
111. “*Mounaditya-Sahasralinga- Kamalardhangina Narayana dvi Somesvara- Phalgunatha-Vijayadityahvayanam kriti| sa (pra) sādamacīkaraddiviṣadām Kedāradevasya khyātasvottaramānasasya khaṇanam satram vaṭe cākṣaye*”||.
112. *Pracaṇḍaraśmeriva caṇḍamojah-* verse 55. *PIHC*, p. 23, pt. I, p. 36; Sircar, D. C., *Epigraphic Discoveries of East Pakistan*, p. 40.
113. 114. *IB*, pp. 149-57.
114. *IB*, pp. 149-57.
115. *IB*, Vol. III, pp. 25-35; *CBI*, p. 350; Kielhorn, *EI*, VI, pp. 203-207; *JASB.*, Vol. VI, pp. 88-97.
116. *EI*, II, p. 350; *Gaudalekhamala*, p. 127; *CBI*, p. 370.
117. This tradition is also recorded in *Pag Sam Jon Zane*. cf. *JASB*, 1898, p. 20. In a *Champū-kāvya* called *Udayasundarī kathā*, composed by Sod’d’hala, a poet of

Gujarat in the eleventh century A.D., and published in the Gaekwad Oriental Series, Dharmapala 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 Palas belonged to the solar race.

118. *Ramacarita*, p. IX.
119. Quoted in Banerji. R.D., *Bāṅgālār Itihāsa*, Part I, 2nd ed. (in Bengali), p. 168, f.n. 18.
119. Tārānātha, *Geschichte des Buddhismus in Indien*, German translation by A. Schiefner, pp. 208-9. Tārānātha 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.
120. *Palas of Bengal* [Memoirs of the (Royal) Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. V, No. 3], Calcutta, 1915, p. 46.
121. This view, originally propounded by Mr. Prabhas Chandra Sen has been restated at some length by Mr. J. C. Ghosh (*IHQ*. IX. 484-85).
122. *JASB*, Vol. VI, pp. 88-97; *EI*, Vol. VI, pp. 203-07; *IB*, pp. 25-41; *CBI*, pp. 350-353.
123. *CBI*, pp. 236-240.
124. *IB*, p. 57.
125. *Ibid*, p. 71.
126. *Ibid*, p. 106.
127. *Ibid*.
128. Vidyananda, Tejachandra (Ed.), *Brāhmaṇa Sarvasvam* of Halāyudha, Calcutta, 1290 B.S., pp. 12-13.

129. *HBP*, p. 442.
130. *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.
131. *IB*, p. 71.
132. *IHQ*, Vol. XXX, p. 78ff.
133. Sircar, D. C., *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit*, 1982, Calcutta, 1982, p. 135.
134. *ASIAR*, 1930-34, p. 257
135. *JASB*, Vol. 65, 1896, Part I, pp. 8-9; *IB*, Vol. III, p. 140; *IHQ*. IV, p. 760; *CBI*, p. 312.
136. *IHQ*, Vol. II, No. I, March 1926, pp. 78-86; *IB*, Vol. III, pp. 177-180.
137. *JASB* (N.S.), Vol. X, 1914. p. 99; *IB*, Vol. III, p. 118; *CBI*, p. 334. Ibid, p. 9; *IHQ*, Vol. II, 1926, p. 81.
138. Daniel, H.H. Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyakara's Subhasita-ratnakosa*, Cambridge, 1965, Section 7.
139. Banerjee, S.C., (Ed.), Calcutta, 1965.
140. Bandopadhyay, Suresh Chandra, *Sanskrit Sahitye Bangalir Avadan* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1369 B.S.
141. Dhoyi, *Pavana-Duta*, Verse 30.
142. *Kumarasambhava*, 5.38.
143. *Brahmana-sarvasyam, Mangalacharam*, Ed. Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1958, p. 1.
144. Ibid.
145. The *Purana* is believed to have started in 8th Century A.D. and come to present form in 15/16th cent. A.D.

146. *āsanam svāgatam pādymarvyamācamanīyakam madhuparkācamasnānam*
vasanābharaṇāni ca gandhapuṣpe dhūpaḍīpou naivedya vandanam. Apte, V. S.,
The Students' Sanskrit English Dictionary, 1988, p. 570.
147. The mystical syllable is considered as a preservative like armour.
148. *Brahmavaivarta Purana, Ganesa Khandam, Unavimsa Adhyaya*, pp. 250-251.
149. It is believed to have been compiled in Bengal in the 13th century A.D.
150. Tarkaratna, Panchanan (Ed.), *Brihaddharma Purana*, Calcutta, 1396 B.S., Uttara
 Khanda, Chapter XIII, p. 340.
151. Chakravarty, Jahnvi Kumar, *Aryasaptasati O Gaudvanga* (in Bengali), Calcutta,
 1378 B.S., verse no. 331, p. 221.
152. *Ibid*, verse no. 648, pp. 297-98.
153. *Ibid*, p. 57.
154. Dikshit, K.N., *Excavations at Paharpur*, Delhi, 1938, p. 60.
155. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, 'History of the Surya Image in Bengal', *Folklore*,
 December 1967, p. 424-25.
156. *SVRM*, p. 257, VRM 2324.
157. *SVRM*, pp. 235, 238, 240, 256.
158. *SVRM*, p. 239.
159. *SVRM*, pp. 254, 256; *DM*, p. 73.
160. *MMC*, pp. 15-20.
161. 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.
162. This feature occurs in the ninth century C.D. in the Rajshahi and Bogra images

only.

163. The *Karanda-mukuta* is prescribed for all the gods other than Brahma and Rudra who are endowed with *Jatamukuta* and Narayana who should exclusively wear *kirita-mukuta*. It is a short and small *karanda* (basket)-shaped crown, indicating subordination in status. This is characteristic of various kinds of goddesses and minor deities. *EHI*, pp. 29-30.
164. *SVRM*, pp. 261, 264; *MMC*, p. 20.
165. *SVRM*, p. 259.
166. *Ibid*, p. 258.
167. *DM*, p. 74.
168. *MMC*, pp. 16, 17, 19.
169. *IBBS*, p. 173.
170. Dasgupta, Chittaranjan, *Acharya Jogeshchandra Purakriti Bhavan, Descriptive Catalogue*, (in Bengali), Bishnupur, 1390 B.S., pp. 35-36.
171. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, 'History of the Surya Image in Bengal', *Folklore*, December 1967, p. 427.
172. *SVRM*, pp. 250, 253.
173. *Ibid*, p. 264.
174. *BSHI*, pp. 185-197, 363-371.
175. Naogaon: 9; Niyamatpur-3; Godagari: 3.
176. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 426.
177. *HB-I*, p. 457.
178. Bhattacharya, P.K., *Iconography of Sculpture*, University of north Bengal,

Darjeeling, 1983, p. 11, pl. II, fig.4.

179. *BSHI*, pp. 182, 366.

180. Kotalipada image, *HB-I*, p. 457 and a Faridpur image.

181. *SVRM*, p. 246.

182. *Ibid*, p. 259.

183. *BSHI*, pp. 185-195, 363-371.

184. *Ibid*.

185. Nagaon - 4, Tanor - 2.

186. Gazole -1, Bamangola -1.

187. *SVRM*, p. 252.

188 Sun images from Baria, Manda, (Rajshahi) and Deopara-Godagari (Rajshahi)

SVRM, pp. 242, 245.

189. *SVRM*. p. 242.

190. Sun images from some unknown place in Rajshahi and Badhair, Tanor (Rajshahi),

SVRM, pp. 241, 242.

191. *HBP*, p. 424.

192. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 82.

193. *Ibid*.

194. Kundu, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

195. *Ibid*, p. 79.

196. *Ibid*.

197. Sastri, H.P., *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal*, Calcutta.

198. *'Brāhmi Māheśvarī caiva Vaisnavi caiva te tanuh / Tridhā yasya svarūpantu*

Bhānorbhāsvān prasidatu', Bibliotheca Indica Edition, Ch. 109, V. 71.

199. *SVRM*, pp. 247-248, pl. 240, VRM 654; *AR-VRS*, 1925-26, p. 9; *BSHI*, p. 193.
200. Sarkar, K. C., "A New Form of Surya from Varendra", *IHQ*, vol. VI, No. 1, March 1930, pp. 465-70.
201. Chatterjee, A., *Padma-Purāṇa - A Study*, pp. 193-94. The *Śāradātilakam*, XIVA.2, Emphasizes the syncretic character of the worship of the Sun.
202. *AR-VRS*, 1932-33, pp. 15-16, pl.1, fig.1; *DHI*, p. 550, pl. XLVII.3.
203. *DHI*, pp. 547-548, pl. XLVIII.3; Bhattacharyya, Dipak Chandra, *Iconology of Composite Images*, p. 25, fig. 20.
204. *DHI*, pp. 547-548.
205. Aunadale, N. 'Pala Inscription in the Indian Museum, *JPASB*, Vol. 4, 1968, p. 101.
206. Bhattacharya, *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 334.
207. *HBP*, p. 438.
208. *Ibid*, p. 440.
209. *SWAI-P*, p. 71.
210. Hazra, R.C., *op. cit.* p. 171.
211. *Yajnavalkya Smṛiti* (Bombay Ed.), 1892, p. 89.
212. *Bṛihat-samhita*, XLII.37.
213. *Ibid*, XLIII. 14; XLVII. 29.
214. *Ibid*, XLVII.26, 29.
215. *Ibid*, XXIV. 6.
216. Datta, Kalidas, 'Two Saura images from the District of 24-Parganas', *IHQ*, Vol. IX, March, 1933.

217. Representation of the wedding of Siva with Parvati.
218. Vasu, N. N., *Vanger Jatiya Itihasa, Rajanya-Kanda* (in Bengali), IV. 88, 90.
Mahādeva-kārikā quoted by Umesh Chandra Sharma; Kulapañji by Rāmadeva.
219. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.
220. *Brihat-samhita*, V.19-20.
221. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p.92 ff: Sircar, D. C., *Select Inscriptions*, II, p. 104.
222. *Samba P.*, 30.18, 32.12; 37.19.
223. *Ibid*, 39.41.
224. *Ibid*, Ch.I. 47-83. cf. Chakravarti, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 38-44, 80-82.
225. Quoted by Belvalkar, S.K. and Ranade, R.D., *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. II, p. 298.
226. Sircar, D. C., *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, p. 61.
227. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 361.
228. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 77.
229. Mitra, Haridasa, 'Sadasiva Worship in Early Bengal', *JASB*, Vol. 29, 1933, p. 205.
230. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 84f
231. *EI*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 92 ff: Sircar, D. C., *Select Inscriptions*, II, p. 104.
232. *Skanda Purāṇa. Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa*, Ch. 133, p. 508 ff.
233. *Ibid*, Ch. 27, Verse 52.
234. VII,1, 139, II.
235. XXII.11.
236. *Pātālakhaṇḍa*, Chaps. 19, 21 and 22.
237. Dey, N. L., *The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India*, (3rd Ed.), New Delhi, 1971, p. 125.
238. *Ibid*. p. 25.