SUN WORSHIP AND SUN-IMAGES IN EARLY BENGAL

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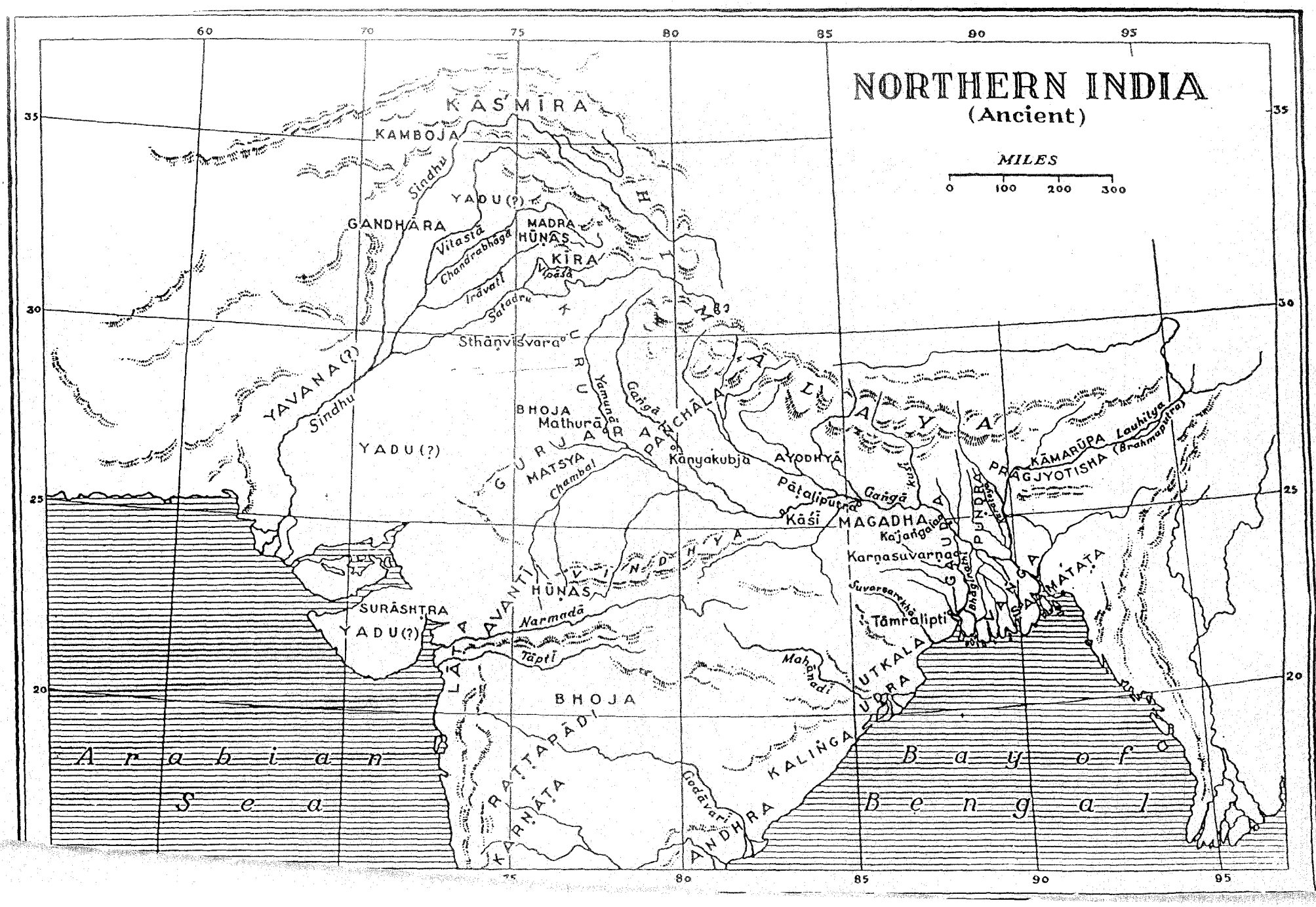
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MADRA
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KĪRA
Vitastā
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Irāvatī
Vipāśā
Śatadru
HIMĀLAYA
Sthāṇvīśvara
YAVANA (?)
Sindhu
BHOJA
Mathurā
YADU (?)
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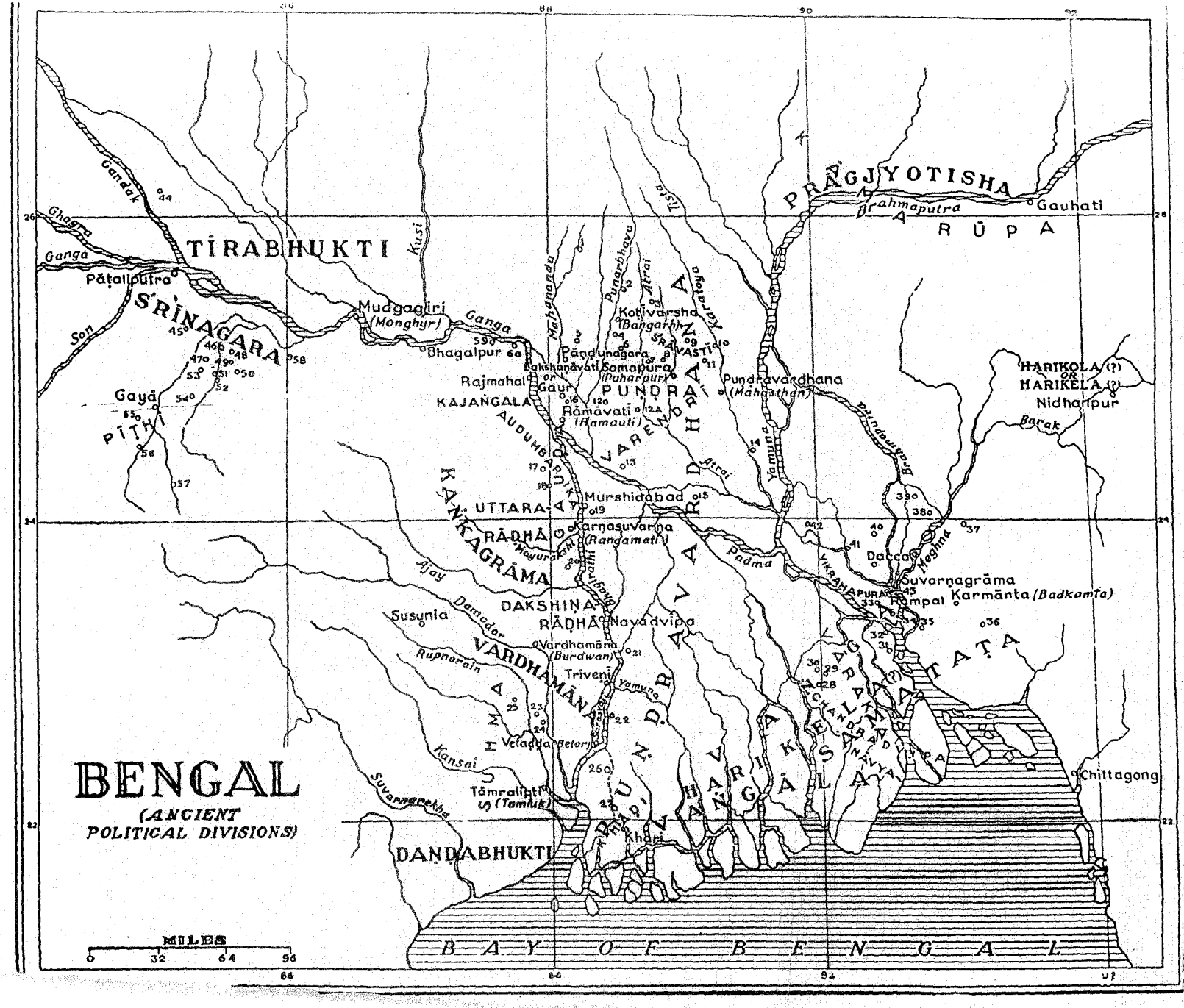
BENGAL
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VARDHAMĀNA
SAMATAṬA
VAṄGA
HARIKELA
DANDABHUKTI
Pāṭaliputra
Mudgagiri (Monghyr)
Bhagalpur
Gayā
Rajmahal
Gaur
Pāṇḍunagara
Kotivarsha (Bangarh)
Śrāvasti
Lakshaṇāvati or Somapura (Paharpur)
Pundravardhana (Mahāsthan)
Rāmāvati (Ramauti)
Karṇasuvarṇa (Rangamati)
Murshidabad
Nidhanpur
Dacca
Suvarṇagrāma
Rampal
Karmānta (Badkamta)
Vikrampur
Navadvipa
Vardhamāna (Burdwan)
Triveni
Susunia
Vetaḍa (Betor)
Tāmraliptī (Tamluk)
Khāḍi
Chittagong
Gauhati
Brahmaputra
Ganga
Ghagra
Son
Gandak
Kusi
Mahānanda
Punarbhava
Tista
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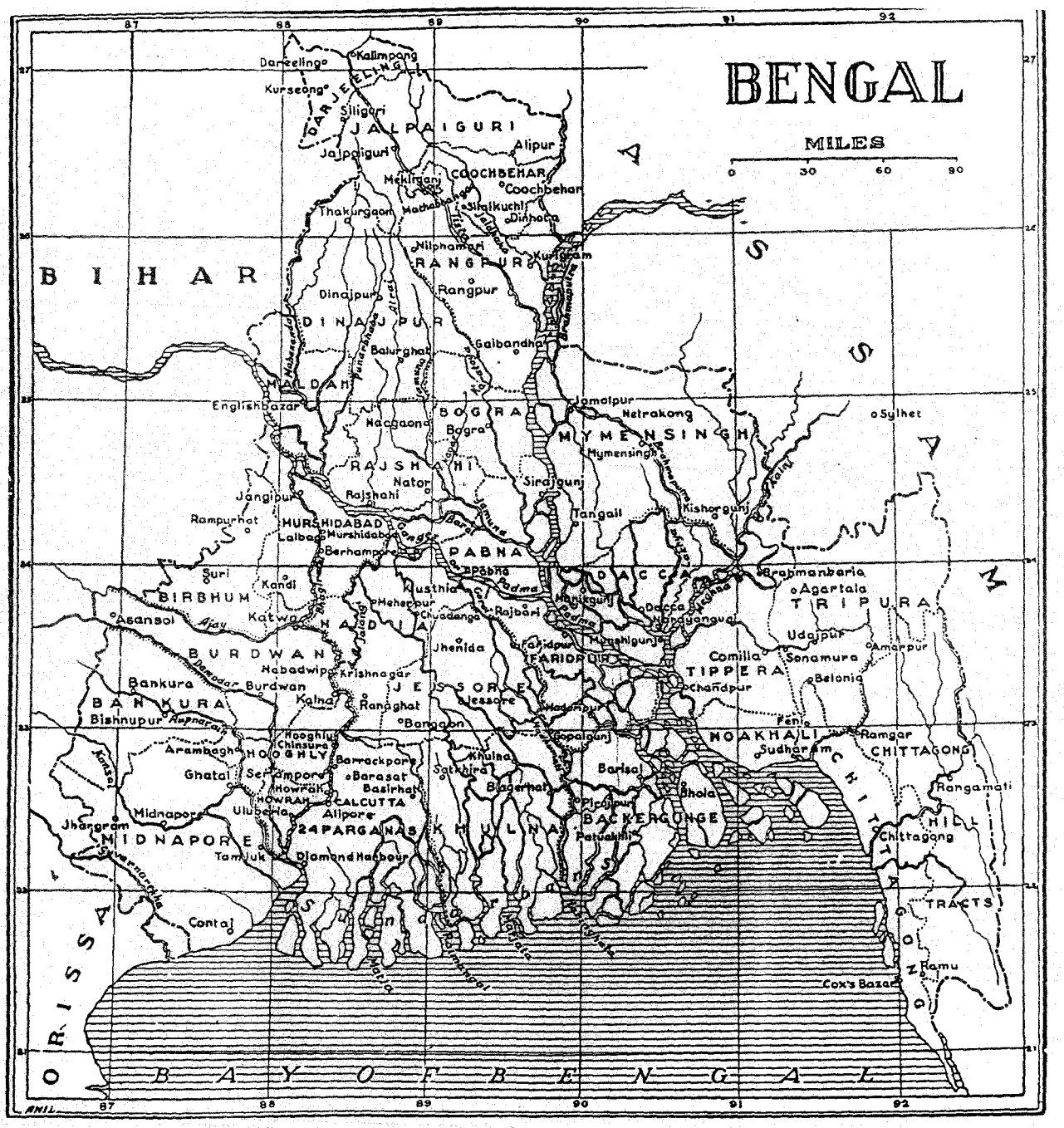
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DARJEELING
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DACCA
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KHULNA
BACKERGUNGE
TIPPERA
NOAKHALI
CHITTAGONG
HILL TRACTS
TRIPURA
HOOGHLY
HOWRAH
CALCUTTA
24 PARGANAS
MIDNAPORE
BANKURA
BURDWAN
BIRBHUM
NADIA
MURSHIDABAD
Darjeeling
Kalimpong
Kurseong
Siliguri
Jalpaiguri
Alipur
Mekliganj
Coochbehar
Thakurgaon
Sitalkuchi
Dinhata
Nilphamari
Kurigram
Dinajpur
Rangpur
Gaibandha
Balurghat
Englishbazar
Nagaon
Bogra
Jamalpur
Netrakona
Sylhet
Mymensingh
Jangipur
Rajshahi
Nator
Sirajgunj
Rampurhat
Tangail
Kishorgunj
Suri
Kandi
Berhampore
Pabna
Kushtia
Brahmanbaria
Agartala
Asansol
Katwa
Meherpur
Rajbari
Manikganj
Dacca
Narayanganj
Udajpur
Amarpur
Jhenida
Faridpur
Comilla
Sonamura
Krishnagar
Chandpur
Belonia
Bankura
Burdwan
Kalna
Ranaghat
Jessore
Bishnupur
Bangaon
Feni
Ramgar
Hooghly
Chinsura
Barrackpore
Khulna
Sudharam
Arambagh
Serampore
Barasat
Satkhira
Barisal
Ghatal
Howrah
Basirhat
Bhola
Midnapore
Ulubaria
Alipore
Patuakhali
Jhargram
Tamluk
Diamond Harbour
Chittagong
Rangamati
Contai
Ramu
Cox's Bazar

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PREFACE

Among all the early images discovered in Bengal, those of the Sun god umerically, occupy a position second to that of Visnu. This clearly shows that the Sun od had been one of the most popular deities in this part of the country in the Pre-Mohammedan days. Even today, the Sun is one of the five conspicuous deities of the Hindu pantheon. However, it is surprising to notice that the Sun-cult of Early Bengal has not received its due attention as is given to other cults. No individual study of the solar cult in Bengal has been done so far, though a few articles have appeared on some of its different aspects here and there. The materials for the study of the Sun-cult still lie hidden in the original sources as well as scattered in innumerable journals. Therefore, I have been tempted to tread on this almost untrodden field, which is full of possibilities and thought-provoking investigation.

The present study on 'Sun worship and Sun- images in Early Bengal' is the result of quite a few years of an extensive library work and comprehensive field survey that I had painstakingly undertaken. It covers a long period from the pre-Aryan stage of Bengal History to the end of the ancient period i.e. 12th -13th centuries A.D. However, Sun worship in present times at the folk level has also been discussed to show its prevalence among the rustic masses since time immemorial.

The present thesis has been completed under the able guidance and supervision of Dr. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, Ex-Jadunath Sarkar Professor of History, University of North Bengal and Dr. Shyamal Ch. Guha Roy, Reader in History, Siliguri College, Darjeeling. It was Dr. Bhattacharya who for the first time highlighted the importance of

this area of research to me, evinced a keen interest in the subject and guided me emphatically for the greater span of my research before his retirement. I am deeply beholden to both of them for all the guidance and help that they had so kindly given.

In the completion of the present thesis, I am indebted to a large number of scholars of India and abroad and among them I must mention the names of Late Prof. Kalyan Kumar Ganguly (Calcutta), Late Prof. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta (Calcutta), Prof. Bratindra Nath Mukherjee (Calcutta), Prof. T. K. Roychoudhury (North Bengal University), Prof. Bhaskar Chattopadhyay (Burdwan University), Prof. V. C. Srivastava (Benaras Hindu University), Prof. L. P Pandey (Himachal Pradesh University), Prof. Shahanara Hussain (Rajshahi University), Late Dr. Mukhlesur Rahaman (Formerly Director, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi), Dr. Enamul Hoque (Formerly Director-General, Bangladesh National Museum), Dr. Kunal Chakravorty (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and Dr. S. N. Kundu (Burdwan) for their valuable suggestions and other academic help extended so kindly whenever I had approached them.

I am also grateful to Prof. Emajuddin Ahmed (Formerly Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Dhaka), Md. Shahajahan (Project Director, Technical Education, Bangladesh), Md. Mozahar Hossain (Formerly Chief Engineer, Rajshahi University) and Late Prof. Santosh Kumar Basu, formerly Curator of the Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University for their help and encouragement. I also express a sense of belonging with my friend Dr. Dilip Kumar Sarkar, Controller of Examinations, North Bengal University for his untiring inspiration for the completion of the research-work I had undertaken nearly a decade back.

I am indeed extremely grateful to the authorities and staff of the Asiatic Society's Library, National Library, Calcutta University Library, Bangiya Sahitya Parisad Library, Indian Museum Library, National Museum Library, North Bengal University Library etc. for the required academic help. I have extensively made use of outstanding objects from different museums. In course of my investigation of these objects I have examined the collections of the Varendra Research Museum (Rajshahi), Bangladesh National Museum (Dhaka), Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art (Calcutta University), Directorate of Archaeology (West Bengal), Tamluk Museum and Research Centre (Midnapore), A. K. M. Museum (North Bengal University), Malda Museum (Malda), Balurghat College Museum, Dinajpur District Library and lots of other smaller museums in India and Bangladesh. I am extremely grateful to the authorities of these museums and collections for allowing me so kindly to study such materials.

Lastly, with a sense of respect and love I remember my wife Chandralekha and my son Chandrajoy for ungrudgingly facing the hard times with or without me and constantly inspiring me to finish this hard task.

Dow Hill School Qrts.
Kurseong
Darjeeling
1 November 2004

(Bijoy Kumar Sarkar)

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	*Aitareya Brahmana*
AEI	*Art of Eastern India,* Frederick M. Asher.
Ag. P.	*Agni Purana*
AGS	*Asvalayana Grihyasutra*
AMC	Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University.
ASS	*Apastamba Srautasutra*
AR-VRS	*Annual Report of the Varendra Research Society*
ASIAR	*Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report,* Delhi.
AV	*Atharvaveda*
BAU	*Brihadaranyaka Upanisad*
BDS	*Baudhayana Dharmasutra*
Bhav. P.	*Bhavisya Purana*
BI	*Bibliotheca Indica*
BNM	Bangladesh National Museum
BSHI	*Bengal Sculptures: Hindu Iconography up to C.1250 A.D.,* Enamul Hoque.
CBI	*Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions,* S. K. Maity, and R. R. Mukherjee (Ed.).
CIO	*Corpus Inscriptionam Indicarum,* J. F. Fleet (Ed.).
CU	*Candogya Upanisad*
DHI	*Development of Hindu Iconography,* J. N. Banerjea.
DIPGV	*Development of Iconography in Pre-Gupta Vanga,* S. K. Basu.

DM	*Dinajpur Museum*, Bangladesh.
EHI	*Elements of Hindu Iconography*, T. A.G. Rao.
EI	*Epigraphia Indica*
ESB	*Early Sculpture of Bengal*, S. K. Saraswati.
GB	*Gopatha Brahmana*
GDS	*Gautama Dharmasutra*
GGS	*Gobhila Grihyasutra*
HB-I	*History of Bengal*, Vol. I, R.C. Majumdar (Ed.).
HBP	*History of the Bengali People*, N.R. Ray (Tr. By John J. Wood).
HGS	*Hiranyakesin Grihyasutra*
IA	*Indian Antiquary*
IB	*Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, N.G. Majumdar.
IBBS	*Iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, N. K. Bhattasali.
IMC	Indian Museum, Calcutta.
JASB	*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
JISOA	*Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, XVI, 1948.
JRAS	*Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, London.
JUPHS	*Journal of U.P. Historical Society*
KGS	*Khadira Grihyasutra*
KU	*Kausitaki Upanisad*

KKBI	*Kharosthi and Kharosthi Brahmi Inscriptions in West Bengal,* B. N. Mukherjee.
Mat. P.	*Matsya Purana*
MBH	*Mahabharata*
MGS	*Mānava Grihya Sutra*
MHM	Mahasthangarh Musuem
MMC	*Malda Museum Catalogue,* M. S. Bhattacharya.
MRCSB	*Minor Religious Cults and Sects in Bengal* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Kaplana Chattopadhyay.
MS	*Maitrayani Samhita*
MU	*Maitri Upanisad*
ORJH	*The Orissa Historical Research Journal*
P.	*Purāṇa*
PB	*Pancavimsa Brahmana*
PBPDD	*Prachin Vange Pauranik Dharma O Devabhavana,* S. N. Kundu.
PGS	*Paraskara Grihyasutra*
Pl.	Plate
Puranic Records	*Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs,* R. C. Hazra.
Ram.	*Ramayana*
RPVU	*The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, A. B. Keith.
RV	*Rigveda*
Sam. P.	*Samba Purana*

SAB	*Sculptural Art of Bangladesh,* A. K. M. Samsul Alam
SAGC	State Archeological Museum, Calcutta
SB	*Satapatha Brahmana*
SGS	*Sankhayana Grihyasutra*
SMB	*Sāmavidhāna Brāhmana*
SPP	*Sāhitya Parişat Patrikā*
SSS	*Sankhayana Srautasutra*
Studies	*Studies in the Upa-puranas,* Vol. I, R.C. Hazra.
SU	*Svetasvatara Upanisad*
SV	*Samaveda*
SVRM	*Sculpture in the Varendra Research Museum: A Descriptive Catalogue*, Mukhlesur Rahaman.
SWAI-P	*Sun Worship in Ancient India,* L. P. Pandey.
SWAI-S	*Sun Worship in Ancient India,* V. C. Srivastava.
TA	*Taittiriya Aranyaka*
TB	*Taittiriya Brahmana*
TS	*Taittiriya Samhita*
VDP	*Visnudharmottara Purana*
VM	*Vedic Mythology*
Vol.	Volume/s
VRM	*Varendra Research Museum,* Rajshahi.
VS	*Vajasaneyi Samhita*
VSP	Vangiya Sahitya Parisat, Calcutta.

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The cultural life of India through the ages has been dominated by its preoccupation with the pursuit of religious values. The earliest inhabitants of India might have had their own religious system. The advent of the Aryans brought new streams of religious thought. Thereafter the Brahmanical religion had taken deep roots in the minds of the Indian people. Many and various forces of nature were duly personified as gods and goddesses and their worship formed an important aspect of the Vedic or Brahmanical religion. Centering round the Brahmanical deities there developed different cults at different times. Sun worship is one of such cults. The fundamental facts that the Sun is the creator of day and night , and by being the source of light and heat on the earth, is the creator of life, and producer of food and vegetation, must have impressed the human mind from very early times

A. S. Geden has rightly pointed out in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*[1] that solar worship has been described as the real religion of India. Sun worship in India can be traced as early as the Neolithic period with the dawn of the farming economy. The deep sense of reverence for the beneficial qualities of the Sun led to its representation in symbolic forms on prehistoric and proto-historic (Indus Valley Culture) objects.

In the Vedic tradition, the Sun was worshipped under various forms and names such as Surya, Savitri, Mitra, Visnu, Pusan, Vivasvat, Bhaga and Aryaman. Most of these deities along with a few others came to form a group of divinities under the name of the Adityas. Some gods and goddesses of the solar family were invoked in the *Rigveda* and

worshipped either in natural form or by means of symbols and fetishes or by meditation. The Later Vedic age continued the worship of the atmospheric Sun under various names and aspects. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* also inform about the growing popularity of Sun worship in the period of their composition. The geographical extension of the Sun-cult appears to have been the whole of Northern India. The Sun was generally being represented, as noted earlier, by means of various symbols before the development of the solar cult. Surya, however, appeared in human form from an early period in Indian history. From the early centuries of the Christian era, the North Indian form of the Sun-Cult was greatly oriented by the Iranian Sun-worshippers - Magi. In course of time, these Maga Brahmanas spread in large numbers from Northwestern India to Eastern India as is known from Govindapur (Bihar) Inscription dated 1137 A.D.[2] and it was mainly in the efforts of these Sun-priests known here as Acaryas that Sun-worship came to be highly popular in Eastern India. The early Surya-images seldom fail to show the alien features like long tunic, waist- girdle and boots. However, gradual Indianisation of these traits and emphasis on Indian elements like lotus appear to have begun from the Gupta period. The beautifully carved images of the Sun were dedicated and installed in temples. The late Puranas, specially the Upa-puranas, shed much light on the Sun-cult of the early medieval period. After the Guptas, many dynasties of different parts of India patronized the Sun-cult, perhaps for the kingly role of the Sun in heaven. Backed by them and by public men - officers, merchants, scholars, fighters, cloth-weavers etc., the solar cult met with wonderful success.

It is clear to us that Sun worship began in India from a very early time and continued to gain popularity in different parts of India at different times. However, it is

emarkable that in the Eastern part of India, especially in Bengal and its adjoining areas, t became highly popular. In the *Arseya Upanisad* (4th Century B.C.), the Pundras and Suhmas who were undoubtedly the inhabitants of Bengal, have been described as the Sun worshipping tribes. Quite a number of terracotta Sun-images in the pre-Gupta times, even as early as the Maurya-Sunga period, have been found from lower Bengal. Numerous icons of the divinity belonging to the Gupta period have also been procured from various parts of the province. References to the worship of the god in the inscriptions of the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries A.D. are numerous. According to a tradition preserved among a section of the Grahavipras (Sakadvipi), Sasanka brought twelve Brahmanas living on the bank of the Sarayu for worshipping the Sun in order to treat an incurable disease which was, however, cured.[3] The Pala kings, though Buddhists, were not hostile to Brahmanical religion in any way; rather, they encouraged it in various ways. Dharmapala is said to have claimed their descent from the solar race.[4] Sun-images of the Pala period have also been found in large numbers. The Sena kings were strong advocates of the orthodox Brahmanical faith and helped it to attain the position of supremacy in Bengal. Sun worship continued in this period too. Number of the Surya-images belonging to the Sena period is considerably large. Visvarupasena and Suryasena of the Sena dynasty were devout Sun-worshippers. They call themselves *Parama-saura*, indicating the existence of a separate Sun-sect.

A number of contributions have been made by the eminent scholars to the isolated problems relating to Sun-images. Among some earlier works, which are general in nature, the following deserve special mention : K. K. Ganguli, *Some Aspects of Sun Worship in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1965; L. P. Pandey, *Sun-Worship in Ancient India*,

lhi,1971; V.C. Srivastava, *Sun-Worship in Ancient India*, Allahabad, 1972; Ashutosh nattacharya, *The Sun and the Serpent Lore of Bengal*, Calcutta,1977; A. C. Dass, *Sun-orship in Indo-Aryan Religion and Mythology*, Delhi, 198; D. P. Pandey, *Surya: onographical Study of the Indian Sungod*, Delhi,1989. Sun worship and Sun images ave also been discussed to some extent in a number of scholarly works such as: R. D. anerji, *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, Delhi, 1933; S. K. Saraswati, *arly Sculpture of Bengal*, University of Calcutta, 1937; R.C. Majumdar (Ed.), *The istory of Bengal*, Vol. I, Dacca, 1943; J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu conography*, Calcutta, 1956; T. N. Chakraborty, *Some Aspects of Religious Life in Bengal*, Calcutta University, 1957; K. C. Sarkar, *The Sculpture of Ancient Varendra*, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, 1963; J. N. Bnerjea, *Panchopasana*, Calcutta, 1970; R. C.Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1971; Rajatbaran Dattaray: *Vedicism in Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1974; Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangalir Itihas (Adiparva)*, Reprinted, Calcutta, 1359 B.S.; P. K. Bhattacharya, *Iconography of Sculptures*, Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum, Darjeeling, 1983; Rama Chatterjee, *Religion in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1985; A. K. M. S. Alam, *Sculptural Art of Bangladesh*, Dhaka,1985; R. K. Tripathi, *Social and Religious Aspects in Bengal Inscriptions*, Calcutta,1987; Enamul Hoque, *Bengal Sculpture: Hindu Iconography up to C. 1250 A.D.*, Dhaka,1992; S.N. Kundu, *Prachin Vange Pauranik Dharma O Devabhavana* (in Bengali), Burdwan University, Burdwan, 1996; Sakti Kali Basu *Development of Iconography in Pre-Gupta Vanga*, Calcutta, 2004 In this connection, it may be mentioned here that there is hardly any attempt so far made of a comprehensive work

delineating different aspects of the Sun worship in the area under study and its related problems.

We are, however, fortunate enough to have a large number of original sources for our study. Among these we may, at first, mention the Vedas like *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda* and other Samhitas like *Vajasaneyi*, *Maitrayani*, *Taittiriya* etc.; Brahmanas like *Aitareya*, *Gopatha*, *Kausitaki*, *Satapatha*, *Pancavimsa*, *Sāmavidhāna*, *Taittiriya etc*; Upanisads such as *Taittiriya*, *Maitri*, *Candogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Kausitaki*, *Svetasvatara*; *Grihyasutras* like *Apastamba*, *Asvalayana*, *Gobhila*, *Khadira*, *Hiranyakesin*, *Mānava*, *Paraskara*, *Sankhayana etc*; Dharma Sutras *like Baudhayana Gautama etc* ; Two Epics - *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; Puranas like *Vayu*, *Visnu*, *Markandeya*, *Brahmanda*, *Matsya*, *Bhavisya*, *Skanda*, *Samba*, *Agni*, *Saura*, *Brihaddharma*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Visnudharmottara;* Tantras such as *Guhya Samaja Tantra*, *Saradatilaka*, *Sadhanamala*, *Saundarya-mala* etc; Smritis like *Manu and Yajnavalka*; different *Silpasastras* and works like *Brihat Samhitā*, *Āryāsaptaśatī*, *Dharma Puja Vidhana Kriyakandavaridhi*, *Pavana-Duta*, *Ramacharita Sadukti-karnamrita*, *Subhasita-ratnakosa* and the *Kulaji* texts. The archeological sources like inscriptions, coins, amulets, seals and sculptural pieces that are discovered from different parts of Bengal again supply us information, which are no less important.

The popularity of Sun worship in early Bengal led to the proliferation of different types of Sun-images. Temples were also dedicated to the Sun god. Inscriptions were carved with respectful reference to the divinity. Then these phenomena naturally pose certain questions. What is the secret of the continued popularity of Sun worship in ancient Bengal? Is it the fact that out of the three Saura-centres of India as referred to by

ıe late Puranas, Mundira that is believed to be the same as *Gangasagara-samgama* Southern Deltaic region) and Mandāra, one of all the important images of Surya in India ın Punyavardhan (Puṇdravardhana)[5] played a significant role in spreading and popularizing the Sun-cult all over the province? Sun-god was regarded not only as the bestower of welfare and fulfiller of desire but also as *Samasta-roganam hartta* (healer of all diseases).[6] How far did the episode of Sasanka, the first historical ruler of Bengal, as mentioned earlier, create a congenial atmosphere for popularization of the Solar-cult in Bengal? To what extent did the tolerant policy of the Buddhist Pala rulers towards the Brahmanical religion help the Sun worship along with other principal cults like Vaisnavism and Saktaism in enjoying traditional supremacy? As said earlier, Suryasena and Visvarupasena call themselves *Parama-Saura* while *Parama-Mahesvara* is applied to both Vijayasena and Vallalasena and *Parama-Vaisnava* to Laksmanasena. This poses a very pertinent question as to why the later Sena Kings made such a remarkable departure from the religious affiliation of their predecessors.

A thorough investigation of all these questions will necessitate the proper understanding of the sociological significance of the proliferation of Sun-images and Sun worship in this part of India. Besides the Sun-temples at Mundira, it is not unlikely to locate some areas of ancient *Saura-Mandala* in Varendra, which have yielded perhaps the largest number of Sun-images. This again is possibly due to the presence of a Sun-sect, the existence of which can be traced from the time of the Mahabharata, as postulated by Hopkins.[7] Again, it is no less interesting to notice that notwithstanding the immense popularity of the Sun-cult in the early medieval Bengal, it steadily receded to the background with the passage of time, leaving room to the other important Brahmanical

cults. Ultimately, it was relegated to the position of just one of the deities of the *Panchopasana*, a *graha* of the Navagrahas and also to a folk religion. The medieval folk-literatures of Bengal like Mangala-Kavyas also depict both Surya and Siva as symbols of fertility cult. It is well known that Sun is very much connected with the productive system. At the same time, it is also associated with the fertility cult along with Siva, as mentioned earlier. The idea can be understood properly since the days when the sculptural representation like *Martanda-Bhairava*, the syncretistic form of Surya and Siva, was visualized. It is interesting to note again in this connection that when the popularity of the Sun worship was on the wane perhaps since the last important ruler of the Sena dynasty known as Suryasena and the ultimate dissolution of the Sena power in Bengal, Sun-worship became the exclusive preserve of the peasantry and the womenfolk at large as the folk cult.

Lastly, we would like to have a proper understanding of the different aspects of Sun worship under several chapters. The introduction is followed by discussion of the worship of the Sun in the Vedic literature. Next, we propose to deal with the Sun worship in the Epic and Puranic literature. The worship of the Sun is closely related to a legend of the Samba Purana and the role of the Iranian Sun-worshippers (Maga Brahmanas) is also required to be investigated in this context. The fourth chapter deals with the growth and popularity of Sun worship in early Bengal, while in the fifth chapter we are inclined to make a thorough probe into the different types of Sun-images discovered in various parts of Bengal and preserved either in the museums or in the private collections. In the last chapter, we have taken notice of the factors responsible for the subsequent decline in the popularity of Sun worship. The conclusion deals with the findings of the study.

In the appendices, we have sought to investigate some interesting matters relating to the Sun worship in early Bengal. These are (a) Sun temples in Bengal; (b) Sun worship in folk-tradition and (c) inscriptions (with proper translation) appearing on the Sun-images discovered in Bengal.

Notes and References

1. XII, p. 83.

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

3. cf. *Mahadevakarika Kulapanji* by Ramadeva.

4. cf. "*Samudrakula-dvipa*"- *Ramacharita*, 1.4.

5. *Skanda Purāṇa, Prabhāsa Khaṇda*, Ch. 133, p. 508 ff.

6. Bairhatta Surya-image Inscription, *ASIAR*, 1930-34, p. 257.

7. *Epic Mythology*, p. 88.

CHAPTER - II

SUN WORSHIP IN THE VEDIC LITERATURE

SUN WORSHIP IN THE VEDIC LITERATURE

The worship of the Sun as a prominent deity was prevalent among almost all the ancient nations of the world, for the celestial luminary appealed greatly to their religious instincts. Sūrya was being worshipped in India from very early times. Vedic India had a vigorous tradition of Sun worship, which forms an integral part of Nature worship so prominently practiced by the Indo-Aryans. The Sun was worshipped under multiple names and forms in the Vedic tradition. Different Vedic Sun gods represent a special aspect of the Sun. Differences in functions, positions[1], aspects and times of daily worship of the Sun god as well as differences of tribes and families[2] among the Indo-Aryans and those of society and occupation[3] among the Aryans and non-Aryans appear to have contributed to the multiplication of names and forms of the Sun god. Sacrifices were offered to the Sun god in his various aspects under different names such as *Sūrya, Savitri, Pūşan, Bhaga, Vivasvat, Mitra* and *Viṣṇu*, each personifying to a greater or lesser extent the different attributes of the Sun.

I

Sūrya:

Sūrya represents primarily the round red orb of the Sun and hence is "the most concrete of the solar deities"[4]. His connection with the visible luminary orb is very intimate in the *Rigveda*[5]. In the *Atharvaveda, Sūrya* looses that intimacy with nature and becomes primarily a great force of magic and medicine[6]. However, in the Brāhmaṇas, Upanisads and Sūtras the orb of the Sun is regularly worshipped[7]. In the *Rigveda,*[8] the

singer wishes the rising Sun to declare him sinless to Mitra and Varuṇa. Kauşītakī used to adore the Sun god for the removal of his sin[9]. In the *Sūtra* literature also, he is prayed particularly to deliver from sin[10]. *Sūrya* is also a great healing power, obviously because of the healing qualities of his rays. In the *Rigveda*, he is worshipped for the removal of jaundice as well as for the eyesight[11]. The healing aspect of *Sūrya*'s personality was developed in fuller terms in the *Atharvaveda*. There he is prayed for a cure of yellowness of eyes, skin, teeth and nails as well as for a cure of the cough and pains of different kinds including that of heart and for the protection of the eyes[12]. In the Brāhmaṇas, he is intimately connected with the diseases of the eyes[13]. He is also invoked for granting long life[14]. The Sun is the giver of rain and heat.[15]

The Vedic seers also ascribed to *Sūrya* ideas higher than those of its material form did. In the *Rigveda*, the Sun is described as the soul of all movable and immovable things.[16] This tradition is repeated in the Vedic literature throughout.[17] In the Brāhmaṇas, *Āditya* is said to be the supreme essence of the deities and the soul of all the gods.[18] In the Upanişads developed the concept of *Puruşa* in the Sun, which is nothing but the formless ultimate reality while the Sun is the essence of the formed and actual reality.[19] *Sūrya* has been repeatedly identified with the universe in the later Vedic literature.[20]

He has also been conceived as the time.[21] In some Rigvedic hymns,[22] he is described as a celestial bird called '*Garutmān*' with beautiful wings (*divyah suparṇa Garutmān*) while in one verse[23] he is described as a white and brilliant horse brought by *Ūşā*. He is more often described in the *Rigveda* as moving in a car "sometimes drawn by one, and at other times by several, four or seven, swift and ruddy horses or mares'.[24] His rays were sometimes conceived as the seven horses of his chariot.[25] The benevolent

nature of *Sūrya* is very much prominent in the *Rigveda* but the later Vedic period witnessed the development of his malevolent aspect too. *Sūrya* is the scorching Sun and is no other than the death.[26] If there occurs any default, *Sūrya* would burn down the sacrificers.[27]

Savitri:

Savitri is "the stimulator of everything".[28] He is the spiritual power of the Sun and denotes his abstract qualities. The works of impulsion, vivification, instigation and stimulation are characteristically attributed to *Savitri*. He enlightens men and stimulates their thought.[29] In the *Taittrīya Samhitā*, he is often prayed for impulsion. *Atharvaveda*[30] describes him as the lord of stimulation. In the Brāhmaṇas, this quality of *Savitri* has been repeatedly and emphatically mentioned.[31] In the *Śrauta* and the *Grihyasūtras,*[32] the impulse of the god finds very frequent mention. Other works such as bestowing of riches, purification of sin and protection from the evil are also attributed to him. Of course, these activities remain subservient to his main work of stimulation. He is intimately connected with the sacrifices in the Vedic tradition.[33] Like *Sūrya*, he is pre-eminently a golden deity. His eyes, arms, hands, tongue and hair are of gold; so are his armour, chariot and its pole. Therefore, *Savitri* is not a mere abstract deity.

Savitri is connected with wisdom and intelligence.[34] He is prayed in some domestic rites for instilling of intelligence. The famous *Gāyatri Mantra,*[35] known also as *Savitri Mantra*, which has been regarded as the valuable hymn to pay devotion to the Sun god and remained the sacred morning prayer of every devout Hindu for more than two thousand years, sheds much light on the nature and personality of *Savitri*. W. Jones renders it, "Let us adore the supremacy of that divine Sun, the godhead, who illuminates

all, who recreates all, from who all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress towards his holy seat".[36] According to Sāyaṇa, the hymn means: 'We mediate on the light which is one with Brahma; his own light which, from its consuming influence on ignorance and its consequences is termed *bhargas* and is that which is desirable, from its being to be known or worshipped by all (the property of the supreme being, the creator of the world and the animator through the abiding spirit of all creatures). Thus, the *Mantra* contains the belief that the solar light is the symbol of ultimate reality. It is enjoined in the Brāhmaṇas to employ this hymn in many rituals.[37] It is also utilized in the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* of the Atharvavedic tradition.[38] The Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads have interpreted it in the highest metaphysical sense.[39] It finds mention in the *Sūtra* literature too.[40] In addition to the *Gāyatrī Mantra, Rigveda* associates *Savitri* with the highest metaphysical ideas elsewhere too. *Savitri* has been invoked as the supreme god, the creator and the preserver, and the regulator of all movable and immovable.[41] In the *Cāndogya Upaniṣad* (3.12) he has been symbolically identified with the ultimate reality. These descriptions of *Savitri* later on contributed to the development of the Sun-sect by the sectarians.

In the Brāhmaṇas and the Sūtras, *Savitri* is the chief deity in the initiation ceremony. Owing to his connection with stimulation, sacrifices and wisdom, the intelligentsia of the Vedic society[42] seemingly favoured him. In the later Vedic literature,[43] the intellectual classes, particularly the Brahmanas, are frequently referred to as considering *Savitri*-worship by means of the *Gāyatrī* hymn as essential for spiritual upliftment. The oblations to *Savitri* are to be given at the house of a carver.[44]

Pusan:

Pusan signifies the benevolent power of the Sun, manifested chiefly as a pastoral deity. He has been intimately connected with cattle and pastoral life in the Rigveda.[45] He is connected with the prosperity of cattle in the later Vedic literature too.[46] He takes care of cattle so that they may not be dashed to pieces in the ravine and brings them home safely, when they have gone astray and in general, restores lost things. Pusan is intimately connected with paths in the *Rigveda*.[47] He is a guardian of the roads, which is a characteristic feature.[48] He knows the roadways and protects his devotees from dangers such as wolves and robbers. He is intimately connected with a particular class of people known as *Panis*[49] who were traders and most probably non-Aryans.[50] He has been asked to generate generosity in their hearts so that they become complacent towards the priests. He has a beard and braided hair. He travels in a chariot drawn by a goat[51] and he carries a golden spear, an awl, and a goad. His favourite food is ***Karambha*** ("gruel"). He is connected with marriage in the wedding hymn.[52] He is invoked to lead the bride safely.[53] There is no growth of his personality in the later Vedic literature except his spiritualization in the Upanisads. The Bharadvajas are special priests of Pusan in the Rigveda. The oblations to Pusan are to be given at the house of a divider.[54]

Mitra:

Mitra (Iranian Mithra) is identical with Mithra of the Indo-Iranian Sun god.[55] In the *Rigveda,* he is so closely associated with Varuna that he has virtually lost his independent stature. Only one hymn[56] is exclusively devoted to him, where it is stated that 'he brings men together by the utterance of his voice, and watches the tillers with unwinking eye'. According to MacDonnell,[57] the bringing of men together is a distinctive

feature of Mitra in the Vedic literature. Rigvedic evidence points to Mitra as the representative of the beneficent aspect of the Sun as suggested by the name Mitra which originally meant "an ally". In the *Rigveda* (VII.62.4), he is mentioned as the dearest friend of the people. The later Vedic literature also refers to his friendly nature.[58]

He attains independence in the later Vedic literature. In the *Atharvaveda,* Mitra is represented as uncovering in the morning what has been covered by Varuna (IX.3.18). The *Taittiriya Samhita* also directly refers to Mitra as the god of the day and Varuna as that of the night.[59] This view prevails in the Brahmanas too. Sayana[60] and other commentators regarded Mitra as the presiding deity of the day as well. It is only in the later Vedic literature that Mitra appears as a god of concord and agreement.[61]

Visnu:

Visnu is the most interesting of the different solar divinities, as he became one of the principal constituents of the composite god of the Vaisnava religion. The main characteristic of his nature is his three steps. Exclusive epithets like *Urugaya* (wide going), *Urukrama* (wide going) and *Vikrama* meaning swift motion are applied to him several times in the Vedic literature. He is the personification of the swift-moving Sun.[62] Two of his steps are visible. However, the third or highest is invisible, far beyond the flight of birds, and is as an eye fixed in heaven, shining brightly down. It is the supreme power in the universe and three worlds are engulfed in it. Visnu traverses three regions by his three strides.[63] This is a characteristic quality of him in the Vedic literature throughout.[64] Sakapuni, a predecessor of Yaska, regards these three strides as the course of the Sun through three divisions of the universe, earth, air and heaven.[65] Aurnavabha, another predecessor of Yaska (*Nirukta*, 12.19) takes them to mean the rising, the

culminating and the setting of the Sun. Modern scholars like Max Muller, Keith, Wilson, Roth, MacDonnell and Kaegi favour the latter view. He took his three steps to protect the man in distress, to provide him a dwelling.[66] In the Brahmanas, he is said to assume the dwarf form in order to help the god against the demons.[67]

Visnu sets in motion, like a revolving wheel, his ninety steeds (days)[68] with their four names, 'an allusion probably to the three hundred and sixty days of the year divided into four seasons. It is significant to note that here Visnu has been compared with *Cakra*, the symbol of the Sun god, which became one of the prominent emblems of Visnu in the later mythology. The most outstanding heroic deeds performed by Visnu were two: firstly, he helped Indra with whom he is closely associated in the battle with Vritra, and secondly he took three strides in order to traverse the whole world.

Visnu, from the very beginning, was popular among the Aryan masses as the god of productivity. So prominent is his quality as the great source of fertility, procreation and vegetation in the Vedic and the post-Vedic literature that many consider him primarily as the god of fertility. In the Rigveda, he is frequently invoked for bestowal of food.[69] The later Vedic literature also associate him with the food as well as plants.[70] In his invocation with other deities, he is invoked to promote conception.[71] He is invoked in the conception rite for laying the womb.[72] He is a protector of embryos. It is said in the later Vedic literature that he blesses his worshippers with children.[73] Thus, he is also a god of fertility and productivity and this, perhaps, accounts for his being called *Sipivista*.

Vivasvan:

Vivasvan appears to have originally represented the rising Sun. He was also looked upon by the hymnists as the first sacrificer and the ancestor of the human race. He

is the husband of Tvastri, the daughter of Tvastru, the architect of the gods. He is believed to protect one from Yama. The Vedic legend[74] about the marriage of Saranyu, the daughter of Tvasta, with Vivasvan was obviously the basis of the elaborate story current in the Epics, and the Puranic story about Surya marrying Samjna, the daughter of Visvakarma, her desertion of Surya after leaving with him her shadow (Chaya) due to her inability to bear her husband's excessive brilliance and Visvakarma's attempt to reduce it in order that his daughter might endure it.

The Adityas:

Most of the deities mentioned above along with a few others like Amsa, Daksa, Dhatri, Marttanda, etc. came to constitute, in different groupings and different contexts, a special class of gods collectively known as the Adityas, 'sons of Aditi', though Aditi was also looked upon as the mother of all the other Vedic divinities. Originally, six Adityas are mentioned in the *Rigveda*: Mitra, Aryama, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksa and Amsa.[75] However, the number increased from six to seven by the entry of Surya and to eight by the inclusion of Marttanda. Eight Adityas also occur in the *Atharvaveda* and the *Taittiriya Samhita*. In the *Taittiriya Brahmana*,[76] the names of eight Adityas are mentioned as Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, Amsa, Bhaga, Dhatri, Indra and Vivasvat. Owing to different traditions, there has been difference in the list of the Adityas. The *Satapatha Brahmana* at one place fixes their number at eight including Marttanda, while in two other passages,[77] it raises the number to twelve and identifies them in this context with the 12 months. However, their names have not been enumerated. The identification of the Sun god with the Time is a marked feature of Sun worship of the later Vedic era. The Epics, Puranas and other later texts accept the number twelve. Many of the solar deities of the

Vedic period are found here. Later, the worship of the twelve Adityas along with that of the *Navagrahas* (the nine planets) came to occupy an important place in the religious life of the Hindus.

Mitra: Mitra, one of the Adityas, has already been discussed in the foregoing pages.

Aryaman: Aryaman, also an Indo-Iranian deity, is a less defined aspect of Surya and so much destitute of individual traits that in the '*Naighantuka*' he is not included in the list of the gods. According to Wilson, Aryaman presides over twilight.[78] He is described as the animator of humankind.[79] His friendly nature is referred to in the *Rigveda*[80] and finds mention in the Atharvaveda too.[81] Thus, the conception of Aryaman seems to have differed but little from that of the greater Aditya, Mitra. Aryaman, which means chivalry, is the chief of *Pitris*

Bhaga: According to Yaska,[82] Bhaga is the presiding deity of the forenoon. However, its association with the Sun is not very clear. The name means 'dispenser' or 'giver' and is of Indo-European origin. He is also regularly conceived in the Vedic hymns as 'a distributor of wealth' usually the gift of Indra and Agni, the chief leader of rites[83] and the sustainer of the world.[84]

Amsa: Amsa has also no individual personality. He is almost synonymous with Bhaga, expressing both the concrete sense of 'share, portion' and that of apportioner'.

Daksa: Daksa was considered with Aditi as the universal parent representing the luminous sky.[85] It fits in with his description in the *Satapatha Brahmana*[86] as Prajapati.

Varuna: Varuna is described as a 'very wise son of Aditi'[87] and the chief of the Adityas in the Vedic literature. Mostly, he is described and invoked along with Mitra, and

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only sometimes with other gods. He seems to represent the luminous encompassing sky.[88] Sayana,[89] the well-known commentator of the Vedas, however, remarks that the setting Sun alone is called Varuna. He causes the night by his departure.

Surya: Surya- the seventh Aditya has already been described.

Marttanda: Marttanda, the eighth Aditya has almost no individual feature. It is only said of him that he was born from a dead egg and was thrown away by Aditi. He is mentioned just as a name of the Sun god in the later Vedic literature.[90] It is suggested by MacDonnell that he is a representative of the setting Sun.[91]

Asvins: The character of these two deities, always mentioned in one name Aśvins, is not well defined. The most marked feature is that the Aśvins are twins and inseparable generally.[92] Yaska takes the Aśvins to be the twilight before dawn: half-dark, half-light. However, he has also quoted alternative views of his predecessors.[93] Some considered them as the heaven and earth, others as the day and night and some others as the Sun and the moon while the legendary writers or writers of history regarded them as two kings, performers of holy acts. However, their solar character is affirmed by their connection with Usas (Dwan), Surya and Vivasvat. Usas who is probably their sister comes in their wake. Suryā, daughter of Surya, is their wife and accompanies them on their car.[94] The car of the Asvins is golden or Sun-like[95] in all its various parts and traverses heaven and earth in a single day as the cars of the Sun and Usa are also said to do. They are the sons of Vivasvat and Saraṇyū, daughter of Tvaṣṭri.[96]

The attributes '*rudravartani*' (having a red path) and '*hiranyavartani*' (golden pathed) are peculiar to the Asvins. They reveal the light aspect of the Asvins' personality. The close connection of the Asvins with horses as their name as well as other connections

is again a pointer in the same direction. They appear in the early dawn[97] when they yoke their horses to their car and descend to earth to receive the adorations and offerings of their votaries.

The Asvins are connected with marriage, production and love.[98] They are invoked along with several other gods to bestow fertility on the bride.[99] They gave the wife of a eunuch a child and made the barren cow yield milk.[100] They are responsible for the rain so essential for the fertility of the vegetative world.[101] They are divine physicians with several Rigvedic legends of miraculous cures to their credit. These legends illustrate their role as the physicians for diseases such as blindness in the main or restoring youthful vigour, helping young maiden in production and works connected with procreative potency. In the later Vedic literature also, they are the physicians restoring the eyesight and other diseases.[102] In the Upanisads, the Asvins are mentioned sparingly but wherever they find reference is in connection with the procreation.[103] The character of charioteers attributed to them in the *Rigveda* is maintained in the later Vedic literature. There is a reference in the *Taittiriya Samhita* to the effect that the oblations for the Asvins should be offered in the house of the charioteer.[104]

In the later Vedic literature, it is found that the position of the Asvins came to be degraded and the orthodox circles looked down upon them. The *Taittiriya Samhita* mentions that at the beginning, the Asvins did not drink *Soma* and it was later that they acquired the habit of drinking *Soma*. A bad Brahmana who desires to drink *Soma* offers prayer to them. In a similar way, the *Brahmanas* inform that the deities did not invite them at the sacrifice as they mixed with the human beings too much. The position of the Asvins declined in the later Vedic age probably because of too much emphasis on their

fertility aspect. The orthodox circles regarded this field as a private and closed book and therefore, did not like this aspect of them, which came to be more prominent in the post-Vedic era.

II

Theriomorphic, Fetishistic and Symbolic Forms of the Sun Gods:

The Sun was also adored in theriomorphic, fetishistic and symbolic forms in the Vedic period. These aspects were, however, not very important.

Behind the anthropomorphic forms of some solar gods, probably there may have been some animals. The Asvins seem to have the horses, Pusan the goats and Visnu the bird in the background of their personalities.[105] In addition to these identifications of the Sun gods with the animals, there were a variety of animal-fetishes of the solar deities in the Vedic worship. These fetishes, no doubt, played a minor role.

The horse in general is a symbol of the Sun god. This becomes evident from his several descriptions in the *Rigveda*[106] and in the later Vedic literature.[107] It is said that the dawn leads a white steed.[108] The *Brahmanas* have directly identified the Sun with the horse.[109] In the *Asvamedha* sacrifice, horse was employed as the symbol of the Sun as the lord of the heaven.[110] The bull is another symbol of the Sun god in the Vedic literature. Surya has been called a bull in the *Rigveda*.[111] In the *Taittiriya Samhita*[112] and the *Satapatha Brahmana*,[113] the Sun has again been described as the bull. In many Atharvavedic rites, the bull used to be employed as the symbol of the Sun-god.[114] The bull represents the procreative potency of the Sun.[115] The goat appears to have been another animal-fetish of the Sun god. According to MacDonnell, Pusan was specially associated with the goat. The bird in general was also symbolic of the Sun god due to its

fast speed. Frequent comparison is found in the Rigveda[116] between the Sun and a few birds such as an eagle, a swan, a falcon etc. The Sun has been referred to a number of times as a particular bird '*Suparna-Garutmat*' (probably a mythical bird) or simply Suparna. In the later Vedic literature also, such descriptions occur.

Besides animals, various material objects were also employed in the Vedic times to symbolize the Sun god. The wheel served as a well-liked symbol of the Sun god. It represented both the shape and motion of the Sun.[117] The wheels of the Sun's car are too often referred to in the *Rigveda.*[118] The wheel was also frequently used as a symbol representing the Sun in the Vedic rituals[119] such as the *Vajapeya* sacrifice or the ritual of laying the sacrificial fire or the solstice-festival. A golden disc as well as simple gold was also employed to symbolize the Sun god in the Vedic ritual.[120] The practice might have originated in the Rigvedic age. In the Vedic rituals, a gold plate served as the symbol of the Sun.[121] In various rituals, simply the gold was employed to represent the Sun god.[122] A firebrand was also utilized as a symbol of the Sun.[123]

The lotus also served in the Vedic rituals[124] as a symbol of the Sun probably in his fertility aspect. Lotus appears to be connected with the Sun in the *Atharvaveda.*[125] A circular white hide also symbolizes of the Sun god.[126] The white colour, sacred to the Sun god, also served as his symbol. Generally, a white horse[127] or a white cow[128] or a white round skin[129] is used to represent the Sun.

Fetishes as Precursors of Icons:

Material objects like the wheel, the disc, the lotus etc. that served as symbols of the Sun god in the Vedic rituals are found on numerous early coins[130] some of which may be dated in the later Vedic age.[131] These representations might have been encouraged by

the Vedic tradition. These material objects symbolized the Sun god only during their employment in the rituals and therefore, they tend to command importance as ritual components than as icons. However, they may be taken to be the precursor of later images. The general trend of the Vedic society as indicated in the Vedic literature seems to be aniconic.[132] The aniconic tradition of the *Rigveda* goes on in the later Vedic period too. However, it is evident from the use of symbols as Sun-fetishes in the Vedic rituals that the tradition of the worship of the Sun has moved forward from the purely aniconic tradition to the semi-iconic phase as these *vimbas* or *Sandris pratikriti* served as temporary icons of the Sun in unconventional sense. Not only iconic tradition but also public worship by means of temples could not be developed. One thing should, however, be mentioned here. Sun in human form has been found represented on the Mauryan pottery[133] and actual specimen of the Sun-images of the first or 2nd Century B.C.[134] has been discovered as well. Therefore, it is not unnatural to suggest that by the last part of the *Sutra* period the tradition of image making and worship was prevalent among a section of the people most probably outside the Vedic circle.

III

Social aspect of Sun Worship:

The adoration of the Sun under one name or other is important and essential in all the social and religious rites and ceremonies of the Vedic society. It shows that Sun worship was popular among the people in Vedic India. The ceremonies where the worship of the Sun was integral are the following:

The Sun is worshipped at different occasions in the marriage ceremony. Pusan is prayed to lead the bride safely.[135] Mitra, Visnu and Surya along with other gods are invoked to protect the couple.[136] After marriage, on the fourth night towards the morning the husband offers oblations with prayers to the Sun for expiation.[137]

In the Initiation ceremony, Sun god plays a far more important role. The recitation of the *Gayatri* hymn is the most important part of the ceremony[138] Surya is prayed for bestowal of insight and radiance on the student.[139] When the charge of the student is given to the Sun, he is to be worshipped.[140] When the teacher takes charge of the student, many solar deities are invoked.[141] The worship of the Sun is to be done when the studentship ends.[142]

The worship of the Sun is prescribed in all the *samskāras*. In the *Kesanta* and *Cudakarman* ceremonies, Savitri is invoked.[143] The recitation of the hymn sacred to the Sun is prescribed for a valiant male child.[144] The child in his fourth month is made to look to the Sun while the adoration to the Sun continues by means of the muttering of the hymn.[145]

The role of the Sun god is important in the daily life too. In a few *Grihyasutras*, every householder is enjoined to offer oblations to the Sun god daily in the morning.[146] In case someone sees a bad dream,[147] rises after the Sun-rise,[148] falls in some danger[149] or desires to win co-wives,[150] the worship of the Sun is to be done. Every twice-born householder is to perform the *Samdhyopasana*, a form of the Sun worship. The Morning Prayer along with the muttering of the *Gayatri Mantra* and facing towards the east should begin before the Sunrise and goes on until the disc of the Sun is on the horizon. The evening prayer commences by facing the north-east along with muttering of the *Gayatri*

when the solar disc is about to set and it continues till the stars appear in the sky.[151] Offer of an *arghya* to the Sun is also prescribed.[152] As the *Samdhya* was to be done according to the procedure laid down in the *Grihyasutras* and *Dharmasutra*s daily by every twice-born Hindu,[153] it may be said that Sun-worship in its spiritualized form was a very important feature of social life.

In various seasonal ceremonies and festivals, Sun god figures prominently. At the partaking of the first fruits of the harvest[154] as well as in the house-building ceremony,[155] the Sun is worshipped. In many agricultural festivals[156] and in the funeral ceremony, the Sun is also worshipped by means of reciting the hymn propitiatory to the him.[157] An *Aditya-vrata* prescribed for a student is referred to in the *Gobhila Grihyasutra.*[158] In addition to the common people, the aristocratic circles of the Vedic society also worshipped the solar deities. This is evident from the worship of the Sun in the *Agnicayana* and *Agnihotra*, employment of the solar symbolism in the *Asvamedha* and the *Vajapeya* sacrifices as well as in the ceremony for the setting up of the sacred fires, places of the Sun gods given in the *Soma* sacrifices and offering of libations to Pusan, Savitri and Surya in the seasonal sacrifices.[159] It was beyond doubt that the Sun was not worshipped independently outside the institution of *Yajna.*

Method of Worship:

The Sun, like other deities, was worshipped through the recitation of the hymns and the offerings.[160] The recitation of hymns was essential in the Vedic worship. The hymns were of two types: the prayer and the praise. There are internal evidences in the *Rigveda* and the later Vedic literature in favour of this. The recitation of hymns sacred to the Sun is also referred to in the *Brahmanas*, the *Srauta* and the *Grihya-sutras.*[161] It is

said in the *Sutras* that the hymns were to be murmured and not recited. This practice was called *japa*. There are many references in the *Grihya-sutras* to the *japa* of hymns for the Sun worship. The procedures of Sun worship may be known from the study of the constituents of the *Samdhyopasana*, which is a type of Sun worship. Those constituents were *japa* (the muttering of the *Gayatri Mantra*), the *arghya,* the *acamana* (cleansing the mouth), the *pranayama* (the inhalation and exhalation of the air), the *marjana*, the *aghamarsana* and the *upasthana*.[162] Emphasis is laid on the *japa* in the *Grihya-sutras* but in the *Dharma-sutras* elaborate rules have been evolved for other elements.[163] As the *Samdhyopasana* was the ideal worship for every twice born householder, it may be suggested that the general worship of the Sun god necessitated these procedures as well.

The offerings consisted either of the oblations or of the libations. The oblations consisted of clarified butter poured on fire while the libation was that of the *Soma* juice in the fire, on the ground or on the sacred grass strewn on the floor. The libation of *Soma* juice was an essential part of the Vedic ritual and all the solar deities were connected with it. References are found in the Vedic literature of the oblations of clarified butter to the Sun gods.[164] Salutations are offered and meditations are addressed to Surya[165] and Savitri.[166] It is enjoined that the horses of the Sun are also to be salutated.[167] Meditation devoted to the Sun also finds frequent mention in the *Chandogya Upanisad* (II.9). Beholding of the light of Surya is also prescribed. According to the *Maitri Upanisad* (I.2), the worshippers are supposed to gaze on the solar orb. The worship of the Sun was essentially domestic, as the entire ceremony was performed in the house of the worshippers. It was non-sectarian too, as various deities were simultaneously invoked

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and many of them in turn were praised as the supreme deities. No reference is made to any temple or any place of community-worship in the early Vedic literature.

Occasions of Sun- Worship:

Worship of the Sun is prescribed for once (in the morning), twice (in the morning and the evening) or thrice (at the dawn, the noon and the evening) in a day. Three occasions of Sun worship are indicated even in the *Rigveda*. According to *Aitareya Brahmana*, the hymns sacred to the Sun god should be recited in keeping with his movement. Sun worship for twice a day (in the morning and in the evening) is mentioned in *Kausitaki Brahmana*.[168] Three occasions of Sun worship is referred to in the Upanisads as well. Kausitaki used to adore the Sun in the morning, at midday and in the evening.[169] Worship of the Sun as the symbol of *Brahman* is also prescribed at seven different times of the day.[170] These seven times are as follows: the pre-rise, the post-rise, the cow gathering, the mid-day, the past mid-day, past afternoon and the post-Sunset. It seems that in the beginning, the *Samdhyopasana* used to be performed twice - in the morning and in the evening,[171] but later, it was to be done for three times - the morning, the noon and the evening.[172]

Thus, Sun worship was in the nature of the *yajna*, which consisted of the recitation of the hymns of the praise or the prayer and the offerings of the oblation of clarified butter poured on fire and libation of Soma juice sprinkled either on the fire or sometimes on the ground or sometimes on the sacred grass strewed on the floor. There was no real development of the concept of the icon proper and the temple, though the tradition of the symbol-worship came to develop. The worship of the Sun god was exclusively domestic as the entire ceremony was performed in the house of the

worshipper. It was also of non-sectarian character because many gods were invoked simultaneously and many of them in turn were lauded as the highest. The same priest glorifies the Sun as the supreme god and the next moment, he eulogizes another divinity as the highest. From the beginning, it was enjoined to worship the Sun either once or twice or thrice. Salutation and meditation also formed the method of worship. Further, *Suryadarsana* is also prescribed. In the Sutras, we find the evolution of a distinct form of Sun worship involving the *japa*, the *arghya*, the *marjana*, the *acamana*, the *aghamarsana* and the *upasthana*. There was also a class of Sun-worshipping saints in the Vedic society.

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CHAPTER - III

SUN WORSHIP IN THE EPIC AND THE PURANIC LITERATURE

SUN WORSHIP IN THE EPIC AND THE PURĀNIC LITERATURE

I

EPICS

The post-Buddha epoch was characterized by the growth of sects and sectarian ideologies. The religious life of the Epics,[1] therefore, came to be dominated by sectarianism. In keeping with the changed ambiance, the Sun-cult also underwent very important changes in its concept of the divinity and its ritual. The Sun came to be one of the eight important deities of the Epics who had a sectarian following.[2]

March towards Sectarianism:

A Sun-sect known as *Sauras* finds specific reference for the first time in the *Mahābhārata*. It is said that in the camp of the Pāndus, there were a thousand and eight others who were Sun- worshippers.[3] In the said Epic, there is a hymn[4] in praise of the Sun god having 108 names, which was finally communicated to Yudhiṣṭhira by Dhaumya.[5] All the characteristic features of a sectarian divinity can be traced in this legend of Sun worship by Yudhiṣṭhira. He is the highest god, the lord of Manus and Manvantaras.[6] In the list of 108 names, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Skanda, Yama, Varuṇa, Indra, Soma etc. are just other names of the Sun god that demonstrates his supremacy. In the all the seven worlds, there is none who can surpass him.[7] His names such as Aja,

Kāla, Ādideva, Carācarātmā, Sukşātmā and Viśvakarma are communicative of his superiority and recognition with the highest metaphysical principle of the cosmos. In this context, mention is also made of the grace of the god and submission to him. This shows that the Sun god was a deity of a sect and the flow of *bhakti* was flooding the naturalistic concept of the Vedic tradition of the Sun god. In the legend of Karṇa, there are references to the *bhaktas* of the Sun god.[8] In the same way, the legends of Samvarṇa[9] represents Vasistha as praying to the Sun god in a sectarian manner. He is the cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution. In the *Āditya-hridaya Mantra* of the *Rāmayāṇa,*[10] the Sun god has been identified with all the great divinities in the typical sectarian way. He is the lord of even Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa.[11] He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all creatures.[12] The development of sectarian texts, which is a fundamental feature of a sect, is also traceable in the Epics. 'A secret *Veda* of the Sun' has been specially mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, which was taught to Arvāvasu. It is, therefore, evident that the *Sauras* developed a *Veda* of their own that was different from the traditional Vedas. The sectarian following of the Sun god may also be traced in some of the names of historical celebrities in the *Mahābhārata*. Such names are Sūryadhvaja, Rocamāna, Amsumāna[13] and Sūryadatta. In ancient India, many persons used to take the name of their god because of intense devotion to him. The data in the Epics thus demonstrate the march of Sun worship towards sectarianism from the non-exclusive and naturalistic tradition of the Vedic period.

Most probably, the solar sect originated as early as two-three centuries before the Christian era as the evidences of the Epic data, Pānini, Patañjali, early Buddhist and Jaina literatures combined with that of early images and coins disclose.[14] The distant past of

the Sun-sect may be pushed back to the 5th-4th cent. B.C. that is the upper limit of the *Mahābhārata* and that may be the era of Pānini as well.

The solar sect seems to have been ideologically connected with the Vedic thoughts. It is said that the Sun worshippers in the camp of the Pāndus were experts in the Vedic lore.[15] Names such as Sūrya, Savitā, Pūṣa, Bhaga, Aryamā, Tvaṣṭā, Vivasvān, etc. in the list of 108 names are Vedic survivals in the Epic pantheon. The method of Sun worship in the Epics is also in many ways a survival of the Vedic tradition. The *japa* and other constituents of the ritual such as the *ācamana*, the *prānāyāma*, the *upasthāna*, the *arghya*, etc. are mentioned in them.[16] In the *Rāmayāṇa*, a class of worshippers is referred to as worshipping the Sun by means of the *upasthāna* with their arms upstrtetched.[17] Similarly, Samvarṇa adored the Sun god by asceticism with face towards the Sun.[18] His descriptions as the soul of the universe,[19] the Time and the rain-giver are continuations of the Vedic tradition.

The solar sect seems to have been developed by the indigenous traditions of *bhakti*. It is said that various non-Āryan tribes such as Siddhas, the Cāraṇas, the Gandharvas, the Yaksas, the Guhyakas, the Nāgas, the Asuras and the Rāksasas adored the Sun.[20] *Bhakti* finds direct mention several times in the *Mahābhārata* in connection with the Sun worship. He is adored by means of *dhūpa*, *dīpa* and *naivedya*. The worship of the Sun god in the Epics integrated the indigenous traditions of *bhakti* and *pujā* along with the Vedic tradition.

The *Mahābhārata* appears to have been familiar with the fire-Sun-worshipping Maga priests from Śākadvīpa, the advent of whom marked the beginning of new traditions in solar cult.[21] They are mentioned for the first time in this work. Reference is

also made to the four castes of Śākadvīpa one of which is the Magas - the Fire-worshipping priests.[22] The Irānian tradition of Sun worship seems to have had its impact on the solar sect of the Epics. Mihira - the Magian Sun god has been explicitly referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as one of the names of the deity and distinguished from its Indian counterpart - Mitra in the same line.[23] In addition, the Magian tradition of providing boots etc. to the Sun-images seems to have been mentioned in the legend of Jamadagni referring to the offer of umbrella and boots to him by Sūrya.[24] It is evident that the *Mahābhārata* was familiar with the Magian tradition. However, there is no significant influence of it in the Sun worship in the *Mahābhārata* except in the adoption of the name of Mihira and a few legends like those of Jamadagni and Māṭhara. In the *Rāmayāṇa*, there is no reference to Mihira or the Magas in the *Āditya-hridaya* hymn

The solar sect found in the Epics goes unnoticed by the Greek writers. Moreover, it is not specifically mentioned either in the works of Pāṇini or of Patañjali. In view of this, it is reasonable to suggest that in the Epic period, the sect of the Sun was not very popular. Most probably, it emerged under the impact of the indigenous tradition of *bhakti* and the Magian tradition of Sun worship. The patronage given by the alien rulers like Darius, Mihirakula, Kaniska, etc.[25] might have also been responsible for the growth of the solar sect.

Humanization of the Sun's personality:

The personality of Sūrya has been fully humanized in the Epics.[26] However, he is still described as a disc, a bird, a horse, or a bull.[27]. In the *Mahābhārata,* the Sun appears in human form in connection with the legends of Arvāvasu, Karṇa, Kuntī, Yudhiṣṭhira and Jamadagni.[28] The Sun was allegedly present in human form when Agastya instructed

Rāma to recite *Āditya-hridaya* hymn.[29] He possesses hands, hair etc., drinks, makes speeches, gives knowledge, acts as witness and goes home.[30]

In keeping with the humanization of the Sun's personality there also developed a family round him. Tvaṣṭrī, daughter of Tvaṣṭri and also known as Samjñā and Saraṇyū, is the wife of Vivasvat.[31] Suvarcalā is also mentioned as a devoted consort of him. Chāyā, the shadow of Saraṇyū, though not referred to in the Epic proper, finds specific mention in the Harivamśa as the wife of Sūrya. Aśvins are his sons by Tvaṣṭrī,[32] and Śaniscara by Chāyā. Karṇa, and Yama are also his children.[33] In addition, Sūrya had also a few other sons. Suprajā, Sraddhā Vaivasvatī and Sāvitri are referred to as his daughters.[34] Most probably some of his family-members such as Aśvinī-kūmaras-Dasra Nāsatyas[35] also came to be invoked along with him. Aruṇa is the charioteer of Sūrya.[36] Aruṇa, Māṭhara and Daṇda are referred to as his attendants and worshipped along with the Sun.[37]

Names and Traits of the Sun god:

The Epics refer to several old Sun gods such as Sūrya, Savitri, Mitra, Pūṣan, Aśvins, Vivasvat, Viṣṇu, Bhaga and Tvaṣṭā.[38] However, these once-separate gods are now considered just as different names and forms of the Sun. Vibhāvasu came to be common name in the Epics.[39] *Ādityas*, sons of Aditi, are also referred to in the *Mahābhārata*. According to the wise, they are twelve in number. In accordance with a list of the *Mahābhārata,* the twelve *Ādityas* are Dhātā, Mitra, Aryamā, Indra, Varuṇa, Amśa, Bhaga, Vivasvān, Pūṣā. Savitā, Tvaṣṭā, and Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu, though youngest, is said to be the greatest of the *Ādityas* because of his qualities.[40] The twelve *Ādityas* have been identified with the twelve months of the year in the Epics too.[41] It is clear that the Epics were following the tradition of the Brāhmaṇas in respect of the *Ādityas.* The only

difference is that Viṣṇu emerges here as the chief of the *Ādityas*. Under the name of Sūrya or *Āditya*, the once-separated solar deities were merged into one Sun god though his different aspects were represented by different old names and new synonyms and epithets. The coming out of the Sun in *Āditya* or Sūrya as the Supreme and original solar divinity marks an exit from the past and may be considered as the Epic innovation.

The primary function of the Sun god is to drive away darkness and demons.[42] More prominent than his day-maker aspect is his role as the rain-giver and the corn-producer. It is said that he draws up waters for eight months during his northern course and in the remaining four months, he pours them down in the form of rain during his southern course.[43]. From the combination of heat and water, the plants and corns are produced. Thus, the Sun is ultimately responsible for the production of food on which men subsist.[44] That is why the food has been described as a form of Sūrya. Yudhiṣṭhira prayed to him specifically for food, which he gave to him for twelve years.[45] The rain-giving aspect of Sūrya is not fully developed in the Vedic tradition though it is known. However, in the Epics this aspect is quite frequently emphasized and was taken up later on by the Purāṇas.

He is identified with Time in an equal manner. This becomes evident from his names such as *Kāla, Samvatsarakara, Kālacakrapravartaka, Kālādhakṣya* and *Kṣaṇa*.[46] The twelve *Ādityas* who are regular Sun gods in the Epics are identified with the twelfth months of the year.[47] He is the lord of the planets[48] and also identical with all the planets.[48] Thus the tradition of worshipping Sūrya in association with Navagrahas was initiated in the Epics.

In the Epics, the benevolent qualities of the Sun god are expressed by such epithets as *Maitreya, Karunānvita, Dhanvantari, Jīvana, Kāmada* and *Prāṇaadhāraka.*[49] However, the role of the Sun as a malevolent deity is also emphasized in both the Epics. He is the destroyer of the universe[50] and an evil planet.[51] Probably, the oppressive heat of Northern India, where the Epics were composed, had contributed towards this feature. The Sun god is a great moral and ethical force in the Epics. He is the beholder of good and bad deeds of men.[52] The identity of the worshipper and the worshipped is repeated when it is said that the saint approaches to enter his disc at which Vivasvat welcomes him. The glory of the saint and the glory of the Sun becomes one.[53]

Method of Sun worship:

The recitation of hymns sacred to the Sun god formed an essential feature of the Epic worship too. Yudhiṣṭhira worshipped the Sun by repeating hymns containing 108 names of the divinity as well as by hymns of praise and prayer.[54] Karṇa resorted to the method of *japa* of hymns propitiatory to the Sun god. In the *Rāmāyaṇa, Rāma* invokes the Sun by the *japa* of the *Āditya-hṛidaya* hymn.[55] Besides the *japa,* others constituents of the ritual are the *ācamana,* the *prāṇāyama,* the *upasthāna* etc.[56] The concentration and purity of mind and observance of vows involving complete fasting also constituted the ritual of Sun worship as Yudhiṣṭhira lived on air only while adoring the Sun god with devoted mind.[57] There is a reference in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the *munis* who observe difficult vows such as worshipping the Sun god by means of the *upasthāna* with their arms up stretched.[58] Similarly in the *Mahābhārata,* Samvaraṇa worshipped the Sun god by asceticism with face towards the Sun. Kuntī invoked the Sun by the power of a magic

formula. The posture at the time of the worship used to be standing with face towards the Sun.[59] The salutation[60] to the Sun god is a frequent theme in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, the *japa* of the Epic tradition is slightly different from that of the Vedic ritual. In the *japa* of the Epics, exclusive emphasis was laid upon the names of the deity while in the Vedic school the repetition was of full hymn containing praise and prayer.

Departures that are more significant may be seen in the employment of flowers, incense, garlands, lamps etc. in Sun worship in the Epics.[61] It is already mentioned that Sun god was completely anthropomorphized and he used to appear in human form before the worshipper. However, there is no specific mention of any image of the Sun god in the Epics.[62] On the other hand, usual images of the Sun dating as early as the 2nd century B.C.[63] are found. Further, terracotta-containing figures of the Sun of still earlier period i.e. Maurya-Śunga period are available.[64] Therefore, it can be said that the tradition of Sun worship by means of images was known the Epic society[65] but it was not a popular creed, as it is not directly mentioned. The worship of the Sun was done at two *samdhyās* and seventh and sixth days were especially auspicious for his worship.[66]

In reality, the Epics continue Sun worship of the Vedic tradition along with the adaptation of non-Āryan and popular trends of the solar cult. In the Epics, Sun worship assumed greater proportions and a sect came to be developed round him. The solar sect is purely indigenous in nature though the Epics are aware of the Magian tradition. Further, in the Epics, the Sun god witnessed a free and full humanization and there emerged a fully developed family round him. He has been associated with various legends in which may be traced the origin of the conception of halo and high boots, the latter under the

Irānian influence. In spite of various names of the Sun god, there is a tendency to regard these once-separate solar gods as different names and forms of one Sun god. There are many traits of Vedic origin in Sun's personality while others presage Purāṇic trends of solar worship. Sun worship appears to be popular among all sections of the Epic society. The worship centers round the concept of *bhakti* with its paraphernalia, which is a revolutionary change from the Vedic tradition.

II

PURĀṆIC WORLD

The Purāṇas present a composite religion in which are blended the Vedic tradition of sacrificial religion, the semi-Vedic stream of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and other unorthodox cults and the non-Vedic thought of Śāktism and Tāntricism.[67] Broadly speaking, there are two main stages in the development of the composite religion.[68] Firstly, in the early Purāṇic works the Vedic and the *Smārta* traditions have been given prominence though the semi-Vedic thought of *bhakti, pujā, vrata, tīrtha* etc. are also casually mentioned. Secondly, in the later Purāṇas, which originate from the 5th-6th centuries A.D. emphasis is laid upon the glorification of the semi-Vedic and even non-Vedic divinities in a sectarian fashion. The prevalence of *bhakti, pujā, vrata, tīrtha,* the worship of images in temples and the influence of Tāntricism are special characteristics of this stage.[69]

We know very well that there had been a vigorous tradition of solar worship in the Vedic period and an indigenous school of Sun worshipper existed from the pre-Aryan times. From the first century A.D. onwards (if not earlier),[70] a foreign tradition of Sun

worship appears to have been quite popular in the society. After the downfall of the Vedic system and the prevalence of a foreign tradition of Sun-cult, the indigenous thought of solar cult[71] really presented a sort of challenge to orthodox Sun worshippers. In response, they composed this system of composite Sun-cult, which are found in many early and late Purāṇas.

(a) EARLY PURĀNIC WORLD

Impact of the Vedic and Epic Tradition:

The earlier Purāṇas carry on the Vedic and *Smārta* traditions of solar worship, though minor changes and additions are found in keeping with the changed conditions. The atmospheric aspect of the Sun as seen in the Vedic literature continues to be adhered to. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the Sun appears as the chief of the planetary system.[72] His descriptions as the arranger of the day, night, seasons etc. show his atmospheric aspect.[73] He is worshipped by the *Gāyatrī* and nobody should neglect the *Samdhyopāsanā*.[74] According to the *Mārkaṇdeya Purāṇa*, he abides in the *Veda* and his self is Vedic.[75] He dwells in the sky.[76] His first form is luminous and can hardly be gazed upon because of its circle of splendour.[77] The concept of the twelve *Ādityas* as the twelve months of the year is popular in the early Purāṇas,[78] which is also Vedic in origin. Constituents of the solar ritual such as the *arghya*, the *ācamana*, the *japa*, the *samhdhyopāsanā*[79] etc. are also Vedic survivals. References to sacrificial oblations to the Sun god are occasionally found in the early Purāṇas.[80] All these are indicative of the fact that in the Sun-cult of the early

Puranas, the Vedic tradition was given a prominent place, though non-Vedic elements such as sectarianism, *bhakti, pujā* etc. are also traceable therein.

Epic sectarianism had its impact upon the early Purāṇic world. The legends of Yājñavalkya,[81] Satrājit,[82] Brahmā,[83] Aditi[84] and Rājyavardhana[85] reveal the acquaintance of the early Purāṇas with the ideologies of a Sun-sect. Most probably, this trend was inspired and nourished by the non-Āryan tradition. Significantly, the picture of solar sectarianism drawn based on early Purāṇic accounts is corroborated by the Gupta inscriptions[86] and iconography. Many Sun-images of the Gupta period had been found from all over Northern India[87] that clearly demonstrate that Sun worship had developed itself into a cult-form.

Names and Forms of the Sun God:

In the early Purāṇas, Āditya emerges as the most popular name of the Sun. In the *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇda* Purāṇas this term is enumerated along with other names of Sūrya.[88] In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, prayer is given to the Sun god under the name of *Āditya*.[89] Yājñavalkya invoked the Sun god in the name of Āditya too . The emergence of Āditya as the popular name of the Sun is really an achievement of the Epic-Purāṇa tradition, because the etymological derivation of Āditya in the Purāṇas is based upon the semantic principles[90] while in the Vedas it was derived from the name of their mother – Aditi.[91] The Ādityas represent a group of Sun gods in the early Purāṇas. Generally, their number has come to be fixed as twelve. In many early Purāṇas[92] the list of the names of these twelve Ādityas is given. A comparative study of these lists[93] will reveal that Viṣnu, Indra, Dhātā, Tvastā, Pūṣā, Vivasvān, Mitra, Varuṇa, Amśa (its variants are Amśu,

Amsumān) and Bhaga are common to all lists. The other two Ādityas are taken among from these Sun gods - Savitā, Aryamān, Parjanya, Yama, Viṣṇu and Indra. One significant omission in these lists is Mārttanda. However, he finds a definite mention as a Sun god in the *Matsya Purāṇa*.[94] The twelve Ādityas reside in the *Sūrya-maṇḍala*[95] and are identified with the twelve months of the year. The concept of the Ādityas as the Time is more prominent than their being simply the Sun gods.

Many Ādityas such as Viṣnu, Pūṣan, Savitā, Aryamā, Vivasvān and Bhaga are invoked independently of this group. Savitri, Bhāskara, Sūrya, Vivasvat, Āditya are some of the names of the Sun god[96] under whom Yājñavalkya prayed him.[97] In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* the names of the Sun-deity are mentioned as Āditya, Bhāskara, Bhānu, Savitri, Divākara, Pūṣan, Aryamā and Svarabhānu. In all these references, we do not find the name of Mihira - the Iranian name of the Sun god - most probably due to the orthodoxy of the early puranic world.

It is mainly the benevolent aspect of the Sun god, which is worshipped in the early Purāṇic period.[98] He draws water for the eight months and pours them down during the next four months. Due to the rain and heat produced by the Sun, the corn grows and the world subsists. Therefore, he is called *Jīvana* and *Brahmasatkrita*.[99] He is responsible for long life as is revealed by the legend of Rājyavardhana found in the *Mārkandeya Purāṇa*. The role of the Sun god as the liberator from the sin, the giver of long life and prosperity and remover of diseases are described in connection with the *Sauravratas*.[100] The malevolent aspect of the Sun also finds mention in the *Mārkandeya Purāṇa* . To avoid the creation-destroying fiery glory of the Sun, Brahmā prayed to him and persuaded him to contract his supreme glory.[101] Visvakarman's paring of the Sun's rays[102]

probably symbolizes the curtailment of the excessive heat and the destructive power of the Sun as well. The emphasis was laid upon the benevolent aspect of the Sun in the early Purāṇas because the Purāṇic religion centered round the concept of a loving god whose grace is sought for by the devotees.[103]

Humanization of the Sun and the Iconic Tradition:

There is also a development in his personality towards humanization in the early Pūraṇas. The legends of Satrājit,[104] Aditi,[105] Yājñavalkya[106] and Rājyavardhana[107] are important in this regard. In all these legends, the Sun appeared at first in his natural form. However, he displayed his human form when the worshipper requested for the same. With humanization, there emerged a family round the Sun god. In the early Purāṇas, the story of *Samjñā* and her shadow *Chāyā* as wives of Sūrya is referred to.[108] Sūrya has many children -*Yama*, *Manu* and *Yamī* by *Samjñā*; two *Aśvins* - *Dasra* and *Nāsatya* and *Revanta* from *Samjñā* in mare's form ; *Manu*, *Śanaiścara* and *Tapatī* from *Chāyā*. In some late passages of the early Purāṇas,[109] the attendants of the Sun god - Daṇda and Pingala - also find mention.

From the references to human form of the Sun it appears that the early Purāṇas were aware of the iconic tradition of the Sun god that was in vogue in the contemporary society.[110] However, no direct reference occur to the image of the Sun in them. Some passages of the *Vāyu*, the *Matsya* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya* Purāṇas, which refer to the Sun-image, are regarded as later interpolations.

According *to the Vāyu Purāṇa*, Yājñavalkya and his pupils, having been inflicted with the sin of *Brahmahatyā* and advised by Brahmā, worshipped the god *Vālukeśvara* of

twelve beams in the city of Vāyupur, took bath in the tanks including the *Sūryakuṇda* and merged them into the world of Sūrya *(Sūrya-maṇdalam)*. Ten *Rākṣasas* named *Yātudhānas* who were probably indigenous tribes of India are said to have been the followers of Sūrya and roamed with the deity.[111] The reference to *the Rākṣasas* wandering along with the god can refer only to the icon of the Sun. Similarly, the reference to the worship of the god *Vālukeśvara* of twelve beams in the city of Vāyupur may clearly mean to refer to the worship of a Sun-image in a temple. Further, the presence of a *Sūryakuṇda, which* became quite common in classical and mediaeval Hindu India[112] and was an integral part of the Sun-temple complex, presupposes the existence of the image and temple of the Sun at this place. The legend of Yājñavalkya occurs in many early Purāṇas, which do not mention the worship of *Vālukeśvara or Sūryakuṇda*. It may, therefore, be said that these additions were interpolated in the original story in the later period. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, they were added after the 5th cent. A.D.[113] to meet the popular demands for image and temple. These passages seem to have been influenced by the *Śāmba Purāṇa*,[114] which refers to the twelfth form of the Sun that is similar to *Vālukeśvara* of twelve beams. The god *Vālukeśvara* who was no other than the Sun god is specifically mentioned as of twelve beams - a fact, which is in conformity with the Magian tradition of worshipping the Sun in his twelfth form. All these indicate that there may have been some foreign elements in the Sun-cult as referred to in these passages of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*.

The Matsya Purāṇa[115] gives detailed instructions regarding the construction of Sun-images. It indicates that the practice of making Sun-images was already an established fact. There is no reference to Iranian features such as northerner's dress, high

boots etc., which came to be incorporated in the orthodox literature from the 6th-7th cent. A.D. as is evident from the *Śāmba Purāṇa.*[116] Therefore, the Matsya Pūraṇa passages cannot be later than the sixth cent. A.D. Since there is no mention of Sun-images in earlier Purāṇas like the *Vāyu and* the *Brahmāṇda* that were composed between the 3rd-5th cent. A.D., [117] these passages may be placed between 500-600 A.D.[118] Similarly, Sun-images are referred to in connection with several solar vows but these passages cannot be earlier than the sixth cent. A.D. [119] However, there prevailed the custom of making Sun-images in society from first cent. A.D. onwards as is evidenced by the iconography.[120] They ignored it out of their orthodoxy, as the tradition of Sun-images seems to have been alien to the Vedic tradition.[121]

Solar Vows in the Early Purāṇas:

The development of vows on an organized scale as the part of a particular religious faith is essentially a Purāṇic concept.[122] In the *Viṣnu,* the *Vāyu,* the *Brahmāṇda* and the *Mārkaṇdeya* Purāṇas, there are no references to solar vows, though penances and austerities, fasting in honour of the Sun god etc. are referred[123] to several times. *Sauravratas* are mentioned for the first time in certain late chapters of the *Matsya Purāṇa.* The worship of the Sun god by means of lotus as displayed in these *vratas* definitely bespeaks of a period, which is earlier than the time of the adoption of the Magian forms of Sun worship by means of images with Iranian features. S.N. Roy[124] and Srivastava[125] have justifiably placed those chapters on the *Sauravratas* in between 500-550 A.D. Thus, the solar vows came to be developed and incorporated in the Sun-cult at the end (500-550 A.D.) of the early Purāṇic age. The main solar vows are the

Kalyāṇasaptamī, Viśokasaptamī, Phalasaptamī, Śarkarāsaptamī, Kamalasaptamī, Mandārasaptamī, Śubhasaptamī [126] and *Sūryasaṅkrānti*[127] in the early Purāṇas.

The *Kalyāṇasaptamī vrata* is a solar vow to be performed on Sunday of the 7th day of a bright fortnight. The vow centers round the worship of the Sun with flowers, sandals, white clothes, incense, eatables, raw sugar, salt and fruits. Eight pictures of the Sun god drawn on the eight petals of a lotus should be worshipped by the recitation of a *mantra* having eight names of the Sun deity. One who observes this *vrata* attains freedom from diseases, liberation from all sins, prosperity and long life.[128]

The *Viśokasaptamī vrata*[129] is to be kept on the sixth and the seventh days of the bright fortnight in the month of *Māgha*. On the sixth day, the observer of the *vrata* should take bath with black sesame and observe fast and celibacy. After taking bath and performing the *jape* in the morning, he should worship the golden lotus as *Ark*. On the seventh day, he should observe silence, eat food without oil and salt and give away the lotus, clothes etc. in charity. This makes the observer free from all sorrows and diseases for a period of ten *pumas*. He who observes it with no particular desire attains unification with Brahma.

The *Phalasaptamī*[130] is to be celebrated on the seventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Mārgaśīrṣa*. The vow requires the worship of the Sun with a golden image and golden lotus under various names. The rewards of this vow are the attainment of endless fruits, prosperity and the freedom from diseases and ultimately the attainment of the *Sūryaloka*. In this *vrata*, the Sun god has been identified with *Brahmā, Indra, Viṣṇu, Śiva* and *Varuṇa*, which shows that he was regarded as the highest. The *Śarkarāsaptamī*[131] to be observed on the seventh day of a bright fortnight in the month of

Vaiśākha enjoins the worship of the Sun by drawing a lotus on an altar, reciting hymn propitiatory for Savitri and employing incense etc. One who celebrates it attains sons, grandsons and final emancipation. The *Kamalasaptamī vrata*[132] is to be celebrated on the 7th day of bright fortnight in the spring. The vow centers round the worship of the Sun in the form of a golden lotus by means of flowers, incense etc. and recitation of *mantra* sacred to the Sun under various names - *Kamala, Prabhākara* etc. The observer should then give away gifts and food to the Brāhmaṇas. This is to be done for possession of inexhaustible wealth and going to the *Sūrya-maṇdalam* .

The *Mandārasaptamī vrata*[133] is to be observed on the seventh day in the month of *Māgha.* Here the Sun is to be worshipped by means of a golden image along with a eight-petalled lotus under the names of *Bhāskara, Sūrya, Arka, Aryamā, Vedadharma, Caṇdabhānu, Pūṣan* and *Ānanda.* The employment of *mandāra* flowers in this vow forms a special feature of it.[134] The *Śubhasaptamī*[135] enjoins Sun worship by means of the golden ox and golden cow as born from him and also by flowers, incense etc. and the recitation of *mantra* to *Aryamā priyām.* The *Sūryasaṅkrānti vrata136* is *to* be observed on the day of equinoxes or solstices. The Sun should be worshipped by drawing an eight-petalled lotus under eight different names in the pericarp of the lotus. The *arghya* of water, sandal and flowers is to be given on the floor to the Sun. This entitles the observer to be honoured by the gods in the kingdom of Indra.

These *vratas* display a fixed procedure of the worship, the supremacy of the divinity and exclusive devotion to him. In view of the above facts, they appear to be connected with sectarian Sun worship but their nature is essentially domestic. There is no reference to any regular image or public worship. However, the references to the making

of golden man on the lotus as the solar symbol clearly show the foreshadowing of the iconic tradition.

Besides these occasions, Sun worship is prescribed in general on Sundays by drawing a twelve-petalled lotus with red sandal.[137] In the fore part of the lotus, the horses of the Sun should be inscribed. Here he has been described as the soul of the universe, the basis of the *Rik,* the *Yajus* and the *Sāma* Vedas. One who observes this ritual attains freedom from all sins and goes to the *Sūrya-maṇḍalam*. In the *Viṣnu Purāṇa,*[138] it is prescribed for every householder to perform this form of Sun worship as one of the daily obligations. It involves the *ācamana, arghya* of water and recitation of a hymn invoking the Sun god under various names such as *Vivasvat, Bhāsvat, Savitri* and *Viṣṇu* etc. It is stated that the *Sūryavrata* is one of the sixty ordinances explained by *Śiva.*[139]

The existence of various types of Sun worshippers is well revealed by the *Mārkaṇdeya Purāṇa.* The subjects of Rājyavardhana who worshipped the Sun god included variety of Sun worshippers.[140] Some of them paid adoration by presenting to him the *arghya,* presents and other oblations, the second class by maintaining silence, the third by repeating the Vedic hymns, the fourth by lying down on river sandbanks without taking food, the fifth by offering oblations to the fire and repeating solar hymns day and night, the sixth by casting their eyes on him and standing there and the seventh by presenting incense, flowers, oblations, unguent prayers, food, lamps and other offerings. The *pūjā* form of worship was getting popular though persons also resorted to older traditions.

Position of the Sun god:

It is said in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*[141] and other early Purāṇas that the *cakra* of Viṣnu, the trident of Śiva, *vimāṇa* of Kubera and *śakti* of Kārtikeya were made by Viśvakarmā out of the pared glory of the Sun. This is undoubtedly indicative of the superiority of the Sun over *Viṣṇu* and other gods. In the *Mārkaṇdeya Purāṇa*, Brahmā is referred to as having prayed to the Sun god for the continuance of his creation. Evidently, the power of Sūrya was greater than that of Brahmā.[142] The prominent place of the Sun god in the legends of Yājñavalkya, Rājyavardhana, Brahmā and Aditi and the reference to *Sauradarśana*[142] *may* tend to show that the Sun was occupying an important position. The equality of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya is indicated when these four gods are regarded as indistinguishable.[143] Further, the Vaiṣṇava, the Śaiva and the Saura vows are treated on equal terms in the early Purāṇas.[143] Sūrya and Śiva are identical in some early Purāṇas.[144]

(b) LATE PURĀNIC HORIZON

The late Purāṇas and the Upa-purāṇas throw a flood of light on the Sun-cult as developed between the 6th century A.D. and the 12th-13th centuries A.D.

Growth of Solar Literature and sect:

A vast *Saura* literature came to be developed in this period. Unfortunately, most of these works such as the *Sūrya Purāṇa*, etc. have been lost except the *Sāmba Purāṇa*. Of all the extant Purāṇas, the *Sāmba Purāṇa* appears to be the earliest work of the *Sauras*. The verses in the *Skanda*, the *Brahma*, the *Varāha*, the *Agni* and the *Garuda* Purāṇas that shows sectarian form of Sun worship have certainly been borrowed from the *Sāmba Purāṇa*[145] The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* also appears to have been the borrower from the

Same *Purāṇa*.[146] The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* and the *Śāmba Purāṇa* are the most comprehensive and complete documents of the Sun-cult of the Magian tradition.

A full-fledged Sun-sect developed in the later Purāṇic times on an unprecedented scale along with all the paraphernalia. The indisputable supremacy of the god, the exclusive devotion, the fixed procedure of worship and other sectarian features are found in the *Sāmba*, the *Bhaviṣya*, the *Varāha*, the *Skanda* and other late Purāṇas. The *Sāmba Purāṇa* at its very outset describes the Sun god as the cause of creation, protection and destruction of the universe and also as the soul of *Brahmā, Nārayaṇa* and *Samkara*.[147] He creates the universe and various kinds of creatures in the form and capacity of Brahmā[148] and pervades it as well. He is the only god to deserve devotion and worship.[149] He is attended by the gods, the *Yakṣas*, the *Gandharvas*, the *Apsarās*, the three Vedas incarnate, the three *Samhdhyās* incarnate, the *Ādityas*, the *Vasus*, the *Maruts*, the *Aśvins*, *Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra* and many other lesser gods. The making of Indra, Varuṇa, Rudra etc. as attendants of the solar divinity points to his supremacy. He is eulogized by Brahmā, Rudra[150] and other important gods. Thus, the concept of the Sun god as developed in the later Purāṇas is that of a sectarian deity.

The sectarian character of the solar cult is evidenced by the presence of a band of its followers known as the *Sūryabhaktas*,[151] by the emergence of a special class of priests known as the Magas and the Bhojkas or the Yājakas,[152] and by the development of a sectarian *Saura* literature. The reference to the *Sūrya-Siddhānta* as distinguished from the *Traividyā-Siddhānta*[153] clearly demonstrates that the system of Sun worship had developed an exclusiveness that is quite befitting for a sect. Employment of flags and flag-staffs for the Sun god,[154] fixed methods and procedures for his worship,[155] evolution

of a code of conduct for his worshippers,[156] use of a sectarian *mantra,*[157] elaborate rules and regulations for making his images and temples and for other constituents of the solar ritual[158] were actually products of a sectarian Sun-cult. *Bhakti*, which is the basis of a sect, is referred to several times in the late Purāṇas.[159] The late Purāṇic records on Sun-sect are corroborated by the epigraphy[160] and secular Sanskrit literature[161] of the period.

Concept of the Sun god:

In the *Sāmba* and other late Purāṇas, the concept of the Sun god is highly metaphysical. He is the highest deity and the supreme *Brahma.* He is both the individual and the supreme soul and is both one and many. The Supreme Being who is both personal and impersonal remains formless while residing as *Kşetrajña* in the material body and is not contaminated by actions or influenced by the objects of senses. When transcending the three *guṇas* he is called *Puruşa.* He pervades the universe, protects and regulates it and receives worship in different forms from gods and men in the different stages of life.[162]

The impact of the Vedic tradition is easily traceable in this concept. *Sāmba Purāṇa*'s description of Surya as the cause of creation, protection and destruction, whose manifestations are the three Vedas,[163] appears to have been inspired by the Vedic concept. The influence of Vedantic philosophy may be seen in the Vaśişṭha's praise of the Sun god as the highest. At several occasions, the Sun has been described simply as the luminary[164] that is in line with the Vedic tradition. *Savitri, Sūrya, Āditya, Mitra, Vivasvat* etc. are Vedic survivals in the later Purāṇic pantheon of the Sun god. The concept of the twelve Ādityas - Pūşan, Mitra, Vişṇu, Vivasvat, Dhātrī, Bhaga, Indra,

Varuṇa, Aryamān, Amśumat, Tvaṣṭri, and Parjanya as identical with the twelve months[165] is also Vedic survival.

Mihira appears in the later Purāṇas[166] as one of the twelve common names of the Sun. The *Sāmba* and other late Purāṇas prescribe the worship of the Sun in his twelfth form, which is that of Mihira.[167] All these show that the Magian tradition was also accepted in these Purāṇas. Thus, the sectarian concept of the Sun god synthesized the Vedic and Magian concepts of the Sun god. In between these two, there had been the indigenous tradition of *bhakti*[168] centering round a human Sun god who had a large family also.[169]

The Magas and the solar cult:

In the late Purāṇic period, Sun worship came to be formally associated with a foreign priesthood known as Maga. Many late Purāṇas refer to a legend about the coming of the Magas in India from Śākadvīpa and their association with the Sun-cult. The relevant part of the legend may briefly be summed up as follows: *Sāmba,* the son of Krişṇa by Jāmbavatī, was cursed by his father to suffer leprosy for his undesirable relations with the wives of Vāsudeva Krişṇa. To be cured of the disease *Sāmba,* on the advice of Nārada, constructed a Sun-temple at Candrabhāgā (modern Chenab in the Punjab) for the worship of the god. Unfortunately, no Brāhmaṇa was ready to accept the office of a regular priest of this temple. Therefore, he sought the help of *Gauramukha,* the priest of Ugrasena who advised him to get the Magas, the special Sun worshipping priests from Śākadvīpa. Accordingly, Samba went to Śākadvīpa, brought eighteen families of the Magas and installed them into the office of the priest of his temple.[170]

The late Purāṇic data on the Magas are corroborated by Varāhamihira[171] who clearly instructs that the installation and consecration of Sun-images should be caused to be made by the Magas. The legend finds confirmation in an inscription at Govindapur in Gayā district dated the Śaka year 1059 corresponding to 1137-38 A.D. In its opening stanza, the Magas are represented to have been brought into the country by Sāmba. Their existence in India is again indicated by many Iranian features such as *avyaṅga, udicyaveśa* and *upanātpinaddha.*[172] All this evidence conclusively proves that a certain class of priests known as the Magas with exclusive devotion to the Sun was brought into India from Śākadvīpa.

It has been held[173] that the Magas of the Purāṇas were no other than the Sun worshipping Magi priests of Iran. Originally, they were a priestly tribe of Medea,[174] a section of which worked their way into Zoroastrianism. Out of the compromise between the way of life of the Magi priests and that of the Persians[175] was born Mithraism not later than the 5th-4th cent B.C.[176] The chief features of the Magi-cult were the worship of the Sun god and Fire-god under the name of Mithra, the use of *'barsom'* and a belief in the division of the world between good and evil powers represented by light and darkness[177] respectively. They were famous for magic and occult power. Śākadvīpa must have been situated in Iran, mostly probably in Eastern Iran[178] since the Śaka occupation of western India where the temple of Mūlasthāna is supposed to have been built by the Magas, was principally the work of the Śakas of Eastern Iran.

It has been suggested[179] that the Magas entered into India for the first time in the wake of the Achaemenid invasion of the 6th-5th cent. B.C. The first wave of the Magas appears to have been confined to the north-west borders of India where the Achaemenian

influence had been paramount. It was in this very region that the Magas started their activities.[180] They continued coming in waves in the trains of foreign invaders. The second significant wave of the Maga came in the wake of foreign invaders in the post-Maurya period. That the Magas came in waves is indicated by the *Sāmba Purāṇa*.[181] It appears that a third wave of the Magas who were the followers of Zoroaster must have left Iran for India because of the spread of Islam after the sixth cent. A.D. The Magas of this wave came to be known as the Yājakas.[182]

It is not known as to how far these Maga-priests could influence the indigenous tradition of Sun worship in ancient India. Many Purāṇas[183] do not mention the role of Magian priests at all and continue the indigenous and national tradition of Sun worship that is found in the *Veda*s, the *Brāhmaṇas,* the *Ūpaniṣad*s, the *Sūtras* and the Epics. Purāṇas like the *Kūrma* describe the Sun just as a heavenly body, which is in conformity with the Vedic account of the Sun god. The *Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Brahmāṇda* and *Matsya* Purāṇas reveal that the orthodox tradition of Sun worship actually developed on the lines of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa's* [184] prescription of a golden disc to represent the solar orb and the Upaniṣadic[185] doctrine of the golden *Puruṣa* in the Sun who was identified with the Ultimate Being. The prevalence of this tradition even after the spread of the Magian tradition is also attested by the *Kūrma Purāṇa* . Even in the *Sāmba Purāṇa,*[186] the Vedic tradition has not been forgotten. Moreover, the name of the sect of which the Magas became priests is *Saura* - a Sanskritised form. Further, the whole theology[187]of this system is a reflex of the teachings of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Epics.

The fundamentals of the Maga-cult could not make much headway in India probably because of the assimilative and absorbing capacity of the Indian culture.

Besides, there was hardly anything new for Maga-priests to propagate in India. India had already most of the features of the Maga-cult (especially its Irānianised form that reached India) such as the worship of the Sun under the name of Mithra in the *Rigveda,*[188] the *Atharvaveda,*[189] the *Upaniṣads,*[189] and the Epics,[190] close connection of the fire worship with the Sun right from the Rigvedic times and dualist view of the world in ancient Indian mythology.[191] Therefore, it is evident that the Maga-influence was negligible as far as the mythology, theology and philosophy of the Sun-cult were concerned.

The Magas, however, appear to have exerted powerful influence in iconography and temples. Most probably, the images and temples of the Sun-deity were either not known, or if known, were not popular in India before the advent of the Magas as is evidenced by the Purāṇas.[192] The solar orb was worshipped by the general masses.[193] It is also mentioned in the Purāṇas[194] that the masses worshipped the Sun god not in its anthropomorphic but in its symbolic forms of disc, wheel, lotus, *svastikā* etc.

On the other hand, features such as northern dress, girdle round the waist and high boots occur in solar iconography of the Kuṣāṇa, the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods, which are definitely Persian.[195] They are also referred to in the literary texts[196] of India. These features are confined to North Indian tradition while they are conspicuous by their absence in images of South Indian tradition. The existence of a large number of Sun-temples in Western India where the Magas first established a Sun-temple at Mūlasthāna (modern Multan),[197] also points out that the Maga-priests were responsible for starting this new tradition in the solar religion. The tradition of image making and temple building established by the Magas was materially instrumental in propagating and

diffusing the sectarian form of Sun worship. They gave concrete and lithic representation to the imaginary and atmospheric conception of the Sun as found in the Vedas, the Epics and the Purāṇas.

The Magas are passed in silence by the orthodox literature until the 5th-6th cent. A.D. This shows that for centuries they remained neglected by the orthodox Hindu society. However, Sun-images with Iranian features begin to occur from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards, which points to their popularity particularly among the foreigners and among unorthodox sections of Hindu society. It appears that the orthodox sections of Hindu society had to accept them by the 4th-5th cent. A.D. because of their immense popularity in the pre-Gupta society. The policy of religious toleration of the Guptas and their efforts to assimilate and synthesize divergent traditions - orthodox as well as unorthodox - had its impact upon the Maga-problem also. By the middle of the sixth cent. A.D., they were absorbed in the orthodox Hindu society as is evidenced by the prescription of Magianised Sun worship in the *Sāmba Purāṇa* whose lower limit goes back to 500 A.D.[198] In a manuscript, dated 550 A.D. found in Nepal the Brāhmaṇas and the Magas are given equal status. [199] The instruction of Varāhamihira (550 A.D.) for making Sun-images according to Iranian tradition also proves their absorption in Hindu society by the middle of the sixth century A.D.

It is an undeniable fact that the Magas commanded wide popularity in the later Purāṇic period. The factors, which contributed towards their temporary success, are the proselytizing spirit of theirs,[200] support of the Indo-Greek, the Scythian and the Kuṣāṇa rulers to them,[201] the propaganda of the benefits of Sun worship, especially its curative properties, their contribution towards image-making and temple-building of Sūrya and

their allowance to extend religious privileges to women and men of lower castes.[202] However, in due course they lost their individuality since there was nothing distinctive about them.

The Magas were divided in course of time into two groups: Magas and Bhojakas (later on degraded as the Yājakas).[203] The Magas used to meditate on the syllable 'M' while the Yājakas worshipped the Sun by burning incense, offering garlands and various other articles and muttering *mantras*. However, the aim of both was the same i.e. the attainment of final emancipation through *Karmayoga*. The Bhojakas or the Yājakas or the Sevakas chanted Vedic *mantras* etc.[204] Most probably, they were indigenous priests of the Sun-cult. Later on, they indulged into objectionable activities and practices and entered into matrimonial alliances with foreigners like the Magas. Then they came to be degraded as low or *apāṅkteya*[205] or Devalaka-Brāhmaṇas[206] (temple-priests).

Development of a Family:

The later Purāṇas elaborately describe the family and attendants the Sun god. His two wives are Rājñī and Nikṣubhā. Rājñī's another name was Samjñā or Sareṇu[207] and the Sun had two sons with her - Vaivasvata Manu and Yama Śrāddhadeya and a daughter named Yamī or Kālindī. The shadow of Samjñā was Chāyā who is said to be the same as Nikṣubhā and is identified with Prithvī. From Chāyā the Sun got Śrutaśravas, Śrutakarman, and a daughter known as Tapatī. The other sons of the Sun god were two Aśvins named Nāsatya and Dasra (from Samjñā in Kuru country) and Revanta with the body of a horse having bow and arrows.

There is a reference to the eighteen attendants of the Sun.[208] Agni known as Piṅgala[209] on the right side of the Sun was engaged in checking the good and bad deeds of all creatures. Indra under the name of Daṇdanāyaka[210] on the left side of the Sun was engaged by the latter to rule over the world with his *daṇda* and *nīti.* Kārtikeya and Hara stood at the eastern gate under the name of Rājña and Stoşa respectively. Yama (i.e. Kalmāşa) and Garuda (i.e. Pakşīn) stood with two asses at the gate. The two Aśvins stood on two sides of the god. On the south stood Citragupta and Kālā under the names of Jāndakāra and Māṭhara, on the west stood Varuṇa and Sāgara under the names of Prāpnuyāna and Kşutapā respectively, on the north stood Kubera and Vināyaka and on the east stood Revanta and Rudra, the latter under the name of Diṇdī [211] and also Śrī, Mahāśvetā and Mātris. In addition to these chief eighteen attendants, Soma also figures as an attendant deity of the Sun at one place and there were fourteen other attendants. In the art of the period, these attendants of the Sun are illustrated.[212]

Method of Sun Worship:

The later Purāṇas demonstrate many influences in the evolution of the methodology of Sun worship such as those of the Vedic tradition, indigenous system, Iranian stream, Tāntric practices and Śaiva theology. The first important feature in the worship of the Sun was the introduction of image and temple of the Sun god, which is expressly brought out in the later Purāṇas.[213] The rules for the construction of the Sun-temples and images are also given.[214] References are also made to six mediums of Sun worship viz. fire, water, air, holy place, image and pedestal for the image of a deity.

The later Purāṇas give prominence to the Vedic tradition in their earlier chapters though Iranian elements were already present in the Sun-cult of this period. The Vedic *homa* forms an important part of the worship and the *mantras* to be used are either Vedic or Purāṇic or both.[215] The hymns in praise of the Sun are called *Vedokta* or *Veda-Vedāṅga-sammita*. The *agnihotragriha* (the house for the oblations to the fire) is an integral part of the Sun-temples.[216] There is no reference to Tāntric symbols like *yantra* or *maṅḍala* in the earlier chapters.

The Tāntric cult was becoming quite popular particularly in Eastern India from 7th-8th centuries onward[217] from which the solar cult could not remain untouched. *Sāmba Purāṇa* refers to many Tantric elements in the Sun-cult. The method of initiation, which is full of Tāntric influence involves the selection and preparation of the ground, selection of spiritual preceptors and disciples, offer of *arghya* to the Sun with the *Mahāmantra*, drawing of a *maṅḍala* 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.[218] The *mantras* with Tāntric symbolism are employed at every step. The drawing of *maṅḍala* and the performance of various kinds of *mudrās* and *nyāsas* are in accordance with the Tāntric philosophy. The methods of performing *abhicāra* rites and *bījas* in *mantras* and practice of *yoga* have also been given and six acts viz. *vaśīkaraṇa, ākarṣaṇa, māraṇa, uccāṭana, vidveśana* and *stambhana* etc[219] are also mentioned.

Despite such influences, Sun worship remained free from some fundamental principles of Tāntricism. The concept of a female principle as the cause of the universe[220] is conspicuous by its absence in the later Purāṇas. No such concept as of Prajñā of

Tāntric Buddhism and Umā of Tāntric Hinduism could be developed round the name of Samjñā or Chāyā - wives of the Sun god - by the solar sectarians. No image of the Sun along with the female consort in Tāntric sense has also been found. Thus, the Sun-cult appears to have been influenced by Tāntricism outwardly because these practices were in keeping with the Yogic practices, which were prevalent in the Sun-cult as early as the Upaniṣads.[221]

The Sun was worshiped at sunrise, mid-day and sunset.[222] The later Purāṇas also describe the method of performing annual worship *(Samvatsarī pūjā)* and annual car-festival *(Rathayātrā)* of the Sun with the use of Vedic and Purāṇic mantras[223] as well as the methods of the use of incense and other materials in *pūjā.* They also describe elaborate methods and results of observing seven different *saptamī tithis* as well as twelve *śukla-saptamīs.*[224]

Centres of Solar Cult:

The later Purāṇas inform us of three centers of Magian type of solar worship. The first place is Mūlasthāna or Maitravana[225] on the Candrabhāgā River, which is identified with Multan in Punjab. Hiuen -Tsang who visited this place in the seventh cent. A.D., testifies to its great popularity as a centre of the Sun-cult.[226] Alberuni, Al Edrisi, Abu Ishak al Ishtakhri etc. also give an account of this temple. The *Bhaviyṣa Purāṇa* as well as the *Sāmba Purāṇa* refers to this place as *Ādyasthāna.*[226] According to the legend of *Sāmba,* it was here that a Sun-temple was established for the first time.[227] The fact that Western India where Multan is situated was a strong hold of the Sun-cult, is also attested by epigraphy.[228]

The second centre of solar worship is Kālapriya identified with modern Kālpī on the southern bank of Yamuna.[229] Some scholars identify the Kālapriya-temple of the Sun at Kālpī with Kālapriyanātha at whose fairs all the three plays of Bhavabhuti were staged while others identify Kālapriya with Mahākāla of Ujjayinī. The third place of Sun worship is mentioned as Sutīra, or Muṇḍīra or Udayācala also known as Sūryakānana, Ravikṣetra, Sūryakṣetra and Mitravana[230] while the *Brahma Purāṇa* expressly calls it Koṇāditya or Koṇārka in Utkala (Odradeśa)[231] It is generally identified with modern Koṇārka near Puri in Orissa.[232] Thus, it is evident that the Magian type of the solar cult was developing in the whole of Northern India. Further, it was gradually extending towards the Eastern India as is evidenced by the recasting of the *Sāmba Purāṇa* and addition of chapters in it.[233]

Religious syncretism:

Religious syncretism reaches its climax in the later Purāṇas and finds an excellent illustration in the *Pañcāyatana Pūjā* [234] *Sāmba Purāṇa* speaks of the spirit of rapprochement among different sectarian deities. The Sun is said to have been worshipped as Viṣṇu in Śvetadvīpa, as Maheśvara in Kuśa-dvīpa, as Brahmā in Puṣkara-dvīpa and as Bhāskara in Śakadvīpa.[235] The compromising spirit between the sects of Sūrya and Brahmā[236] is revealed by the Ms. *Puṣkara-Māhātmya* of the *Padma Purāṇa.* The trend of rapprochement between different sects is best illustrated by the syncretic images of the Sun.[237] The cult-syncretism in the later Purāṇic world is attested by early mediaeval inscriptions of the Pratihāra, Pāla, Chauhān and many other Rājput kings who patronized more than one deity and the same at one time.[238]

It is clear that the Purāṇas - early and late - are full of valuable information for the study of the Sun and solar cult from the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier, to the end of the Hindu period of India.

The early Purāṇas continue the national tradition of simple, non-sectarian Sun worship by means of symbols though solar sectarianism may be seen in a veiled form. The old Vedic tradition of worshipping the atmospheric Sun under different names went on. Sun worship played a major role in various domestic rites and the twelve-petalled lotus was particularly associated with the Sun god. The early Purāṇic Sun worship mainly consisted of recitation of the *mantras* - Vedic and Purāṇic, in praise of the Sun god under the names of Bhāskara, Ravi, Sūrya, Savitri, Bhaga, Arka, etc, *arghya* consisting of water, sandal, flowers, especially red and salutation to the Sun god. The Sun was worshipped mainly in his benevolent form.

Sūrya, Savitri and Āditya were given human personalities as well. The family of the Sun god and his chariot were also described with elaborateness not seen before. Sun-images and temples are indirectly referred to. Mention is also made of the characteristics of the Sun-images, which are Indian. The early Purāṇas do not mention the Magas - the Iranian Sun-worshipping priests.

The Later Purāṇas characteristically mention the arrival of the Magas in India and the popularization of the Sun-images and temples at three places referred to above. The Sun-images were to be dressed according to the Iranian fashion. Nevertheless, there is an effort in these Purāṇas to nationalize the foreign aspects. The advent of the Magas gave an impetus to the cause of the Sun worshippers and it spread throughout Northern India. In due course, the national and Iranian traditions of Sun worship were mixed up and the

solar sectarians developed a philosophy, which was similar to the Sāmkhya system. In earlier chapters of the later Purāṇas, the Vedas and the Purāṇas are given prominence while in the later chapters of the later Purāṇas, Tāntric symbolism gains popularity.

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68. Ibid, p. 228.

69. Ibid. p. 21.

70. The presence of the Magian tradition of Sun-cult is proved by the evidence of coins with Mihira legend and Sun-images with Iranian traits from the Kusana period onwards. *DHI,* p. 433.

71. The reference to a Sun-sect - '*Sauras*'- in the *Mahābhārata* (VII.82.l6) shows the emergence of non-Vedic trend in the post-Vedic period.

72. *Viṣnu P.,* II.8.Iff.

73. Ibid, II .8.II-I2; II.8.67ff.

74. Ibid, II.8.53, 58.

75. *Mārkaṇdeya P.,* CII.20, CI TI.6.

76. Ibid, CIX.63.

77. Ibid, CIX.73.

78. Roy, S. N., 'Early Purāṇic Account of Sun and Solar Cult' *Journal of Allahabad University Studies,* 1963 (64), pp 39-59; Srivastava, V.C., 'The Purāṇic Records on the Sun worship', *Purāṇa*, Vol. XI, No.2, p. 232.

79. *Viṣnu P.*, 111.11.39 refers to the *ācamana and* the *arghya* to Sūrya. *Mārkaṇdeya P.*, CIX refers to the *japa* as one of the means of Sun worship. In the Smritis, the Vedic tradition of worshipping the Sun god by means of the *japa,* the *arghya,* the *upasthāna,* the *samhdhyopāsanā etc.* is continued which the early Purāṇas have tried to imbibe. Kane, *op. cit.,* pp. 313ff.

80. *Mārkaṇdeya P.*, CIX.61.

81. *Viṣnu P.*, III.5; *Vāyu P.*, 69.209-21; *Brahmāńda P.*, II.35. 14-26.

82. *Viṣnu P.*, IV.13; *Vāyu P.*, IVC.22; *Brahmāńda P.* III.71.23.

83. *Mārkańdeya P.*, CIII.2; CIII.5; CIV.I8-29; CIV.36.

84. *Mārkaṇdeya P.*, CIV.I8-29; CIV.36.

85. *Viṣnu P.*, IV. 1.34-36; *Brahmāṇda P.*, CIX.62-63; *Mārkaṇdeya P.*, CIX.69-7I; CIX.65; CIX.77.

86. Srivastava, V.C., 'The Solar Cult as Revealed by the Gupta and post-Gupta inscriptions', *Bharitiya Vidya,* Vol. XXVII, Nos. 1-4, pp. 41-48 ; Fleet, J.F.(Ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* Vol. III, London, 1888, pp. 70, 79-88, 125-129, 200-210.

87. *DHI,* pp. 432-36.

88. *Vāyu P.*, XXXI.37; *Brahmāńda P.*, II.13.125.

89. *Dikshitar, V.R.R., Purāṇa Index, Matsya P.,* 184.31.

90. *Mārkaṇdeya P.,* 100.14.

91. Agrawala, V.S., *Matsya Purāṇa - A Study,* Varanasi, 1963, p. 21.

92. *Viṣnu P.*. I.l5.126-131; *Vāyu P.,* 66.66-67; *Brahmāńda P.,* 3.2.67-69; *Matsya P.,* 6.3-5.

93. Roy, S.N., *Paurāṇic Dharma Evam Samāja,* (H), Allahabad, p. 48.

94. *Matsya P.*, 9.86.

95. *Viṣnu P.*. II.10.19; *Matsya P.* 126.25.

96. Dikshitar, V.R.R., *The Pūrāna index,* Vol. III, Madras, 1955, pp. 683-86.

97. *Viṣnu P.*, III.5.15-24.

98. Roy, S.N., 'Early Purāṇic Account of Sun and Solar Cult', *University of Allahabad Studies,* 1963, p. 48.

99. *Vāyu P.*, XXXI.37; *Brahmānda P.,* II.13.125. Such titles are given to the Sun in the *Mahābhārata* too.

100. Srivastava, V.C., 'The Purāṇic Records on the Sun worship', *Purāṇa,* XI. No.2, pp. 241-243.

101. *Mārkandeya P.*, CIII.13.

102. Ibid, LXXVII; Agrawala, V.S., *Mārkandeya Purāṇa, Eka Sānskritika Adhyayana* (H), Allahabad, 1961, p, 165.

103. Macnicol, N., *Indian Theism,* London, 1915, pp. 7, 20.

104. *Viṣnu P.,* IV.13.11, 12, 15.

105. *Mārkańdeya P.,* CVI.1, 3.

106. *Viṣnu P.*, III.5.25.

107. *Mārkaṅdeya P.,* CIX, 59-61, 75-78.

108. *Viṣnu P.,* III.2; *Mārkaṅdeya P.,* LXXVII.1-42.

109. *Matsya P.,* XI.32.36.

110. *DHI,* 434ff. Actual pieces of Sun-images of the Kuṣāṇa and the Gupta periods have been found and the Gupta inscriptions testify to the fact that there had been Sun-temples in the Gupta period; Srivastava, V.C., *Bhāratīya Vidyā,* XXVII, (1-4), pp. 41- 48.

111. *Vāyu P.,* 69-12.

112. Sankalia, H.D., *Archaeology of Gujarat and Kathiawar,* Bombay, 1948, pp. 212.

113. *SWAI-S,* p. 221.

114. *Śāmba P.,* III.3.

115. *Matsya P.* CCLXI. 1-7; XCIV.

116. Hazra, *Studies* Vol. I., p. 57ff. Varāhamihira (550 A.D.) in his *Brihat Samhitā,* ch. 57, directly refers to these features.

117. Hazra, *Purāṇic Records,* p. 175.

118. Ibid, p. 176 assigns these chapters to circa 550-650 A.D.

119. Hazra, *op. cit.,* p. 48. However, S. N. Roy, *op. cit.,* p. 165 takes it to be earlier than 550 A.D.

120. Banerjea, .J.N., 'Sūrya, Ādityas and the Navagrahas', *JISOA,* XVI, pp. 53ff.

121. The *Śāmba* and the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇas* expressly state that the Iranian Magas were responsible for the introduction of this practice. R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upa-Purāṇas,* Vol.I, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 31ff.

122. Hazra, *Purāṇic Records,* p. 228.

123. *Mārkaṇḍeya P.*, CIX.49, CX.26; *Viṣnu P.*, III.5.14.

124. Roy, S.N., *op. cit.*, p. 165.

125. *SWAI-S*, p. 225.

126. *Matsya P.*, 74.2.3.

127. Ibid, 98.

128. Ibid, 74.19.

129. Ibid, 75.

130. Ibid, 76.

131. Ibid, 77.

132. Ibid, 78.

133. Ibid, 79.

134. Ibid, 79.5.

135. Ibid, 79.

136. Ibid, 79.

137. Ibid, 97.5-9.

138. *Viṣnu P.*, III. 11.39-40.

139. *Matsya P.*, CI.63.

140. CIX.50ff. Ānandagiri also informs us that Śamkara encountered the followers of a Sun-sect whose leader was Divākara. There had been six classes of devotees of the Sun. Details may be found in Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

141. *Viṣnu P.*, III.2.11.

142. *Mārkaṇḍeya P.*, CIII.

142. *Vāyu P.*, 104.16, 16.131-34 also refers to it; Handiqui, K.K., *Yaśastilaka and Indian*

Culture. Sholapur, 1949, p. 216.

143. *Matsya P.*, 52.23.

143. Ibid, Ch. 95-101.

144. Ibid, LV.3-5.

145. Hazra. R.C., *Studies in the Upa-Purāṇas,* Vol. I, p. 59.

146. Ibid, p. 57.

147. *Śāmba P.,* 1.1.

148. Ibid, 4.4.

149. Ibid, 2.7.

150. Ibid, 16.25-35; d. *Bhaviṣya P.,* 1.124.8.

151. Ibid, 38.10.

152. Ibid, 27.3, 4, 22, 23.

153. Ibid, 28.15.

154. Ibid, 33.8.

155. Ibid, Chs. 47-83.

156. Ibid, 44.

157. Ibid, 44.

158. Ibid, Chs. 30-31. 36-37; cf. *Bhaviṣya P.,* I.l3 I.I32.

159. *Samba P.,* 38.7-12.

160. Fleet, op. cit., pp. 164-71, 219-21, 234 ; *E.I.,* Vol. XIV, p. 176 & Vol. V., p. 212 ; Maity. S.K. and Mukherjee, R.R., (Ed.), *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions,* Calcutta, 1967, p. 325.

161. *Sūrya Śatakam,* 22, 25, 29 88, 89, 90, 91, 92.

162. Hazra, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

163. *Śāmba P.*, 1.1-6.

164. Ibid. 14.9.

165. *Sāmba P.*, 9.5ff ; *Bhaviṣya P.*, I.65.26b-29; I. 78.58-60.

166. *Sāmba P.*, 9.2 ; *Brahma P.*, 31.15.

167. *Sāmba P.*, 1.13 says that this *Purāṇa* is concerned with the twelfth form of the Sun.

168. Ibid. 38.10.

169. Ibid. 26.

170. *Sāmba P.*, 26, 48.

171. *Brihat Samhitā*, 60.19.

172. Rao, Gopinath T.A., *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2 vols, New York, 1968, pp. 299-305; cf. *IHQ*, 1952, XXVIII.

173. Jairazbhoy, op. cit., p.153; Barth, A., *The Religions of India* (Tr. J.A.R. Wood), London, 1882, p. 257; Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 544; Majumdar, R.C. (Ed). *Age of Imperial Unity*, Bombay, 1951, p. 465; Mitra, D., 'Foreign Elements in Indian Population', *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, pp. 613-15.

174. Moulton, *The Treasure of Magi*, Oxford, 1917, p. 9. Moulton regards them neither Āryan nor non-Āryan but as belonging to a low graded indigenous tribe of Medea.

175. Herodotus was aware of these differences especially in matters connected with the disposal of the dead. They exposed the dead body while the Persians burnt it. cf. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism*, London, 1926, p.57; Ghirshman, R., *Iran*, Pelican Series, 1963, p.156.

176. Burns, E.M., *Western Civilizations,* London, 1957, p. 70.

177. Moulton, *Early Zoroastrianism,* pp. 182-253.

178. Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 465.

179. *SWAI-S*, pp. 244-254.

180. *Skanda P.,* V1.76; *Samba P.,* 26.14; *Bhavisya P.,* I.72.4-6 refer to Mūlasthāna (Multan, Punjab) as the original place of the Magianized Sun-cult).

181. Hazra, *op. cit.,* pp. 95-96.

182. Hazra, *op. cit.* p. 96. cf. *Sāmba P.,* 30.22b. The word *Yājaka* been substituted for the word *Bhojaka.*

183. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Classical Age,* Bombay, 1954, p. 438.

184. *SB*, VII.4.1.10.

185. *BAU*, II.5.5.

186. Hazra, *op. cit.,* p. 63. cf. *Sāmba P.,* 6.15; 12.8; 12.13; 24.7; 29.15; 30.18.

187. Furquhar, J.N., *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, London, 1920, p. 153.

188. *RV,* III.59.

189. *AV,* XIII.3.I3, IX.3.18, III.8.1 and V.I2.1.

189. *Taittirīya U.,* I.1.1, I.I2.1.

190. Hopkins, *op. cit.,* pp. 202-204.

191. Frazer, J.G., *Worship of Nature,* Vol. I, London, 1926, p. 596; *VM*, p.60; Ludwig, quoted by Pusalker, A.D., *Cultural History of India,* Vol. II, p. 65.

192. *Sāmba P.*, 29.2-6. It is interesting to note that here the Maga priests are not described as responsible for image making but Viśvakarman - the native architect

was responsible. It is suggested that Bodh Gayā, Bhājā, Lālā Bhagat and Anantgumphā Sun-images represent the native tradition of solar iconography. cf. *DHI*, pp. 432-34.

193. *RV,* I.175.4; V.29.10; *SB,* VII. 4.1. 10; *DHI,* pp. 137-40, 198-99.

194. *Sāmba P.,* 29.2.6. *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa (Brahma Parvan)* refers to *maṇdala* form of Sun worship. In commenting upon *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra,* II.11.29.16 Haradatta says that the Dravidas used to worship *Āditya* by drawing *maṇdalas.*

195. Banerjea, J.N., 'Myths Explaining Some Alien Traits of North Indian Sun icons', *I.H.Q.*, Vol. XXVIII, 1952; *DHI*, p. 437.

196. *Brihat Samhitā,* ch. 57 (45-8); *Viṣṇudharmottara,* III.67.1-5.

197. *Sāmba P.,* 29.2.6; *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa,* Ch. 139 too narrates the incident.

198. Hazra, *op.cit.,* p. 93.

199. *I.A.,* 1911, Jan., p. 18.

200. Vasu, N.N., *Castes and sects of Bengal,* IV.55-57 suggests probable connection of the Sun worship with Śuṅga, Kaṇva and Hūṇa dynasties.

201. Bloch, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Geseltschaft,* 1910, p. 723 believes that the theory of cure of leprosy by the Sun god came from Persia. However, as shown by the *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda* there was native tradition also that the Sun god cures leprosy and other skin diseases. *Sāmba P.,* ch. 24; *Mayūra Śataka.*

202. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

203. Ibid, p. 97.

204. *Samba P.*, 27.

205. *Bhavişya P.,* I.140, 141, 146.

206. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

207. *Sāmba P.,* 10.17b; *Bhavişya P.,* I.79b; *Skanda P.,* VII.1.11.65b.

208. *Sāmba P.,* 16.1-22.

209. *Bhavişya P.,* I.76.23; *Śāmba P.,* 6.21; III.67.5-7; *Viṣṇudharmottara,* III.67.5-7.

210. *Viṣṇudharmottara,* III.67.5 refers him as Daṇdīn.

211. *Sāmba P.,* 16.1.24.

212. *IBBS*, p. 160.

213. *Sāmba P.,* 29.2-6.

214. Ibid, 29; *Brihat Samhitā,* 57. 46-48.

215. *Śāmba P.*, 30.18, 32.12.; 37.19.

216. *Sāmba P.,* 29.15.

217. Chakravarti, C., *The Tantras, Studies on Their Religion and Literature,* Calcutta, 1963, pp. 80-89.

218. *Sāmba P.,* 39.41.

219. *Sāmba P.,* Ch.I.47-83. cf. Chakravarti, C., op. cit., pp. 38-44, 80-82.

220. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Age of Imperial Kanauj,* Bombay, 1955, p. 314ff.

221. *Maitrī U.*, I.2.

222. *Sāmba P.,* 29.

223. Ibid, 34.14ff.

224. Ibid, 46.

225. *Sāmba P.,* I.38.

226. Beal, A., *Buddhist Records of Western Countries,* Vol. II, London, 1906, p. 274.

226. Hazra, *op. cit.,* p. 105.

227. *Sāmba P.,* ch. 24-26.

228. Sankalia, op. cit., pp. 60, 80, 137,212 ; Fleet, op. cit., pp. 70, 80, 162, 218.

229. Mirashi, V.V., 'Three Ancient Famous Temples of the Sun,' *Purāṇa,* Vol. VIII, No. I, p. 42.

230. *Sāmba P.,* 42.2.

231. *Brahma P.,* 28-32, Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

232. Hazra, *op. cit.,* p. 146. Mirashi, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

233. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 62 suggest that the present *Sāmba Purāṇa* was composed in Orissa.

234. Banerjea, J.N., *Pañcopāsanā* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1950.

235. *Sāmba P.,* 26; 37; 38.

236. Chatterjee, A., *Padma Purāṇa - A Study,* pp. 193-94. The *Śāradātilakam,* XIVA.2, emphasizes the syncretic character of the worship of the Sun.

237. *DHI,* p. 551.

238. *SWAI-S*, pp. 366-391.

CHAPTER - IV

GROWTH AND POPULARITY OF SUN WORSHIP IN EARLY BENGAL

GROWTH AND POPULARITY OF SUN WORSHIP IN EARLY BENGAL

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 caste[6] corresponds with Bengal and Bihar. The Gupta epigraphs and the Chinese records place the territory of the Pundras – then styled Puṇdravardhana – in North Bengal[7] 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 Tamluk (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. Chandraketugarh seal[9] 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 terracotta[13] 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 hymns[14] *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 annus) 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, w 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 figure[23] 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 Bharhut[24] (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 Asia[25] and Persia[26] during the 15th century B.C. As an example, we may refer to the royal seal[27] 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 art[28] 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 indigenousness 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 Chandraketugarh 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 Vihara[33] 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 seal[34] 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 seal[38] 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 seal[39] found in Chandraketugarh. 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 Harinarayanpur[44] (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 potsherd[47] from Chandraketugarh (North 24 Parganas) of c. late last or early 2nd century A. D. The Inscription[48] 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 a 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 switch0ver 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 indigenousness 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 Paharpur[58] 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 Bhahmanas 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 Puṇakauśikā, the headquarters of Sṛingaveravīthī, it is mentioned that three residents - Kshemarka, Bhoyila 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 Śākadviīpa 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 Jagadishpur copper plate is an important religious document. Here the temple construction and the solar worship by means of the oblations of rice, milk and sugar, perfume, incense, lamp etc. before a Sun-image is done by the indigenous peoples of India – probably the 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, Puṇdravardhana, 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 Kumarpur[69] and Niyamatpur,[70] both in the Rajshahi district, North Bengal, which is roughly the Pundravardhana 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 Bhumara[77] (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 Surya[79] image remind us of the technique of the Chandraketugarh 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 comparision 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 inscription[82] (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. Sircar[84] holds that Vijayasena was, in all probability, a Buddhist and the *cakra* or the wheel, therefore, represents the *Dharma Cakra* or the wheel of Law and the deity appearing in front of the *cakra* is Śrī Lokanātha i.e. the Buddha. However, Sukumar Sen is of opinion that the seal of

Vijayasena actually depicts an effigy of Dharma Sūrya with the wheel of time (*Kāla Cakra*) in the background and emblems of horse in front. Dr. Sen[85] 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 Kāvyas, 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 Mallasārul 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 Brāhmaṇical belief. Incidentally, it may be

mentioned that the Mahāyāna god *Avalokiteśvara* was named *Lokanātha* in Bengal and was associated with the primitive god *Dharma* in course of time. The synthesis, thus forged, 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 noted[88] 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 *Aryamañjuśrmīūlakalpa*, 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-rogāṇām harttā'*).

In addition to the worship of the nine planets, the Sun god continued to receive adoration in the form of Dharma as well. The god finds a very reverent mention as the Dharma in the Mallasārul Copper Plate and the Nidhanpur inscription[90] of Bhāskara-varman, issued from Karnasuvarna[91] sometime after the death of Harsavardhana in 647 A.D. Herein Bhaskaravarman has been compared with *Bhaskara* (*Bhaskaramiva tejasām nilayam*) and his rise has bee 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 *Āryadharma* 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, Krodanja (Kolāñcha), Muktāvastu 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 Brahmans 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 inscription[94] as well as the Bhagalpur Copper Plate inscription[95] 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 Brahmans 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 comparision 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 stationary[101] 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 '*viśrāmā-rtham*' 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 Birbhum (the *Uttar Radha*) 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. Yajnavalkya 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 Gadādhar Temple Inscription[105] of the time of Nayapāla begins with "*Om namo Mārttaṇḍāya*" 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* Vallalasen that begin with '*Om om namah Sivaya*'. Similarly, the Madhainagar Copperplate of *Parama-Vaisnava* Laksmanasena commences with '*Om om namo Narayanaya*'. It is known from the Gayā Akşayavata Temple Inscription of Viśvarūpa Visvaditya (a feudatory of the Palas) incised in the regal year 5 of Vigrahapāla 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 Inscription[107] of Yakşapala[108] 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*, *Sahasralińga*, *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*', '*Mārttaṅḍa*'("*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 *Rāmacharita* (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 Vijayasena[124] 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 Vallālasena[125] (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 grant[126] (1181 A.D.) of Laksmanasena 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 Lakṣmanasena[127] 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 Brāhmaṇical settlements in Bengal, there remains little scope of doubt that the cult of the Sun god in its Vedic form made its appearance. In addition to the 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 Vallālasena[131] (1159-1179 A.D.) refers to the performance of the *Hemāsya Mahādāna Yajna* by Vilasadevi, mother of Vallalasena 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 Vallasena, 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 Visvarupasena[136] as well as The Edilpur (Faridpur district) Copperplate of Suryasena[137] 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 euolozical verses around the Sun in the *Subhasita-ratnakosa*, 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 ritual[146] by muttering the hymn – '*Om hring namobhagavate Suryoya paramatmane svaha*', you are sure to get rid of disease. I am giving you this wonderful armour[147] 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 *Jagadvilaksmana* 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 *Brihaddharma 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 Surya[154] 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. image[156] 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 – four [157] from Rajshahi, one from Bogra,[158] three from Dinajpur[159] 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 comparision 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 *rogahartta* 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 relieves 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 images[161] 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 in 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: Rajshahi[164] – 3, Bogra[165] – 1, Rangpur[166] – 1 Dinajpur[167] – 2, Malda[168] – 4, Faridpur[169]-1, Bankura[170] – 1, Hooghly[171] – 1, and 2 in VRM[172] 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-one[174] images with known date (11th century A.D.) and provenance, 15 hail from Rajshahi[175] 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 Kotalipada[177] or Bhitargarh image[178] 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 Vigraha 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 Radha-janapada. 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 images[183] are found to have definitely been the products of the 12th century A.D. and their distribution[184] against the find-spots is as follows: Rajshahi: 12[185]; Rajshahi or adjoining area: 8; Bogra: 1; Dinajpur: 1; Malda: 5[186]; 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 curve a separate position for himself. In some cases, Dandi is also endowed with *Karanda-mukuta* 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 specimen[199] 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 Brahmā[201] is revealed by the Ms. *Puşkara-Māhātmya* of the Padma Purāṇa. An 11th century A.D. sculpture[202] 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 relief[203] 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 Smriti* 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] Yajnavalkya[211] 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 Saka-dvipa) 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 Brahmans 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 *Subhasita-ratnakosa* 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, ākarṣaṇa, māraṇa, uccāṭana, vidveśana* and *stambhana* etc[224] 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 inscription[226] 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, Bhoyil 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 Gadādhar Temple Inscription[230] and the Gayā Sitalā Temple Inscription of Yakşapāla[231] 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 east[233] 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 *Muṇḍirasvāmīn* 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 *Gangasagar-samgama*. However, from the *Padma Purāṇa*[236] we come to know of the *Gaṅgāsāgara-samgama* near *Puruṣottomakṣhetra* (modern Puri).

Mandāra in Punyavardhana (Puṇḍravardhana, North Bengal) can not be precisely identified. However, there is a hill called Mandāra-Giri in the Banka sub-division of the district of Bhagalpur, at the foot of which there is a beautiful tank called *Pāpahāriṇī*, where people come to bathe from a long distance on the last day of the month of *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 Bardhankoṭi 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

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

23. Coomaraswami, A.K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Boston, 1927, pl. V. no. 16; V.S. Agarwala, *Studies in Indian Art,* Varanasi, 1965, pls. IX, X & XI; Biswas, S.S., *Terracotta Art of Bengal*, Delhi, 1981, p. 79, pl. (a).

24. Coomaraswami, *op. cit.*, pl. XII. no. 41, pl. XVI, no. 55.

25. Parrot, A. *Sumer, The Dawn of Art*, New York, 1961, p. 138, fig. 167A.

26. Grishman, R. *Persia: from the Origins to Alexander the Great*, London, 1964, p. 198, fig. 246.

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

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

fig. 21.

29.10.88.6.

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

31. *JISOA*, XVI, pp. 51-56.

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. *CII,* 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. N0. 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.

85. Sen, Sukumar, *Vaṅga Bhūmikā*, Calcutta, 1974, p.319; *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī*, Visva Bharati, 1972, p. 39.

86. Bhattacharyya, A.T., *Sun and Serpent Worship,* Calcutta, 1977, p. 28.

87. Sen, Sukumar & Mandal, Panchanan (ed.), *Rūprāmer Dharmamaṅgal*, Burdwan, B. S. 1351; Introduction.

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; *Kāmrūpśāsanāvalī*, 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. *Bhuvanapatirivodayanuraktomaṇdalo yathāyathamicita karanikaravitaraṇākulitakali timira- sañcatayā prakāşitāryadharmā- 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. '*yastunńgābhyudayāśrito 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 śirobhūşaṇam*. Sircar, D.C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasańge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.

99. Sircar, D. C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasańge*, 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 khyātasyottaramānasasya khananam 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 pādyamarvyamācamanīyakam madhuparkācamasnānam vasanābharaṇāni ca gandhapuṣpe dhūpadīpou 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, Jahnavi 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.

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CHAPTER - V

SUN IMAGES: STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ICONOGRAPHY

SUN IMAGES: STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ICONOGRAPHY

The study of religion cannot advance to any extent without an analysis of Iconography, particularly in India where Image-worship forms the very pivot of the popular religion. The artistic pieces provide us with encouraging facts for the proper assessment of the particular ideas, concepts and practices of each doctrine. The study of Sun-cult in early Bengal would remain incomplete in the absence of descriptions of art-representations of the Sun god. The various ideas, tendencies and practices of the Sun-cult discussed in the preceding chapters may find substantiation in the art-traditions of early Bengal and may be easily understandable in the light of the Sunny rays that appear from the art galleries.

The growth and development of the cult of Surya necessitated the making of his images in various materials. However, it is presumable that long before the inception of any cult, the Sun god and his manifold aspects were being represented by means of various symbols from the Vedic times onwards. These symbols were necessary for the proper performances of the ancient Vedic rites. Sun was represented by a wheel in the religious ceremonies of the time; a wheel very effectively symbolized the apparent movement of the god. Sometimes, the imagery was less clear; thus, a round golden plate or a firebrand stood for the Sun.[1] Among the extant antiquarian remains of the Vedic and early post-Vedic period one can recognize the

symbolical forms of the deity. A spoked wheel and its different forms are commonly found on the punch-marked coins, the origin of which has been traced by Cunningham prior to 1000 B.C.[2] Some of the spoked wheel symbols can well be taken to symbolize the Sun god. Sun also finds representation as a 'rayed disc' on ancient Indian coins.

On a number of very early types of punch-marked coins, small-elongated hexagonal bars of silver appear with several marks, which look like unsophisticated representations of a lotus. Also on other ancient coins, occur a few symbols that seem to be the variant forms of a lotus.[3] Lotus is closely connected with the Sun from the earliest period. The association of lotus with the Sun was because of the fact that the opening and closing of the flower timed with the rising and setting of the Sun. The Puranas emphasize the connection, and enjoin the execution in art of a twelve-petalled lotus. on different petals of which figures of the diverse aspects of the solar deity are to be placed with the divinity *Bhaskara* on the central pericarp (*karnika*). Thus, in Indian art the Sun god was represented by various symbols. When he came to be represented anthropomorphically, the wheel and lotus were not left out; the wheel became one of the major symbols of Visnu, an *Aditya* and lotus was positioned in both the hands of the Sun-icons. Moreover, the wheel and the lotus appear as solar emblems separately on several coins, seals, clay tablets and copperplate inscriptions of the Gupta period afterwards.[4]

Passing on to Bengal we cannot say with certainty whether the iconic representation of Surya in ancient Vanga preceded its worship in symbolic form as was in vogue in different parts of India where a wheel, a round golden plate, a lotus, flower, etc. were commonly used by the Vedic ritualists in the performance of sacrifices. Neither

have we come across at the present state of our knowledge any punch-marked nor cast-coins containing the representations of these objects like the ones of the Uddehika and Panchala Mitra chiefs like Suryamitra and Bhanumitra, which bears on their reverse sides the solar disc, placed on a pedestal. In this connection, it may be relevant to consider that by the side of the Susunia Rock inscription[5] (4th century A. D.) discovered at Bankura, West Bengal, *Chakrasvamin* (Visnu) is represented by a wheel which served as a solar symbol in the centuries before the Christian era, as suggested by the numismatic evidence. The epigraphic records discovered so far in Bengal hardly contain any indication as to when the image-worship of the Puranic Sun god had its beginning.

However, before we analytically describe the representative types of Sun images from Bengal in terms of an evolutionary process of iconic representations, a few observations need to be made about some of their specialties for a better comprehension of the subject.

I

Vast majority of the Sun-images from Bengal are products of the developed phase of the Bengal art and even an informal appraisal of them would bring out the more or less stereotyped elements of their iconography. The largest number of Surya images is found in standing posture. In this position, the divinity is always in *samapadasthanaka* pose, except in one (Pl. 6b) where he is in *tribhanga*).[6] Seated images of the god are indeed very rare, only three representing the god in *vajraparyāńkāsana.*

The god usually holds two full-blown lotuses by their stalks, which rise to the level of the shoulders. Another feature (mostly noticeable in the East Bengal images) is a pair of daggers tucked on either side of the bejeweled waist belt. A fewer images in East

Bengal and almost all from West and North Bengal would show the god with a long sword in a scabbard dangling on the left and held by a diagonal sword-trap. In one image only, the sword is placed on the right side.[7] An extra small dagger is found tucked on the right in a few of the North-West Bengal images. A *chatra* is depicted at the top of the *prabhavali* in many images from East Bengal.

The god is adorned with *kiritamukuta,*[8] the ornamented *katibandha* (*avyanga*) and various other jewelry. The breastplate *(kancuka)* is prominent, the interlacing outlines of which while passing round the shoulders, either make the form of a reef knot on the chest or a designed armour giving an impression of a diaphanous garment for the upper body. The former is a characteristic cognizance for most of the solar icons from East Bengal and in such cases, the *yajnopavita* is not visible on the body. In the North Bengal specimens, the *upavita* is always present, which is, however, a long one like in the majority of Visnu sculptures from the same region. In the northern and eastern India, the lower body of the divinity or at least his feet are left uncarved or covered up with high boots. Even the attendant gods and goddesses are similarly represented. Nevertheless, there are a few images in Bengal that demonstrate the bare feet of Surya.[9]

The principal attendants of the Sun god are the pot-bellied bearded Pingala, the recorder of good and bad deeds of creatures and the youthful Dandi or Dandanayaka, standing on either side. However, they are conspicuous by their absence in a number of Sun images.[10] As regards their placing, the *Visnudharmottara P., Bhav. P.* and *Samba P.* direct Pingala and Danda to be represented on the right and left of Surya respectively. The vast majority of the Bengal images follow this direction. However, the *Agni Purana* places Pingala on the left side and Dandi on the right, the compliance of which is found

in a few images only. Pingala.[11] is always represented with a pen and inkpot in his hands, while in the two hands of Dandi there may be any two of the attributes of *khadga, khetaka, sakti* and *aksamala* and the gesture of *abhaya* or *katihasta.* According to the *VDP,* they are also to be dressed in *udicyavesa.* Generally, both of them wear the *karandamukuta* but occasionally *kiritamukuta* as well. Sometimes Pingala is adorned with the *jatamukuta.*

An uncertain number of the wives of Surya are met in the texts. They are *Dyaus, Prithivi, Mahasveta, Saranyu, Surenu, Rajni, Niksubha, Nisprabha, Chaya, Savarna, Samjna, Suvarcasa, Prabha, Sandhya, Usa, Pratyusa* etc. It is difficult to say definitely whether these are synonyms or individual personalities as are variously made out in some of the *Puranas.* According to the *Bhav. P.,* the goddess in front of the Sun god is Mahasveta.[12] The two *camaradharinis* on his sides, according to the *Agni P.,* are Rajni and Nisprabha (or Niksubha). The two arrow-shooting attendants have been identified as Usa and Pratyusa.[13] Interestingly, some sculptures[14] show four arrow-shooting females, two of them occasionally on horseback. However, quite a number of sculptures do not represent such females at all.

Many Sun sculptures from Bengal show Aruna driving the Sun god's chariot with a whip in his right hand and holding the trunk of a *makara* with the left. An image[15] shows the god accompanied only by Aruna driving the seven-horsed car (Pl. 9a). The trunk of the *makara* has been interpreted by many scholars in different ways. According to N. B. Sanyal, 'Aruna, the charioteer, has his seat on the head of a *makara*'.[16] N. K. Bhattashali described it as 'a curious gaping biped' and equated it with 'the *Naga'* or the *bhujanga-rajju* of the *Matsya P.,* which serves to rein the seven horses[18] In this

connection, we may refer to the description of the Sun's chariot as found in the *Visvakarma-Silpa*[19]: *'evamuktarathastasya makaradhvaja isyate'* ('His chariot thus described should have an ensign of *makara*'). Therefore, the *makara* in question is nothing else but the ornamental *Makara*-head of the chariot mentioned in the iconographic text. The idea is clearly discernable from the profile of the war chariots with similar *makara*-heads illustrated on at least two terracotta plaques from Paharpur temple.[20] However, in three images from East Bengal,[21] Aruna is seated behind a peacock. In two of them, the bird is shown in profile while Aruna holds its neck by his left hand. This is simply a replacement of the *makara-dhvaja* by the *mayura-dhvaja*, which is very common with the front-heads of the palanquins and boats of the same region even in the present day.

In the developed Sun-icons, the chariot of the deity is drawn by seven horses with Aruna seated or half-embedded into the *ratha*. One Surya image from Bengal shows only one horse,[22] another with four horses,[23] the third (Pl. 4a) with eight[24] and the rest with seven. However, no horse is seen in a number of Sun images. It is difficult to theorize that the absence of the horses or the chariot in solar sculptures is signs of early specimen.

The largest number of Surya images is two-armed, though his images or those of his different aspects with four hands and (very rarely six) are also not unknown. Two four-armed images of Surya (VRM nos. 734 & 654) are known from Bengal and both show the god seated. The introduction of more than two hands came to be an important aspect of the development of the Sun-image in the early and late period.[25] The *Matsya Purana* (Vangavasi edition),[26] Visnudharmottara[27] and *Suryopanisada*[28] (a very late work) prescribe that the Sun god should have four arms (*Caturbahu*). The *Visvakarma*

Sastra describes many of the Adityas having four arms with their respective emblems two of which must be lotus flowers, held in the front right and left hands. Prof. MacDonnell[29] is of the opinion that these two additional hands were carved to hold the emblems and the natural ones were employed for any action or pose, i.e. *Abhaya* and *Varadamudra.* However, S. V. Venkatesvara[30] disagrees with him. In fact, the additional hands were needed for action. Later on, due to the influence of Tantricism and other sects of Hinduism Surya was also shown, though very rarely, with six, eight, ten or twelve hands. The combined images of the Sun god with other Hindu gods come under this category.

The fact that Surya is one of the 12 Adityas was very much in the mind of the Bengal sculptors of the mediaeval period. Naturally, we have over a dozen of images where the god is depicted along with eleven other Adityas, the latter placed on the upper part of the *prabhavali.* They are, in fact, miniature versions of Surya himself, all two-armed and carrying two full-blown lotuses in their hands. They may either be standing or sitting irrespective of the posture of the Sun god. Some times, Ganesa is added to them. That Surya is also one of the nine *Grahas* was also very much known. Quite a number of images show Surya surrounded by miniature *Grahas* that is specifically directed by the *VDP.*[31] Two images show on the *prabhavali* the miniature representations of the Hindu Triad, the eight *Dikpalas* and the *Astanagas*. About the depiction of various deities with the Sun god, the *Matsya P.* mentions the fact rather briefly *(nanadevaganairyukta).* The *Agni P.* (51) after describing the figure of Surya continues with the details of the other Adityas and their *Saktis,* the *Grahas*, the *Dikpalas*, the *Astanagas* etc. It is deserving of note that images with representations of additional deities are more numerous in East

Bengal. An important iconographic feature found in various texts is the great effulgence *(mahateja)* of Surya, which occur in several images by two or three layers of flames issuing out from the body of the divinity.

Having noticed the general as well as some specific iconographic characteristics, we now proceed to discuss about the Sun images in Bengal as far chronologically as possible. It may be noted that in most cases motifs such as Vidyadharas, *kirttimukha, gaja-sardula* and other general decorative elements have been ignored.

II

Surya is not depicted in human form in early Bengal art until a comparatively late period. Before the evolution of real cult-icons of the Sun god, there are a few human representations of the Sun on the terracotta of the Maurya-Sunga period. The earliest representation of the Sun god in human form is found in a beautiful terracotta mould from Chandraketugarh datable to c. 2nd century B.C.

2nd Cent. B.C. Terracotta Winged Surya from Tamluk:

The beautiful terracotta mould from Tamluk (Midnapore) displaying a winged male figure[32] standing in a frontal pose datable to c. 2nd century B.C. deserves mention at first (Pl. 1a). Each of the two hands placed on the waistband *(katisutra)* holds long stalks of full-blossomed lotus *(vikasita padma)*. The figure is bedecked with round-shaped earrings. He is further bedecked with a beautifully fashioned *kanthi* decorated with floral medallions. It is also shown wearing a stylistic *sirastraka* slightly tapering to an ornamented top and armlets and beaded round-shaped bracelets arranged in four strands.

The figure wears a thick waistband the middle of which is characterized by the presence of knotted *katisutras* in small cylindrical forms acting as the *katisutragranthi.* The waistband is further furnished with small tinkling bells. The waist-girdle worn by the figure under discussion is slightly different from the ones worn by other figures of divinity. The most interesting feature is the delineation of the wings, beautifully and artistically arranged on both the corner-sides of the stela beside the upper parts of the arms. Two conical-shaped objects depicted in the form of cluster of plantains representing the row of bananas are found to be displayed on either side of the lower part of the stela. A pitcher-like auspicious object with ear of corn sprouting forth from it is placed on the pericarp of the petalled lotus.

We may well speculate about the identification of the winged figure based on the iconographic attributes. The association of wings with the image of Surya seems to find its origin in the Rigvedic concept of the Sun. He is described as the beautiful winged celestial bird *Garutman* in some of the Rigvedic hymns[33]. *Suparna* (well winged) is no other than the Sun itself. Therefore, we may conclude that the figure stands for Surya (the Sun god) in one of its earliest representations in iconic form in terracotta. Two full-blown lotuses held by the figure is again a pointer to his identity as the Sun. The round-shaped *karma-bhusanas* seem to resemble *Surya-mukhi* (helianthus annus) flower, which has been traditionally been associated with Sun worship in Bengal. The plantain tree is also traditionally connected with Sun worship. It is, thus, clear that the winged figure represents the Vedic Sun god Surya at its nascent stage of iconic development.

The representation of Surya in the form of a winged human figure,[34] though innovative in its representational style with some of the accompanying iconographic

attributes seemingly drawn from the existing local beliefs, faiths, customs and practices of the land, was not, however, a new one in the context of greater Indian art as such. In the sculptural panels of Bharhut[35] (Sanchi) datable to 2nd century B.C., we have beautiful representations of winged human figures carved out in Chunar red sand stone. It is true that the basic idea of identifying the Sun god with the beautiful winged celestial bird Garutman *(divyah sa suparna Garutman)* came from the Rigvedic hymn (1.164.46).

Chandraketugarh terracotta sculpture of 1st century B.C. / A.D.:

Another beautiful terracotta sculpture of circa 1st century B.C. / A.D., which has been found from Chandraketugarh,[36] 24-Parganas (Pl. 1b) is very significant. The wheeled terracotta object represents a regally posed male figure seated on a chariot in European style. The beautifully fashioned chariot is drawn by four fast-moving horses (which is unique in Bengal) - the two of which are centrally placed and the rest of the two shown in profile. He has behind his head a circular nimbus elegantly rimmed with decorative lines of dotted motifs in two bands and he wears a turbaned crown typical of the period and a garland with a pendant. The figure is flanked by two females of diminutive sizes who passionately cling to the main figure by the neck. The chariot on which the figures are displayed along with the galloping horses stand on a raised circular platform on the left corner of which is noticeable a funny torso of a monstrous demon (the symbol of darkness?) being pierced through by the sharp-edged rolling wheel of the chariot.

The figure is bedecked with a pair of circular ornate earrings that reach its shoulders. The oval-shaped face, the strongly accentuated ridged eye-brow, the very protruding round eyes, the straight nose though not very prominent, the relaxed lips and

divine smile- all indicate the characteristic features of the Kusana period. The round-shaped turban-like headdress and the elaborately ornate nimbus also bespeak of the characteristic features of the Kusana period. All the iconographic features along with the sacred thread thrown across the right shoulder of the bare-bodied figure indicate its immediate association with divinity.

In the Rigvedic hymns, the Sun god is often described as moving on a car drawn by one, seven or several ruddy horses.[37] There are a number of Surya images belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era mostly sculptured in stone, which show the god seated on a chariot. That the terracotta figure from Chandraketugarh under discussion, represents the solar god Surya would be evident if we take into account of the iconographic motifs discernible in the depiction of some of the Surya images of the period found in different parts of India. One of the earliest of such representations of Surya images is from the Saptasamudri well (D 46) which is now in the Mathura Museum.[38] Here the Sun is represented as sitting on his haunches inside a one-wheeled car drawn by four horses. The god holds a lotus bud in his right hand and a scimitar in his left. He is dressed in heavy tunic and there are traces of top boots in his partially visible legs. He has a Sun disc behind his head and a pair of wings is seen attached to his shoulder. Another such image of Surya is beautifully represented in the relief from Bhaja Vihara[39] near Pune, Western Ghats. The relief at Bhaja represents the god as riding a chariot drawn by four horses in the company of two women, while the wheels of the chariot pass over grossly proportioned nude demons. The representation of the Chandraketugarh terracotta Surya image under discussion is so strikingly similar to the Bhaja Surya image in stone that one wonders which way the creative impetus traveled

indeed! A part of the terracotta chariot with remnants of four horses discovered from Bhita of the same period is a close parallel of the present specimen. Again, in the relief of the Sun god depicted on the stone railing at Bodh-Gaya, we find him riding a one-wheeled chariot drawn by four horses and being attended on either side by female figures shooting arrows. It appears that in some way or other the style of representation of the Sun god spread from Western to Eastern India and even inflamed the imagination of the artists in Bengal to produce the terracotta plaques referred to above.

The sacred thread thrown across the right shoulder of the bare bodied figure is very much thick in shape. It consists of three strands. It is characteristic of the representational style that is so strikingly met with in the iconic representation of Agni hailing from the same Chandraketugarh region. In the Rigvedic hymn (10.88.6), we find Surya as identified with Agni, another important Vedic god.

One of the most significant findings in this terracotta Surya is the appearance of Aruna, the celestial charioteer of the Sun god. Depicted only in its upper bust in a diminutive scale and placed between the two dangling legs of the main deity Surya, Aruna is found to be wearing a small cap-like headdress. It serves as an example in testifying to the continuance of the art tradition through the ages with the Kashipur (24 Parganas) Surya image in stone in this part of ancient Vanga. The two female deities flanking the main god may be taken as standing for Usa and Pratyusa, the consorts of Surya. Bedecked with circular earrings these two female deities are found to be having their respective coiffure arranged in a stylistic shape of cap-like headdress.

Let us now examine the factors, indigenous and foreign, behind the Sun-images mentioned above. According to Cunningham,[40] the four horses and the general execution

in the solar images of the early period largely bear a resemblance to the Greek representation of Helios-the Greek Sun god. On the contrary, Banerjea suggested that the Rigvedic description of Surya as drawn by one, three, four or seven horses gave inspiration to this sort of representation. In the *Rigveda*,[41] the specific number of horses of the Sun's chariot is seven and no particular importance is given to number four. All the iconographic literatures of India specifically mention seven horses for Sun's chariot. On the other hand, the Iranian Sun god Mithra traverses[42] the wide firmament in his four-horsed chariot and the Greek Sun Helios god has been famous for his quadrigo. It is well known that Mithra was represented in human form for the first time in the Hellenistic courts in association with Greek Sun-god-Helios. Therefore, it is suggested that the solar images of the early period came to be evolved under the Hellenistic impact. In this tradition, the Mithraic tradition was already mixed up. However, the influence of the Hellenistic tradition was confined to the four horse-motifs only. The features of the divinity along with attendants like Usa and Pratyusa and the chariot are Indian in character. The absence of the Central Asian features (high boots, Iranian coat, etc) in these images clearly shows that these images derived the alien impact through the Hellenistic stream[43] and not directly. In the succeeding period, the images were modeled under the influence of the Central Asian tradition, which must have entered India in the wake of the Kusana invasion.

1st Cent. A.D. Terracotta *Udicyavesi* Surya from Hadipur (24 Parganas):

Hadipur (North 24 Parganas) has yielded a beautiful terracotta seal belonging to the 1st century A.D.,[44] which displays on one side a male figure (Pl. 2a). The figure stands facing to front in rigid *samapadasthanaka* pose on a slightly raised platform and is

flanked by lotus plants on its right side and a banana plantain on its left side. A horse standing in an east-west direction is found to be figured out behind the plantain tree. A headdress of kausia cap type adorns the head. The figure is bedecked with earrings; the round one in the left ear look like a full-blown small flower round while the one in the right also appears to be a round full-blown small flower. A square-shaped small symbol is noticed on the right shoulder of the figure. The right hand holds the uppermost part of the stalk of the larger lotus, which is fully petalled with the pericarp in the centre. A full-blown lotus of a smaller size is displayed beneath the stretched right hand on the right side of the larger lotus. On the left side of the larger lotus is depicted a lotus with its bud only; the left hand is placed akimbo. Interestingly, the figure wears a close fitting jacket forming part of the longer that is gathered at the anklets. It also wears soft-padded boots.

That the figure is of a divinity becomes amply clear from some conventional motifs such as the flat kausia cap-like headdress, the left hand held akimbo, the frontal stance in *samapadasthanaka* pose etc. which have been employed in the representation of different deities of different religious sects during the post-Mauryan and Pre-Gupta period. Since the figure holds the stalk of the lotus by one of his hands and wears Northerner's dress *(Udicyavesa)*, it stands for the Sun god in one of its most formative stages at a time when alien influence in solar iconography was slowly but steadily infiltrating into the mainland from northwestern India. The display of the horse, which is inalienably connected with all the Sun gods and the plantain tree, which is also significantly associated with the Sun worship also confirms the identification of the deity with the Sun deity.

As already noted, the figure under review is found to be wearing the tunic and the soft-padded boots (the well-known iconographic traits of the Surya images of the north), which is one of the archaic representations of it ever come across in Bengal. In *Brihat-samhita* (57.46-47), we come across one of the earliest descriptions of Surya images in the fashion of *udicyavesa.* The *Vishnuudharmottara Purana* (Ch, 67.2.16) of a later date also lays down that he (the Sun god) should be covered with a coat mail and he should wear a Northerner's dress. J.N. Banerjea says that the writers of such texts undoubtedly emphasize in this way the foreign origin of this type of Sun cult introduced into India in the beginning of the Christian era or even earlier.

The display of altogether three lotuses is iconographically very interesting. It does not appear to be an isolated art motif only witnessed in this particular divine figure. On the contrary, it appears to have served as a major and significant art-motif handed down to the icon-makers of the successive periods. The Kashipur (North 24 Parganas) Sun image of late Gupta period also shows the deity as holding three full-blown lotuses in each of its two hands.

2nd Cent. A.D. Terracotta Seal with a round object representing the Sun:

That the Sun was symbolically represented even in the 2nd century A.D. in Bengal is evidenced by a terracotta seal.[45] This 2nd century A.D seal. from Berachampa (North 24 Parganas) displays, within a border of dots, a boat fitted with a mast carrying a banner and above it a round object representing the Sun in the sky. The accompanying legend in Kharosthi and Kharosthi-Brahmi has been read as *Bhajotha dijre (or jri) ssudhrdho* (=*Bhajatha dvijeshu udadhau)* meaning, "You take resort into the Brahmins (while) at

sea". The most important point is the display of the Sun on the seal in the accompaniment of the advice calling the seafarers for taking resort unto the Brahmins while at sea. It shows to what extent the worship of the Sun god had infiltrated into the various strata of the society of ancient Vanga.

3rd Cent. A.D. Seal staff: aniconic representation of Surya

Aniconic representation of the Sun is found to have continued in the next century as well. In this connection, we would like to mention a hemispherical terracotta seal [46] from Chandraketugarh and now in the collection of the AMC (AMC.T 8521). The seal datable to c. 3rd century A.D. displays a female figure with an elaborate head-dress standing to front with her right hand akimbo and the left hand stretched out to her left pointing to a staff rising from (or from behind) a water reservoir (with two lotuses) and fitted to a pole which is topped by a canopy over her head. Now what is of great significance from our point of view is the depiction of the staff rising from the water and flanked by two lotuses. In the *Rigveda* (4.13.5), Surya has been called the pillar of the sky. Could we take the staff for the pillar of the sky personifying the Sun? We may refer to the Surya pillar from Nagarjunakonda[47] of the 2nd century A.D. and say that the aniconic representation of Surya was not uncommon during this period side by side with his iconic representation.

Horse and lotus on a terracotta seal:

Theriomorphic representation of the Sun so prominently found in the Vedic period was not, in all probability, unknown in Bengal. A big fully petalled lotus is shown as rising from a pond on one side of a terracotta seal.[48] Two galloping horses turning their

heads to a person riding on one of them are also depicted. The presence of the equestrian beside the full-blown lotus flower may be taken to have indicated the need of protecting the pond from desecration by committing acts, which could have excluded its use for religious purpose. The legend *Dhesido (desitah)* in Kharosthi in left field is very important indeed. It may be quite possible that the rider was instructed (*desitah*) to guard the pond since it was perhaps kept aside exclusively for the growth of lotus flowers. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Rigveda (10.142.8) emphasizes the need of digging ponds or tanks for having full-blown lotuses besides for the supply of pure drinking water (9.110.5). The second horse, which is not having any rider on it, may be taken to have symbolically represented the presence of the Sun god.

Early Gupta Phase

The extant Surya figures of the early Gupta period are not very many in number; they, however, seldom fail to show most of the foreign elements.

Open-bodied booted Surya from Harinarayanpur (24 Parganas):

An oblong plaque in slate stone from Harinarayanpur (South 24 Parganas) and datable to early 4th-5th century A.D. shows a male figure (Pl. 2b) in *samapadasthanaka*.[49] The two hands bent from the elbows and raised to the level of each shoulder are found to be holding two full-blossomed lotuses by their stalks. A flat-cap like headdress crowns the head. The figure is adorned with long earrings, necklace and torque. He is also found to be wearing a coat, trousers and boots. That the figure represents the Sun god in his *udicyavesa* is quite clear.

The two pillar-like objects shaped in cylindrical forms remind us of the Surya pillar of the second cent. A.D. from Nagarjunakonda. However, it is to be noted that the latter symbolically represents the Sun god and not in his iconic form as is the case with the - Harinarayanpur plaque. The concept of Surya pillar, in case the two pillars are taken as representing the Sun in addition to his iconic representation, was very much known to the artists of ancient Vanga during the 3rd/ 4th century A.D. In that case, we could notice an uninterrupted continuity in the flow of art style into ancient Vanga during the succeeding periods from different parts of India and their subsequent experimentations and reorientations by her artists in conformity with the needs and likings and disliking of its people.

The image under discussion can definitely be taken as the next significant stage in the evolution of the Sun-icons, not only in ancient Bengal but also elsewhere in the country. The beginning in this direction was made with the upper part of the body of the deity being denuded of its peculiar *udicyavesa* of the time. In addition, this was done without sacrificing the artistic beauty of the iconic representation. The lower part of the *udicyavesa* along with the booted feet pales into insignificance before the high-pitched rhythm of an absolute Indianised version of the image. The Sun 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 betray gradual but steady shedding off the Northerner's dress with the *avyanga* (waist-girdle) and the booted feet being retained in all .the cases. There has been, however, perceptible change over the ages in the fashioning of the *avyanga* since the days of the Harinarayanpur *Surya* image. The boots as well as lotus-stalks are noticeable in the iconic representation of Surya of the Pala Sena age. It seems that in the

pre-Gupta age in Vanga, Surya in the *udicyavesa* was looked upon as having foreign association

It has been tacitly assumed by scholars that the peculiar type of the Surya image worshipped all over India from the Gupta period onwards and earlier was derived from an Iranian type.[50] The extant Surya images of the early Gupta period are not very many in number; they, however, seldom fail to show most of the alien features. However, the gradual idealization of these traits and preponderance of Indian elements had already begun from the late Gupta period. A description of a few of the early and late Gupta as well as early and late mediaeval images of the god hailing from Bengal will show that the earlier the sculptures the more prominent and less and less idealized are the foreign traits and the Indian elements are comparatively few.

4th Cent. A.D. Surya image from Kumarpur (Rajshahi):

The Kumarpur Surya[51] is an extremely coagulated specimen (Pl. 3a). The slab of the image is rounded at the top with a high pedestal on the dado of which are carved the figures of seven horses standing erect with their forelegs raised high. Above, the charioteer Aruna sits in the centre. Behind him is Surya in *samapadasthanaka* between Usa and Pratyusa, the lower portion of each from below the knees being submerged in the pedestal. The two hands of the god bent at the elbow, are raised to the shoulders, clasping stalks of full-blown lotuses (*sanala-padma*). All are dressed alike in knee-length tunics with a corded belt in the middle. Surya's ornaments consist of necklace, earrings, bangles and a cap-like, low *kirita*. Though carrying bows and arrows as usual, Usa and Pratyusa are not represented in the archer pose; the former stands facing front

and the latter in slight *tribhanga.* All the figures are executed in low, flat relief, their sharp and rigid angles and lines confining the main effect to the surface. The features of Surya are broad and heavy, his shoulders wide and straight. All these features together with the long tunic covering the body from the neck to the knees, open round eyes, flat and low head-dress are points indicative of its affinity with the Kusana sculptures of Mathura, datable to the 3rd century A. D. Yet, the peculiarity of the features 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.

The seven horses found in the Kumarpur relief show the departure from the custom of the Kusana artists to provide the Sun's chariot with only two or four horses. Standing Surya may be regarded as a Gupta innovation in solar iconographic tradition.

5TH Cent .A.D. Surya image from Niyamatpur (Rajshahi):

The Niyamatpur (Naogaon, Rajshahi)[52] Surya image (Pl. 3b) is executed in coarse-grained sandstone. The deity stands erect on a low pedestal between two dwarfish attendants, Pingala and Dandi. He wears a long tunic fastened at the waist by a belt.[53] His crown is low and flat with an engraved lotus between triangular plaques above the rim. In his two hands, sharply bent at the elbow and raised, he holds a pair of lotuses by the stalks as enjoined in the *dhyanas*. He stands with his feet close to each other, but from the ankles, the legs appear to move away from each other.

Pingala and Dandi stand swaying away from the main deity unlike whom they wear *dhotis* and hold indistinct objects in their hands. Arrow-shooting females, consorts,

and Aruna along with the wheel and the horses of the chariot are conspicuous by their absence in this specimen. The only innovation is the scarf or belt introduced for the first time in these two images. The scarf round the waist is not found in the pre-Gupta relieves. The back slab is plain and asymmetrical. In its Kusana type dress and headgear, position of the two hands and strict frontal standing altitude, the figure of Surya is similar to the one noticed in Kumarpur relief, and also in style not unlike the image of the god from Bodh-Gaya dated in the 26th year of the reign of Dharmapala.

The Kumarpur and Niyamatpur images bear remarkable affinity to the Kusana Surya figures of Mathura as regards their dress and general characteristics; unlike the Mathura images they are, however, all standing and the chariot is absent. Where as a pre-Gupta[54] date was suggested by S. K. Saraswati and Nihar Ranjan Roy, an early Gupta period date has been assigned by J. N. Banerjea.[55] About the absence of so many iconographic features in this image, S. K. Saraswati says that it belonged to a period 'when the iconography of the god had not yet been stereotyped.[56] However, it may not be quite correct. Over a dozen of Sun images accompanied by Dandi and Pingala only have been discovered, whose dates range from c. 4th to 9th century A. D. Long before the end of this period, the iconographic elements of the developed Sun-icons, had been spelled out in the *VDP* and some other *Puranas.* What seems more probable is that the sculptors, in these cases, went on following a text like the *Brihat-samhita,* which even in the middle of the 6th century A. D. described the god alone and did not elaborate about the accessory figures at all.[57]

Image on seal:

On a seal attached with the Mallasarul Copper Plate grant[58] of the time of Maharajadhiraja Gopachandra (6th century A.D.). is represented *Sri Lokanatha*. The seal bears in a relief a standing figure of a two-armed deity with a halo-like *chakra* in the background (Pl. 8b). The *chakra* that stands for the wheel of time is traditionally regarded as the solar symbol. The anthropomorphic figure may be identified as that of Sun god in view of the traces of the foreparts of some horses below, in front of the figure. On the pedestal, there seems to be carved some devotees.[59]

Late Gupta & Early Mediaeval Phase

The late Gupta and early mediaeval Surya images differ from the above in this respect that they are far more elaborate in their presentation than the above. In the icons of the mediaeval times, a definite tendency to the grouping and arrangement of the attendants of the god is discernible.[60] It will be necessary now to study a few representative types to notice a process of development.

Surya image from Kashipur (24 Parganas):

A standing Surya-image[61] in black basalt from Kashipur (24 Parganas) is an excellent specimen (Pl. 5a) of the late Gupta period. It shows the god standing erect with a halo behind his head, holding lotus-stalks in his two upraised hands and having his legs partially inserted in the *triratha*-chariot pedestal. The deity wears a belt tied by a knot- a tradition that even lingers through the mid-stream images of India belonging to the Pala period. Over the pedestal in front of the god sits the charioteer Aruna with his body

partially hidden. His left hand is gathering up the reins of the horses and the right holding a lash. Aruna and probably the arrow-shooting female figures, now broken away, are the only companions of the god. The god possesses a sword, the hilt and part of which is dangling by his left side and tied by a loose sling from his right shoulder. This may be reminiscent of the North Indian militarism mainly aroused by the Huna invasion led by Mihirgula in sixth century A.D.; the contemporary artist could not help adapting that northern outfit and armoury for the divine image. Besides, in Hindu pantheon Surya or the Sun god often appears as a warrior or *Ksatra* who rides on the back of his chariot driven by seven horses obviously indicating seven colours of the Sunray from east to west, and defeats the menace of darkness. Forming a single row from left to right, the horses put their front legs upwards in a galloping manner. Seven bridles or trappings are attached to them held by the charioteer Aruna, whereas the composition renders the effect of a celestial car. The one-wheeled chariot is clearly outlined and 'the way in which the horses are treated and the two demons of darkness (?) are shown beneath the chariot reminds us not only of the earlier technique of Bodh-Gaya and Bhaja[62] but also of the terracotta plaques discovered at Chandraketugarh. The image seems to have belonged to the period earlier than that of the Surya-image found at Deora (Bogra district, Bangladesh) discussed below.

The Kashipur image shows the deity as holding three full-blown lotuses in each of its two hands. We have already found the display of three lotuses in the image of Surya in a first cent. A.D. terracotta seal from Hadipur (24 Parganas, North). It appears to have served as a significant art-motif handed down to the icon-makers of the succeeding periods.

Surya image from Deora (Bogra):

The emotionalism of the eastern version is fully evident on a late Gupta image of Surya[63] in bluish basalt, discovered at Deora in the district of Bogra and now preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi (Pl. 5b). The figure of Surya, somewhat flat but three dimensional from the ankles up to the shoulders, is standing with a circular halo with dotted borders round the head. The halo diverges to right and left to form similar but smaller *prabamandalas* behind the heads of Pingala and Dandi. The deity holds a lotus stalk in each of his two hands, which sprouts upward parallel to his ears in a bunch of one big and two tiny blossoms. The right hand is broken and above the bridge of the mutilated nose is a round *tilaka*. The broad, powerful torso of Surya is bare save for a short necklace of apparently beads. He also wears small, circular earrings, bracelets and a flat cap-like crown (*kiritamukuta*), which is decorated by a lotus device, carved between a pair of beaded bands. The ears are covered with twisted rolls of hair falling from beneath the crown. The god is clad in a *dhoti* tied round the waist by a girdle with an ornamental clasp in front. Along his left side is seen a short sword kept in position by means of a chain, which is intersected by a scarf passing round the waist and is knotted to the right with the ends gracefully arranged on the hip. The boots (or leggings) on his legs are only partially visible for much of the latter is inserted into the pedestal as we find in the later Surya relief from Ellora[64] or in the Kashipur (24 Parganas) Surya of approximately the same or a little earlier date.

In front of the god, is his charioteer Aruna seated cross-legged behind a half-lotus device, holding the whip and reins. Dandi and Pingala stand respectively to right and left

on side of Aruna, wearing similar dresses and ornaments including the flat-topped headgear. The former is not bearded as in latter images, and carries the pen and inkpot while the latter holds a *sula* in his right hand and the left hand is on the hip. Two arrow-shooting goddesses Usa and Pratyusa are represented behind half-lotus devices to the right and left of the deity. The legs of the attendant figures are also encased in boots, which like those of Surya, are partially hidden. On the *triratha* pedestal are the seven horses of Surya's chariot carved in profile with the single wheel[65] *(cf. ekacakram* of the *dhyana).*

The image under discussion is similar in outline to that of Kashipur. Both the images more or less 'exhibit the sublime spiritualism of the Sarnath school combined with the emotionalism of its eastern version'.[66] However, the Deora image undoubtedly shows some development in the treatment of the iconic type of the Sun god not present in the Niyamatpur and Kumarpur relieves already described. The latter two had only two attendants, namely, Dandi and Pingala. The horses of the chariot had been given in only one image. However, here the number of attendants has increased. In addition to Dandi and Pingala on either side of Aruna, we also find the arrow-shooting female figures - Usa and Pratyusa - on two sides.

The Deora Surya is not much removed in point of date from the Bhumara Surya sculpture, carved inside a *caitya*-window panel of the Siva temple at Bhumara but it introduces many new specialties absent in the latter.[67] It must be noted, however, that the Bhumara Surya was an accessory figure, appearing inside one of the '*caitya*' in a temple dedicated to Siva, while the Deora Surya seems to have been the principal object of worship in a solar shrine.[68]

Here the Kusana dress has no doubt disappeared and the image is given a complete indigenous character. However, it should also be remarked that some other features characterizing the Sun-images carved in the subsequent centuries (the Pala period), e.g. the sacred thread so prominent on the body of Surya and his additional attendants in the persons of Mahasveta and the two queens *viz.* Samjna and Chaya - have not yet made their appearance; they are yet to be introduced in the images of the Sun-god carved in the coming centuries.

The way in which the long curls falling on the shoulders are treated and the '*trivali*' marks are shown on the throat, the plain circular halo with beaded border, scarf passing round the waist, the long sword tied with a slanting strap on the left side, paucity of ornaments and strict simplicity of design – all these as well as the very refined treatment of the whole theme specify it as a fine specimen of Bengal sculpture of the late Gupta period. The circular halo with only a beaded border appears to be but a plain reminiscence of the exquisitely decorated halos of the Sarnath Buddha images. The deep shadows below the eyes and round the lips accentuate the emotionalism of the full round face.[69] In point of style and execution, this image from Deora has general resemblance with those of the panels in the Gupta temple at Deogarh. The Deora image, as it has been suggested by J.N. Banerjea, S. K. Saraswati and others, may be assigned to the Gupta period,[70] when the full-fledged image of the god with all his attendants might have been imported in Bengal.

J. N. Banerjea[71] has even gone to extent of describing the Deora sculpture as an ideal Sun-image carved in the 6th century, with full details and all the requisites for a Sun-relief. For the first time, the god is shown wearing all the ornaments and attended by

all the members of his retinue, Danda, Pingala, two Usa, Pratyusa and Aruna with seven horses. The image in question seems to have been the principal object of worship in a solar shrine. We have, therefore, little doubt that the Sun worship was introduced in Bengal sometime in the pre-Gupta period but it was consolidated on a firm foundation during the Pala rule in Bengal.

Bronze miniature Surya image from Deulbadi (Comilla):

A Surya figure (Pl. 6a), a bronze or octo-alloy (*'astadhatu'*) miniature[72] about 6" in height, closely corresponds to the Deora composition in many of its details. However, the main figure of the god is found to be seated, which is usually very rare. He sits cross-legged in a car of one wheel while seven spirited horses are represented underneath the car as drawing it along. There is a prominent girdle round the abdomen of the god. As usual, he holds a pair of lotuses in his two hands. On two sides, sit Pingala, with a short beard to right and Dandi to left and Aruna is seated behind the *makara*-device of the chariot-head. Usa and Pratyusa stand in *alidha* and *pratyalidha* at the extreme ends, shooting arrows. No consort is depicted. The Sun god and his two principal attendants are each provided with separate halos behind their heads. The axle and the two wheels of the chariot are fitted quite realistically. The two full-blown lotuses held by their stalks and the jewellery including the prominent girdle round the abdomen retain the touch of the master hand behind the sculpture. The miniature image of the god is undoubtedly a remarkable specimen of the East Indiana art of the 7th-8th century A.D.[73] S.K. Saraswati[74] assigns it to the 7th century A.D. The Surya image with its composite elements of attendants, charioteer, horses etc. represents not a very distant approach to the full fledged stela composition of the Pala art.[75] The image was originally found along with an inscribed image of *Sarvvani* from some ruins in the village of Deulbadi, in the Tippera District, some 22 miles south of Comilla and is now housed in the Bangladesh National Museum.

Unaccompanied, booted terracotta Surya from Bogra:

The unique terracotta Surya[76] (21" ht.) from Bogra district in the Mahasthan Museum, Bangladesh is a remarkable piece (Pl. 8a) of sculptural art of the Gupta period from Bengal. The image shows the god completely in round with a plain circular halo behind the head. He wears a flattop *kiritamukuta, hara, kundalas, valayas* and a tunic that covers the body up to the knees and is fastened to the waist by a girdle. The characteristic rolled-scarf goes round the back, the plated ends of which gracefully hang on two sides from the elbows and reaches well below the level of the tunic. High boots cover the legs, the feet being broken at ankles and lost. A sword in the jeweled scabbard is dangling on the left held by a diagonal sword-strap. The lotuses in the hands are gone. No consort or attendant is depicted and, as the pedestal is lost, the presence of the horses or the chariot cannot be ascertained.

The sculpture represents the mediaeval type that depicts the Sun god riding on a horse unaccompanied by any attendants. The *'Agni Purana'* (Ch. 51) and the *'Sri Visvakarmavatara Sastra'* (Ch. 28) describes it in similar language- *'Athavāsvasāmūrudha kārya ekastu Bhāskara.* In the much damaged Sun-temple at Konarak (Orissa), such a Surya figure known by the name of *Haridasva* appears in the role of a *'Parsadevata'* placed on the outside niche of one of the walls of the main shrine.[77]

Pala Period

The last part of the eighth century A.D betrays a change in iconic perspective of the Surya divinity coming over Bengal. Actually, this marks the period of transition between the Gupta and the Pala times concerning style and composition.

Early Pala seated terracotta Surya from Paharpur:

A stray terracotta plaque[78] discovered at Paharpur represents a divinity with a halo behind the head, seated cross-legged and holding full-blown lotuses into uplifted hands. The god is identified as the only representation of the Sun god at Paharpur. It reminds us of similar representation of the god on the Bodh-Gaya railings. The divinity is shown with the upper garment flying above the shoulders in usual Paharpur style. This representation may be reasonably assigned to the early Pala-period i.e. the second half of the 8th century A. D. In the middle and later Pala period, we find many stone sculptures representing the Sun god, but no seated figure of this type has yet been discovered.

Early Pala Surya from Bhadrakali (Hooghly)

The sculptured representation of the Surya divinity in a niche on a stone slab probably belonging to the 8th century A.D. from Bhadrakali in the district of Hooghly delineates a significant iconography of the god inspired by *dhyana*.[79] Here the divinity appears in full anthropomorphic form ignoring the prescribed rule contained in the *Matsya Purana*. However, the peculiarity [illegible]

distantly echoing the two-dimensional art of Bharhut. Another feature of the particular sculpture not very uncommon in Pala sculptures is the representation of the deity within a shrine. The previously mentioned niche has two pilasters surmounted by square capitals on both sides. The niche is ultimately crowned by a pyramidal lintel terminating with architectural shape in the upper end. It is minutely decorated with architectural designs and minor niches within itself shaped as *caitya* windows often with peering human heads or otherwise containing a lotus. Such appearance of the so-called *caitya* windows leads us further to the conclusion that this sculptured piece might have taken shape in the beginning of the Pala age, as far as we know that the Pala kings were ardent patrons of

Buddhism. The main niche containing the Surya image with its pilaster motifs and the minutely decorated lintel will represent a celestial mansion or palace as if visualizing the concept of a *vimana*. Again, there is considerable absence of decoration in the composition except the crowning lintel recalling the language of the Gupta Art, which lingered over decades. The anthropomorphic form of Surya is represented as wearing a pair of pointed boots, as it will be seen about the sculptures of the Sun god appertaining to Pala Bengal. Danda and Pingala also wear similar footwear worn by the main divinity and helmets of characteristic form. However, the helmet or crown of the main divinity was going to maintain its dimensional beauty of *Kiritamukuta* as it is seen in the Surya image belonging to circa seventh century A.D. In this eighth century image from Bhadrakali we find that the chariot and horses along with the charioteer Aruna vanish from the scene though the symbolic suggestion may still be there. The god holds a lotus in each hand; the petals of the lotus facing the viewer are open while those of the upraised flower are closed, [illegible] marking the end of the Gupta style as well as the beginning of the Pala convention.

Early Pala Surya image in South Kensington Museum:

The stage next to that of the Kashipur and Deora image in the development of the Surya motif is very beautifully illustrated by a remarkable sculpture[80] of early Pala Art in the collection of the South Kensington Museum London. All the attendants of the Sun god are grouped on either side of his figure, almost in a line with the arrow-shooting figures of Usa and Partyusa shown just above their head; unlike the Deora and Kashipur sculptures, all the figures are shown standing out of the chariot pedestal with their legs heavily booted. However, the treatment of the lotus bunch in the hands of the central

figure as well as of the long sword attached by a strap to his left side distinctly reminds us of the two specimens noticed above.

Surya of early or middle Pala period:

If a comparison is made between the group of sculptures (Deora, Kashipur and South Kensington images) with the four Surya relieves, one each from Bihar, west, north and east Bengal reproduced in plate LIX of R D. Banerjee's 'Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture', we can clearly trace the process of the further development of the iconic type. The two sculptures hailing from Bihar and north Bengal are undoubtedly earlier than the two others from east and west Bengal are and they possess some peculiarities of the older group of Surya relieves. The treatment of the broad sword hanging on the left side of the central deity, the parabolic *'prabhavali'* of the two compositions, the *'kulah'* caps on the heads of Dandi and Pingala, absence of any

M., No. Fa 5/176) and the absence of the two queens in the Bihar one (Indian Museum, No. 3924) - all these features prove that they belong to the early or middle Pala period.[81]

Features of Surya images of Late or early Sena period:

The profuse ornamentation of the relieves from Western Bengal (IMC No. Ms. 8) and Eastern Bengal (Dacca district), their 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 (*'karandamukutas'*) of Dandi and Pingala definitely date them in the late or early Sena

period. These two Surya figures are characteristically representative of the fully developed type of such icons in Bengal, and many of the Sun images in the collection of the different local museums and those of eastern India conform to them in a greater or a lesser degree.[82]

11th cent. A.D. Surya image from Kotalipada:

The eleventh century alto-relivio image of Surya from Kotalipada (Faridpur) [83] is characteristically representative of the fully developed type of such icons in Bengal. The image stands in *samapadasthanaka* pose on a full-blown lotus issuing from *agni-kundas* on a low pedestal of the *saptaratha* type, which is carved on its face with the figures of seven horses. He is accompanied by Dandi and Pingala, standing like the central deity on lotus-flowers issuing from *agni-kundas* and holding their usual attributes. Mahasveta is standing on the lotus in front at the foot of Surya, with the right hand in the *abhayamudra* and the left hand in the *varadamudra*, below it, is the seated figure of Aruna. In front of both, Dandi and Pingala stand on the same lotus pedestal. Usa and Pratyusa are represented in the same gestures as found with Mahasveta. There are some additional iconographic features like the swan above the middle horse with its neck being clasped by Aruna, the *vanamala* and a cord tied in the middle of the chest into knots like a *channavīra* in place of the sacred thread. Three kneeling devotees are also carved on the portion of the pedestal in the centre. The whole slab, from the foot to the crown, represents the aureole; its edges emit flames. There is an umbrella at the apex; below it and on either side is seen the flying *Gandharvas*, each carrying a garland along with consorts with folded hands.

Developed image from Dacca:

The black stone image[84] from Sukhabaspur (Munsiganj, Dacca) shows the Sun god in his developed form standing against a throne background (Pl. 19a). The god stands erect in his car. He holds two lotuses in his two hands, which rise a little above his shoulders. His cloth descends down to the knee and a second piece of cloth is flatly hung in his front. The girdle, which holds his cloth tight round the waist is profusely ornamented and is further, decorated with artistic hangings. Two daggers are attached to the girdle on the two sides. The breast is protected by armor; the outlines of which intertwine to form a knot on the breast. The god wears elaborate necklaces and earrings and an artistically worked coronet bedecks his head. The leg of the god is covered by high footwear, the upper fringes of which are artistically carved.

Bearded, potbellied Pingala also in top boots stands on the right side of the god with pen and inkstand in his hands. Youthful Dandi, who is also shown in armour and top boots, stands to the left with a sword in his right hand and with the left resting on a staff. The two wives of Surya, [illegible] respectively on the left and the right side of the god. The goddess Mahasveta in miniature is placed in front of the Sun god. The two female Archers shooting arrows are also shown to the right and the left of Pingala and Danda. The half-bird Aruna is driving Sun's chariot of one wheel and seven Horses. Below Aruna is represented the upraised trunk of *makara* (a mythical animal), which Aruna holds in his right hand and which evidently is serving him in place of the gathered reins of the Seven Horses. The image is richly ornamented with *Kirttimukha* sign at the top. The centaur-upon-

elephant (*gaja-sardula*) design is exhibited on the two perpendicular sides of the piece, while above these are a pair of Vidyadharas.

Bare-footed Surya images

By the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., there was fairly a tendency in North India to carve Sun images with the features of the god prevalent in Southern India[85] and Bengal could not remain untouched as well. Three Sun images (Pl. 10b) from Gazole (Malda)[86] and one from Mangalbarirhat (Naogaon, Rajshahi. Pl. 11a), have the most conspicuous feature of the South Indian Sun-images. The Sun god is not wearing any covering or boot on his feet. However, Surya images with bare feet in eastern India are extremely rare. Evidently, the sculptor must have followed a South Indian text for these bootless images as the North Indian authorities prescribe deterrent punishment for such violation. Other feature of the Sun god such as lotuses and the seven horses of his chariot obviously [illegible] These examples too show the attempts to bring the synthesis of the two different traditions of the carving of the Surya-relieves prevalent in the north and south of the country. The cause of the difference between the characteristics of the Sun-relieves prevailing in northern and southern India, was, we feel, mainly regional. The factor of time and place was mainly responsible for their distinction.[87] The same conclusion can be drawn from the *Samba* and the *Bhavisya Purana*, which give minute details about the carving of the Surya images. The carving of the feet, even of its fingers and nails - is also prescribed and their respective measurements are given in detail. It may be interesting, to note that both these texts belong to northern India.

As is well known, most of the images of Surya are endowed with booted legs according to the accepted North Indian tradition. However, as already pointed above, a few images without the depiction of footwear has been discovered from Bengal, where the influence of the southern iconography is unmistakable.

Barefooted standing Surya figures from Malda:

A specimen, discovered from Gazolee[88] (Malda district) and dated in the 11th century A. D., shows the god as standing in *sampadasthanaka* pose on a lotus-pedestal, holding the stalks of lotus in his two upraised hands. The attendant couples, respectively to the proper right and proper left sides, are placed on a halo of low relief. Miniature figure of *Mahasveta* and Aruna are present. The most striking feature is that the neither the Sun god nor his attendants (Aruna, Dandi, Pingala, Samjna, Chaya, Mahasveta) wear any boots. In other respects, the image bears resemblance to those wearing boots.

4-armed bare-footed Copper Surya from Rajshahi:

One bare-footed copper Surya[89] in seated position has been discovered from Mangalbari, Dhamoirhat, Naogaon (Rajshahi). The deity is four-armed and seated in *sukhasana* on a lotus on a raised platform placed on the chariot. In his upper two hands, he holds two lotuses by the stalk. The lower right and left hands show the *varada* and *abhayamudra* respectively. Aruna sits behind the god, holding the reins of the seven horses carved below the lotus throne. Surya is clad in a *dhoti,* a double-stringed *upavita* and ornaments, which consist of earrings, necklace and bangles. His legs are bare and not covered by boots.

Introduction of eleven Adityas in Sun images

The *Dvadasadityas* also came to be worshipped as component parts of the solar religion.[90] Representation of eleven other Adityas along with the main deity became a feature of the Sun-image in the tenth-eleventh century A.D. The iconographical traits of these may be seen in brief. All *Dvadasadityas* have been given four hands [91] while the *Visvakarmasastra*[92] gives only two hands to Pusan and Visnu. However, in actual sculptural representation, variance may be noticed. The images of the Adityas are shown either on the sides of the Surya (usually set up behind the image of the Sun god), or eleven of them are carved on the *prabhavali* of the Surya-image, thus bringing the entire number to twelve. The worship of the twelve Adityas separately was not much in vogue.

Quite a number of images,[93] almost all from East Bengal, portray the god (Pl. 11b) accompanied by eleven Adityas, Pingala, Dandi three consorts, Aruna and the seven horses, though with minor differences among them. The Surya image from Pākilāra (Comilla)[94] of a later phase of the Pala art represents the eleven Adityas in miniature as standing in the background (Pl. 12a). In the black stone image[95] collected from the village of Kulkundi (Gosanihat, Faridpur) in the BNM (no.60) (originally discovered in the Sandwip Island of the Noakhali district), the eleven Ādityas are represented in miniature on either side within circles of foliage (Pl. 12b). Six of them are placed on the proper left and the remaining five of them are on the right. In addition to eleven Adityas, some other Brahmanical deities are also often shown in the Surya image. In an excellent image of Surya[96] found from the river Gumti in the hamlet of Pākilāra near Mainamati post office, the central deity is flanked by Ganesa as well (Pl. 13a). The Kulkundi Sun image depicts a potbellied, 2-armed and bearded standing figure holding a lotus-stalk in

the right hand and a *kamandalu* in the left. This figure has been identified as Agni.[97] No consort is depicted in the stone image from East Bengal[98] in the BNM (No.79). Dandi is represented without any sword in a fine image of the Sun god found at Rājair (Faridpur)[99] while the Sun image from Pākilāra depicts him with a sword in hand instead of a club. Most of the images show two arrow-shooting females, while two images represent four, two being on horse back.[100] In the stone image from East Bengal[101] (BNM No. 79), on either side of the god are represented four arrow-shooting females, two of whom are on the horseback and placed below the Adityas. The Kulkundi Sun image represents two equestrians below the sixth circle on either side, shooting the rays of the Sun in the form of shafts to the farthest regions of the universe. In a few of these specimens, the special scarf with floral designs passes by the front and looks like the *vanamala* of Visnu. In addition, in the same images the short *yajnopavita* is unusually carved on the *kancuka* or coat of mail covering the upper body. In the image from Rājair (Faridpur), the exquisitely carved *Kancuka* clings to the body of the god like a piece of finely embroidered muslin. The images from Vikrampur (Dacca)[102] as well as from the river Gumti in the village of Pākilāra are depicted with the umbrella sign at the top[103] while the Pākilāra Surya image represents the *Kirttimukha* above in the place of the parasol. The Kulkundi image bears a short inscription of the 12th year of the reign of King Govinda Chandra (1032 A.D.) of the Candra dynasty of East Bengal. Here the Sun god has been invoked as the 'maker of the day and the God of the persons afflicted with the *Takman* (skin-diseases).[104] The figures of twelve Adityas are also reported to have been discovered at Tribeni, District Hooghly.[105]

Introduction of eight *grahas* in Sun images

Representation of the other eight *grahas* standing along with the main deity also became a feature of the Sun-image in the tenth-eleventh century A.D. The images of the *grahas* are shown either on the sides of the Surya or on the *prabhavali* of the Surya-image, thus bringing the entire number to nine.

Surya images with eight *grahas* from Southwestern Bengal:

Four images,[106] all from the southwestern Bengal, represent the deity accompanied by the eight Grahas, four on either side (Pl. 14b). Pingala, Dandi, Aruna, the seven horses and the two arrow-shooting females are present but no consort is depicted, probably because of emphatic focus on the *graha* aspect of Surya. However, in one image of this category from Vikrampur (Dhaka) two consorts are depicted as well (Pl. 15a).

Seated Surya with seated *grahas* from Bairhatta (Dinajpur):

No doubt, the Sun worshippers of ancient Bengal preferred to see their god in standing posture but they were not very averse to the seated posture of the deity as well. An inscribed black stone image[107] of the Sun god (Pl. 16a) hailing from Bairhatta (Dinajpur) and belonging to the 12th century A. D. is interesting for it contains some novelties not present in the other group. It is a seated variety, which is comparatively rare. The pedestal inscription calls the god 'Surya' and describes him as 'remover of all diseases' (*'samasta-roganam hartta'*). The deity is seated in *'padmasana'* with flames issuing from his head and torso, hands (broken) holding the usual lotus flowers. He is accompanied by Pingala, Dandi and three consorts, all seated, the upper half of

Mahasveta being broken. The artist has faintly suggested the covering of the body and the legs. The chariot is drawn by seven horses. The deity is flanked on two sides by the two arrow-shooting females. Miniature figures of the eight other *Grahas* are also seated on the *prabhavali,* four on either side of the central deity. There are, on each side, an arrow and a crescent with a ball on it supported by a shaft. The symbols cannot be explained. The sculpture is a bit heavy and crude in its style and execution.

Sun images with other Brahmanical deities

Surya with Visnu, Ganesa & 2 figures from Dinajpur:

The image from Banshihari (W. Dinajpur)[108] in the SAGC shows the miniature figures of Visnu and Ganesa on the left side of the *prabhavali* and two defaced figures on the right (Pl. 13b). The deity is also usually attended by Pingala, Dandi, Aruna, the 7 horses, 2 arrow- shooting females and 2 consorts on either side.

Surya images from Vikrampur with the Triad, *Astadikapalas* & *Aṣṭanāgas*:

Two identical images[109] from Vikrampur (Dhaka) show the god with Pingala, Dandi, 3 consorts, Aruna and the 7 horses as usual. However, on the top of the *prabhavali* are seated Brahma, Mahesvara and Visnu (Pl. 14a). The Triad is flanked by the *Astadikpalas*[110] with their respective mounts, four on each side. On the two edges of the lower part of the slab are the *Astanagas*[111] in *anjali,* four on each side, with their half human and half snake-bodies *(sarpa-pucchākriti).* The inspiration for these two images might have come from the *Agni Purana* (51).

Surya with Adityas, garhas, Ganesa, Karttikeya, zodiacal signs, 6 males & 9 females:

The unique black stone image[112] (Pl. 20a) of the Sun deity worshipped in the house of the Gosvamis at Sonarang (Tangibadi, Dacca) is the most elaborate image of the Sun god in the eastern districts of Bengal, nay, in the whole of Bengal. The god is accompanied as usual by Pingala, Dandi, Aruna, 7 horses, 3 consorts and 2 arrow-shooting females. Except the *Kirttimukha* at the top of the *prabhavali* and the figures of the two flying *Vidyadharas* on either side of the head of the god, there is not a single other redundant detail over the whole sculpture. However, the number of miniature figures that crowd the piece makes up the want of decorative details. Below the *kirttimukha* are shown the eleven Adityas. Over the elaborate halo around the head of the god are six seated cross-legged two-armed male figures, one of whom is holding a noose by its two ends over his head. Their identity is not certain. The *Risis* are said to be companions of Surya but their number is seven. Do they represent the six seasons? Then on the right side of the *prabhavali* are the eight planets, twelve zodiacal signs and miniature figures of Karttikeya and Ganesa. To the left of the god, seven female figures are sitting cross-legged, one above the other, and two more closer to the Sun god, each one of them making various gestures by her two hands. Bhattashali allegedly took seven of them as representing the *Seven Mothers (Sapta matrika).* MIle de Mallmann thinks that they are the nine *Saktis* namely *Dīptā, Sukşmā, Jayā, Bhadrā, Vibhūti, Vimalā, Amoghā, Vidyutā and Sarvatomukhī* who are mentioned in connection with Sun worship in the *Īśānaśiva-gurudevapaddhati* [113] and this seems to be more logical.

III

Syncretic Images of the Sun god

On literary[114] as well as archaeological[115] evidences, it may be demonstrated that there has been occasional identifications of Surya with Siva, Brahma and Visnu and also with Buddha. The *Pancayatana puja* marks the climax of this trend. Clear connection of the individual members of the triad with the Sun god is demonstrated by several interesting image types of composite character that have been found in Bengal. These are mostly mediaeval in point of date and emphasize the absorption of the other cult deities in the Sun. We can refer now a few medieval sculpture of composite character.

11 Cent. A.D. 6-armed Surya –Brahma:

A beautiful stone Surya of the 11th century A.D[116] from Mahendra, Kushmandi (West Dinajpur), and now preserved in the collection of the V. R. S. Museum, presents an entirely new iconographic type of the divinity (Pl. 20b). The image agrees with the usual two-armed standing Surya figures of the 11th century A.D., as far as the attending figures are concerned. However, its prominent difference from them lies in the number of its hands. Four-armed standing and seated Surya images, though rare, are known from parts of Central and Eastern India; but this one is endowed with six hands. His natural hands hold the two full-blossomed lotuses as usual, while the four additional hands show the *varadamudra* (with lotus mark on the palm) and rosary (*aksamala)* on the right and *abhayamudra* (with *padmanka)* and water pot (*kamandalu)* on the left. The pointed slab with the *saptaratha* pedestal contains at the base the figures of the seven horses, drawing

the Sun god's chariot. The god is represented in *udicyavesa,* standing with his customary attendants. The head of the god is framed by a nimbus and the back slab, with a decorative pillar-like upright on each side, is sparsely ornamented. At the apex of the stele is a *kirttimukha,* spewing rosettes and creepers between *Gandharva* couples in the midst of cloud motif.

The nearest textual approximation to this type is the description given of Dhatri, the first in the list of the *Dvadasadityas* in the *Visvakarmavatara Sastra* as quoted by T. A. Gopinatha Rao.[117] The Dhatri aspect of the Sun god holds lotuses in its two natural hands, a lotus garland (or a fillet of lotus seeds) in its (back) right hand, and a water-vessel in its (back) left **(Dakşine pauşkarī mālā kare vāme kamaṇdaluh Padmāvyām śobhitakarā sā Dhātrī pratjamā smṛtā).* However, the increased number of its hands, its solar features and rosary and water-vessel (two of the well-known emblems of Brahma) in two of its hands bring it in line with the groups of syncretistic icons being noticed here. This image may be regarded as a composite representation of Brahma and Surya[118] and iconographically compared with the three-headed and eight-armed Chidambaram figure, probably combining in Surya the members of the orthodox Brahmanical triad, according to H. Krishna Sastri[119] or with the so-called Trimurtis found in Bundelkhand region.[120] S. K. Saraswati tentatively identified the 6-armed image with the 4-armed Dhatri which is not quite satisfactory.[121] Dhatri is, no doubt, one of the Adityas, but Dhata or Vidhata is also one of the synonyms of *Brahma Prajapati*, and both these characters appear to be symbolized in this interesting sculpture. The sculpture is remarkable, not only from the iconographic point of view, but also from the artistic one.

12th Cent. A.D. 3-headed 10-armed Marttanda-Bhairava from Manda :

A unique three-headed and ten-armed sculpture (Pl. 21b) datable in the 12th century A.D. has been discovered from the neighborhood of Manda (Rajshahi).[122] It is preserved in Rajshahi Museum in Bangladesh. Carved partly in the round, the deity stands *samapadasthanaka.* Of the three faces, the central one has a serene expression, but the right face is distinguished by its horrible appearance (*ghora*) with beard, three eyes, open mouth and protruding teeth. The face on the left side is also three-eyed. All the three heads have the *jatamukuta.* The two-eyed placid face resembles that of Surya, but the side faces, three-eyed, bearded and mustached, are like those of *Bhairava.*

From the broken off stumps, the image appears to have been origin-ally twelve-armed. Only six hands, three on each side at the back, have survived intact. Its front two pairs of hands are broken, but two full-blown lotuses with stalks are visible in the uppermost pair of hands. The three hands, which are intact on the right side, carry respectively from the top *sakti,* (spear) *trisula* (trident) and *khatvanga* (staff with a skull). The corresponding attributes in the three left hands are *nilotpala* (blue lotus), *damaru* (drum) and *sarpa* (snake). These are all characteristic attributes of Siva, and thus the Saivite character of the image is quite evident. On the screen behind the main image is depicted a mass of high flames issuing from heads and shoulders, which suggests its association with the *Bhairava* aspect of this god.

The back slab is pointed at the top and the base of the *saptaratha* pedestal is carved with the figures of seven horses. Above the horse in the middle, inserted within a wheel, is Aruna seated on the head of a *makara* between Usa and Pratyusa, standing respectively in *pratyalidha* and *alidha* and holding bows land arrows. In front of the deity

and on his *padmapitha,* stands Mahasveta between his legs, with the customary attributes in her two hands. To the right and left respectively are Rajni and the pen and inkpot bearer Pingala endowed with *jatamukuta,* and Niksubha and Dandi carrying a sword. The legs of each, excepting those of Aruna, arc encased in high boots. All the figures in the group are profusely adorned, and clad in *dhotis.* Over the chariot drawn by seven horses, the god in *dhoti* with raised folds and scarf wears sacred thread, top boots and jewellery. On the top are a *kirttimukha* and two flying Vidyadharas.

The image does not correspond to any known iconographic text. However, iconographically it conforms, largely, to the *dhyana-mantra of Marttanda* variety of Surya as quoted in the *Saradatilaka Tantra* *(*Saradatilaka, Patala* XIV.41.2). This variety of the Sun god is significantly referred to there as *Vallabhārdha*[123] that means, "Half of Siva (*Bhairava),*" thus pointing to the composite nature of the iconic concept.

K. C. Sarkar[124] tentatively identified the god with the 4-faced 8-armed *Marttanda-Bhairava* given in the *Saradatilaka Tantra*[125] and ever since it has been referred to as such. The present image actually may be taken as a four-faced one, the face at the back remaining uncarved. The text prescribes the *khatvanga, padma, cakra, sakti, pāśa, śṛṇī, aksamala* and *kapāla* as attributes in hands and requires all the four faces to be three eyed. Mlle de Mallmann drew our attention to two descriptions of a syncretic image of Surya and Siva, one from the *Agni Purana* and the other from the *Matsya Purana,* both with four faces and eight arms but differing from the *Saradatilaka Tantra* descriptions of attributes in hands.[126] The Bengal image does not follow any of these texts. Nor does it agree with the details of the few similar images discovered from elsewhere in India.[127]

In the Puranas, many *'stotras'* are mentioned identifying Siva with Surya.[128] In one entire chapter (73rd) of the *Agni Purana,* elaborate description has been given about the rituals of Sun worship. It is stated there that the worship of the Sun god should be performed by the recital of a *mantra*, named *Samharini*, in which Siva has been identified with Sun.[129]

In fact, this kind of worship of the Sun started because of the growing Tantricism, which was spreading fast everywhere in the country, especially in eastern India in the early medieval period. In the *Brihat-tantrasara* of the celebrated Krishnananda Agamavagisa, there is a section on *'Suryamantra'* where we come across the identifications of Brahma, Visnu and Siva with Sun god.[130] There is hardly any doubt, however, that Sun worship in its Tantric form laid particular emphasis on the identity of the Sun with Siva. Most probably, this attitude led to the development of the concept of the composite deity, *Marttanda-Bhairava* whose description, as is well-known, finds a prominent place in the *Sarada-tilakatantra.*[131] In the *Kalika Purana* also, Surya has been referred, at least once, as *Martanda-Bhairava.*[132] Therefore, the identification of Siva and Surya in the *Samharini mantra* of the *Agni Purana* and the figure of *Marttanda-Bhairava* clearly indicate the Tantric influence on Sun worship.

Four-armed bare-footed Surya-Visnu:

A black chlorite sculpture[133] (26.7 x 19 cm) of unrecorded provenance depicts the Sun god as four-armed, nimbate and seated cross-legged in *padmasana* (Pl. 21b). Aruna is similarly seated in front on a chariot, which is being drawn to left by seven horses carved in profile and placed upon a low platform. In his upper hands, the god carries a pair of lotuses. The lower right and left hands hold the *Sankha* and *cakra* respectively.

The god has the bare feet in front of which is seated Mahasveta. The ornaments worn by the god are plain and not engraved and his headgear is a low *kirita.* The example appears to be a syncretic icon, combining the elements of Surya with those of Visnu. It may be added that the combination of Surya with Visnu most probably led to the bootlessness of the god so as to be acceptable to the devotees of both the cult-gods.

10-armed Surya-Lokesvara:

Apart from Brahma, Visnu and Siva, reconciliation and rapprochement between rival gods and their creeds is also traceable from the direct association of Bodhisattva Lokesvara with other Hindu cult divinities including the Sun god.

A fragmentary (only the head and upper part of the torso with multiple arms, some intact and others broken, are preserved) relief[134] of medieval Bengal is said to be a striking combination of Surya and Lokesvara (Pl. 22a). Of the ten arms, six are gone. Of the remaining 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 has one head with the *jatamukuta.* There is a seated figure of the two-armed *Dhyani-Buddha Amitabha* in miniature on the crest of the image. J. N. Banerjea tentatively identified the image as a combined representation of Surya and Lokesvara.[135] However, the *Jatamukuta* as the headgear and *aksamala* in one of the hands of the deity deserve a much deeper dig for a more satisfactory identification. Both these iconographic elements are connected with the god Brahma, a fact that may tempt us to trace in this image the combination of Surya with the former, though it is very difficult to arrive at any definite conclusion in view of the loss of the attributes in other six hands. Anyway, if the identification of the sculpture as *Surya-Lokesvara* has to be accepted, it would be better to find in it the amalgamation

of Surya and *Jatamukuta-Lokesvara*. In this connection, it may be mentioned that one of the main forms of the Buddhist *Avalokitesvara-Lokantaha* in Bengal was *Simhanada-Lokesvara*, the healer of Leprosy[136] who took the form and features of Surya.

IV

Navagraha Worship

The worship of the Navagrahas was much in vogue in early Bengal. Yajnavalkya lays down certain details about the images of the Grahas. He says that figures of *Surya*, *Soma* (Moon), the son of the Earth *Mangal*a (Mars), the son of the *Soma Budha*, (Mercury), *Brihaspati* (Jupiter), *Sukra* (Venus), *Sani* (Saturn), *Rahu* and *Ketu* should be made of copper crystal, red sandal (wood), gold (in the case of *Budha* and *Brihaspati*), silver, iron, lead and bell-metal respectively. Their figures were also to be drawn on canvas in their respective colour or in *mandalas* made of scented paste (Sandal-wood-paste). Besides *Yajnavalkya-Smriti*, many other works namely the *Visnudharmottara Purana*, *Agni-Purana*, *Amsumadbhedagama*, *Silparatna*, *Rupamandana* etc. give different descriptions about their forms.

The iconographical representation of Navagrahas does not seem to follow canonical texts. If we compare a number of texts from the *VDP*, *Agni P.*, *Matsya P.*, *Silparatna*, *Manosollasa*, *Devatamurtiprakaranam*, *Isanasivagurudevapaddhati*, *Rupamandana*, *Nispannayogavali* etc. with some extant sculptures many of which were found from Bengal[137] it will be noticed that the latter not only depart from the former in most cases but also differ in some respects among themselves as well. According to these texts, the individual Grahas could be two-armed or four-armed and they could be with or

without mounts. The attributes in hands and the nature of mounts could also vary. However, the list of the divinities in all these sources consisted of the stereotyped nine Grahas, namely, *Ravi* (Sun), *Soma*, *Mangala*, *Budha*, *Brihaspati*, *Sukra, Sani*, *Rahu and Ketu* (the ascending and descending nodes of the moon), albeit occasionally with various synonyms. Except the first two and the last two of the names, the remaining ones are all planets.

Separate representations of any particular one of the nine planets are extremely rare. To date we know of only two, which are on two of the plaques of the plinth of the Paharpur temple: one is of the *Chandra* and the other is of *Brihaspati*. Debala Mitra noticed[137a] that the *Graha* images of Bengal and Bihar considerably accorded with the *Agni P.* in respect of attributes but she assigned the wide disagreements with regard to the mounts to different sources of inspirations.

Navagraha Panels:

Most of the Navagraha images show the Navagrahas in panels where the divinities are placed in a particular order. Over a dozen of them depict Ganesa accompanying the planets, placed at the beginning of the row. This peculiarity is seen in the Bengal sculptures alone. It is quite natural that the introduction of Ganesa, who as *Vighnantaka* wields power of putting obstacles and removing them, into the group, was to strengthen the corporate cult to avert evils and obtain success. However, the iconographic texts seem to be silent about this alliance of the *Grahas* with *Ganesa*, against the fact that the latter was specifically directed to accompany the group of the *Matrikas*.

The fine 11 century A.D. Navagraha slab[138] (17" X 3'3") in black chlorite stone from Kankandighi under the Mathurapur P.S. of the Diamond Harbour sub-division (Khari, 24-Parganas) is a very good representative specimen of the group-presentation (Pl. 23a). In it, the images of the nine planets, as prescribed by the Hindu astrology, with that of Ganesa, are elegantly carved in relief. They are standing in graceful pose in a row on lotus pedestals, with Ganesa at the beginning. Each of the figures has over the head an oval halo with lotus border and a snake-head-like design between them, and wears a sacred thread and a short skirt tied round the waist by a girdle. Their other peculiarities from the left are noted below.

1. *Ganesa* stands in *abhanga* pose, wears a *jatamukuta*, a pair of bracelets of beads, and holds in his right hand a rosary and in his left a battle-axe.
2. *Ravi* stands in *samabhanga* attitude, wears a *kiritamukuta*, a necklace, a pair of bracelets and a *Vanamala* hanging up to the knees, and holds, as usual, in his either hand a lotus stalk terminating in two lotuses, just above the shoulders.
3. *Soma* stands in *abhanga* attitude, wears a *Kiritamukuta*, a necklace, a pair of bracelets, a pair of armlets and holds a rosary in the right hand and a *Kamandalu* in the left.
4. *Mangala* stands in the same pose as the above image, wears a *Kiritamukuta* and other ornaments like the image of the moon and holds a rosary in the right hand and a spear in the left.
5. *Budha* stands in *Tribhanga* attitude with his left leg half bent, wears a peculiar headdress and other ornaments as in the above two images and holds with his two hands an arrow. Along the left side is a big bow, placed on his shoulder, extending up

to his feet.

6: *Brihaspati*, a pot-bellied figure with long beard, stands in *abhanga* pose, wears a *Jatamukuta* and other ornaments like *Budha,* and holds a rosary in the right hand and a *Kamandalu* in the left.

7. *Sukra* stands in *abhanga* attitude, wears a *Kiritamukuta* and other ornaments as in the above images, and holds in his right hand a rosary and in the left a *Kamandalu.*

8. *Sani* stands in a peculiar attitude, owing to his paralytic affection caused by a curse, wears a *kiritamukuta* and other ornaments like *Sukra,* and holds a *rosary* in his right hand and a staff his left.

9. *Rahu*, the big-mouthed figure has only the upper part of a human body. He is seated on a chariot, and wears a headdress like modern tiara and other ornaments as in the above images, has a pair of big moustaches, and holds with his two hands an unfolded book. He has a small eye on the forehead and a hood of snakes over the *mukuta.*

10. *Ketu* is in a human figure, in *abhanga* attitude with the lower part like a serpent tail. He wears a *mukuta*-like tiara and other ornaments as in the body of *Rahu*, has a hood of snakeheads over the *mukuta,* and holds a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left.

Below the lotus, on which the above images of the planets stand are carved in low relief, the stems and leaves of the lotus plant in scrolls, with the main stem in the centre and the *vahanas* (mounts) of the planets within and below them. Among the *vahanas,* the following are from the left, within the stems and leaves of the lotus plant: A lion, swan, boar, deer, elephant, jackal, buffalo, fish, vulture, and the following are beneath them: a mouse, horse, ram, peacock, dog, swan, frog, ass and chariot. Over the halos of the

images of the planets, there is a border in relief with three decorative designs, one in the centre and two on the two sides like *Makara* heads, placed back to back. Upon that, on the upper and on a portion of the side edges or the slab are depicted flames of fire. The beautifully designed long rectangular slab with the main figures inset in very high relief, seems to show that the whole composition was itself an 'object for regular worship in times of *graha-yaga* and not a 'door-piece' (pl. XXXI, fig. 2).[139] Similar Navagraha panels (but without the stems and lotus plant in scrolls in the pedestal) have been discovered in the districts of West Dinajpur,[140] Rajshahi,[141] Malda,[142] and Birbhum[143] Those from Rajshahi and Madnabati are dated in the 11th and 12th century respectively.

In one panel from North Bengal in the AMC, [144] very unusually Ganesa and the *Grahas* begin their order from the proper left. The panel[145] from Akhilya (Rajshahi) in the BNM (No. 67.41) shows additional miniature figures of the Hindu Triad and eight other divinities, probably the *Dikpalas*, on the upper part of the slab (Pl. 24b). One fragmentary panel in the SAGC[146] shows Ganesa, Ravi and Soma, but the *vahanas* are not represented.

A few panels[147] show the Navagrahas standing without the presence of Ganesa or the *vahanas* (Pl. 24a). Two other fragments[148] may belong to this type, which does not show the *vahanas*, and the Ganesa-ends are broken. One of these last two specimens (the sandstone panel in the BNM) appears to be of late Gupta period and nearer in date to the IMC fragmentary specimen from Sarnath.[149]

In most of the Navagraha slabs hitherto discovered, all the images of the planets are found standing side by side, though there are a few where they are depicted in seated postures. The sandstone panel in the SAGC[150] broken into two pieces, seemed to be a

door lintel from some shrine. It shows the Navagrahas in seated position as in the case of the most of the Graha-panels from Orissa. Ganesa is absent and no *vahana* is represented.

Individual Grahas:

The separate and detached figures of the Navagrahas are very rare throughout India with the exception of the Sun god. The reason may be attributed to the fact that they were not independently worshipped, as even now the Hindus do not worship separately under the belief that this may offend the other planets. As we know, only two detached images of the planets have been discovered up until now from Bengal. These are Nos. 60 and 61 on the basement of the Paharpur temple and belong to the seventh or 8th Century A.D., the period of the second group of the stone relieves at Paharpur.

On the western wall of the main shrine at Paharpur is depicted a male[151] who is standing quite erect between two plantain trees and holding a water pot (*kamandalu*) in the left hand, which hangs down, and a rosary (*aksamala*) in the right that is raised up. He wears a *'jatamukuta,'* very artistically arranged, and no ornaments at all; a prominent crescent (*ardhacandra, indukalā*) mark appears over the crown of matted locks. The only god wearing a crescent on the head is the god Siva and on this ground only R. D. Banerji described the image as 'Siva conceived as *Somanatha*, the lord of the moon'[151] and K. N. Dikshit too described it as that of *Siva-Candrasekhara.*[152] However, S. K. Saraswati pointed out the absence of two of Siva's invariable cognizance such as the *urdhvalinga* ('penis erectus') and the third eye vertically placed on his forehead. He referred to a *dhyana* in the *Agni Purana*[153] and correctly identified the image as that of *Candra* (moon-god), the second planet.[154]

Next to the image of Candra at Paharpur, is another sculpture[155] on the western wall representing a slightly pot-bellied two-armed male figure standing erect on a plain *triratha* pedestal with a kneeling devotee with folded hands to his right, wearing a *'jatamukuta'* and the dress of a Brahmanical sage. He has two hands; in the left, raised to shoulders, he holds a manuscript *(pustaka)* and the right, disposed in *varada,* exhibits a rosary *(aksamala)*. His hair is carefully arranged upward with a knot in the middle. He wears a scarf or a skin, tied to the waist by string girdle, and an *uttariya* is seen covering a part of the body. No ornaments bedeck his person. A devotee kneels on the right in *anjali*. Two trees, perhaps plantain trees, appear on two sides in the background and an arch with the facade decorated with lotus rosettes is seen above his head.

Both R. D. Banerji[156] and K. N. Dikshit[157] described it as a representation of the god Brahma. It seems that the manuscript and the rosary as attributes were responsible for such description. It was S. K. Saraswati again who, in the absence of additional faces and hands, did not agree to such identification and correctly identified it as the fifth planet *Brihaspati* after comparing it with his characterization in the *'Visnudharmottara'*. The text (111,69.3) lays down that *'Brihaspati*, the preceptor of the gods, should be made of a complexion like that of molten gold and two-armed, a manuscript and a rosary being placed in his two hands' (*..dvibhujasca brhaspatih pustakamcaksamalanca karayostasya karayet //*). This description, however, does not tally with the *'Agni Purana'* account of *Brihaspati*.

A fragmented black stone icon (100 x 59 cms.) from Kandaran (Malda Dist.) and now in the Malda Museum[158] shows a male figure (Pl. 26b) standing on lotus pedestal in a slight *abhanga* posture. The slightly bent proper left leg comes a bit forward, while the

proper left leg kept behind goes up until it meets the beautiful bend near the waist. The proper left hand clings to the waist and carries a *kamandalu*. Just above the elbow, we find a *keyura* or armlet. The proper right hand is bent at the elbow with the open palm facing the devotee and a rosary is placed between the palm and the thumb. The figure wears a fine cloth, which covers the region between the knees and the waist. The torso also carries shallow indented lines starting from the proper right and going upwards to the left suggesting *uttariya*. The waistband of the figure carries floral decorations with a full-blown flower at the centre.

On two sides of the standing figure, we come across pairs of plantain trees. The back-slab of this fragmented figure shows a lotus petal rim and rows of pearl decorations. It is interesting to note that the pedestal of this sculpture shows two full-blown lotuses on two sides, lotus stalks and foliage all in shallow engraved lines. Iconographically this figure would be identified as that of *Brihaspati*. The figure is broken above. On the grounds of modeling and general appearance, this piece seems to be a product of second half of 11th century.

VI

Images of Revanta

Revanta is one of the sons of Surya, some of the others being Yama, the twin Asvins, Vaivasvata Manu, Savarni Manu and Sani. According to the Puranas, he is very much the principal son of the Sun god. It appears that people preferred to worship mostly the worship of Revanta, the son begotten on Samjna and therefore, he is found depicted more by the sculptors than others are.

The chapter on *Pratima-laksana* in *Brihat-samhita* lays down that 'Revanta riding on horse back is (shown) engaged with his companions in the sport of hunting' *('revanto śvāruḍha mṛgayākriḍādi parivārah').*[159] The *VDP* description is more meager which states that 'the Lord Revanta should be like Surya, (and) on the back of a horse' *('pṛṣthe śce Sūryavatkāryo revantaśca tathā prabhuh')*.[160]

The *Markandeya Purana* and the *Kalika Purana* throw some more light on this deity. According to the former, Revanta delivers people from the natural calamities like the terrors of forests, great conflagrations, apprehended invasion or loot by enemies and robbers and bestows upon his worshippers welfare, riches, happiness, kingdom, health, fame and advancement.[161] *Kalika Purana*[162] lays down that the image of Revanta should be placed on a white horse with his hair tied up by a cloth. The deity should be dressed in a coat of mail and should carry a sword in his right hand and a whip in the left. It also recommends his worship by kings and says that he should be worshipped in either an image, or a water-vessel, at the gates according to the rites of Sun worship (Ch.V. 49). The *Bhavisya Purana* says, *"Revanto nama yo-rkasya rupenarkasamah sutah"*.[163] Images of Revanta were previously taken as *Kalki.*[164] It was B. B. Bidyavinod who for the first time made his correct identification. N. K. Bhattashali and N. N. Sanyal and J. N. Banerjea further elaborated on the iconography of him.[165]

The worship of Revanta seems to have been much in vogue in Eastern India. Raghunandana quotes a passage from the '*Kalpataru*', which took it from the *'Brahma Purana'*, and records the worship of Revanta with pomp and ceremony.[166] A few images of this god have been discovered in Bengal. These images largely agree among themselves. The equestrian deity is invariably two-armed and always surrounded by

attendants one of whom holds a parasol over the head of the god. The horse is caparisoned and the legs, armour and ornaments of Revanta are exactly like those of his father. It appears from the better-preserved specimens that the sculptors had different aspects of the god to emphasize upon and the extant images may at least be divided into two types.

As many as nine images representing Revanta have been found in different parts of Bengal. From among these nine images, four are from *Pundravardhana* (three from Dinajpur and one from Malda) and one each from *Radha* (Birbhum), *Vanga* (Bajrayogini, Dacca), *Samatata* (Badkamta, Comilla) and *Chandradvip*a (Chancharipasa, Bakarganj. Pl. 26a).

The earliest sculpture of Revanta in Bengal, dated to the 9th century A.D. and made of gray sandstone, has been found from Shadea, Dinajpur that once formed a part of ancient *Varendra*. The example[167] agrees in essentials with the Itahar (Dinajpur) image of Revanta detailed below. However, all the accompanying figures except that of the umbrella-bearer are absent. The second image[168] of Revanta (Pl. 25a) belonging to the 10th cent. A.D. comes from Sonapur, Itahar of the same Dinajpur District. In this relief, Revanta is represented on a richly caparisoned horse. In his right hand, he holds against the chest a drinking-vessel (*pan-patra*) and the reins (*rasmi)* of the horse in the left. The deity wears a *dhoti* as well as ornaments; his right leg is encased in a high boot while the left is invisible. Under his right leg, a dog is seen running along with the horse that tramples on a boar with the left foreleg. Over his head is a high umbrella held by an attendant from behind, which thus indicates his royal rank. There are also four other attendants, three of them armed, and the fourth holding a cloth bag with his hand dipped

into it. In the rounded base there is, between two trees, a frieze of three dancing musicians, a female dancer with her right hand in the *abhayamudra*, an archer and a boar. The scene obviously depicts a royal hunting (*mrigaya)* with usual revelries.

The third icon[169] of Revanta (Pl. 25b) carved in black basalt again comes from another area (Ghatnagar) of the Dinajpur District. This 11th century A.D. sculpture presents him in a very interesting manner. On a double lotus, the booted god rides on horseback with his feet in the stirrups, a whip (*kasa)* in his right hand, reins of the horse in his left and a parasol held up by an assistant over his head. A broad-headed sword hangs on his right. The deity is apparently in the midst of two robbers ready to attack him. In front of the god, stands the first robber who has seized the horse by the head and is flourishing a dagger in his right hand. Behind him and his mount is a tree on which is the other robber with a dagger in hand. Just above the head of the horse is represented a dwelling cottage and a couple seated inside. The pedestal shows a seated woman cutting a fish with a fish knife (*banti*) and behind her is a man with a sword and a shield approaching as if to lay hands on her. In the base are also the figures of a woman in *atibhanga* standing on a lotus with an indistinct object in her hand and a kneeling worshipper. Thus, the figure of Revanta in this composition closely conforms to his description in the *Kalika Purana* (85.46-49), but the surrounding scene differs from the Bihar images, which seem to follow the *Brihat-samhita*. The depiction of the peaceful domestic scene as well as perils of life on the same slab was, perhaps, an attempt to delineate the power of the god who, according to the *Markandeya Purana*, looks over the safety of his worshippers from the menace of thieves and robbers. Incidentally, it may be noted that the motif of a woman cutting a fish also occurs in the pedestal of the *Hariti*

image housed in the Bangladesh National Museum. In view of this, the above-mentioned female standing in *atibhanga* seems to be the representation of *Hariti*, wife of *Kubera* whose attendants are the *Guhyakas*. The confusion about the kingship over the *Guhyakas* between *Kubera* and Revanta or the urge for prayer to the mother-goddess *Hariti* who is the patroness as well as the stealer of children, for protection of offspring against danger, might have contributed to such representation.

A black stone idol of the divinity[170] datable to the 10th -11th century A.D. has been recovered from Badkamta (ancient *Karmanta*) in the present Comilla district (Bangladesh). It represents the hunting episode with more realistic details. To the left of the equestrian booted deity, (seen underneath the belly of the horse) an archer, beside who stands a dog, has shot an arrow that has struck a boar fleeing ahead. Another smaller boar is represented in front of the wounded one. Below Revanta is a man with a sword in his right hand. To his left stands a woman, perhaps his wife, with a frolicsome child at her feet. In the front panel are seven women bearing flowers and fruits, and water in a pitcher. Below them, stand four male attendants, two of them with swords in their hands, the third a club, and the fourth a hawk. The presence of so many men, women and children with *naivedyas* indicates Revanta's role as the protector of people from the terror or natural calamities that involved nearly all sections of the society.

The artists of the Pala period followed the North Indian tradition in making the images of Revanta in Bihar and Bengal. However, they did not show the god flanked by *Danda* and *Pingala* and/or with the *Navagrahas* at the top as found in the early medieval Revanta icons of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Even the artists of Bihar and those of Bengal did not always agree with one another about the details of

representation. Contrary to the Revanta images from Bihar that face to the proper right,[171] all the Bengal images face to the proper left. Bihar's stray depictions of a few things such as a lotus in the left hand of the god, *chamara* and *kalasa* in the umbrella-bearer's hands and pouring of wine by a female attendant into the cup held by the god[172] are not found in any of the Revanta-images from Bengal. Bengal's uniqueness also lies in representing the god as the protector of his worshippers from the dangers of the thieves and robbers as illustrated in the Ghatnagar image, which happens to be the only sculpture in the whole of India with such a distinctive feature. Frequent danger of armed robbery faced by the people with enormous riches most probably gave impetus for such a representation as laid down in the *Skanda Purana.*[173]

Constant representation of the wild boar as a game in the image of Revanta engaged in the sport of hunting is quite significant.[174] For an equestrian offspring of the mighty Sun god, it would have been natural to go for big game hunting like lion, tiger, etc. Besides, hunting a wild pig was neither theologically sanctified nor would it be in consonance with the concept of *mrigaya.* On the contrary, a boar symbolism could have been fruitfully appropriated to highlight the inner eschatology of the boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The incidence of a boar with the Revanta icon, therefore, suggests an idea other than those underpinning Hindu iconographic symbolism. Two things can be inferred on logical grounds, one being related to the iconology of the particular animal symbolism, and the other indicating the socially positioned expression of a non-Aryan or a lower strata Aryan deity in the Hindu pantheon. Revanta, being iconically proffered as a deity addressed to the protection and well-being of his devotees, has had a social statement uttered through the particular animal symbolism. The pig itself is value-neutral

except that it is a species of a quadruped genus, but the 'import' as a symbol hints at the particular layer of the social strata, which is subsisting on cultivation and hence craves the indulgence of a protective deity to save the means of subsistence from predators. In addition, partly integral to this argument is the aspect of social mobility. Revanta, as a respectable member of Hindu pantheon, would have transcended the social segmentation of the Brahmanic society. However, Revanta being avowedly tied with the populist tier of the Indian society would unavoidably suggest that in the process of Hinduisation, a non-Hindu theological universe had been integrated through the dynamics of social mobility. A cult outside the stereotypes of Hindu liturgy could have elevated in the larger social movement for adoption and assimilation to the level of the lower rung of the *varnasrama* system only. In spite of Hindu internalization of the non-Hindu, Revanta perhaps was not attributed with the benefits of the status mobility corresponding to the social mobility that widened the sphere of aryanization with the erstwhile non-Aryan milieu.

VI

Attendants of Sun god

Besides Revanta, images of the attendants of Surya have also come to be known. However, it is not certain whether they were meant for the purpose of worship.

Pingala:

One bronze image[175] of Pingala (Pl. 27a) belonging to the12th Century A.D. is found in the Varendra Research Musem, Rajshahi. The bearded and pot-bellied figure stands in *tribhanga* on a double lotus. He holds a pen in its right hand and an inkpot in the left. The figure is clad in a *dhoti,* which is secured around the waist by a cloth band. It

also wears an *upavita* and *uttariya* His legs are encased in high boots and a scarf is thrown over the two arms. The hair is piled high at the back of the head and secured by a jeweled band decorated with five upright plaques. The ornaments consist of a pair of round earrings, *keyuras and* bangles.

Dandi:

An image[176] of Dandi (Pl. 27b) made of bronze and belonging to the 12th century A.D. is also housed in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi. The figure stands in *tribhanga* as in the preceding example on a double lotus with the palm of right hand bent inwards and supported against the chest by means of a strut. The left hand holds a sword with its point raised upwards. The figure is clad in a *dhoti*, which is secured round the waist by a jeweled band. He wears round earrings, armlets, bangles, a tall crown and a headband. The legs are encased in high boots.

Thus, the solar iconography of early Bengal largely confirms the literary traditions of the solar cult as represented in the Vedic, the Epic and the Puranic records and other Indian texts. Interestingly, no punch-marked nor cast-coins showing Sun-disc on a pedestal have yet been discovered in Bengal. It appears that the iconic representation of Surya in ancient Vanga preceded its worship in symbolic form as was in vogue in different parts of India. The anthropomorphic representation of the Sun god even in the pre-Gupta period have been visualized in three forms: a celestial winged bird *Garutman*, a god riding a chariot drawn by horses and the god in tunic and boots under the Magian impact. The concept of Surya pillar was probably known to Bengali artists in the 3rd/ 4th century A.D. In the innovatory process, later Sun-images show slow but

steady removal of the Northerner's dress with the waist-girdle) and the booted feet being retained in all the cases. However, bare-footed Surya was also not unknown. 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. Neither in the pre-Gupta nor in the Gupta period was Surya ever seen as a accessory figure. During the last two or three centuries of the so-called Hindu rule, Surya was not only represented as combining with other gods but also shown as an accompanying figure of the major cult-gods.

Notes and References

1. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 51.
2. *Coins of Ancient India*, (Rep.), Varanasi, 1963, p. 43.
3. Allan, J., '*Coins of Ancient India*'; cf. some indigenous coins of Taxila.
4. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 53.
5. *CBI*, p. 41.
6. The image from Bankura is now housed in Vangiya Sahitya Parishad, Bisnupur (Bankura).
7. The stone Surya image from Gangasagar of 24-Parganas, at the Museum of Art, Philadelphia; No.27.9.1; St. Kramarisch, *Indian Sculptures in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, pp. 90-91, pls. 24, 25.
8. The sculpture from Nahapara, (Dhaka) BNM No. 62 shows the god with *Karandamukuta*, as laid down by *Amsumadbhadgama* and *Suprabhedagama*.
9. Malda Mus. Cat. RSR 15, 16, 27.
10. Terracotta, Bogra, MHM no.1138; terracotta, Chandraketugarh, AMC no. T6836;

stone, Tithi (Dinajpur), AMC no. 168 and stone, Bengal, in AMC.

11. In the *Bhav. P.,* he is called *Agni* (*IBBS,* p. 164) and in the *Mat. P.,* (VI), *dhata* (261.6a).

12. *IBBS*, p.151.

13. *EHI,* 1(2), p. 313; *DHI,* p. 432, 436 etc; *HB-I,* p. 457; *ESB*, P. 25; *ISPMA*, p. 90.

14. East Bengal, BNM no. 79; Rampal (Dhaka), BNM no.68.65; Kulkundi (Faridpur), BNM no. 60.

15. Black stone image from Tithi (Dinajpur); AMC no. 168.

16. *VRS-AR,* 1929-30, p. 10.

18. *IBBS,* pp. 169, 171, 172.

19. Quoted by N.N. Vasu, *The Archeological Survey of Mayurabhanja*, vol. I, Mayurabhanja State, 1911; EHI, vol. I, pt. II, p. 302.

20. *MASI,* no. 55, plates LVII. a, b.

21. Surya images from Vikrampur (Dhaka) BNM Nos. 61 and 66.31 and from Daharpara (Faridpur), BSP No.429; *BSP- Cat.*, pp.76-77, pl. XVII.

22. *IA*, 1925, p. 170.

23. The terracotta Surya image from Chandraketugarh (24-Parganasas), AMC No. T6838;

IA-Rev. 1955-56, p. 62, pl. LXXII-b; *LK*, No.6, 1959, p. 46; *Modern Review*, 1956.

24. The stone Surya image from Satagovindapur (Dinajpur), BNM No.70.558; *BSHI*, p. 188, pl. 160.

25. *JISOA*, pp. 74-75.

26. *JUPHS.*, 1958, Vol. VI, part II, p. 49.

27. *DHI,* p. 437.

28. *JRAS*, 1917, p. 599.

29. MacDonnell, A.A., 'The development of early Hindu Icons', *JRAS*, 1917, P. 599.

30. *JRAS*, 1918, p. 523.

31. III, 67. 9b.

32. Basu, Sakti Kali, *Development of Iconography in Pre-Gupta Vanga*, Calcutta, 2004, p.74, fig. 20.

33. *RV*, 1.164.46.

34. Coomaraswami, A.K., *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Boston, 1927, pl. V. no. 16; Agarwala, V. S., *Studies in Indian Art,* Varanasi, 1965, pls. IX, X & XI; Biswas, S.S., *Terracotta Art of Bengal*, Delhi, 1981, p.79, pl. (a).

35. Coomaraswami, *op. cit.*, pl. XII. no. 41, pl. XVI, no. 55.

36. AMC No. T6838; Indian Archaeology - A Review, 1955- 56 pl. LXXIIb; *Modern Review*, April, 1956; P.C. Dasgupta, 'Early Terracotta from Chandraketugarh', *Lalitkala* No.6 Oct. 1959, pp. 45-52; Basu, *op. cit.* p. 80.

37. *RV*, 1.115, 3; 7.60.3; 7.63.2.

38. Coomaraswami, *op. cit.*, p.67, fig. 103.

39. Ibid, p. 67, fig. 24.

40. *ASIAR*, III, p. 97.

41. *RV*, I.115.3; X.37.3, 49.7; V.29.5, V.45.9; IV.13.3.

42. Quoted by Cumont, F., *The Mysteries of Mithra*, New York, 1956, p. 2.

43. *DHI*, pp. 256-59.

44. *KKBI*, pp. 45-46, Sl. No. 8; Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

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

46. *KKBI,* pp. 55-56, Sl. N0. 39, pl. XXXIII, fig. 37A; Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 87)

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

48. *KKBI*, pp. 45, Sl. No. 8, pl. XIX, fig. 8A; Basu, *op., cit.*, p. 87.

49. Basu, *op. cit.*, p. 88, fig. 23.

50. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 68.

51. *SVRM*, p.236, pl.232.; *ESB,* p. 12; *AEI,* pp. 11,21,61,97, pl. 13; *DHI,* p. 435; *HB-I,* pp. 521-22.

52. *AR.-VRS.* 1934-35. p.13, fig. 1; *SVRM,* p. 254, pl. 243; *HB-I. pp.* 521-22; *DHI,* p.435; *ESB, P.*12, fig. I; *AEI*, pp. 11, 21. pl. 14.

53. J. N. Banerjea wrongly stated the Niyamatpur image to be with bare feet. The high boots reaching just god below the knees are very clear. *Cf. HB-I,* p. 456.

54. *ESB,* pp. 12-13; *HB*-I, p. 521.

55. *DHI,* p. 435; *HB-I*, p. 456.

56. *ESB*, p. 13.

57. *BSHI*, p. 186-187.

58. Sircar, D. C., *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, University of Calcutta, 1942, p. 372.

59. *MRSCB*, p. 275, Pl. *V.* Fig. 2.

60. *JISOA,* XVI, p. 62.

61. *ESB*, p.12; *JISOA*, XVI, pp. 80-81; *SWAI-S*, pp. 303-304.

62. *DHI*, pl. XXVIII, fig. 4.

63. *AR-VRS,* 1926-27. pp. 2-3, fig. I; E*SB,* pp. 21-22, fig- 5; *DHI,* pp. 435.36; *HB-I,* p. 523; *AEI,* pp. 61, 62, 65, 68, pl. 106; *SAB,* pp.61, 63-64, fig. 6; *SVRM*, p. 248-249, pl.

241; *SWAI*-S, p. 303.

64. *EHI*, Vol. I, pt. II, p.313, pl. LXXXVIII, fig. 2.

65. There is a Vedic myth, which tells us that one wheel of the chariot of the Sun god was taken by Indra. Therefore, his chariot is always shown with only one wheel.

66. *ESB*, p. 30.

67. The *Bhumara Surya* carved inside a *caitya* -window panel of the Siva temple at Bhumara has been described by R. D. Banerjee thus: The god is standing and has two hands. There is a plain halo behind his head and he wears a tall cylindrical headdress. In his left hand he holds a lotus while his right hand is damaged (it must also have held a lotus). The god wears long boots of soft leather and long coat tied at the waist with a sash. He is attended by two men who wear peculiarly long Scythian coats tied with a belt and long boots. They also wear tall pointed conical caps like the Scythians. The figure on the right holds a lance or spear in his right hand while that on the left holds a lotus. The horses of the Sun god either seven or four in number are absent). *(M.A.S.I., No. 16 (The temple of Siva at Bhumara), p.13, pl. XIVa; *JISOA*, p. 62).

68. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 80.

69. *ESB*, p. 22.

70. *DHI*, p. 436; *ESB*, p. 30.

71. *DHI*, pp. 22, 436.

72. *ESB*, p. 30; *JISOA*, p. 81; *IBBS*, p.172.

73. *IBBS*, p. 172.

74. *ESB*, pp. 31-32.

75. *HB*-I, pl. XXX. fig. 76, LXVIII, fig. 166 etc; Banerjee, R.D., *Eastern School of Mediaeval Sculpture*; French, J.C., *Art of the Pala Empire of Bengal.*

76. *BSHI*, pp. 188-189, pl. 161.

77. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 76.

78. Dikshit, K.N., Excavations at Paharpur, Delhi, 1938, p. 60.

79. Dasgupta, Subrata Kumar, 'History of the Surya Image in Bengal, *Folklore*, December 1967, p. 424.

80. *HB-I,* p.457; *JISOA*, pp. 81-82; St. Kramrisch, *Rupam*, Vol. 40.

81. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 82.

82. Ibid.

83. *Vangiya Sahitya Parisad Catalogue,* 76-77, PI. XVII; *HB-I*, p. 457.

84. *IBBS*, pp.169-170, pl. LXVIII; *BSHI*, pp.185-186.

85. *SWAI-P*, p. 100.

86. Malda Museum Nos. RSR-15, 16, 27; Bhattacharya, Malay Sankar, *Art in Stone: A Catalogue of Sculptures in Malda Museum*, Malda, 1982, pp. 18-20.

87. *SWAI-P*, p. 104.

88. Bhattacharya, M. S., *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

89. VRM no. 734; *AR-VRS,* 1927-28, p. 3, fig. 3; SVRM, p.250, pl.242; *BSHI*, p.193.

90. Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 350.

91. *EHI*, Vol. I, pt. II, p. 310.

92. Quoted by Rao, *EHI*, pp. 310-11.

93. (1) Vikrampur (Dhaka) BNM, *IBBS*, pp.170, 3A(iii)a/2; (2) Vikrampur (Dhaka) BNM no.75, *IBBS*, pp.170-71, 3A (iii)a/4; (3); Nahapara (Dhaka), BNM No. 80, *IBBS*, p.

170, 3A (iii)a/3; (4) Ārial (near Nahapara), *IBBS*, p. 170; (5) Rajair (Faridpur), BNM no.77; *IBBS*, p.173.3, pl. LXI.a; (6) East Bengal, BNM, *BSHI,* p.363; (7) East Bengal, BNM, *BSHI*, p.363; (8) East Bengal, BNM, *BSHI*, p.363; (9) Pakilara (Comilla); B.C. Law Volume II, pp. 219, 231, pl. XIXb; (10) Comilla dist., *IBBS*, p.173, No. 4; (11) Kulkundi (Faridpur), BNM No. 60, Bhattashali, N. K., *EI*, Vol. XXVII, 1947-48, p. 25, plate opposite p. 25; *HB*-I, pl. LXX, 169; *BSHI* 190, pl. 165.

94. Ramachandran, T. N, 'Recent Archaeological Discoveries along the Maināmatī and Lalmai Ranges, Tippera District, East Bengal', *B.C. Law Volume*, Part II, Poona, 1946. p. 219.

95. Bhattashali, N. K., *EI*., Vol. XXVII, 1947-48, p. 25, plate opposite p. 25; *HB*-I, pl. LXX, 169; *BSHI*, p. 190, pl. 165.

96. Ramachandran, *op. cit*., p. 219.

97. *BSHI,* p. 190.

98. *BSHI*, p. 190.

99. IBBS, p. 173.

100. In the Surya image (2nd/1st cent. B.C.)from Bhaja the god is found escorted by figures on horseback, both male and female, one of which is provided with some kind of stirrups. *JISOA*, XVI, p. 54.

101. *BSHI*, p. 190.

102. *IBBS,* p. 170, 3A (iii) a/2.

103. The earliest representation of an umbrella spread is found over the nimbus behind the Bodh-Gaya Surya image of first cent. B.C., *JISOA*, XVI, p.53.

104. Bhattashali, N.K. (Ed.), *EI.* Vol. 27 1947-48, pp. 25-26. The alternative translation

of the first line would be "(This is the image of) of the Sun god, caused to be made by the illustrious Lakşmīdīna. Sircar, D.C., *Bhāratavarşa*, Chaitra, 1348 B.S., p. 397.

105. *ASIAR*, 1930-34, p. 37.

106. *BSHI*, p.189; Stone, Nanigram (Hooghly), AMC No.31; Stone, Amanpur (Midnapore); Stone, Siddha (Midnapore); Stone, Dalmi (Purulia), *AMTSI*, II, p.41, pl. 291.

107. IMC No. 8601, A16241; *ASIAR*, 1930-34, pp. 256-57, pl. CXXVIIc; *HB*-I, p. 457, pl. XV, fig. 39; *JISOA*, p. 82-83; *JASB*, XXVIII, 1932, pp. 147-150, pl. 2; *BSHI*, pp. 192- 193, pl. 124) seated (Plate 124).

108. Stone, Bashihari, W. Dinajpur in SAGC; *SBHI*, p. 187, pl. 157.

109. BNM Nos. 61 & 66.31; *BSHI*, p. 189, pl. 162.

110. *Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirriti, Varuna, Maruta, Kuvera and Īśa.*

111. *Ananta, Vāsuki, Padma, Mahapadma, Takşak, Kulīra, Karkaţa and Sankha.*

112. *IBBS*, pp.172-173, pl. LX; *BSHI*, p. 191, pl. 167; *EIAP*, pp. 92-94.

113. *EIAP*, p. 93; *JISOA*, X, p. 239.

114. Winternitz, M., *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, 1927, p. 536; Monier Williams, W., *Religious Thought and Life in India*, London, 1891, pp. 411-12; Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, pp. 327-28, *Matsya P.*, L V.3.5, *Brahma P.*, 33.11.14, *Kalika P.*, 74.113, *Markandeya P.*, Ch. I09.5; *Agni P.*, Ch. 73 and many later Upa-Puranas identify Surya, Siva and other gods. *Kuta Mantm* of Java (Quoted by Biswas, D. K. 'Surya and Siva', *IHQ.*, 1948, vol. 24, p. 142ff) shows this religious syncretism.

115. Nirmand copper plate inscription identifies Siva with Mihira (Persian Mithra), Fleet, J.F., *C.I.I.*, vol. III, pp. 288-89.

116. *AR-VRS.* 1932-33, pp. 15-16, pl.1, fig.1; *DHI.* p. 550, pl.XLVII.3; *HB-I,* p. 457-58, pl. 1.6; *SAB.* p. 207. Fig. X7; *SVRM, pp.* 269-270, Plate 252; *BSHI,* pp. 193-194, pl. 170; *JASB*, XXVIII, 1932, pp. 190-192.

117. *Pratima-lakshanam,* pp. 86-87.

118. *HB-I,* p. 458.

119. *South Indian Gods and Goddesses,* Madras, 1916, p. 236; fig. 144.

120. *IA.* 1918. pp. 136 ff.

121. *JASB, XXVIII,* 1932, p. 192.

122. *AR-VRS,* 1929.30. Pp.9-10, pl.2; *DHI,* pp.549-550; *HB-I,* p. 458, pl. XVI.40; *SVRM,* p. 269, pl. 251; *BSHI*, pp. 194-195, pl. 171.

123. *DHI,* p. 550.

124. Sarkar, K. C., "A New Form of Surya from Varendra", *IHQ*, vol. VI, No. 1, March 1930, pp. 465-70 and plate.

125. *DHI*, p. 549. Sivaramamurti refers to an image of this iconic form from Konarak in Orissa. See *JAS* (Letters), XXI, 1955, no.2, p.83, fig.17.

126. *EIAP*, p. 106.

127. At Damoh, Bundelkhand, *IA*, 1918, pp.136-138, plate II; at Chidambaram, Madras, *SII.* P. 236. fig. 144.

128. *Agni P.* 73. 16-17 (*Bibliotheca Indica* Ed.) Vol. I, pp. 210-11.

129. Ibid.

130. *Brihat-tantrasara* (Basumati Ed.) p. 147.

131. Biswas, D. K., *IHQ*, Vol. 26, year 1950, p. 168.

132. 74. 113, (Vangabasi Ed.) p. 475.

133. *SVRM*, pp. 247-248, pl. 240; *VRM* 654; *AR-VRS*, 1925-26, p.9; *BSHI*, p. 193.

134. *DHI*, pp. 547-548, pl. XLVIII.3; Bhattacharyya, Dipak Chandra, *Iconology of Composite Images, New Delhi, 1980,* p. 25, fig. 20; *BSHI*, p.195; Chatterjee, Rama, *Religion in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1985, p.379.

135. *DHI*, pp. 547-548.

136. *HBP*, p. 438.

137. Mitra, Debala, "A Study of some graha-images of India and their possible bearing on the *Navadevatas* of Cambodia", *JASB*, Vll, 1965, pp. 13-37.

137a. Ibid, p. 26.

138. AMC no, Am. 119; *VRSAR*, 1928-29, App. p. 6. pl. 5; *HB-I*, p. 459, pl. XVII. 43; *DHI*, pp. 444-445, pl. XXXI. fig.2; *IHQ*, IX, pp. 202-7; *JISOA*, p. 100.

139. Appendices to the *VRS.-Rep.* 1928-29, p. 6, fig. 5.

140. (i)Nayabazar, VRM no. 323; (ii) Daharol, VRM no. 1474; *VRSAR*, 1932-33, p. 15; (iii) SAGC no. S. 232; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 14; (iv) SAGC no. S.224; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 14; (v) at Sarala; (vi) Bangarh, SAGC, no. S. 34: *JASB*, VII, 1965. pp. 20-21, pl. X, fig. 10; (vii) at Khamrua.

141. (i) Manda, VRM no. 1580; *VRSAR*, 1936-38, p. 23; (ii) SVRM, VRM no. 2682. Here Ganesa is four-armed, with axe and *ankusa* in the upper hands and a *bijapuraka* and a bowl of sweets in the lower right hand and lower left hand respectively. (iii) A K M M no. 7/p.7.

142. Madnabati, AKMM no. 8/p. ARI.

143. Mallarpur, SAGC, no. S. 167; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 22, pl. XII, fig. 12.

144. AMC no. T. 7271; *IA-Rev.* 1960-61, p. 70; *JASB* VII, 1965, p. 21, pl. XI. 11.

145. *BSHI*, p.198, Plate 176.

146. Kushmandi, W. Dinajpur, SAGC no. S. 58; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 14.

147. *BSHI*, p. 199, pl. 177. The panels are: (i) Balurghat (West Dinajpur), 11th cent. A.D., VRM no. 50; SVRM, p.271, pl. 255; (ii) Gaur (Malda), IMC no. Gr. 13; *Anderson-Cat.* II, p. 261; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 15, Plate II, fig. 2; (iii) Talanda (Nadia), AMC no. T. 3683; *JASB*, VII, 1965, pp. 16-17, plate IV. 4; (iv) Malda. Malda Mus. Cat., p.12.

148 (i) Dinajpur Dist., BNM No. 70.1349; (ii) W. Dinajpur Dist, SAGC no. S. 225; *JASB*, VII, 1965, p. 22, pl. XII, fig. 13.

149. *DHI*, plate XXXI.1.

150. Bengal, SAGC no. S. 213/214; *JASB* VII, 1965, pp. 17-18, pl. VI. 6.

151. No. 60; *MASI*, No. 55 *(Paharpur)*, pp. 53-54, pl. XXXb; *ESB*, pp. 66-67, pl. IX. fig. 24; *ASIAR*, 1925-26, p.111; *HB-I*, p. 459, pl. LVI, 138; *JISOA*, pp. 97-98; *BSHI*, p. 200.

151. *ASIAR*, 1925-26, p. 111.

152. *MASI*, no. 55 *(Paharpur)*, p. 54.

153. '*kundikajapyamalinduh*'(Candra should have a *'kuṇḍikā'* (water vessel) and a *'japyamala'* (a rosary of beads), 51.10-12.

154. *ESB*, pp. 66-67.

155. No. 61; *MASI* No.55 ('Paharpur'), p. 54, pl. XXXd; *ESB*, pp. 65-66, pl. IX. fig. 23; *HB*-I, p. 459, pl. LVI. 139.

156. *ASIAR*, 1925-26, p. 69. 111.

157. *MASI*, no. 55 ('Paharpur'), p. 54, pl. XXXc.

158. *Malda Mus. Cat.*, p. 8, No. RBR-1; *MRSCB*, p. 287.

159. Ch. 57, V. 56.

160. Bk. III, Ch. 70, V. 53.

161. *Markandeya Purana,* Chap. 108, verses 11, 19-22 (Bib. Ind. Edition).

162. 85, 46-49.

163. 6.79, 78.6.

164. *JASB,* 1909, pp. 391-392.

165. *IBBS.* pp. 174-177; *IHQ, III,* pp. 469-472; *JISOA, XVI,* pp. 91-93; *DHI.* pp. 442-443.

166.*'Pujyah sāśvaiśca Revanto yathāvibhavavistaraih'*, *'Tithitattva'*, p. 690.

167. *SVRM*, p. 268, VRM No.1532.

168. Ibid, pp. 267-268; VRM No.1531.

169. *Ibid*, p.267; Sanyal, Nirad Bandhu, "A New type of Revanta from the Dinajpur District", *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1927 pp. 469-72 and plate facing p. 469.

170. *IBBS*, p.175; *BSHI*, p.196.

171. *JASB*, 1909, p. 392, pl. XXX.

172. Sharma, B.N., *Iconography of Revanta*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 54-57.

173. 44. 1.11.217-18). 1.11.217-18.

174. Incidentally, it is also worth mentioning that Revanta was a favourite god of the Gonds, a tribal clan of Madhya Pradesh, who were fond of hunting animals and eating their flesh (Sharma, B.N., *op .cit.* pp. 58-59). The overall form of the Revanta

images suggests that he was a folk deity of hunting communities and was connected with popular life, but later he was accepted into Brahmanism, bound in blood relationship with the equestrian *Surya* (Ray, Nihar Ranjan, *Bangalir Itihas* (in Bengali), First edition, p. 627). He does not seem to have had that popularity in the orthodox Brahmincal circle, and belonged to the folk religion, his cult being an adjunct of Sun worship (*HB-I*, p. 409).

175. *SVRM*, p. 270, pl. 253; VRM No. 167.

176. *SVRM*, p. 270, pl. 254; VRM No. 168.

CHAPTER - VI

DECLINE IN THE POPULARITY OF SUN WORSHIP

DECLINE IN THE POPULARITY OF SUN WORSHIP

The popularity of the Sun worship in Bengal down to the end of Hindu rule is indicated by the opening verse in the Copperplates of Visvarupasena and Suryasena in praise of the Sun god. The extant remains of the icons of Surya, dated or undated, also suggest the continuity of Sun worship until at least the early mediaeval period. Perhaps, this popularity was partly the cause as well as effect of the deep-rooted belief recorded on the pedestal of a Surya image from Bairhatta (Dinajpur District) that the god was the healer of all diseases (*samasta-roganam hartta*). However, since the early part of the 13th century A.D. things began to change in the disfavour of the Sun-cult. In actuality, the process started long back, specifically since the Sena Period. The northern style Surya and his worship probably did not last long after the Varman-Sena era; at least there is no intimation of him in the prolific medieval literature. There is no evidence in modern Bengal or from medieval Bengal either, to suggest the distinct worship of Surya images.

There could be various reasons for the subsequent decline in the importance and anthropomorphic worship of the Sun in early Bengal. However, it is also to be kept in mind that the solar worship in the forms stated above did not only disappear from this part of Eastern India, but also from the rest of the Indian sub-continent. Naturally, the factors responsible for the decline elsewhere are also to be taken note of in the present discussion. Therefore, the contributory factors deserving investigation could be of both general as well as local types.

No mysticism, symbolism or high philosophy around Surya:

The daily visibility of the Sun to naked eye prevented the sectarians to develop any mysticism, symbolism or high philosophy centering round him. Consequently, though he became popular universally due to simplicity of concept and beneficence, highest devotion could not be given to a phenomenon that was visible to the naked eye. No distinct school or schools of philosophy did ever grow up around the Sun god, as they developed round the two major *Puranic* systems. We find extensive religious literature in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D around Vaisnavism and Saivism[1] but almost nothing about Surya. As a result, no backing of high philosophy[2] was available to him - a fact that is so essential for greatness in religious matters.

Popularity of *ekantika* worship:

In the early mediaeval period, the emphasis was given upon the *'ekantika'* worship of the *'Istadeva'* due to monotheistic ideas reaching north from the South. The *ekāntika* worship became more popular than the *smārta* type, of which the syncretic icons and *Pancyāyatana* temples were the products. It may be that the *ekāntika* attitude was regarded as better fitted to meet the challenge of Islam. No one who believed in his *Istadeva* could not give an important position to a god (i.e. Sūrya) liable to be identified with rival gods - Brahma, Visnu or Siva.[3] Therefore, while some Sun-temples were destroyed; others were either deserted or converted into the fanes of other gods.

Degradation of Sun worshipping Maga Brahmanas:

The immense popularity of Sun worship in anthropomorphic form as well as in the temples was a direct contribution of the Iranian Maga Brahmanas. We have already seen that after their advent in India in the fifth century B.C., they remained neglected for long in the orthodox Hindu society, as their customs varied with those of the Indians in many fundamental points and they indulged into many obnoxious practices according to the norms of Indian culture.[4] However, they were somehow accepted in the 4th -5th cent. A.D. because of their popularity among the unorthodox Hindus.[5] In reality, on account of their peculiar customs, these Brahmans remained distinct and separate from the great mass of the Indian Brahmana community from the very earliest times."[6] During the period of the revival of Hindu supremacy, they were found to observe not only a number of distinct rites and customs of their own with which the Vedic Hindus had no ritualistic or cultural affinity, but also to get indulged into many objectionable practices.

In the opinion of the orthodox Brahmanas, the study of astrology and practice of medicine were some of the condemned vocations and very much reprehensible on the part of the Brahmanas.[7] On the contrary, the Sakadvipi or Devala Brahmanas used to cultivate astrology, palmistry and the casting of horoscope etc. They also officiated in the *grahayajna* as priests with a view to propitiating the planets, prescribed amulets and practiced treatment of smallpox etc.[8] Pursuit of these censurable arts and sciences reduced them to an extremely degraded position.

It has been suggested[9] that in course of time the Sun worshipping Magas were divided into two groups – of the Magas and the Bhojakas later on degraded as the Yajakas. Bhojakas or Yajakas or the Sevakas appear to have been indigenous priests of

the Sun-cult as they are described as chanting Vedic *mantras* etc.[10] Most probably the Bhojakas followed this injunction at the beginning but deviated from it later on. In addition, they indulged into obnoxious practices and entered into matrimonial alliances with foreigners like the Magas. According to Monier Williams,[11] the Bhojakas themselves were the descendants of the Magas through the women of the *Bhoja* race. The Ganakas (astrologer, also called Graha-vipra) are said to be the issues of Devala (Sakadvipi Brahmana) father and Vaisya mother.[12] Because of this prohibited inter-caste marriage or origin from unwanted matrimony, the Bhojakas came to be degraded as low or *apāṅkteya*[13] or Devalaka-Brahmins[14] (temple-priests). It may be derived specifically from the Deo-Baranark (Shahabad, Bihar) inscription that with the temple of the Sun god were associated the Bhojakas.[15] The service of a *pujari* or priest of a popular god, who officiates at smaller shrines and lives upon the offerings made to the idol has always been held to be degrading and is never performed by any higher class Brahmanas.[16] The name *Bhojaka* is taken to have originated from their function of eating first on *Śrāddha*-ceremony. Varāhamihira[17] informs us, "the Brāhmaṇa who knows very well the (astronomical and astrological) works and their meaning, is the first to eat the food (*Agrabhuk*) offered to the manes". It is but natural to presume that an *agrabhuk* Brahmana would be looked upon as fallen in the higher circle of the Hindu society.

It is said in the *Brahmajalalasutta*[18] that cannot be dated later than the fourth cent. B.C. that the magic priest were held in disrepute in the time of Buddha. It is well known that the Magas were famous for their magic and occult power. It is quite probable that the Buddhist text had Magas in mind while referring to the magic priests in the time of

Buddha. The Magas were in disrepute too in India because of their objectionable practices.

The Graha-vipras are said to have been hypocrite and even described as '*Kaitavabid*' (Master fraud).[19] They were well known in the society for their fraudulence. That they were not respectable everywhere in the society and looked down upon as fallen has been indicated in the *Brihaddharma Purana*. It is attributable to the fact that by giving up the Vedic religion they got excessively attracted to astrology. A section of these Brahmanas called *Agradani Brahmana* were also considered as fallen because of their practice to receive the first gift in the funeral ceremony from the Sudras.[20]

The Maga Brahmanas, since the very beginning, extended religious privileges to women and men of lower class.[21] The priests of the castes belonging to *Madhyama* (intermediate) and *Adhama* (low) *Samkaras* are said to be degraded *(patita)* Brahmanas, who attain the status of the castes they serve. The idea gradually grew that the Brahmanas serving the lower castes attained their rank.[22] Therefore, it can be said safely that because of their association with the people of lower strata the position of the Sakadvipi Brahmanas was lowered beyond measure in the eye of the higher society,

Most of the *pujari* Brahmanas are illiterate[23] that might have been true of most of the Sun-worshipping Sakadvipi Brahmanas in early Bengal too. The view seems to be reasonable if we take into account the scantiest literature of the Sun- cult authored in Bengal against the Himalayan volume of literature that grew up around Vaisnavism and Saivism. It is an established fact that in early medieval period, Bengal was the home of a body of learned Brahmanas whose livelihood was made easy and secure by private or royal charity, and who dedicated their lives to the highest ideals laid down for them in the

holy scriptures.[24] Both Vaisnavism and Saivism derived their strength and inspiration from the great community of Brahmanas distinguished for their religious zeal, knowledge and scholarship as well as from the magnificent temples. Most probably, most of the *Saura Devala Brahmanas* or the *Graha-vipras* were extremely bereft of equal learning, erudition and highest biblical principles. Therefore, they remained deprived of private or royal help, resulting in difficult livelihood and consequent adaptation of blameworthy vocations on the part of a Brahmana. In an environment fraught with rivalry among different cults or religions from within and outside, worshippers with little education, poor earnings and insufficient state or private support can never infuse so much of vitality to their cult.

The descendants of the early Maga immigrants finally lost their position in the society, if they ever at all enjoyed any high position there. Deprived and excommunicated of the association of the higher Hindu society, these Brahmins sought to establish supremacy over the low-class untouchables of society and it was from then that solar worship became almost extinct in higher Hindu society.[25] The indigenous *Surya-puja* and its alien form were mixed up and its separate existence as a cult for the exclusive worship of the deity was obliterated.[26]

The Brahmanas and the Ksatriyas who traditionally enjoyed vast powers and privileges in India for a long time could not tolerate that a new class of people like the Maga Brahmanas should usurp their supremacy. The Magas were originally the priests of the foreign people who exercised political authority in India for short periods over portions of the county, but ultimately were defeated and absorbed in the Hindu fold. The priests of the defeated and assimilated people could not hope to exert much influence.

The people of India had become used to the supremacy of the Brahmanas from Vedic times. Their custom, ceremonies, rites etc. had been evolved and propagated by themselves. The people had full faith in them. They had no liking for the new foreign priests, and did not, therefore, follow them unless the latter brought their sectarian religious views in line with the religious prosperities of the time.[27]

No development of *Saura-Sakti:*

Bengal became one of the leading centers of the *Sakta* cult during the last two or three centuries of her ancient period. Even as early as 7th-8th century A.D. *Sakta* goddess was worshipped in *Radha* and *Varendri* with Tantric rites by a man in collaboration with a woman, as found in the *Devi Purana*.[28] Most of the Tantric books were not only written in Bengal, but also the full burgeoning of Tantricism took place here.

The major mental focus of the Sena-Varman-Deva ages was the meditation and concepts entrenched in astrology, the *Agamas*, *Nigamas* and *Tantra*. Saivism, one of the major sects in Bengal, had been influenced by Tantrik concepts and practices. It would seem that during the Pala period, the figures of the divine couple, *Uma* and *Mahesvara*, had captivated the Bengali mind. The coupled form of the embracing figures of Siva and *Uma* came to be a concept of Bengali Tantrik Saktaism. Sitting comfortably in the lap of Siva, bound in embrace and smiling joyously, *Uma* was indeed the *Tripurasundari* of the power of Siva, of the Tantrik devotees, the meditation of which was the highest form of *dhyanayoga*. In a few images of *Laksmi-Narayana* from Eastern and Northern Bengal, Laksmi appears seated on the left knee of Visnu, which readily reminds one of the contemporary images of Siva and *Uma-Mahesvara*. The development of *Vaisnavism* in

Bengal in the Sena-Varman period was largely enhanced because of the evolution of the *Radha-Krisna* concept and the concept of *Radha* very likely developed under the influence of Saktaism.[29]

Sun worship also adopted Tantrik practices but remaining free from some fundamental concepts of Tantricism such as the conception of a female principle who in association with a male principle is responsible for the evolution of the universe.[30] No such concept as of *Prajnā* of Tantric Buddhism and *Umā* of Tantric Hinduism could be developed round the name of *Samjñā* or *Chāyā* - wives of the Sun god - by the solar sectarians. His consorts were never given any separate worship in Bengal, which is psychologically a matriarchal region under a tremendous impact of Tantricism, not to speak of according as much high position as that of *Laksmi, Uma* or *Radha.* Naturally, the Bengalis did not keep on feeling attracted in the sect or the cult, which is devoid of matriarchal element, which does not believe in the independent entity of *Sakti* and engage in her worship. It is significant to note that no image of the Sun with the female consort in Tantric sense has been found so far. The solar sectarians did not popularize this concept and convert it into Tantric doctrine of a *Saura-Sakti* particularly when other sectarians were adopting it.[31]

No single deity had ever been able to reach the core of the Bengali heart. It was the divinities in company with the dominant *saktis* that have always occupied the highest position in their mind. Therefore, the deities like *Lakshi-Narayana, Uma-Mahesvara* and *Radha-Krisna* reign supreme here. Conversely, Brahma, one of the most important divinities of the Hindu Trinity, is given a secondary position in the religious pantheon and invoked only during the offering of oblation along with the *Kusandika* hymn of

marriage. Similarly, Ganesa also could not gain much influence in the psyche of the Bengal people. He receives worship from the mercantile community only as a giver of success and at the beginning of occasional religious ceremonies in the houses of the *smarta*-people. The same thing happened also in case of Surya.

Inclusion of Surya in *Pancopasana:*

Another factor of importance, which might have halted the march of the Sun worship, was the inclusion of the Sun god in the system of *Pancopasana.* Sun god was considered the cause of everything of the world. He was responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction. Thus, gradually developed the philosophic view that all deities being his manifestations, his worship can, without any philosophic contradiction, be combined with the worship of other deities.[32] It also seems that the groupings of five principal deities at one place came into existence out of keen rivalry and competition among the respective sects. It must have resulted in mutual understanding among them and harmonious relation with one another. Alternatively, this keen rivalry and competition among the various sects might have infused a fear of curse in their minds in the event of not worshipping the other equally benevolent or harmful gods. This sort of thinking resulted in the worship of chief deities in a group. In view of the Muslim aggression and danger from Islam, a pressing necessity of unity among the followers of different sects might have also impelled them to think of worship of five main deities in a group. Thus originated the syncretic images, *Pancopasana* and *Pancayatana* temples. Whatever may be the case, it has been enjoined by the *Smritikaras* that in the daily worship, one has to pay one's obeisance to the five deities namely, *Ganesa, Narayana,*

Surya, Siva and Sakti. A Brahmin, officiating as a priest for the worship of any god or goddess, is found to perform initially *Pancopasana* or the worship of five-deities.[33] 'Suryaya *namah*' is the usual mantra used by the priests for performing the worship of the Sun god. Significantly enough, the utterance of the mantra '*Adityadi Navagrahebhyah nama*' is the usual practice of the priests. It accommodates the name of Aditya (Sun god) along with those of the nine planets. The system of worship (*Puja-vidhana*), as approved by the *Puranas* and the *Smriti-nibandhakaras* of Bengal, has left no scope of exclusive worship of the Sun god.

Non-availability of royal patronage:

The royal patronage of a religion is not only a good index of its general influence and popularity, but also an important factor for its prolonged and dominant survival. In Bengal, the Pre-Pala dynasties of the Khadgas in Samatata and Kantideva in Chattagram, as well as the Pala, Candra and Kamboja dynasties and individual rulers like Ranavanka-malla of Pattikera were all Buddhists. Vainyagupta (*Mahādeva-pādānudhāya*), Sasanka,[34] Lokanatha, Dommanapala and the early Sena rulers like *Parama-Saiva* Vijayasena and *Parama-Saiva* Vallalasena were all Saivas. The Varmans of East Bengal, the later Sena kings like *Parama-Vaisnava* Vijayasena and the Deva family of Tripura-Noakhali-Chattagram region were *Vaisnavas*. No royal Saura family is known in Bengal. In fact, Sun worship was not the official religion in India. Only the Sena kings Visvarupa and Suryasena, who most probably ruled from 1206 – 1225 A.D. styled themselves *Parama-Saura* i.e. devout worshippers of the Sun, but that too after professing the two great faiths (i.e. Saivism and Vaisnavism) followed by their ancestors.[35] Lack of royal

patronage not only prevented the Sun-cult from enjoying added popularity among a large body of people but also disabled its counsels to be influential with the rulers. Thus deprived of easy and secure livelihood through private or royal charity, they could not devote themselves with full time, attention and enthusiasm to the all-round advancement of the Sun cult.

Eclipse of Surya by Visnu:

Assimilation of some features belonging to two Hindu cult gods became a common factor in the religious arena, which is clearly visible between Surya and Visnu too. Mention may be made of *Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa* that acquired great circulation in medieval time. *Surya-Narayana* is actually regarded as a form of Visnu, which points to merger of Sun worship in the Visnu cult.[36] Equal faith of a devotee to both Viṣṇu and Sūrya is indicated by the two halves of his name, viz. *Viśvāditya* and *Viśvarūpa* recorded in *Akṣayavata Praśasti* of Yakṣapāla's father Viśvāditya-Viśvarūpa.[37] Fusion of these two gods seems not to be uncommon. Both the divinities had originally the same common source of Vedic Surya. Puranas also show their identical relation. The *Agni Purāṇa* states that the Sun-god is another manifestation of the god Viṣṇu who is extolled and glorified in the hymns of the *Rigveda* and is the source of all good and evil.[38] In the *Samba Purana*, it is said that the Sun was worshipped as Visnu in *Svetadvipa*.[39]

With the rise of Vaisnvism, the Sun god gradually began to loose much of his importance, as Visnu, originally a solar deity, absorbed in himself much of the elements that had been attributed to Surya in the earlier days.[40] Even in iconography, there also occurs no special distinction between the concepts of the image of Visnu and that of the

standing, four-armed Surya upon a lotus with the two wives, Samjna and Chaya, on either side, and before him the charioteer of the Sun. Thus, it was not difficult for Visnu to eclipse Surya, at least in Bengal.[41] As there was already a popular sect round Visnu – a form of the Sun,[42] the question of a Saura sect could not possibly have arisen in the people's mind. Because of prolonged royal patronage, missionary zeal of a large body of distinguished and dedicated Brahmanas and adaptation with the prevailing Tantricism, *Vaisnavism* became so dominant and aggressive a religion as to turn the Sun god of whom he was just an insignificant aspect in the Vedas, into a part of his body. This finds an excellent reflection in verse 1 of the Sian Stone Inscription[43] (approx. 1043 A.D.) and in verse 2 of the Kamauli Copper Plate[44] (1132 A.D.) of Vaidyadeva, where Surya, 'borne on a seven-horse chariot', has been described as the right eye of Hari (Visnu). Visnu's superiority over Surya is noticeable even in the solar *vrata*. In the *Surya-Vrata* performed by the people of Chittagong, one set of food-offerings is presented by the priest to Visnu, the Preserver of the world, who is, at first, propitiated and another set to the Sun-deity.[45]

Identification of Surya with Siva:

Besides Vaisnavism, Saivism was also a great sect in the Brahmanical religion in early Bengal. Like the former, it had also enjoyed state support from some of the Gupta and Sena rulers in addition to that of Sasanka, Lokanatha, Dommanapala etc. and intense devotion of a large number of Brahmanas besides enormous strength flowing from the Tantrik cult. For reasons stated above, Sun-cult was not in a position to cope with Saivism and preferred to link the Sun-deity with *Mahesvara*. The composite image of

Marttanda Bhairava serves as an excellent illustration of this tendency, which is also but a pointer to the weakened position of the Sun god. Scale turned in disfavour of Surya to such an extent that he came to be identified with Siva in the *Matsya Purana*. Hence, in the *Adityaśayana Vrata* it is enjoined that the worship of *Uma-Mahesvara* be done with the recitation of the names of Surya and *Sūryācā* should be done on the *Sivalinga* (55-56). Both the deities occur in the *Matsya Purana* (68-35) in a compound viz. *Ravisankarau*. In the *Samba Purana*, the Sun is said to have been worshipped as *Mahesvara* in Kusadvipa.[46] In the Saiva system, the Sun is not a mere votary of Siva, but also one of his *astamurtis* (*Malavikagnimitra*, I, 1). The identity of Surya with Siva may be traced back as early as the *Rigveda*. In some passages of the *Rigveda*, *Agni* is identified with the Sun.[47] Moreover, Śākapūṇi, a predecessor of Yaska, expounded a theory of three-fold existence of Agni, viz. terrestrial, aerial and heavenly based on the *Rigveda*-10.88.10 (Nirukta 7.28). Moreover, Rudra is closely connected with Agni in the Rigveda.[48] This easily explains the above injunction and the identity of Siva and Surya.[49]

Over-shadowing by Vaisnavism and Saivism:

It appears from the available evidence that the preponderance of *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* over-shadowed the cult of the Sun god, which consequently further declined. Royal patronage secured by these two sects from the Senas, no doubt, added much to their strength and popularity. The worst position of the Sun god may be gleaned from a stone image of *Harihara* (Pl. 22b) belonging to the 12th -13th century A.D. The central figure represents Siva in the right half and Vishnu in the left half and both the gods are provided with respective *ayudhas*, *vahanas* and *saktis*. In the background at the extreme

right appears a standing Buddha in *abhayamudra* and in the corresponding position to the left is Surya with his usual attributes, attendants, charioteer and chariot-horses.[50] Here the Sun god is shown not only as inferior to Brahmanical gods like Visnu and Siva but also to Buddha because the latter, though placed in the background, has been given the right side,[51] which is traditionally regarded as more important than the left one. The composition of *Hari-Hara* standing between the two wives reminds us of the verse describing *Pradyumnesvara* in the Deopara *prasasti* of Vijayasena. Similar verses in praise of *Hari-Hara* are also quoted in Sridhardasa's *Saduktikarnamrita*. Repeated occurrence of such description in the epigraphy, literature and real art clearly demonstrates to what a low position was reduced the Sun god under the aggressive ascendancy of the two great cults. It is as if the two dominant cults of Bengal have vehemently avenged for the insignificant representation of their respective deities in the *prabhavali* of a few Sun images.[52]

Failing to maintain an exalted position in the society by successful competition, the Sun-cult probably made an endeavor to depict its deity as the god of the rival cults to sustain his popularity in orthodox institution. In the folk songs around the Sun god discovered from the district of Barisal in Eastern Bengal,[53] he has been called Hari as well as Siva. In the same folk ballads, Gauri is stated to be the Sun god's bride and a legend about Sri Krishna has also been interpolated. We find it stated that the god Siva (i.e. the Sun god) adorned with flowers of *Dhutura* plant in his two ears, has started on his journey, and is going to Mathura accompanied by sixteen hundred milk-maids (*"Śibāi ṭhākur yātrā kalle dui kāne dhuturo / ṣolaśata gopinī laye chaliclhe mathurā"*).[54] The reason for thus identifying the Sun-deity with *Hari* (or Vishnu) and *Siva* and connecting

him with *Gauri* and *Gopinis* is not far to seek. It seems that the worship of the Sun god was waning in popularity. To revive the waning popularity of the Sun-cult and enhance its value in the popular estimation, this deity has been represented as three deities rolled into one and the name of the wife of the well-known and popular deity Siva has been assigned to the Sun god's wife.

Rivalry and reverses of Surya:

There existed many a religious sect, major or minor, in Bengal and rivalry among them was not quite unnatural. The enmity revealed itself mainly by way of representing other dominant god or gods as attendant or accessory figures of another ambitious cult-god or replacing some opponent deity from the Trinity. The Sun-cult, especially spearheaded by the Maga Brahmanas of foreign origin, could not have been an exception. In *Trimurtis*, Surya as the principal god is not unknown as it is found in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Surya replaces Brahma in the trinity in an inscribed sculpture of Bengal. There are many composite images at Ranapur, which may be taken[55] as of Brahma, Visnu and Surya thus showing that Siva has been replaced by Surya. Surya replaces Visnu in the door lintel of the tenth century A.D. Siva-temple at Tejpur in Assam with Brahma and Siva on two sides. Samkaracharya had to face the Sun-worshippers in the Deccan, whom he found as divided into six sub-sects.

Enmity of the Saivas, especially the *Pasupatas* has been suggested[56] as one of the causes for the decline of the Sun-cult under discussion. Even the Mahabharata[57] goes to state: - "Meanwhile, *Rudra* of terrible prowess rushed against the celestials. Filled with anger he tore out the eyes of *Bhaga*" (i.e. Surya). "Excited with anger, he attacked *Pusan*

(Surya) with his foot. He tore out the teeth of the god as he sat employed in eating the large sacrificial cake". It is not unnatural for the god Pasupati, the lord of beasts, to have fallen into conflict with *Pusan* who is intimately connected with cattle and pastoral life in the Rigveda,[58] with the prosperity of cattle in the later Vedic literature[59] and with the *Panis*[60] who were traders and most probably non-Aryans.[61] It is equally not unexpected of the god of the *Vratyas* (outcastes) to have been angry with *Bhaga*, 'a distributor of wealth', usually the gift of Indra and Agni, and the chief leader of rites[62] and the sustainer of the world.[63]

The Saivas, particularly the *Pasupatas*, were opposed to the solar cult and this must have checked its progress largely. The Pāsupata was the oldest form of Saivism prevalent in North India. Varahamihira refers to the *Pasupatas*, while prescribing the installation of images of different deities. He states, "The priests who install the image of Visnu, should be *Bhagavatas*; of Sun, Magas; of Siva, the *Pasupatas* (Ash-armed one)....". Saivism in Bengal was of the *Pasupata* sect, as is evident from the Bhagalpur grant of Narayanapala.[64] It is deserving of note that emanating from the South, the kings of the Sena dynasty were prominent devotees of Sadasiva the concept of which, having been accepted in South India, in course of time spread to Bengal with the Southern dynasty and its army.[65] With the decline of Buddhism in the 12th century A.D. Saivism became predominant in Bengal. As a historical process, a highly antagonistic attitude of the *Pasupatas* of Bengal against the Maga Brahmanas whose sphere of influence also included a large body of the *Vratyas* is easily comprehensible.

Surya reduced to the status of a *graha:*

It has already been seen that the worship of the *Navagrahas* became immensely popular in medieval time mainly among the Hindus, as a means to secure peace, prosperity and long life, avert misfortune and harm enemies. Constant fear of growing foreign invasion and prevailing socio-economic tensions might have contributed to this new phenomenon. The Sun worshipping Maga Brahmanas who took to the profession of astrology upheld *Grahayāga* or *Svastyāyana* as a sole, infallible panacea for the problems confronting the society. In astrology, *Ravi* (Surya) is considered as one of the leading planets, determining the fortune of humankind. Introduction and popularization of Navagraha worship in such an energetic way, in reality, brought the Sun god down to the position of one of the planets only, though a central figure among them, from the loftiest seat of a great benevolent deity and the 'soul of all movable and immovable things'.[66] Independent worship of the Sun as a god naturally lost its rationale in the society. In absence of images of the nine planets in a single stone slab, they could be worshipped by drawing their figures on canvas in their respective colour or in *mandalas* made of scented paste (Sandal-wood-paste). The present practice of *grahayajna* with no requirement of icon in any form, in all probability, was prevalent in the last phase of our period under discussion. Under the changed situation, there was left no urge before the people to do the individual and anthropomorphic worship of the once-great god Surya in temples, big or small. Therefore, majority of the Sun-temples were either deserted or converted into the fanes of other gods, while some others were destroyed out of iconoclastic zeal. Anyway, the *Maga-dvijas* who introduced, popularized and took to the greatest height, the anthropomorphic and temple-worship of the Sun god under a strong religious zeal,

hankering for elevated social status and pressing need for a better economic pursuit, had to reduce their dear deity for more or less the same reasons to such a precarious position, loosing the game for 'survival of the fittest'.

Assimilation into Brahmanical religion and solar deity:

The whole question concerning the decline of Sun worship in the so-called post-Hindu period originates from the occurrence of large number of Sun-images and references to Sun temples belonging to the Pala-Sena period against their conspicuous absence in the succeeding age. It is well known that the practice of Sun worship in anthropomorphic form and in temple was not at all an indigenous one, rather very much alien to the mainstream tradition. A critical study of the practices of the primitive tribes of India that may be resorted to know about the initial form of Sun worship in this country clearly shows the general absence of any material representation of the deity and offering of sacrifices to him in an open space cleared of jungle on a raised altar.[67] Even in different *Surya-vratas*, which have been performed by the womenfolk from time immemorial, the god is worshipped with the aid of symbolic representation. In the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Upanisadas*, the *Sutras* and the Epics we notice the worship of the Sun god in both atmospheric and symbolic forms, especially among the orthodox section of the society.

Coming to the Puranic age, we are amazed to find that many Puranas[68] even do not mention the role of the Magian priests at all and continue the indigenous and national tradition of Sun-worship as found in the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas,* the *Upanisadas,* the *Sutras*, and the Epics. In the *Visnu, Vayu, Brahmanda, Markandeya* and *Matsya* Puranas,

which were thoroughly imbued with the orthodox spirit of the Sun-cult, the Vedic tradition[69] of Sun worship is found to have been carried on. They reveal that the orthodox tradition of Sun worship actually developed on the lines of the *Satapatha Brahmana's*[70] *prescription* of a golden disc to represent the solar orb and the Upanisadic[71] doctrine of the golden *Purusa* in the Sun who was identified with the Ultimate Being. The prevalence of this tradition even after the spread of the Magian custom is attested by the *Kurma Purana* which describes the Sun as the heavenly body in regulating time and seasons, in maintaining the planets in their position and in fostering the life of the plants and animals. This description is in conformity with the Vedic account of the Sun god. Even in the *Samba Purana,*[72] which symbolizes the climax of the Magian belief, the Vedic tradition has not been forgotten. The *Devi Bhagavata Purana*, describing the various sects of Hinduism, states that some persons who knew the Vedas worshipped the Sun everyday in the morning, midday and in the evening with various hymns.[73] This shows that among the Sauras was also a section, which continued worshipping him in the old Vedic way. Even a group of the Sun worshipping Magas[74] called Bhojakas (later on degraded as the Yajakas) who appear to have been indigenous priests of the Sun-cult, are described as chanting Vedic *mantras* etc.[75] In view of the above, it is evident that even after the flood of Magian Sun worship in Northern India, the indigenous form of Sun worship without image and temple had simultaneously been going on.

It is beyond doubt that in the field of iconography and temples, the Maga priests exerted powerful influence and this new tradition was materially helpful in propagating and diffusing the sectarian form of Sun worship. They gave material and lithic representation to the imaginary and atmospheric conception of the Sun as

found in the *Vedas*, the Epics and the *Puranas*. However, as far as the mythology, theology and philosophy of the Sun-cult were concerned, the Maga-influence was negligible.[76] As a means to wipe out the Magian element even in solar iconography, a constant, conscious and vigorous attempt was also being made in the form of hiding or idealizing the alien traits (northerner dress, waist-girdle and high boots) in the Sun images. This is evident from steady shedding off the Northerner's dress by keeping the upper body of the divinity open (Harinarayanpur image) or covering it with a diaphanous garment, threatening instruction for not making the god' s feet [77] and endowing him with Indian attributes such as *Yajnopavita, tilaka* etc.

The endeavour to merge the Sun-cult back with the Brahmanical stream was slow but steady until the rule of the Buddhist Palas because of their eclectic policy, though they were also the upholders of the Brahmanical religion and social system. However, in the Sena period the wheels of the religion and society turned in the one direction; in this era the all-pervading and all-embracing religion of Bengal was Brahmanism, governed by the *Vedas* and the *Puranas,* the *Sruti and* the *Smriti,* and affected by the *Tantras.* Further, from the second half of the eleventh century the descendants of the Buddhist kings also gradually took to Brahmanism. By the end of the ancient period, the Brahmanism of the Vedas, *Smriti* and the *Puranas* had triumphed and the Sun god was ultimately assimilated into the Brahmanical religion losing his identity in the Brahmanical solar deity. This may find corroboration in Verse 1 of the Edilpur Copperplate of the Sena king *Kesavasena* (1206-1210 A.D.) where the Sun 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 wings (i.e. the two fortnights), of which one is white and the other is black".[78]

Dharmathakur* replaces Surya in *Radha:

In ancient *Radha* or modern West Bengal, we find the immense popularity of the worship of *Dharmaraj* or *Dharmathakur* who has been identified in the *Sunya Purana*[79] and the *Dharmapujavidhana*[80] with the Sun god. Some solar attributes had definitely been absorbed in the personality of the *Dharmathakur*. He is also conceived as the remover of diseases like Surya. It is not unlikely that the place of the Brahmanical god Surya was gradually occupied by this folk-god *Dharmathakur* at least in some parts of Bengal. Given the authenticity of the *Sunya Purana* of Rāmāi Pandit, it can be accepted that Dharma festival was current in Sena times prior to the Turkish conquest. It seems that the local tradition of adoring the Sun god as *Dharma* was so widely accepted in western part of Bengal that it did not leave any opportunity for the *Udicyavesi Surya* in Puranic garb to gain popularity.[81] It also appears that after the rule of *Parama-Saura* Visvarupasena and Kesavasena, the solar devotees of the South-West Bengal, being deprived of state support, gradually assimilated themselves into other religious communities of acceptable nature.[82] Quite logically, this draws our attention to the growth and development of the cult of *Dharmathakur,* who best represents the Sun god in terms of characteristic features.

Thus, the predominance of *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* over-shadowed the cult of the Sun god. Surya even began to be called Hari as well as Siva in an attempt to revive his waning popularity. Further, there was no scope of exclusive worship of the solar deity

because of the development of *Pancopasana*. The inclination for the Vedic form of Sun worship under the Varian-Sena regime and the popularity of *'ekantika'* worship of the *'Istadeva'* due to the advent of monotheistic ideas from the South gave the final blow to the Sun-cult.

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38. *Agni P.*, Tr. by Manmath Nath Dutta, Vol. I. 120-33.

39. *Samba P.*, pp. 26; 37; 38.

40. Chattopadhyay, S., *The Evolution of Theistic Sects in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1962, p. 58.

41. *HBP*, p. 452.

42. Bhandarkar, R.G., *Vaisnavism, Saivism and other Minor Sects*, (Rep.) Varanasi, 1965; Hopkins, E.W., *Religions of India*, Boston, 1895, pp. 377-78.

43. '*pravodhanidre jagatām yasyonmīlan-mīlane*'- Sircar, D.C., *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, Calcutta, 1387 B.S., pp. 85-101.

44. *"etasya dakşiaṇadṛiśo Vamśe Mihrasya jātavān pūrvam Vigrahapāla"*: *E.I.*, II, p. 350; *Gaudalekhamala,* p.128; *C.B.I.*, p. 370.

45. Bhattacharyya, R.K., & Mitra, S.C., 'On the Worship of the Sun-deity in Bihar, Western and Eastern Bengal', *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, Vol. XIII, 1927, pp. 316-316.

46. *Samba P.*, p. 26; 37; 38.

47. MacDonnell, p. 93.

48. Ibid, p. 77.

49. Kantawala, S.G., *Cultural History from the Matsya Purana*, Baroda, 1964, p. 185.

50. *ASI AR*, Part II, 1930-34, pp. 256-257.

51. Incidentally, it deserves to be mentioned that much earlier Lord Buddha had been accepted as one of the incarnations of Visnu, and it did not take very long for the acceptance to develop into affection.

52. In the Surya image from Banshihari (West Dinajpur) in SAGC shows the miniature figure of Visnu on the left side of the *prabhavali* and two defaced figures on the right. Two identical Surya images *(*BSHI*, p.189, pl. 162) from Vikrampur (Dhaka) in the BNM (N0.61 & 66.31) show Brahma, Mahesvara and Visnu seated on the top of the *prabhavali.*

53. *Typical Selections from Old Bengali Literature,* Part I, published by the University of Calcutta, 1914, pp. 164,171.

54. Mitra, Sarat Chandra, 'On the Cult of the Sun god in Medieval Eastern Bengal', *Journal of the Department of Letters*, Vol. XV, 1927, pp. 149-200.

55. Ojha, G.H., *History of Jodhpur*, I, 1938, p. 66.

56. Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

57. XII.160.18-19.

58. *RV*, I.5.1, 2; VI.54.5; VI.53.9.

59. *MS*, 4.3.7; *TB*, I.7.24; *SGS.*, 3.9.

60. *RV*, VI.53.3, 5, 6, 7.

61. *Vedic Index*, vol. I, p. 472.

62. *RV*, VII.3.8.3.

63. *RV*, VII.3.8.2.

64. *IA*, XV, p. 304; *Gaudalekhamala*, p. 55.

65. *HBP*, p. 420.

66. *RV*, I.115.1.

67. Das, Tarak Chandra, 'Sun-worship amongst the aboriginal tribes of Eastern India', *Journal of the Department of Letters*, Vol. II, 1924, p. 90.

68. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The Classical Age*, Bombay, 1954, p. 438.

69. Roy. S.N., 'Early Puranic Account of Sun and Solar Cult', *University of Allahabad Studies*, 1963, pp. 41-45.

70. *SB*, VII.4.1.10.

71. *BAU*, II.5.5.

72. Hazra, *Studies*, p. 63. cf. *Samba P.*, 6.15; 12.8; 12.13; 24.7; 29.15; 30.18.

73. *Srimad Devi Bhagavata P.* Ch. VIII. Book I, p. 27, Tr. by Swami, Vijayananda, alias Hari Prasanna Chatterji, Panini Office, Allahabad.

74. Hazra, *Studies*, Vol. I, p. 30.

75. *Samba P.*, 27.

76. *SWAI-S*, p. 258.

77. Change in religious outlook against top boots and *Avyaṅga* is met with in the injunctions led by *Matsya, Padma* and *Agni Purāṇas* where the sculptor is warned against covering the feet of the god if he does not intend to be inflicted by leprosy. *Padma.P. Srişţi.Khaṇda*, Vaṅg. Edition. Chap. VIII, Sl. No. 42; *Matsya Purana, CCLXI, 1-7;* XCIV.1. Such scriptural prohibition provided sentiment to the sculptors of later ages to insert or submerge the feet of the god below the knees in the chariot-

pedestal or to put them inside the chariot.

78. *IB*, p. 126.

79. Sen, Sukumar, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, Vol. 1, *Apararddha*, Calcutta, 1975; p. 147 ff.

80. Mandal, Panchanan & Sen, S. (ed.), *Rūprāmer Dharmamaṅgal*, Introduction, Burdwan, B. S. 1351.

81. *MRCSB*, p.70.

82. Tarafdar, Mamtajur Rahaman, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas* (in Bengali), Dhaka, 1987.

CONCLUSION

The entire exercise so far made in the preceding chapters has provided a scope to understand the uniqueness of Sun worship in ancient Bengal in the backdrop of general ambience. Such an attempt has definitely helped to understand the history of an important cult in India in general and in Bengal in particular. To put in a different way, the study of the solar cult in Bengal enables us to appreciate the religious culture of early Bengal through evaluating the complex undercurrent behind its gradual rise and decline against a wider landscape.

The worship of the Sun as the Supreme reality existed in Bengal at least since the later Vedic period among a few of her dominant tribes like the Pandas and Sumas. It was no less popular in the pre-Gupta period as well. Profound knowledge of the Vedic Brahmanism was not lacking in ancient Vanga. Of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses widely worshipped there, Surya happened to be one of them. It seems that the Iranian Mages were not responsible for the introduction of the Sun images in India because there was an indigenous tradition of showing the Sun-deity riding on a chariot drawn by horses. The early indigenous tradition of anthropomorphic Surya may be traced in some terracotta plaques of the Sunga-Kusana period found in different parts of Bengal. Second century B.C. terracotta from Tamluk represents a standing winged figure with full-blossomed lotus in hands and cluster of plantains on either side of the stela and a pitcher-like object with ears of corn. The association of wings with Surya originally occurs in the *Rigveda*. Lotus standing for the creative force symbolized the Sun since early times. The plantain tree is also traditionally connected with the Sun worship. No doubt, the winged

figure depicts the Vedic Sun god at its embryonic stage of iconic development. A good number of such winged figures have been discovered in different parts of ancient Vanga Thus, Sun worship was not only introduced in early Vanga during the Post-Maurya and Pre-Gupta period under strong Brahmanical influence but was also quite prominent. Further, the worship of the Sun god developed in ancient Vanga along an indigenous line in which the solar deity appeared in the form of a winged divinity.

Another terracotta of the first century B.C. / A.D. from Chandraketugarh (24-Parganas) shows the Sun god seated on the four-horsed chariot driven by Aurna and flanked by Usa and Pratyusa. According to Cunningham, the four horses resemble the representation of Helios – the Greek Sun god. The Greek influence in the Sun image of Bengal does not seem to be unexpected in view of the discovery of the images of foreign deities like the Roman god Janusand Athena in olden Vanga in the Pre-Gupta era. This resemblance is, however, superficial because the features of the Sun god along with Usa and Pratyusa and the chariot are very Indian. Though largely resembling with many features of the Bodh-Gaya, Bhaja, Lala Bhagat or Anantagumpha Sun images, the Chandraketugarh terracotta Surya figures as an independent deity along with attendants and thus seems to have been object of worship with utmost devotion. On the contrary, those four images of Surya are accessory decorative figures in the religious architecture of the heterodox or other Brahmanical sects. In addition, the relief in question reveals the element of the *bhakti* cult that was very much present in the country in the pre-Gupta period.

The northerner's dress - tunic and boots - first occur in solar iconography in ancient Vanga in a beautiful terracotta seal of 1st century A.D. from Hadipur (North 24

Parganas). In this dress, we can visualize the advent of the Iranian Surya in early Vanga. The new re-orientation could take place only when the *Northerner* type of solar icons was introduced in Bengal by its new settlers who had brought the Maga priests and when the vigorous participation and assistance of these Brahmanas was available. Interestingly, the Magian tradition in making Sun images in ancient Vanga continued to be the major guiding force in its later representations. The aniconic representation of the Sun god and its worship probably prevailed in this age as well. The concept of Surya pillar does not seem to have been unknown to Bengal artists in the 3rd/ 4th century A.D. The Sun god seems to have been immensely popular like Indra and Agni in ancient Vanga, possibly among the various strata of the society during the Post-Mauryan and Pre-Gupta period, as contemporary images of the god, though in terracotta, are widely available in lower West Bengal. In an agrarian society, Sun worship could not have been of lesser importance.

Sun worship did not disappear with the passage of time. During the Gupta rule in Bengal, the image-worship of the deity in ancient Vanga was further spread in Greater Bengal and consolidated on a firm foundation. With the new settlement of Brahmanas, the cult of Vedic Sun god Savitā was brought in along with their daily programme of rituals and prayers. The earliest epigraphic reference to Sun worship in Bengal and that too in a temple occurs in the Jagadishpur (Rajshahi) copper plate (447 A.D.). Here the temple construction and the solar worship by means of the oblations of rice, milk, sugar, perfume, incense, lamp etc. is done by the native peoples – probably the Vaisyas. Besides the Iranian Magas, the Indians of even orthodox tradition also followed the practices of the anthropomorphic and temple worship of the Sun. Thus, by the middle of the fifth century A.D. there came into existence a developed Sun-sect with all the paraphernalia of

a shrine, icons, priesthood, rites and procedures. It is of utmost significance that among the inscriptions referring to Sun worship in India, the Jagadishpur copper plate (447 A.D.) happens to be the earliest one. This is a clear indication of immense popularity of Sun worship in ancient Bengal along with a deep root of the tradition of Sun image and temple in the religious concept of the people.

From the Gupta period, the worship of the Sun of a purely northern culture became very widespread in Bengal. By this time, the Sakadvipi Brahmanas seem to have spread all over this region. The earliest Sun images in India belonging to the Gupta period hail from Kumarpur and Niyamatpur, both in the Rajshahi district. The wheel of the chariot, the two female attendants of the god and his consorts are not found in both the images. Most probably, these images were meant for worship of the god. Wide prevalence of the Sun cult all over Bengal from the late Gupta period is evidenced by a number of inscriptions and numerous stone sculptures. The Sun image from Deora (Bogra) shows some development in the iconic type of Surya. While the contemporary Surya in a Siva temple at Bhumara (Madhya Pradesh) was an accessory figure, the Sun image from Deora appears to have been an object of worship in a temple. The full-fledged image of the god with all his attendants might have been imported in Bengal in the Gupta age. Greater number of lotuses found in the Kashipur image was perhaps meant to highlight the predominance of the native element in the solar iconography. However, the Sun-images from Deora or Kashipur had undoubtedly, been the products of the continuing art-tradition introduced in ancient Vanga by the Maga Brahmanas. People in early Bengal also represented the solar deity in seated posture, though it is very rare. From the Deulbadi icon, we learn that the god Surya was also worshipped by the

Buddhists, sometimes simultaneously with Brahmanical deities; in addition to worship in temple, the Sun god was also worshipped by individuals in their houses in image form. As regards the followers, the orthodox Brahmanas, the Vaisyas etc. were also connected with the solar cult in addition to the Iranian Magas.

Like *Pundravardhana* or *Vanga,* Sun worship was equally prevalent in *Vardhamana-bhukti.* However, here the Sun god is identified with *Lokanatha Dharma* as referred to in the Mallasarul Copper Plate inscription (543 A.D.). The tradition of Samba's cure by Sun worship is found to have influenced Sasanka. In order to cure himself of a serious disease, he is said to have brought 12 Graha-vipras from the banks of Sarayu to officiate in the *grahayajna* and offered sacrifices to nine planets. Sakadvipi Brahmanas occasionally came to Bengal from Upper India and popularized Sun worship and *grahayajna* by utilizing the people's belief in the curative aspect of the Sun god. In addition to the worship of the nine planets, the Sun god continued to receive adoration in the form of *Dharma* as well.

Vedic religion became increasingly stronger during the Pala-Candra-Kambojas. In fact, all the Pala kings were patrons of Brahmanas, Brahmanical images and temples and therefore, granted lands for them to enhance their own virtue and renown. The soar deity was regularly worshipped by these large numbers of orthodox Brahmanas by means of *Samdhyopasana.* Surya and his worship are frequently mentioned in the contemporary inscriptions and the atmospheric aspect of the Sun becomes prominent here. It appears from the Sian (Birbhum) inscription that probably king Vigrahapala made a gift of a chariot for a big Sun-temple for the annual *rathayatra.* The reference to a gift of golden lotus for the silver images of Surya and Navagrahas, no doubt, speaks of intense devotion

for the Sun among a section of wealthy people. Towards the end of the Pala period, Sun worship became very popular among the Brahmana rulers of Gaya. The Gayā Gadādhar Temple Inscription of the time of Nayapāla and the Gayā Sitalā Temple Inscription of Yakşapala of the time of Govindapāla begin with adoration to Surya and the first verse is dedicated to the Sun god. *Surya-pranama* was also a popular form of the worship of the Sun in this age.

In the 11th - 12th centuries A.D., the Vedic Brahmanism made a great progress with the support of the Varman-Sena kings. With the gradual extension of the Brāhmaṇical settlements in Bengal, the solar cult continued vigorously in its Vedic form. The Sun god was worshipped by the orthodox Brahmanas through *Samdhyopasana* along with the Gayatri hymn. Visvarupasena and his son Suryasena were staunch followers of the Sun god and it was in this period that the solar cult was further enhanced. Perhaps the contributory factor was the belief that the god was supposed to cure all types of diseases (*"samasta-roganam hartta"*). In the Madanapada and the Calcutta Sahitya Parisat Copper-plate of Visvarupasena as well as the Edilpur inscription of Suryasena, the Sun god figures as the reliever of the world from the clutches of darkness, as the friend of lotus flowers and as a wonderful bird having two wings of the two fortnights of the month. This demonstrates the *Satapatha Brahmana* concept of the Sun that was in vogue along his worship in image. The kings' inclination for this form of solar worship shows a strong undercurrent flowing against the popular practice of the image worship of the Sun god. Kings Visvarupasena and Surya call themselves *Parama-saura,* which indicates the existence of a separate sect of Sun worshippers.

Sun worship is amply referred to in the religious and secular literary texts of the Varman-Sena period such as *Subhasita-ratnakosa* of Vidyakara. By the time of Vidyakara, the Vedic worship of the Sun had grown into an important cult strengthened by impact of the Sun worship of Persia. Vidyakara considered the Sun to be one of the chief divinities of Hinduism. From all the four verses in the *Subhasita-ratnakosa* centering the Sun at Sunrise, it appears that many Hindus addressed their prayers to the heavenly body in the morning. The *Sadukti-karnamrita* of Sridharadasa also quotes a number of verses of different poets on the Sun, which is indicative of an important position of the Sun god among the Hindus. The same text makes a clear reference to *Surya-pranama* by referring to salutation to the east filled with fragrance. Dhoyi in his *Pavana-Duta* refers in to the Sun temple at Triveni, Hooghly. Halayudha has liberally eulogized the Sun god in the *Mangalacharana* of his *Brahmanasarvasya.* The *Brahmavaivarta Purana* states that the worshippers of the god Surya gain recovery from different kinds of illness. According to the *Brihaddharma Purana*, "He who worships the Sun would be healthy, wealthy and prosperous and repair to the holy immortal feet". The same Purana gives us some important information about the priests who were responsible for the spread of Sun cult in India. A reference to these Brahmans is also found in the *Aryasaptasati* where the *grahasanti* (propitiation of planets by sacrifices etc.) has been beautifully described.

In addition to the epigraphic evidences, there are several images of the Sun god that speaks much more about the Sun-cult from the eighth to the 12th century A. D. and even later. The number of Sun-images from the Pala and Sena periods is very large. It appears from the find spots of the 8th century images that the anthropomorphic worship of

the Sun was prevailing largely in *Varendri* and some parts of *Uttar Radha*. The terracotta Surya from Paharpur portrays the deity with a halo, seated as cross-legged and holding lotuses into the uplifted hands, which reminds us of the divinity on the Bodh-Gaya railings. The temple design in a few Sun-icon points to the popularity of Sun worship in temples. Surya and his two attendants Dandi and Pingala are represented as wearing a pair of pointed boots, as is seen in the Sun icons of the Pala Bengal. Discovery of only three Sun images in 8th century A.D. leads us to presume that the image worship of the god had yet not developed on an organized and widespread scale. The non-representation of the female attendants in the solar relieves also points to its distance from Tantrik philosophy. Out of the 26 ninth century images noticed hitherto, all the 25 hail from Pundravardhana – four from Rajshahi, one from Bogra, three from Dinajpur and 16 from Malda. Therefore, it can be said that image-worship of the solar deity became more popular not only in the district of Rajshahi but also arrived at new areas like the districts of Dinajpur and Malda. Remarkable growth of Sun images in comparision to the preceding 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 *rogahartta* concept of the Sun god. The tradition of Sun worship among the Pundras as referred to in the *Arseya Upanisad* probably played a prominent role in the ever-increasing popularity of the image worship of Surya in the Pundravardhana. Interestingly, three images from Gazole (Malda) represent the Sun god and his attendants without any boots – a feature that is extremely rare in the whole of India excepting the South. It is evident that the Bengali artists and the devotees did not follow in all respect the iconological arrangement of any existing text in fashioning the Sun images. High boots occurs in most of the

images of Surya as well as his attendants though they are mostly clad in *dhoti*. Samjna and Chaya, two wives of the Sun god, enter the iconographic scene, though in a very few images. Surya's ornaments consist of necklace, bangles, earrings and a jeweled girdle. The Bogra sculpture of the god endows him with a circular *tilaka* on the forehead. Pundravardhana in the 9th century also emerged as the centre of Sun worship.

Sun images of the 10th cent. A.D. found in Bengal appears to be less in number than in the earlier century but its worship was extended in new areas such as Rangpur in north Bengal, Faridpur in Vanga and Bankura in Radha. Most probably, some of the Sun worshipping people of Rajshahi district were shifting to different places under some professional or commercial compulsion and the arrival of the popular belief in the curative aspect of Surya in new areas impelled the people to worship the Sun-deity in image form. The only Surya image in Bengal standing in *tribhanga* (Pl. 6b) is a product of this century. Pingala, Dandi, Aruna and Mahasveta accompany the Sun god in most of his representations. The arrow-shooting Usa and Pratyusa also appear in a number of Sun-icons while Samjna and Chaya are very seldom represented. *Upavita* and *uttariya* very often adorn the god.

Sun worship gained much more popularity in the 11th century A.D., because of which more number of images have been discovered. Rajshahi again maintained its position as the main centre of Sun worship followed by Dinajpur and Malda. Some new areas also came under the sphere of the solar cult. Vikrampur was an important centre of Sun worship in the Vanga region. The representation of *agni-kunda* in a Sun-icon probably points to growing importance of sacrificial element in the religious ceremony. The image of the Sun god is usually carved partly in the round. The god and his

attendants wear *dhoti* and high boots. In two sculptures, the Sun god is seen as wearing *vanamala*, which as a characteristic attribute of Visnu marks the beginning of Surya's assimilation with Visnu. In a number of solar images, eight planets are also engraved, which undoubtedly highlights the planetary aspect of the god. In the Sun-icon from Joypurhat (Bogra), the god is represented within a temple suggested by a three-lobed arch resting on a pair of pillars.

The frequent endowing of sword or dagger to the Sun god jointly or in greater number is quite in keeping with the current political situation of early Bengal. A good number of Sun images from Vanga illustrate eleven Adityas engraved in them. From the regional point of view, the cult was more popular in Pundravardhana than in its other three counterparts: Radha, Vanga and Samatata. Rajshahi again emerged as an important centre of Sun-cult in Bengal. The worship of the god in Vanga mainly revolved round Dacca and its adjoining area. The solar cult was not that unpopular in the *Radha-janapada* but here the Sun god was quickly being assimilated into the concept of a popular folk-deity *Dharmathakur*.

The iconographic features of Surya in the 12th century are not that different from those of the preceding century. The god continues to appear in a *kiritamukuta* topped by an *amlaka*. The endowing of the Sun god or his attendant with *Karandamukuta* or allotment of *Jatamukuta* for Pingala probably indicates the downward course of the Sun cult. In the Sun-image from Badhair (Rajshahi), we find on the forehead of the divinity a lozenge-shaped *tilaka*, which is characteristic of Buddha signifying 'nobility'. In the Sun images of the Pala and Sena times, the religious outlook of the northern and Iranian

regions is retained, but in the meditation and interpretation of the Sun god, the Vedic and Brahmanical religious concepts appears to have merged.

Features of the Sun god are traceable in the images of various cult deities. A sculpture shows the fourhanded Sun god in *padmasana*. In his upper hands, the deity holds a pair of lotuses and the lower right and left hands carry the *Sankha* and *cakra* respectively. The example appears to be a syncretic icon of Surya and Visnu. The composite icons of Surya and Siva are comparatively few except the *Marttanda Bhairava* from Manda (Rajshahi). Apart from Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, reconciliation and rapprochement between rival gods and their creeds is also found in the direct connection of *Bodhisattva Lokesvara* with Hindu cult deities including Surya. A fragmentary sculpture a 10-armed Surya-Lokesvara with *jatamukuta* in one head. The worship of images in-group of gods belonging to rival sects was also prevalent in Bengal probably in an attempt to promote the religious tolerance.

Navagrahas also received worship as a part of the solar cult. Their worship became prevalent in the post-Gupta period, gaining immense popularity in the medieval time. *Grahayajna* was performed for peace, prosperity, ample rains, long life, nourishment, destruction of enemies and success in a military campaign. Navagrahas images were made of different materials. Besides accompanying the Sun god, the Navagrahas are also depicted on the *prabhavali* of the *Kalyana-Sundara* and the 'Mother and Child' images. Sasanka was cured by performing *grahayajna*. Planets like *Ravi*, *Candra*, *Budha* etc. are indirectly referred to in many inscriptions from Bengal. The Sian inscription refers to the gift of golden lotus for the silver image of the *Navagrahas*. The introduction of the *Grahapuja* everywhere in India is attributed to the Sakadvipi

Brahmanas. 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 the worship of Navagraha images was more popular in North and West Bengal.

As regards the method of worship, the Vedic way of Sun worship through the recitation of the hymns and the offerings was very probably 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. *Surya-namaskara* was also in vogue. It was at the dawn that many Hindus, irrespective of sect, addressed their prayers to the Sun. Image worship of the Sun god at home and in temple was undoubtedly popular. Sun cult was also influenced by the Tantric cult, though outwardly. The Sun was worshipped at dawn, noon and Sunset. From the reference to the Pundras and Suhmas as the Sun worshipping tribes in the *Arseya Upanisad*, land-donation for Sun-temple by three residents in the Jagadishpur inscription and Visvarupasena and Suryasena as *Parama-Saura* as well as from the discovery of large number of images from Pundravardhana, it appears that there existed a Sun-sect in Bengal throughout the early period. There might have developed the centers of Sun worship in Pundravardhana, especially in Mandara and at the *Gangasagara-samgama*.

The popularity of the Sun worship in Bengal continued down to the end of the Hindu rule. However, distinct worship of Sun-images is not noticeable from the medieval times because of various reasons. No backing of high philosophy so essential for greatness in religious matters was available to Surya because of his daily visibility to the naked eye. The Maga Brahmanas who were responsible for the popularity of Sun worship in image and in the temples were degraded in the society because of their study of

astrology, giving up of Vedic religion, their association with the lower untouchable classes and their hypocritical nature. The Sun was reduced from an exalted position to the status of a *graha* because of the extreme fondness of the Maga Brahmanas for astrology and *grahayajna*. The solar cult could not assimilate some of the fundamental principles of Tantricism because of which no concept of *Saura-Sakti* developed around the wives of Samjna or Chaya. The emergence of *Pancopasana* also left no scope of exclusive worship of the Sun god. Royal patronage was almost not nil for the solar cult. With the rise of Vaisnvism, Visnu, originally a solar deity, absorbed in himself much of the solar elements. The preponderance of *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* over-shadowed the cult of the Sun god. To revive the waning popularity of the Sun-cult, the Sun-deity even began to be called Hari as well as Siva. Due to preponderance of the Vedicism in the Varman-Sena age, the indigenous form of Sun worship without image and temple was gaining ground. It is not unlikely that the place of the Sun god was gradually occupied by *Dharmathakur* in some parts of Bengal.

Exclusive worshippers of the Sun are hardly traceable in the present day. However, every Hindu irrespective of sects does his respect to the rising and setting Sun. Ramification of Sun worship is confined nowadays among the Hindu women of Bengal who still observe a number of Surya-vratas such the *Maghamandal*, *Itupuja* etc.

Lastly, a few more words relevant to this kind of research need to be said. In course of our study, we have experienced that in many cases, due attention has not been given in best possible dating of the Sun images, while discussing about them in books or journals. Sometimes, the descriptions of the images are not only meager but also full of secondary things at the cost of the fundamental ones, which actually speak about the true

nature and evolution of a particular cult. In most of the catalogues of different museums, images of the deities have been presented together and described without any chronological sequence. Comparative study of different cults and study thereof from the socio-economic point of view, which gives a better understanding of their real position in the past, is also not also sufficiently found. Further, many museums in India and Bangladesh, though having a priceless collection of sculptures in their possession, have no catalogues published thereof. Therefore, there may even be the chance of those precious antiques not being made use of in study in spite of the best efforts of the researcher. It is also a matter of great regret that even today large numbers of images are found lying carelessly in the stores of different museums or in the police stations or under trees in the villages. To make proper historical judgments of the subjects under review and to preserve our glorious heritage, it is of utmost importance to give proper attention to all these matters.

APPENDIX - A

SUN TEMPLES IN EARLY BENGAL

SUN TEMPLES IN EARLY BENGAL

Architecture is intimately connected with sculpture. While a piece of sculpture might be the creation of an individual's taste and interest, the temple demonstrates the will of the community thereby showing the religious condition of the period. The temples represent in concrete form the prevailing religious consciousness of the people[1].

Aims of Building Temples:

Temples are considered as the symbolic representation of God. It is believed to help in promoting devotion and concentrating innate faith in the divine being. The building of a temple was regarded as a sacred act. It was meant to enhance one's fame and renown in this world and one's eligibility for a place in Heaven. The rewards gained by the performance of sacrifices and public works were equal to the rewards which one attain by building a temple. "One wishing to enter the world attained by performing sacrifices and sinking wells and the like, should build a temple, whereby one should get the fruit of both."[2] "Throughout the ages, the Hindu temple has been built with fervour of devotion - the *bhakti* - as a work of offering and pious liberality in order to secure for the builder a place in Heaven. The Hindu temple is a *tirtha* made by art.[3]

Antiquity of Sun-temples:

There was no scope for a temple in the solar religion of the Vedic tradition as it centered round the worship of the atmospheric form of the Sun by means of oblations and

libations in the sacred fire. Naturally, the Vedic literature is conspicuous by the absence of references to any temple in the proper sense of the term. However, terms indicative of the temple start occurring in the *Grihyasutras*[4], which shows that by the 5th-4th centuries B.C. the tradition of temples had been evolved in the Hindu society. The cult of *bhakti,* which inundated India after the 5th-4th centuries B.C., was responsible for the adoption of the temple-tradition.[5]

As regards the Sun-cult, we do not find any reference to a temple of the Sun in the orthodox literature before the 5th-6th cent. A.D. For the first time, there are references to a Sun-temple established by *Samba* at *Mulasthana* (modern Multan) in the *Samba, Bhavisya* and many other later Puranas.[6] The Magas are said in this legend to have built a city known as *Mulasthana* on the banks of Candrbhaga in Punjab and a Sun-temple there containing image of that deity. The tradition of public worship of the Sun in temples was introduced in India by the Magas as is attested by the literary evidences.[7] From the archaeological evidences, it is clear that many temples with the Sun-icons may have been constructed in India under the influence of the Magi Priests.[8] The Puranas mentioned above also refer to other temples at Konark and Kalapriya established by the Magas.[9] The temple of Multan may have been built in the Saka-Kusana period (2nd cent. B.C.-2nd cent. A.D.). If the testimony of Philostratos and Plutarch is to be believed, there may have been Sun-temples in the kingdom of Porus[10] on the eve of Alexander's invasion (4th cent. B.C.). In view of these evidences, it may be suggested that the tradition of temple for the Sun god may be as old as the fourth cent. B.C. and like other temples, they were made of perishable materials in the Maurya-Sunga period.

Many Gupta inscriptions also refer to Sun-temples.[11] Thus, by the Gupta period the temple tradition came to be incorporated in the Sun-cult by the orthodox Hindus also. However, it appears that the tradition of temple for the Sun god had come into existence much earlier among the masses under the combined impact of the Hellenized Mithraism and indigenous traditions. From the Gupta period onwards, the Sun-temples also came to be built in bricks and stones. That is why we start getting archaeological evidences of Sun-temples from the Gupta period onwards.[12]

Scarcity of materials:

In dealing with the Sun temple, nay with any type of architecture of early Bengal, one is at the very outset confronted with an utter scarcity of material all through the period. Almost none of these early monuments now exist. The fact is rather intriguing because numerous inscriptions of the province, dating from the Gupta period, refer to temples and monasteries. Fa-hien in the 5th century A.D. and Hiuen Tsang in the seventh saw a large number of temples and *stupas* in different parts of Bengal. Dhoyi, author of *Pavanaduta,* mentions many temples in Suhma dedicated to gods namely *Visnu* (V. 28), *Siva* (V. 29), Sun (V. 30) and *Ardhanarisvara* (V. 30).[13] Innumerable images found in Bengal are in them sufficient evidences that in ancient Bengal there were temples for their proper enshrinement. However, the very few standing edifices and the ruined vestiges, brought to light in explorations, are too fragmentary to be of much real use for a detailed account of Sun temple, properly so called. All that is possible to do is to piece together every bit of information from such other sources as inscriptions, literary works,

sculpture and extant monuments elsewhere, in order to reconstruct the history of the Sun temples of the province.

A cause for this almost obliteration may be sought for not only in the soft alluvial formation of the land and its damp climate, but also in the building materials. These last were usually mud, bamboo, reeds, wood and fragile but indigenous products. In Bengal, as in the rest of India, there was, no doubt, always a tendency to use permanent materials for religious edifices. However, even in the more pretentious buildings, the usual medium was brick, certainly a much less durable material than stone.[14] A brick structure, not to speak of the buildings in more perishable materials, cannot be expected to resist for long the effects of damp and relaxing climate, the excessive rainfall, and the luxuriant vegetation of the country. Stone was always very difficult to obtain in Bengal and had to be imported at great expenses from the quarry of Rajmahal Hills. Therefore, Bengal temples were almost entirely made of bricks and when left in neglect, their destruction was only a question.

Along with this natural cause, there was also the human element. Many temples that might have escaped decay because of the more durable nature of their materials were deliberately razed to the ground by foreign invaders because of their iconoclastic zeal. A few were converted by them into mosques or Dargahs.[15] Quite a large number of temples were demolished by the iconoclasts to secure building materials for constructing or decorating their own structures. Instances are not rare where earlier structures were thus utilized with but little transformations, as we have an example in the tomb of Jafar Khan Ghazi at Triveni in Hooghly.[16]

Distribution of Sun-temples in early Bengal:

Sun images have been discovered more or less from most of the districts of early Bengal. Presumably, majority of these icons used to receive worship in temples, big or small. However, we have very scanty references to the shrines of the Sun god, and that too in favour of a few districts only.

***Rajshahi*:** The temple of the thousand-rayed god Surya referred to in the Jagadishpur copper plate (A.D.447 A.D.) from Rajshahi District was established in the village named Gulmagandhika adjacent to the Jaina Vihara area included within *Pundravardhanabhukti*.[17]

Malda: At a place called Madhaipur in the district of Malda, an image of the Sun god is found in a temple of goddess Kali, which lies at a short distance from the present Malda Court Railway Station across the Mahananda River. It is believed that an exclusive temple for the Sun existed here in olden days.[18] According to local scholars, there was a city named Suryapur situated in the forest of Kaṭhāl in earlier times. At a place called Yogibhavan of this Suryapur, is found a big Sun image in a temple. Madhaipur is known to have been once a Brahman-dominated area. Ramapala is also referred to have established at Ramavati (Ramauti) a temple for the Sun god in addition to those for a few other Brahmanical deities.[19]

***Murshidabad*:** There is a Sun temple in the old settlement of Amritakunda or Amarkunda under Navagram Police Station, three miles from Ranidā, in the district of Murshidabad. This temple is popularly known as the '*Gaṅgādityer Mandir*'.[20] The god came to be known as *Gangaditya* because of being installed in a temple on the bank of

the River Ganges. He is the presiding deity of the Amarkunda village. It is learnt that the temple was built in 1307 - 1308 B.S. (1900-01) on an earlier temple-foundation.

Birbhum: There was probably a big temple of the Sun god in the *Rādha* region, which is indirectly referred to in the Sian (Birbhum) Stone Inscription[21] (of approximately 1043 A.D. and belonging to the reign of Nayapala). Grant of a *ratha* by the king for the Sun temple is indicated in Verse 17. Here we find a reference to something similar to a moving victory-pillar given by the king ("*Viśrāmārthamivaişa jamgam-jayastambho babhou yo'rpitah*'). The term'*Viśrāmārtham*' probably indicates that when tired, the horses of the Sun' s chariot would rest for a while at the peak of the temple. Indirect reference is made to a big Sun-temple in another verse (No.46) because the shrine is thought to be the palace of the Sun god where he would stay by giving up the way to the heaven ("*yadīya ruchi lobhitah sa bhagavannābhah pānthatām tyājediti vichintayanniyatamāhi*...).

Bankura: On the bank of a small river Kumari in the extreme southwestern corner of Bankura district[22] lies a temple for the Sun god, which has a standing figure of the Sun god carved on a large pedestal. There is also a Sun-temple at Sonatapal (Onda) in the same district. This *rekha deul* {i.e. temple with curvilinear *sikhara* (tower)} made of brick is one of excellent architectural heritage of the district. It is believd to have been established in the 11th century A.D. The place where the temple is located was known as Hamirdanga in earlier times and still has a large number of the Sakadvipi Brahmanas living nearby.[23]

Hooghly: There are many references to Sun-temples in the District of Hooghly. Panduya (Saptagram) situated thirty-eight miles from Calcutta and now commonly

known as Pedo, probably had a Sun-Temple.[24] Every year in the month of January and April fairs are held here in the honour of the Sun god. When Samsuddin Isuf Shah, a king of Gauda, conquered this place in the 15th Century A.D., the temple was converted into a mosque.[25] An Islamic inscription is found engraved in the lower portion of the backside of a stone slab containing a Sun-image.[26] Tribeni, situated at eight miles to the east of Mahanadi and at the short distance from Hooghly, was another place where probably a temple dedicated to the Sun god existed in ancient period. Dhoyi, the author of Pavana-duta, also refers to the same temple, 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.[27] Twelve figures of the god representing probably twelve different Adityas have also been discovered from Tribeni.[28] Probably, there was a splendid temple dedicated to them, which, later on, was destroyed by the Mohammedan invaders in the 13th or 14th C.A.D.[29]

Midnapore: No Sun-temple is found in the Midnapore District. Nor any evidence that there existed any temple for this god ever in any parts of the district has been discovered so far.[30] The Pala-Sena tradition had no abiding influence on temple architecture in this district almost the whole of which was under the territorial jurisdiction of ancient Orissa since the early medieval period.[31]

A Sun-temple is also found close to the *Visnupada* at Gaya, housing a Sun-image with four hands.[32]

Navagraha-shrines, though rare, have been discovered in other parts of India. Whether any temple for the nine planets had ever come up in early Bengal, especially in

North and South-Western Bengal, which has presented us all the Navagraha images, is not certain.

Patrons of Sun-temples:

The *Brahma Purana* prescribes Sun worship for all the castes - *Brahmanas*, *Ksatriyas*, *Visyas* and *Sudras* - to get all the worldly and non-worldly pleasures.[33] No restriction on account of caste is imposed on Sun-worship in the *Brihaddharma Purana* too.[34] *Religious* privileges were extended to women and men of lower castes by the Magas as well.[35] Deprived of the association of the higher Hindu society, these Scythian Brahmins sought to establish supremacy over the low-class untouchables.[36]

As is well known, Sun worship did not receive royal patronage in Bengal as elsewhere. Therefore, it is quite natural to presume that the kings had played no important role in the establishment of solar shrine in this territory. In keeping with our presumption, we have hitherto only two references to royal endeavour in the matter under discussion. In one case, the Pala king Ramapala, son of Vigrahapala III, is found to have established a temple for the Sun-deity at Ramavati (Ramauti) along with those of Siva, eleventh Rudra, Skanda and Ganapati.[37] The urge on the part of the king to please the people of different dominating cults in view of the recent Kaivarta rebellion, which led to the seizure of the Pala throne by the Kaivarta chief Divya followed by recovery under Ramapala, probably inspired him to take such a laudable eclectic step. In the other case, an indication is made of the grant of a ***ratha*** by a king for the Sun-temple, which presupposes the building of the solar shrine by the king.[38] Large number of Sun-images in stone from different parts of early Bengal speak in favour of the existence of a good

number of temple for the divinity. Perhaps most of these temples were built by the rich people[39] as well as the residents. The Jagadishpur copper plate (A.D.447 A.D.) from Rajshahi District refers to the permanent donation of land by three residents - Kshemarka, Bhoyila and Mahidasa - for the construction of a Sun-temple in the village named Gulmagandhika (Pundravardhana- bhukti).[40] Lands were also granted to the Brāhmaṇas to enable them to build up temples for different gods, as is revealed by several Gupta Inscriptions.[41]

Priests of the Sun-temples:

The information about the priests of the Sun-temples comes from both the literary as well as the epigraphic sources. It is learnt from the *Bhavisya* and some other *Puranas* that *Samba*, a son of *Krisna,* brought the Magas from Sakadvipa to appoint them as the priests of Sun-temples. This is also corroborated by the Govindapur (Navada, Gaya) Stone Inscription[42] of A.D. 1137-38, composed by the poet Gaṅgādhara who belonged to a line of Maga Brāhmaṇa. Further, it is expressly laid down in the *Brihat-samhita* (Ch. 59, V.19) that it was the Magas (the Indianized form of the Magi, the Sun-worshipping priests of Iran) who were entitled to install ceremonially the images of Surya in temples.[43] Varahamihira who lived in the Gupta period categorically says that when a king would construct a temple of the Sun, he would appoint Magi Brahmanas for the worship of the deity.

It may be derived specifically from the Deo-Baranark (Shahabad district, Bihar) inscription that with the temple of the Sun god were associated the *Bhojakas* named Sūryamitra, Hamsamitra, Rishimitra and Durdharamitra. As suggested by Monier

Williams,[44] the Bhojakas were the descendants of the Magas through the women of the *Bhoja* race. Varāhamihira[45] informs us "the Brāhmaṇa who knows very well the (astronomical and astrological) works and their meaning, is the first to eat the food (*Agrabhuk*) offered to the manes". The name *Bhojaka* seems to have been derived from their function of eating first on *Śrāddha*-ceremony.

Bengal abounds in images of Surya belonging to the mediaeval and earlier periods. It is presumable that the descendants of Maga Brahmanas settled in large numbers in this tract. The Brahmanas who came to be known as Acaryas in Bengal and were the main section of the Sauras, had images made for their use, which was worshipped by the general people for averting diseases and other evils.[46] Usually, they looked after the solar temples as priests and also actively pursued the profession of astrologers and averter of astral influences (*grahasanti*), which is referred to in the *Matsya Purana.*[47]

General features of the Sun-temples:

Although no Sun-temples of great antiquity exist in Bengal, we get some idea about their general features from the close examination of some extant temples of the Sun god in other parts of India as well as several stone relieve, for in many cases the deity is shown as installed in temples whose outlines are carved round the divine figure. By a close study and analysis of these, the Sun-temples of ancient Bengal, which all naturally belonged to the northern style of Indian architecture, may be divided into not more than two distinct types according to the form of the roof over the sanctum. However, for a

better understanding, it may not out of point to add just a few words about all the distinct types of Bengal temples.

Ancient temples of Bengal have been classified into four distinct types. (i) The *bhadra, pida* or tiered type, in which the roof over the sanctum consists of a series of gradually receding tiered stages crowned by the usual finials including the *amalaka.* (ii) The *rekha* or the *sikhara* type is characterized by a high curvilinear tower and the usual crowning elements; (iii) the tiered type is surmounted by a *stupa.* (iv) The tiered type is surmounted by a *sikhara.* It should be noted, however, that structural examples of these different types, except those of the second, are very rare, if not unknown, especially so far as the last two are concerned. The first type may be seen as fully devolved in several images such as the images of Surya from Kuldia (24-Parganas), Surya from Baria (Rajshahi; Pl. 18b) etc. Here we find temples with trefoil arches supported on richly decorated pillars, the roofs being composed of an odd number of *pidas* (here sloping tiers), three or five, and the whole surmounted by the *amalaka* and the usual finials. The last tier occasionally shows rampant lions at the course. It may be safely presumed that the Sun-temples in which the above and other Surya images were enshrined might have had forms and features as carved around the celestial figure.

A thorough inspection of a few existing Sun-temples in other parts of India[48] also enlightens us about some other common characteristics of the Sun-temples with minor variations in details. The Sun-temples face towards east. According to the *Bhavisya Purana*, the entrance of a Sun-temple should face the east;[49] if not possible, it should face the west. The *agnihotragriha* (the house for the oblations to the fire) is an integral part of the Sun-temples.[50] The *śikhara* is generally found. They have usually *pradakşinā-mārga.*

They give an impression of massiveness and largeness, though are of moderate dimensions. The Sūrya figures are generally standing along with other figures such as of Viṣṇu etc. It is interesting to note that in spite of the Magian influence on the Sun-cult there is no Iranian influence visible in any of the Sun-temples. However, generally they are in perfect keeping with the art traditions of India. The Magian tradition failed to exert any influence on the technique and tradition of the Sun-temples in India. These characteristics, at least a few if not all, might have been present in the Sun-temples of early Bengal.

Sometimes the image of the Sun god was installed in a temple along with those of other Brahmanical deities as well. It is not also rare that the shrine of other divinity, even belonging to heterodox cult, had been built up just beside or very close to the temple of Surya.[51] The temple of the god *Sahasrarasmi* was established at Gulmagandhika adjacent to the Jaina Vihara area in *Pundravardhana-bhukti*. In close proximity of the extant temple of the Sun god and the lost shrines of Visnu and Siva on the bank of the Kumari River (Bankura)[52] is found a huge 10th cent. A.D. standing image of the 23rd *Tirthanikara Parsvanatha* with the figures of 24 *Tirthankaras* carved on the background. These developments came to take place in early and particularly in late medieval Bengal either out of the growth of the *Panchayatana Puja* or of the social compulsion of harmonious co-existence for a better survival of the cults at stake.

As already seen, stone slabs with *Navagraha* images were used in the medieval temples as architectural pieces (e.g. in a panel on a doorframe, on lintels over the entrance doorway and sometimes on the *torana* of a Surya temple) allegedly to ensure prosperity to their founders and to prevent any evil happening to the temples themselves.

Whether they were placed in the Sun-temples of Bengal, and if so, how - is not definitely known as there is no old temple in this province with such a sculpture fixed in situ.

It is deserving of note that near the Sun-temples[53] at Madhaipur (Malda) and Sonatapal (Bankura) Brahmana settlements, especially of Sakadvipis, are found to have existed, which seems to be quite natural in view of the Maga Brahmanas forming the main section of the Sun-worshippers. This sort of settlement might have been present in the neighborhood of a few other solar shrines as well.

Sun-temple complex:

The Sun-temple of Panduya or Pedo (Hooghly), now destroyed, has still two tanks, named Jarapukar and Pirpukar.[54] These two tanks are undoubtedly *Surya-kundas,* which are sacred to the Sun god. The Sun temple of Modhera (Gujrat), one of the most splendid of the Solar shrines of India, also has a *Surya-kunda* very near, which is now called Rama-kunda.[55] According to *Vāyu Purāṇa*, Yājñavalkya and his pupils, having been inflicted with the sin of *Brahmahatyā* and advised by Brahmā, had their bath in the tanks including the *Sūryakuṇda*, worshipped the god *Vālukeśvara* (Surya) of twelve beams in the city of Vāyupur and merged themselves into the world of Sūrya *(Sūrya-maṇḍalam).*[56] The presence of a *Sūrya-kuṇda* became quite common in classical and mediaeval Hindu India[57] and was an integral part of the Sun-temple complex. The *Rigveda* (10.142.8) emphasizes the need of digging ponds or tanks for having full-blown lotuses (i.e. a sun-symbol standing for the creative force) besides for the supply of pure drinking water (*RV*, 9.110.5). It is said in the Great Epic that the digging of tanks is very agreeable and beneficial and is "gratifying" to Surya himself and rewarded are those who

dig tanks.[58] In view of these facts, it is presumable that the Sun-temples which were not situated on some riverbank, were, in all likelihood, endowed with *Surya-kundas*. Perhaps at least a few of the Sun-temples were provided with *rathas* (Chariot) for the journey of the Sun god installed in the temple – a fact which may be surmised from the reference to grant of a *ratha* by the king for the god in Verse 17 of the Sian Stone Inscription[59]

We have already seen that most of the Sun-temples in Bengal were built up on the bank of some or other river (Ganges, Mahananda, Kumari etc.) and at least one has been provided with *Surya-kundas*. The presence of big and deep-water source like river or pond is quite significant. It has already been noticed in the legend of *Brahma-hatya* and consequent Sun worship by Yajnavalka and his pupils that it was enjoined for those guilty of sin to have a bath before going to worship the solar divinity. Surya has been worshipped from time immemorial for removal of diseases, especially leprosy inflicted because of some heinous act committed (cf. Samba and Mayura legends). How could a bath be possible as a precondition of Sun worship in absence of sufficient water available nearby? There is also a long established custom to see the reflected image of the Sun in the water. Even at the folk level, a miniature pond is dug in the yard to have reflected image of the Sun in the water, on which the solar worship is to be performed.[60] In Sun worship by the Mal-Paharia tribe,[61] a brass pot of water with a mango-twig placed on it is thought to represent the seat of the Sun god. It, therefore, appears that the miniature pond or the brass-pot of water is nothing but an available substitute of *Surya-kunda*, which is very sacred to the Sun god. In addition, water happens to be the most important of the eight offerings to god Surya, others being *Kusa-grass,* clarified butter, curd, honey, red *Karabi* flower and red sandal. Dhoti in his *Pavana-duta* (V. 30), directs the messenger

wind to salute the solar divinity ('*Raghukulaguru*') in the temple of Tribeni on the bank of the river Ganges and offer water to him before departing from there. Water is also very much needed to quench the thirst caused by the heat of the Sun, a fact which probably became very much prominent in the minds of the builders of the Sun-temples. Such a pressing necessity of water in Sun worship explains the location of the solar shrines on the riverbank or the digging of tanks very close to the temple of the Sun god. The coming up of stone Sun-temples mostly on the riverbank is attributable to the advantage of importing thousands of stone blocks from the distant quarries, either by some vessel or by floating them down the river. In this land of alluvial soil, there was no ample scope to make use of stone for the construction of temples.

Thus, large number of Sun images discovered from different parts of Bengal presupposes the existence of several Sun-temples in her ancient period, though no solar shrine of great antiquity is found today and references to them occur scantily in different sources. Temple came to be an important feature of Sun worship from the Gupta period, which witnessed the increased use of stone and preferably brick in the construction. The roof of the Sun-temple was generally of the shape of stepped pyramids crowned by an *amalaka*. The solar shrines with *agnihotragriha* faced towards east. They were mostly built up on the bank of rivers or elsewhere with a pond (*Surya-kunda*) in front.

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27. Dhoyi, *Pavana-duta*, Verse 30.

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58. *MBH, Anusasanaparva*, Section LVIII.

59. Sircar, *Śilālekh Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅge*, pp. 85-101.

60. Bhattacharya, Padmanath, 'Folk-custom and Folk-lore of the Sylhet district in India', *Man in India*, Vol. X, Nos. 2-4, 1930, p.117.

61. Das, Tarak Chandra, 'Sun worship amongst the aboriginal tribes of Eastern India', *Journal of the Department of Letters*, Vol. II, 1924, p. 91; Risley, H. H., *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1891, p.70.

APPENDIX - B

SUN WORSHIP IN FOLK TRADITION

SUN WORSHIP IN FOLK TRADITION

During the period of the revival of Hindu supremacy when the Sun-worshipping scythic people were found to observe several distinct rites and customs of their own with which the Vedic Hindus had no ritualistic or cultural affinity, they became excommunicated from the higher Hindu society. Deprived of the association of this society, these Scythian Brahmins sought to establish supremacy over the low-class untouchables of society and it was from then that the solar worship became almost extinct in higher Hindu society.[1] Though solar worship has outwardly disappeared from the social rites of the Hindus, yet it has not clean gone out of the heart of society. The popular *vratas* such as *Maghamandal Vrata*, etc. are nothing but a popular phase of solar worship.

I

Sun worship by womenfolk

The *Vrata* literally means 'a vow to be observed by undergoing solemnly certain physical and mental discipline for attaining a desired result or object'. Women-folk in India were deprived for a long time of their religious rights and privileges as per injunctions of the *Smritis* or *Dharmasastras*. As a result, they used to satisfy their earnest desire for performing religious rites and rituals by taking part in the *Vratas*, which are folk-rituals unrecognized in the sacred texts (*sastras)*.

It is difficult to determine the antiquity of this form of folk-ritual that are practiced by women folk at different stages of their life. The *Vratas* in their primitive form seem to have been known to the aboriginal tribes and were later adopted in their sophisticated form by the women of the upper classes of the society. The process of extending recognition to the *Vratas* by the priestly class seems to have been long-drawn in character. However, in the *Matsya Purana* Siva is said to have explained the efficacy of some *Saura Vratas*, that is, rituals to be performed invoking the god Surya. An emphasis has been laid upon the performance of such rituals on the seventh day of the bright fortnight, especially in the Bengali month of *Magha*. In the *Matsya Purana*, description has been given of the *Vratas* like *Kalyan Saptami, Visoka saptami, Phala Saptami, Sarkara Saptami, Kamal Saptami, Mandar Saptami* and *Subha Saptami.*[2] The term *Saptami* seems to have signified the auspicious seventh day in the bright fortnight of a month, especially of *Magha*. It may be considered in this connection that the first four and the last one of the *Vratas* mentioned above are prescribed for those who desire to be free from all diseases by an invocation to god *Surya* and a prayer for his beneficent farvour. As in the early Puranas, so also in the later Puranas Vratas find mention for the worship of Surya. In the *Brihaddharmma Purana* (14th century A. D.), for example, we find specific reference to the *Suryavrata*. It would not be unreasonable to hold that the said *Purana* has recorded the tradition of *Vrata* that had been in vogue for a long time. The *Puranas* also recommend the observance of vows or *Vratas* in honour of the Sun with such objectives as obtaining cure from disease, attainment of wealth etc.[3] It is noteworthy that no restriction on account of caste is imposed on Sun-worship.[4] *In* addition to Puranic references, we may also take into our consideration the results

achieved by socio- cultural anthropologists through their researches. Their findings give us to understand different forms of *Vratas* prevalent in different parts of Bengal. The *Vratas* hardly required the use of any *mantra* or a disciplined way of worship. Those were mostly performed by the devotees with the aid of symbolic representation of the deity concerned and the traditional ballads and folklore handed down from generation to generation.

Magha-Mandala Vrata: Among the *Surya-vratas*, the *Magha-Mandala Vrata* is the most popular one, which the girls of East Bengal, Sylhet and Cachar districts observe for years together before their marriage. The detailed description of this *vrata,* which has been given by Dr. N.K. Bhattashali, deserves to be cited in this connection:

"The *Magha-Mandala Vrata* is performed by the Hindu girls from their early childhood. It often begins when they are as young as 3 or 4 years of age. It has to be continued for five years in succession and is performed every year in winter throughout the month of *Magha.* The girls rise before the Sun appears on the horizon and repair to the *ghat* of the nearest tank. They sit by the water's edge with flowers in their hands and begin to chant hymns in vernacular under the guidance of an elderly girl or woman. The hymns are mostly childish doggerel, but not devoid of beautiful sentiments. They describe the childhood of the Sun, his coming of age, his marriage, the birth of his son, & c., and in them are skillfully interwoven the childish hopes and fears of the girl regarding her future wifehood and home, her fears of rivals and her hankering to be the centre of a prosperous household.

The hymns (a dialogue supposed to take place between the girl and the Sun) begin

thus:-

Arise, arise, Sun-nie dear, sparkling and fresh;

Alas, I cannot, I cannot, the mists will not let me.

On the inner courtyard of the home, a shallow circle is dug on the ground with a smaller circle to indicate the Sun to the east, and a semi-circle for the moon to the west. After the chants are finished, the girl returns home and completes observance by the chant of a short hymn, sung while sitting on the edge of the circle. A new circle has to be added each year and each has to be coloured differently by different tinted powders. When the five circles are at last completed, the final observance of eating certain forms of sweetmeat by the girl while sitting on the edge of the circles is performed. The residue of sweetmeat is thrown over her head to be scrambled for by the other girls present. Thus, the five years' observance comes to a close".[5] The *vrata* is usually found to begin on and from the very day, when the Sun passes into the summer solstice after the period of its passage from Sagittarius to Capricon.[6] If one studies a bit closely the rites and rituals connected with the *Magha-mandal Vrata* it will be quite clear that it is merely a popular female edition of the solar worship of older days. The *vrata* appears to be designed mainly as a discipline in early rising in defiance of the cold weather, which is at its height in *Magha*.

Itu-puja: Among instances of folk-worship of the Sun in the Brahmanical society in Bengal, mention should also be made of the *Itu Puja*.[7] Dr. J. N .Banerjea[8] thinks that in the worship of *Itu* lies hidden the Sun worship of the earlier period. In West Bengal, *Itu-puja* is performed by the women of every Hindu family on every Sunday beginning

from the last day of the month of *Karttika* to the last day of the month of *Agrahayana* (November-December) according to the sanctions of Hindu *sastras*. It has been pointed out by Chintaharan Chakraborty[9] that *Itu-puja* is more prevalent in West Bengal than *Magha-mandal*.

It has been suggested that *Itu* has to be derived from *Mitu* that is Mitra or the Sun. That the Sun was not unknown by the name of *Mitra* is thought by some scholars to be evident from the performance of the *Vrata Mitra Saptami* in some parts of Bengal in the month of *Agrahayana*. However, no tradition of Mitra-worship has been preserved and there is no evidence that the Mitra-cult did, at any time, become a popular form of religion.[10] On the other hand, both in the folk legends connected with worship of *Itu* and the Brahmanic form given to this folk worship the deity is definitely mentioned as Surya.[11]

Four small earthen pots are placed on a big earthen cup filled with earth in which seeds of paddy, barley, wheat and cereals are put. These seeds germinate and shoot up in the course of the month as a small quantity of water is poured every Sunday on the earth. The four earthen pots are symbolical of the four seasons of which the Sun is the lord; the earthen cup filled with earth symbolizes the earth ruled over by the Sun. Devotees should forego hair oil, fish and meat on the day of worship. Flowers, *durba*-grass, sandalwood paste, sesame, sun-dried rice, myrobolam and so forth are presented for the rites of worship. Bunches of paddy-crops and some bulbs of arum *(coloccasia)* are inserted into the earthen pot filled-up with water. When the officiating Brahmin priest begins to perform the rite and offers the *puja*-offerings to the said pot, the females, maiden or married, recite some rhymed verses and legend connected with the Sun-deity. These

verses and legend describe how this worship came to be adopted by some persons in an extremely miserable plight and how they came to attain prosperity and happiness through it. When the period of worship ends, *sādh* (rice boiled in milk and cakes) is given to *Itu. Sadh* is a feminine term meaning *simantonayana,* one of the twelve purificatory rites prescribed in the *Grihyasutras* and its use in this connection is characteristic. When the females have finished the recital of the legend, they chant a verse, which embodies the boons, and merits which they desire to obtain. The English rendering of the verse is as follows:

"While I went to gather faggots, I heard the story (connected with the worship) of "*Itu*" the Sun-deity and returned home. If one hears it, what merits does one acquire thereby? A man who has got no wealth, gets wealth; a man who is sonless, is blest with son; the unmarried soon gets married, the helpless gets help from God; the blind man gets back his eyesight, and after death, the hearer of this legend goes to heaven. "

The boons asked for by the observers of the *Itu-puja* are sufficiently and distinctly set forth in the verse, which is recited in connection therewith. The object of the *Itu-puja* is undoubtedly the attainment of domestic happiness. Important facts in connection with this worship are that it is confined to women and requires no priest except on the last day of the worship and that it is performed only on Sundays in the month of *Agrahayana*. The last fact is easily explained by the circumstance that Sunday is especially sacred to the Sun while the two other facts would clearly indicate that the worship is of folk origin. The worship of *Itu* is really in the nature of a *Vrata* and synchronizes with time when the winter paddy crop is harvested and seeds of cereals are sown. The manner of worship in which seeds of grains and cereals are put in a cup filled with earth and watered for a

month and small pots placed on it as symbols of four seasons ruled over by the Sun, would indicate that the worship was, perhaps, in its origin a fertility rite based on the idea of mimetic magic.[12]

Suryer Vrata: Besides the *Magha-mandal Vrata*, Sun worship is still extant in East Bengal in a different form performed by the female-folk. It is known as *Suryer Vrata*.[13] *The* rituals associated with this *Vrata* are as follows: On a certain Sunday of the light fortnight in the month of *Magha,* an earthen altar is to be built in the courtyard on which *ghrita-pradips* (lamps whose wicks are besmeared with clarified butter), whose number must correspond to that of the *Vrata* performers, should be lighted as soon as the Sun rises. After ablutions even before sunrise, the female worshippers stand facing the east with lighted lamps in their hands. They will then make obeisance to the Sun and commence singing songs in honour of the Sun with sounds of *Ulu, Ulu*. The worshippers are not permitted to sit down from sunrise to sunset; they may not partake of anything, not braid their hair or ease themselves. Those who will perform their *Vrata* in a sitting posture will not be allowed to stand up. At noon, the priest performs the worship of the Sun at the foot of the altar. The worshippers will finish their songs after sunset and break their fasts. They will then be allowed to put out the lights and sit down.

The people of Chittagong also perform the ***Surya-Vrata***[14] on the last Sunday of the light lunar fortnight of the Bengali month of *Magha* (January-February). The officiating Brahmin priest is engaged to perform this rite of worship. It takes place on an elevated spot where the public fair is held every year on that fixed date. On the day of the

worship, all the devotees, especially females, rise very early in the morning, go to an adjoining tank with brass water-pot and take baths therein. Each devotee fills up this pot with water and inserts a mango twig into it, and all utter cries of "*Ulu* " in a chorus. No such legend and verses as in the case of *Itu-puja* are recited in this Chittagong form of Sun worship. Retuning home with those pots in their hands, they keep them in such a place where the sunrays must fall upon the pots throughout the whole day to dry up gradually the water within the pot.[15] The gradual drying-up of water by the Sunrays prognosticates the fulfillment of their heart's desires. If the sunrays do not fall upon the pots all the daylong and dry up the water therein, the observers think that their cherished desires will not be fulfilled.

All the devotees fast whole day and go to the aforesaid fair where each purchases a big funnel-shaped incense-pot, two sets of small earthen pots, saucers and lamps with lamp-stands. They take all those things and other *puja*-offerings to the officiating priests who sit in a row. Flowers, *durba*-grass, sandalwood paste, sesame, Sun-dried rice, myrobolam and so forth are presented for the rites of worship. The provision of water pot, which, with a mango twig, some ears of paddy and bulbs of arum inserted there into, is placed upon an earthen saucer and to which the *Puja* offerings are presented, is not indispensably necessary in the Chittagong forms of worship. Each priest prepares those *puja* offerings, arranges them upon those earthen plates, burns incense, lights lamps and performs the rite. He presents one set of food-offerings to *Vishnu*, the preserver of the world, who is at first propitiated and another set to the Sun-deity.

Throughout the day of the *puja*, a sacrificial fire is kept burning before which the *puja*-offerings brought by the devotees for dedication to the Sun-deity, are placed. The

site on which the *puja* as also the fair is held is called by the people "*Surya-Khala*", the place for the worship of the Sun god. The great fair begins from the morning and closes with the sunset.

The only boon, which is prayed for by the worshippers, is that they might be cured of all ailments they might be suffering from at the time. This they do under the belief that the Sun god will cure them of their ailments. Quite analogous to this folk-rite of Eastern Bengal is that which is performed in Bihar by persons who suffer from chronic diseases. They worship the Sun daily after taking their morning bath and read the *Surya-Purana.*

Surya Vrata is also enjoined in the *Brihaddharma Purana*[16] for those who desire to get rid of all diseases and to acquire good health. It has been prescribed for the people belonging to all castes. There are different methods of observing the *Vrata.* According to a method prescribed, the worship of the Sun god is to be performed on the seventh day of the bright fortnight by the devotee who observes restrain in her taking food on the sixth day and fasting on the seventh day and is allowed to take usual food on the eighth day. According to another method, the devotee may worship *Marttanda* on Sundays, observing fast at night. Again, a devotee may also worship god *Bhaskara* on the day of *Samkranti*-cum-Sunday uttering the name of *Aditya* and taking food once only at night. It is further prescribed that a devotee may concentrate upon the setting Sun and later feed the *Brahmanas* with sweets for their satisfaction, herself taking only rice boiled in milk with sweet. The devotees of the Sun god are advised to repeat the *Adityahridaya-mantra* on the seventh day of the bright fortnight in *Magha.* The day should, of course, be a

Sunday. After the repetition of the *mantra,* the devotee has to take holy bath, give donation, practice penance, perform sacrifice and observe fasting. The eight offerings to god Surya are said to be water with *Kusa-grass,* clarified butter, curd, honey, red *Karabi* flower and red sandal. The offerings are to be made in pots made of clay or gold. In some places, the priests are found to officiate in the *Surya Vrata*, preparing an offering on earthen plates, burning incense, lighting lamps and performing the rite on behalf of the *Vrata*-observers. The description of the *Vratas,* as given in different texts, seems to suggest that not only cure of diseases but also all possible desirable things in woman's life are prayed for after an invocation to the Sun god at the time of observing the *Vratas.*

Surya-Vrata in Sylhet: An instance of folk worship of the Sun is reported from Sylhet, Assam.[17] On a Sunday on the 7th day of the moon and on the last day of the month, worship of the Sun is performed on the reflected image of the Sun in the water in a miniature pond dug in the yard for the occasion. On Sundays in the month of *Magha*, the worship is performed with great pomp. At that, the devotees remain standing the whole day and enjoy neither meal nor protection from sunshine. In the past, devotees would take lamp in the hand and plunge themselves into water at sunrise. Standing in water naval deep, they would look towards the Sun, shifting the direction of their faces from east to west, as the Sun would move in its diurnal course until it set down when the devotees would come out of the water to take their food. Only very lately, the custom was to remain standing on the land at spot, looking towards the Sun with a lamp in a hand. Nowadays, however, the worshippers only abstain from sitting down and enjoying their meals and taking shelter in their house, and those who feel difficulty even in this much,

observe fasting only. However, even now the position of the wick-end of the lamp is shifted from east to southeast, south to south-west and west according to the course of the Sun in winter. The lamp is not kept now in the hands, but is placed near the pond in the yard for the *puja* purposes. Formerly both males and females would observe the solemn rite, but nowadays the males seldom do it. The Sun is believed to have no teeth. Therefore, his meal consists of rice and milk. After sunset, the females walk round the pond and sing songs until it is dark when they go and break fast. In almost every rite and worship, an '*arghya*' to the Sun is a sine qua non. '*Arghya*' is an offering of a mixture of grass, rice and water. It would appear, however that two kinds of observances, one *Puranic* in origin and the other of folk origin should be distinguished. In Bankura and other parts of Western Bengal, offerings are made to Dharam to obtain his blessings for the crop of the season.[18]

The ***Chungir Vrata***[19] is observed by the homemakers in East Bengal. On Sunday in the Bengali month of *Agrahayana,* 21 *durba*-grasses put in a tube (*chonga*) of *nala* tree and bathed with milk are offered to the Sun god. The legend recited in this *vrata* is similar to that of the *Itu-puja* of West Bengal. Chintaharan Chakravarty[20] has referred to another *Surya Vrata* known as *Dhākarī Vrata* performed by the aged women. Sun worship by the *Griha-laksmis* (homemakers) through recital of small legends is widely prevalent in the district of Midnapore as well.[21]

Raldurgar Vrata: The survival of the pre-Aryan Sun worship is also found in the folk ritual of the *Raldurgar Vrata.*[22] In addition, there are many folk rites prevailing, in which the tradition of popular solar worship may be traced.

Rathayatra: Among the festivals connected with the worship of the Sun, *Rathayatra* i. e. the procession of the chariots of the Sun-deity is described in the *Bhavisya Purana.*[23] It originated with the aboriginal tribes, and in course of time came to be Aryanised.[24] The concept of the *Rathayatra* as a solar festival was also held by the people of our country in earlier times. According to the geographers, an intimate connection could be traced between the *Rathayatra* and the Diurnal rotation of the Sun. The later *purāṇas* describe the method of performing annual worship (*samvatsarī pūjā*) and annual car-festival (*Rathayātrā*) of the Sun with the use of Vedic and Purāṇic mantras well as methods for the use of incense and other materials in *pūjā.*[25]

Saura literature of Bengal:

In the folk literature that was current during the middle ages in Eastern Bengal, there is ample evidence to show that the cult of the Sun god was widely and strongly prevalent in that part of the country during this period. A very realistic picture of the domestic life of Bengal has been portrayed through the ballad sung in honour of the Sun on the *Magha-mandal Vrata.* Of religious association, there is little in it. The story is rather loose-strung and lyrical in character. However, the solar ballad of the *Magha-mandal Vrata* is not the only evidence of solar literature of Bengal. In accordance with the conventional mode of the composition of *Mangal Kavyas*, one or two *Surya Mangals*

containing coherent and compact stories were also composed in the name of the *Surya Thakur*. The stories narrated in them differ altogether from the story of the *Magha-mandal* legend.

The name of the earliest Bengali poet of *Surya Mangal* is Ramjivan Bhattacharyya Vidyabhushana. He composed *Suryer Panchali* (or the legend connected with the ceremonial worship of the Sun god), in the Saka year 1611 or 1709 A.D. This poem throws a flood of light on the cult of the Sun god in medieval Eastern Bengal.[26] It concludes with the instructions: Whoever would worship the Sun god in this way would be always preserved by his deityship (from all harm). The foregoing medieval Bengali legend bears a striking similarity to the one that is recited in connection with the ceremonial worship of the deity *Itu-Ra'la*, which is performed in Eastern Bengal on Sunday following the day in the month of *Agrahayana* (November-December).[27] From the *Suryer Panchali* we learn:*(a)* that the worship of the Sun god was very popular in Eastern Bengal during the 17th and the preceding centuries of the Christian Era; *(b)* that the people of the countryside worshipped this deity for obtaining the boons of happiness and prosperity; and *(c)* that it was further believed that, if the consecrated water used in the worship of this god were sprinkled upon the bodies of dead men, they would come to life again. In addition to *Suryer Panchali*, a little altered form of the story therein can be seen in another *Vrata* namely, *Karamadi Vrata* performed by the female folk of Eastern Bengal. Hence, the story as written by Ramjivan is not also original. Its style and conception are vitiated by the conventionalism of later *Mangal Kavyas*. Besides Ramjivan, another poet Kalidas by name is known to have composed *Surya Mangal* or

Surya's Panchali. He has spoken of himself as '*Dvija*' or Brahmin; nothing more can be known about him. He is supposed to have flourished in the 18th century A.D.

13 interesting folk-songs describing a few of the leading incidents in the career of the Sun-god have been discovered in the district of Barisal in Eastern Bengal.[28] From the number of archaic Bengali words and phrases that have been used in these folk-ballads, it would appear that they are very old. Some scholars are of opinion that they were composed before the Puranic Age.[29] From an examination of these folk-ballads, it appears that during the Middle Ages, the cult of the Sun-god was very popular in the district of Barisal in Eastern Bengal and that there songs or hymns used to be chanted in every Hindu household in connection with the ceremonial worship of this deity. It would appear from a few lines[30] that they are charms whereby the Sun is caused (160) to come out of the sky and shine upon the earth below. A folk-ballad (No. V) proves, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the popularity and the widespread character of the cult of the Sun god, during the middle ages in Eastern Bengal.[31] From the study of this song, we learn that the sun-deity was prayed to and propitiated by his votaries with the presentation of various kinds of offerings in order to make him shine forth upon this earth, for men cannot live without his life-giving beams. The deity accedes to their prayers, accepts their offerings, and, being propitiated thereby, he pours forth his beams upon the world below, as will appear from line 14 of this song that says, "Having received the worship (from his worshippers,) the boy Sun-god looked all around (him)".

Sun worship still survives in several nursery-rhymes in Bengal.[32] In lower Bengal, there are many nursery-rhymes in vogue that are chanted by little on foggy or cloudy morning without knowing that they are thereby praying to the Sun god and imploring him

to come out of the sky and shine upon the earth below as they are very much in need of the Sun's vivifying influences. Mention may be made of the nursery rhymes no. 52 of Sarkar's collection,[33] which shows how the moon is represented therein as going to the Sun's place describing to the latter the miseries from which men and beast of mundane world are suffering for want of sunshine, and therefore, imploring him to come out of the sky and shine upon the earth below. Again in Nursery-rhyme no. 324 of the same collection, the Sun is prayed to shine upon the earth as well as upon the forest of plantain trees for the ripening of the bunches of plantains and is promised an umbrella to be erected over his head by way of thanks-giving for this boon conferred upon mankind. Again, in Nursery rhyme No. 216 the Sun god is addressed as a 'maternal uncle' and prayed to shine upon the earth.

Worship of the Sun as *Dharmathakur*: In Bankura and other parts of Western Bengal, offerings are made to *Dharma Thakur* with the object of obtaining his blessings for the crop of the season.[34] It appears that Sun was identified to some extent with the Dharma and worshipped as a folk god in rural Bengal in the Middle Ages.[35] Whether this identification was responsible in some way for the alleged popularity of the Sun as a folk god in rural Bengal in the middle ages is not known, although there is little doubt that a large bulk of the rural population of Bengal at the time was Buddhist.

Ramai Pundit, the author of the famous Buddhist work *Sunya Purana*, laid down form and formulae of the worship of Dharma. According to him, Surya is to be mediated on as follows:-

Mandalam vartulakaram suunyadeham mahabalam

Ekcakradharam devam tam Suryam pranamyaham[36]

That Surya drives in one-wheeled chariot is a Puranic Concept but *mandalam, vartulakaram, Sunyadeham* are epithets, which belong to the god Dharma who is often worshipped in a tortoise-shaped stone image. Such an image of Dharma is actually worshipped at the *Sarvamangala* temple at Burdwan town as Surya. It is reported that this worship has continued for the last 250 years.[37] Investigation into cases of Sun worship among Hinduised tribes and tribal peoples reveal interesting facts. A number of tribes identify the Sun with Dharma and offer him unorthodox sacrifices. If it is assumed that these tribes are remnants of the Buddhist population the source of this particular worship may be traced back to the Middle Ages.[38] The object of worship is mainly agricultural, in some cases it is offspring.

II

Sun in the Beliefs and Practices of the Tribes of Bengal

A critical study of the practices of the primitive tribes of Bengal may also throw valuable light on the Sun worship in Bengal. Tylor[39] has shown that Sun worship had been a very widely prevalent phenomenon among the primitive tribes of the world and such instances are not absent in India too. The great, radiant and jubilant deity of the firmament, who makes his appearance daily at the appointed hour and returns back to his

mansion on the other side of the western hills, is the greatest object of reverence and worship for a number of tribes inhabiting this eastern portion of this vast sub-continent of India. Generally, it is not the *physical* Sun who is so much adored and worshipped but it is the *indwelling spirit* of this bright orbit, which is the object of so much regard and adoration.[40]

Santals are the majority among the *Adivasis* of Bengal. Their religious system is headed by the great Sun-god *Sing* Bonga[41] or *Chando.* They worship the Sun as the highest spirit who has his allotted place in the *Jahirthan* or sacred grove.[42] *Chando* or *Sing Bonga* eats chickens and once in four or five years a feast in his honour is held. He protects from all dangers and never harasses anyone. He is worshipped at the *'Jom Sim'* festival. '*Monreko Turuiko*' is invoked in plural number, but actually he is a single God. He is worshipped to have good rain, good harvest and good health. Among the Santals, the sacrifice is placed on an open space where the rays of the rising Sun may fall upon the offerings. The Santals sometime swear in the name of *'Sing Bonga'*. In a paper,[43] Rev. P. O. Bodding provides us with an instance of the Santal belief. Says he, "A common practice for all three sects (of the Kharwar Santals) is that they worship Ram Chando. *Ram* is a Hindu deity; *Chando* is Santali for Sun, but used about the God of the Universe, who is confounded with the Sun". It is a case of mere confusion. There are sufficient evidences to prove the existence of a wide spread idea among the primitive tribes of Eastern India that the Sun is the supreme god of the universe. Referring again to the Kharwar Santals Rev. Bodding writes, "Their women every morning plaster a small circular spot with cow dung in the middle of the courtyard and at the entrance from the

village street. They take care not to be seen during this operation. This plastered bit symbolizes the Sun. Some of their women have taken up the habit of lighting a lamp every evening after sunset, and they worship with this in their hand turning to the four corners of the world."

The ***Oraons*** form the second largest of the tribal communities in Bengal. According to Father Dehon,[44] the Oraons worship a supreme god who is known as *Dharmesh.* A white cock is offered to him in times of calamity when prayers to other gods have failed. This *Dharmesh* is no other than the Sun god[45] - "*Sing Bonga"* of the Santals and the Mundas and *"Boram"* of the Bhuiyas and the Kharias. Curiously, Hopkins and others[46] writes that the Oraons, though recognizing a supreme deity in the Sun, do not pray him because he does no harm.

The ***Bhumij*** people mostly follow the Hindu religion. It has been noticed that they were attracted towards Hindu Gods and Goddesses because of their long association with the Hindus. However, there are many[47] who still worship the Sun under the name of *Sing-Bonga* and *Dharam* "as the giver of harvests to men and the cause of all changes of seasons affecting their agricultural fortunes".[48] *Sing Bonga* is the chief deity of most Austric tribes.

The ***Mundas***[49] also place the Sun-god *Sing Bonga* at the head of their pantheon. In every occasion, they worship him. They believe that *Sing Bonga* created this world, and he only can save them from all dangers. Generally, white goats and white cocks are

sacrificed in his name. The priest '*Pahan*' generally offers worship in the name of different deities.

The ***Mahalis*** are the worshippers of *Surji Devi*. *Sing Bonga* or the Sun God[50] is their *'Surji Devi*'. In *Baisakh* (April-May), they worship *'Surji Devi'*. At that time, they sacrifice kids, chickens and pigeons in the name of *'Surji Devi*' in '*Jaherthan*' or the shrine. The Mahali priest does all the rituals. After the worship is over, they cook the offered meat and take the meal together. The females also can eat that meat; they take equal part in the arrangements. Generally, after every 12 years the Mahalis worship '*Surji Devi*' for the welfare of the village.

The ***Mal-Paharias***[51] has the Sun as their supreme god. They name him as *Gosain*. He is worshipped on occasional Sundays "by the head of the family who must prepare himself for the special rite by eating no salt on the previous day and fasting all Saturdays. Before Sunrise on Sunday morning, a new earthen vessel, a new basket, some rice, oil, areca nuts and vermilion and a brass *lota* (pot) of water with a mango-twig placed on it[52] are laid out on a clean space of ground in front of the house. The worshipper shows these offerings to the rising Sun and prays addressing him as *'Gosain'*. This rice is then given to a goat, which is decapitated while eating, by a single blow from behind.

The ***Kharias***[53] worship the Sun god as creator and preserver. An anthill[54] in an open space is the altar on which the Kharias place their offerings for the solar deity.

Passing on to the ***Gonds,***[55] we find the names *Bura Deo, Bada Deo, Suraj Deo* or *Badial pen* used to indicate their supreme deity, the Sun-god. In the hilly tracts, he is worshipped under the name of Rayatal.[56] On a special day, all the male adults proceed to the forest and set up the altar of *Bura Deo* underneath an *Asan* tree. Next, a symbol of the god is placed on it before which sacrifices take place. The Gonds[57] used to worship a representation of the Sun by means of human sacrifices. It used to be in the nature of a feast in which are combined fertility rites as well.

The ***Asuras***[58] also pay their reverence to the Sun as their chief god. The ***Hos*** regard *Sing Bonga*[59] otherwise known as *"Ote Boram"* as the chief god of their tribe, who created the earth and filled it with all sorts of life. Many compare Him with the Sun. In every celebration, *Sing Bonga* is worshipped. Just after the baby is born, the father sacrifices a chicken in the name of *Sing Bonga.* The **Garos**[60] also pay reverence to the Sun-deity. However, the nature of the god shows a good deal of difference. The Sun deity is no longer a *supreme god* and has lost his dignified position. The ***Korwas*** [61] and some other smaller tribes worship the Sun as their chief god. An anthill in an open space is the altar on which the Korwas place their offerings for the solar deity. The Chief God of the ***Birhors*** is *Sing Bonga* or the Sun God.[62] They believe that *Sing Bonga* created this earth and he punishes the bad. He is compared to the bright rays of the Sun. *Sing Bonga* protects from all dangers. They offer white chicken and white goat facing eastward, while worshipping *Sing Bonga.*

The ***Khonds***[63] worship the Sun as their supreme god under the name of *Penu* (the god of light) or *Bella Penu* (the Sun god). They had a belief in one supreme God, 'a theism embracing polytheism' and other notions, which have been abstracted from their worship of the Sun as the great god. The light or the Sun god created a wife – Tari, the goddess of earth, the originator of all the ills that befell humanity[64] while the Sun god is a good god. Tari tried to prevent *Bella Pennu* - the Sun god from creating man. However, he created man. The dark-goddess Tari sowed the seed of sin in man. Death came to men. The Sun god was victorious while others say that Tari continues the struggle. There are four kinds of fate of man after death. One of this is that the soul goes to the Sun. It is similar to the belief of the Aryans that the Sun is the home of the dead. The chief feast to the Sun god is *Salo-Katho*, which is something like the *Soma*-feast. Since it is held at harvest time, Sun worship appears to have been connected with harvest and fertility. It is something like the *Pongal* festival of south India.

The names, by which the Sun god is addressed amongst the tribe described above, may be classified into two groups, *viz., Sing Bonga* and *Boram.* The group of tribes which uses the former name *i.e., Sing Bonga* has no other variant for it. However, the name *Boram* has a good number of variants, all of which can be recognised as derived from it. The variants generally are *Bero*, *Bedo*, *Buda*, *Biru*, *Bella*, *Bada*, *Badial*, etc.

Amongst all the tribes named above, there is one common feature of the concept of the Sun god. It is the beneficent but innocuous nature of this supreme god - the Sun-deity. The deity who is the chief of all the gods or spirits and who is always beneficently disposed towards his devotees is completely helpless in the hands of the mischievous minor god lings (which are in most cases his own creations) in matters of defending his

poor worshippers on the earth. Another common feature, which looms large before our eyes about the place of worship most suitable to the Sun god according to the unwritten *Sastras* of these aboriginal tribes, is the supreme necessity of a *clear open space* on which the Sun may shine freely without any obstruction. The usefulness of this custom is apparent from the Mal-Paharia system where the falling of the Sun's rays on the articles offered is a necessity. This also perhaps explains similar customs of making offerings to the Sun in the open-air by the rural people of Bengal in many of their *vratas* performed for the blessings of the Sun god *(e.g., Suryavrata, Tapavrata, Itu-pua)*. A peculiar feature of Sun worship among all these tribes is the general absence of any material representation of the deity. The sacrifices are offered to him in an open space cleared of jungle where an altar is raised.

Coming to the articles[65] offered to the Sun, we find very important and interesting characteristics. As a rule, all the tribes mentioned above offer animal sacrifices to the Sun, which consist of fowls, goats, pigs, buffaloes and others. The most important fact about this is the wide prevalence of offering *white coloured animals or birds* to the Sun god. In the month of August when the *Gora* rice ripens, the first fruits of the year are offered to *Sing Bonga* by the Hos. The offering remains to be incomplete without the sacrifice of a white cock, which is offered at the same time. The Mundas worship *Sing Bonga* in times of great distress with the sacrifice of a white fowl. According to Father Dehon, a white cock is offered to *Dharmesh,* the Sun god, in times of misfortune when prayers to other gods have been fruitless.

The facts mentioned above clearly indicate that at some remote past there had been a group of people living in this part of Eastern India, who were ardent worshippers

of the Sun god. With them the Sun-deity was a powerful god, the distributor of good and evil, the source of life and prosperity, the bestower of happiness and misery both in this and in the next world. This once active and powerful god has now, in a new environment, lost his former power, though retaining the prestige.

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15. cf. According to the unwritten *Sastras* of the aboriginal tribes, the place of worship most suitable to the Sun god is a *clear open space* on which the Sun may shine freely without any obstruction. The usefulness of this custom is apparent from the Mal-Paharia system where the falling of the Sun's rays on the articles offered is a necessity. This also perhaps explains similar customs of making offerings to the Sun in the open-air by the rural people of Bengal in many of their *vratas* performed for the blessings of the Sun god *(e.g., Suryavrata, Tapavrata, Itu-puja).*

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50. Baskey, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

51. Das, *op. cit*, p. 89, 91; Risley, *op. cit.,* Vol. II, p.70.

52. This is thought to represent the seat of the Sun god. This may be a rude imitation of the Hindu *purna-kumbha* required in all sorts of sacred ceremonies, religious or social.

53. Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 91.

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APPENDIX – C

EXTRACTS FROM INSCRIPTIONS ON SUN IMAGES

EXTRACTS FROM INSCRIPTIONS ON SUN IMAGES

1. Mahisantosh Surya-image inscription of the 15th regnal year (=899 A.D. of Mahendrapala (Pratihara),

Text: Line 1: *Om* (I) *Samvat 15 Mārgga-śukla-saptamyāh śrī Mahendra pāladeva-vījayarājye Viṣṇu na-*

Line 2: *ndi-naptā Gaṅgānandi-sunū Lokanandinā Āditya-bhaṭṭārakah kārita* (I)

Iti Khanaka Vīdu (dyu) ta (II)

Eng. Trans: - Hail (Ye Lord). On the seventh day of the bright half of the month of *Margasirsa*, i.e. Agrahayana, (appertaining to) the fifteenth victorious regnal year of (king) Sri Mahendrapaladeva, (an) image of Lord Aditya (Surya) was carved or done by one Loka Nandi, grandson of Visnu Nandi and son of Ganga Nandi. Thus, (says) the engraver Vidyuta.

Ref.: Sircar, D.C., 'Mahisantosh Image inscription of Mahendrapala (Pratihara), Year 15', *EI*, Vol. XXXVII, 1968, pp. 204-208; Mukherjee, S.C., *Indian Museum Bulletin*, January 1967, pp. 44-45 and plates.

2. Inscription (C. 10th cent. A.D.) on a Surya-image (British Museum)

"Om Indranīlamaṇiśiśvhyah śilāya

buddhiśālināh, ghaṭitāya kritajaena amṛiteṇa suśilpinā"

Eng. Trans.:- The image has been carved in stone by the wise, grateful, and good artist 'Amṛita', pupil of Indranīlamaṇi

Ref.: Chanda, R. P., *Medieval Indian Sculpture in the British Museum,* London, 1934, p. 66.

3. Kulkudi (P.S. Gosānihāt, Dt. Faridpur) Sun god Image Inscription of Govindachandra – year 12 (C. 1032 A.D.)

1. *Śrī Lakṣmīdīna-kārita-Bhaṭṭārakah*

2. *Śrī Śrī Govindachandradeva pādīya*

3. *samvat 12* phālguna

4. *dine 19*

Eng. Trans.:- (This is the image of) of the Sun god, caused to be made by the illustrious Lakṣmīdīna. The year 12 is of the exalted Govindacandradeva. The 19th day of Phālguna.

Ref.: Bhattashali, N. K., *EI,* Vol. 27, 1947-48, pp. 25-26, plate opposite p. 25; Sircar, D. C., *Bhāratavarṣa*, Chaitra, 1348 B. S., p. 397.

4. Bairhāṭṭā Sūrya image inscription (C. 11th/12th Cent. A.D)

"Om Śrīmad Vaktraśiv=āchārya kārita bhāti kāmadah

Sūryah samasta-rogāṇām harttā Viśva-prakāśakah"

Eng. Trans.: (This image of) the Sun, who bestows splendour and fulfils desires, removes all diseases and illumines the universe, has been made by the Master the Vaktrśiva".

Ref.: Majumdar, N. G., *ASIAR*, 1930-34, p. 257 (Pl. CXXVII, C); *HB-I*, p. 456; *DHI*, p. 440; *SWAI-P*, p. 293, No. 16.

5. Nahapara (Dacca) Surya Image Inscription (C. 12th Cent. A.D.)

"Subhachīttadāsasya"

Eng. Trans.: (The image was dedicated by) Subhachitta Dasa.

Ref.: *IBBS*, p. 170.

6. Fragmentary record of Viśvarūpa

'Jāgartti vasminudite prayāti

chātantu śete janatā samastā I

Trailokyadīpam tamanantamūrttim.

abhyāhatābham śaraṇam prayāti'//

Eng. Trans.: "I take shelter to this all pervading image who is the lamp of this universe (*anantamūrtti*) who having risen rouses the whole world from slumber and having taking adieu keeps them to their bed"

Ref.: *El, Vol.* XXXVI, p. 88; Chatterjee, Rama, *Religion of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1985, p. 213.

7. Rajganj (district Jalpaiguri) Sun god Image Inscription (C. 12th century)

"Om Svasti śrī-Śiva-devādityah"

Eng. Trans.:- (This image of) Aditya was dedicated by Sivadeva.

Ref.: Bhattacharya, P.K., Indian History Congress, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Session*, Utkal University, Bhuvaneswar, 1977, pp. 790-791

8. Rajshahi Surya Image Inscription (C. 12th Cent. A.D.)

"*Om Amitas (ś) ilpīkena pratimā ghaṭitah Om Taraṇiśammya (Taraṇīsasya*"

Eng. Trans.:- "This image was made by the craftsman Amita of Taraṇśa" (?.)

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PLATES



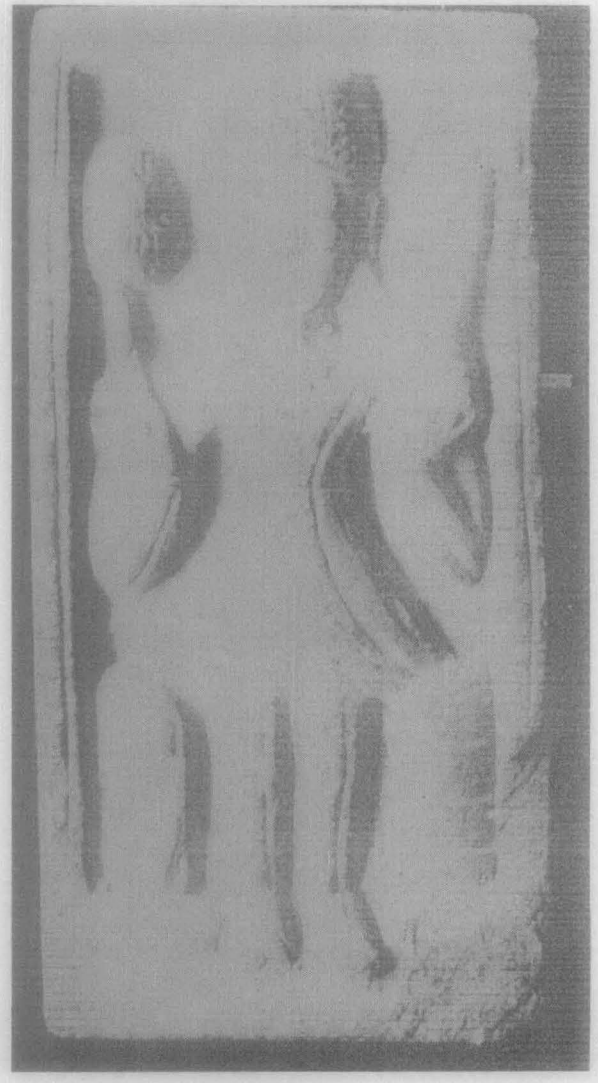
Pl. 1a. Surya, Terracotta, Tamluk (Midnapore)



Pl. 1b. Surya, Terracotta, Chandraketugarh (24 Parganas)



Pl. 2a. Surya, Terracotta, Hadipur (24 Parganas)



Pl. 2b. Surya, Terracotta, Harinarayanpur (South 24 Parganas)



Pl. 3a. Surya, Stone, Kumarpur (Rajshahi)



Pl. 3b. Surya, Stone, Niyamatpur(Rajshahi)



Pl. 4a. Surya, Stone, Satgovindapur (Dinajpur)



Pl. 4b. Surya, Stone, Manikpara (Dinajpur)



Pl. 5a. Surya, Stone, Kashipur (24 Parganas)



Pl. 5b. Surya, Deora (Bogra)



Pl. 6a. Surya, Bronze, Deulbadi (Comilla)



Pl. 6b. Surya, Stone, Bishnupur (Bankura)



Pl. 7a. Surya, Stone, Shanail (Bogra)



Pl. 7b. Surya, Stone, Mahisantosh (Dinajpur)



Pl. 8a. Surya, Terracotta, Bogra



Pl. 8b. Surya, Mallasarul Copper Plate Seal



Pl. 9a. Surya, Stone, Tithi (Dinajpur)



Pl. 9b. Surya, Stone, Adina (Malda)



Pl. 10a. Surya, Stone, Bhadrakali (Hooghly)



Pl. 10b. Bare-footed Surya, Stone, Gazole (Malda)



Pl. 11a. Bare-footed 4-armed Seated Surya, Copper, Mangalbari (Rajshahi)



Pl. 11b. Surya, Stone, Vikrampur (Dhaka)



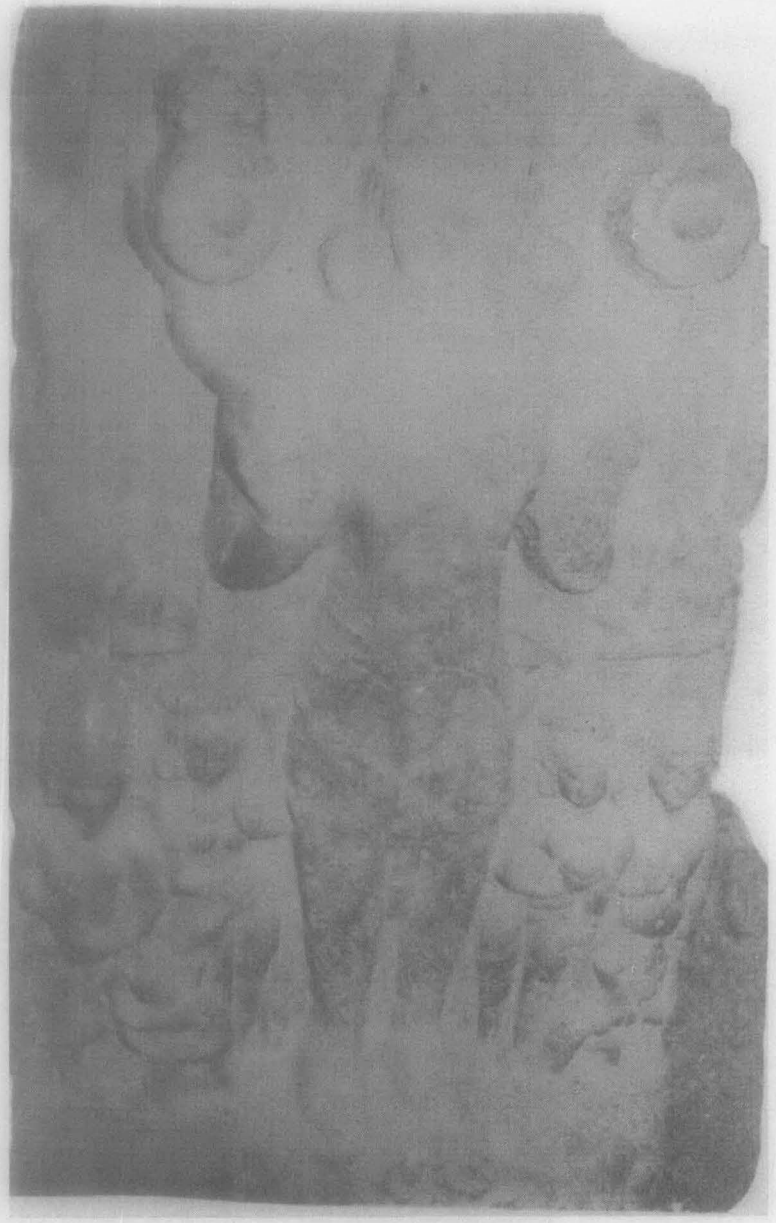
Pl. 12a. Surya, Stone, Chandi-munda, Lalmai.



Pl. 12b. Surya, Stone, Kulkundi (Faridpur).



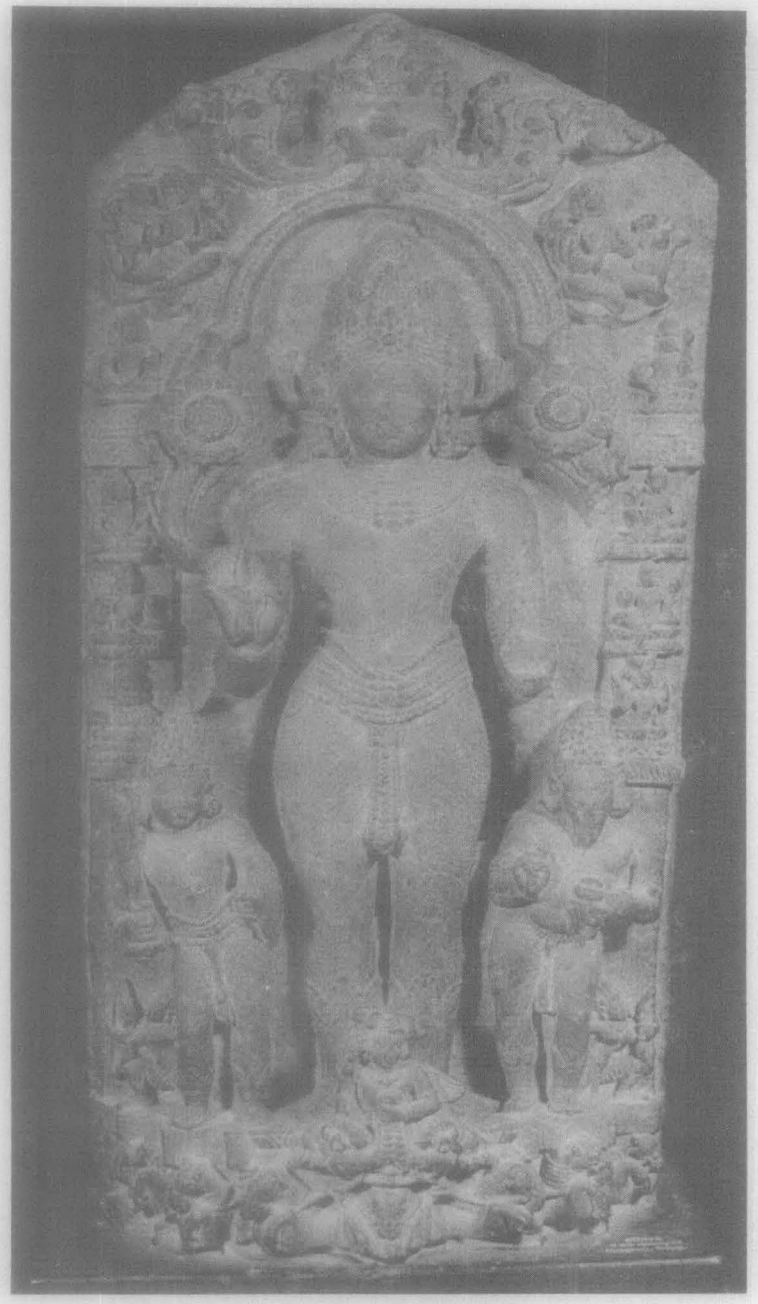
Pl. 13a. Surya, Stone, Pakilara (Comilla).



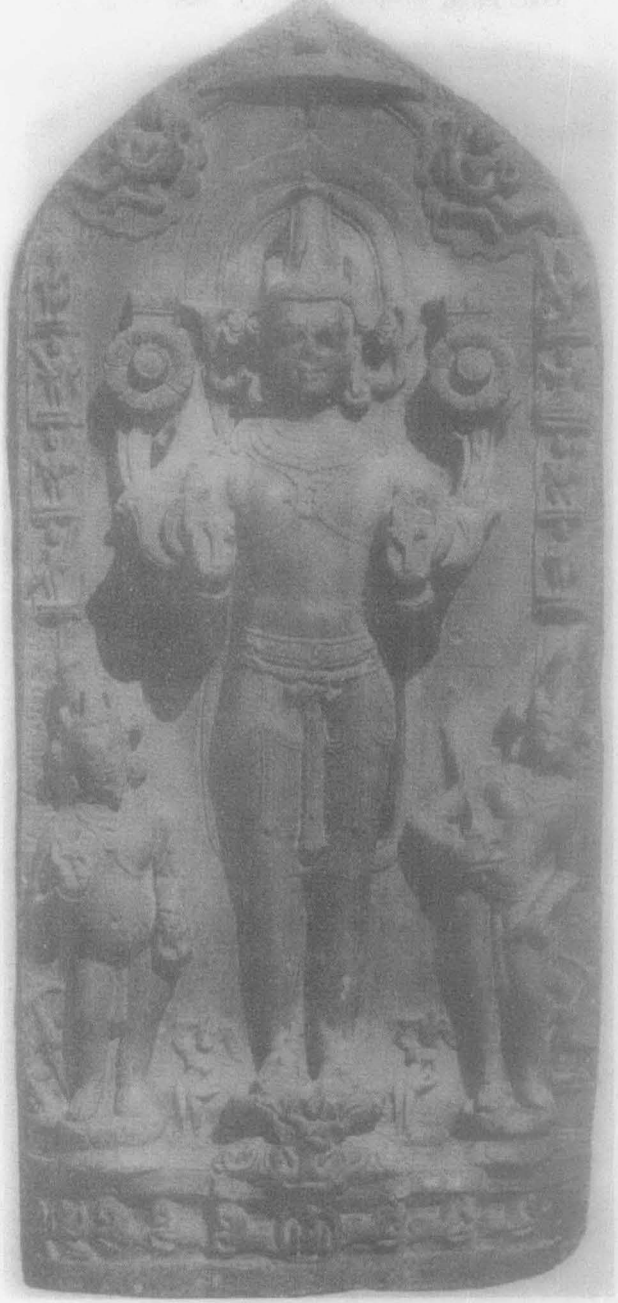
Pl. 13b. Surya, Stone, Banshihari (West Dinajpur).



Pl. 14a. Surya, Stone, Vikrampur (Dhaka)



Pl. 14b. Surya, Stone, Nanigram (Hooghly)



Pl. 15a. Surya, Stone, Vikrampur (Dhaka)



Pl. 15b. Surya, Stone, Gopinathpur (Bogra)



Pl. 16a. Surya, Stone, Bairhatta (Dinajpur)



Pl. 16b. Surya, Stone, Bihanail (Rajshahi)



Pl. 17a. Surya, Stone, Rajshahi



Pl. 17b. Surya, Stone, Durgapur (Rajshahi)



Pl. 18a. Surya, Stone, Jalalpur (Rajshahi)



Pl. 18b. Surya, Stone, Baria (Rajshahi)



Pl. 19a. Surya, Stone, Sukhbaspur (Dhaka)



Pl. 19b. Surya, Stone, Burdwan



Pl. 20a. Surya, Stone (Fragment), Sonarang (Dhaka)



Pl. 20b. Surya-Brahma, Stone, Mahendra (West Dinajpur)



Pl. 21a. Marttanda-Bhairava, Stone, Manda (Rajshahi)



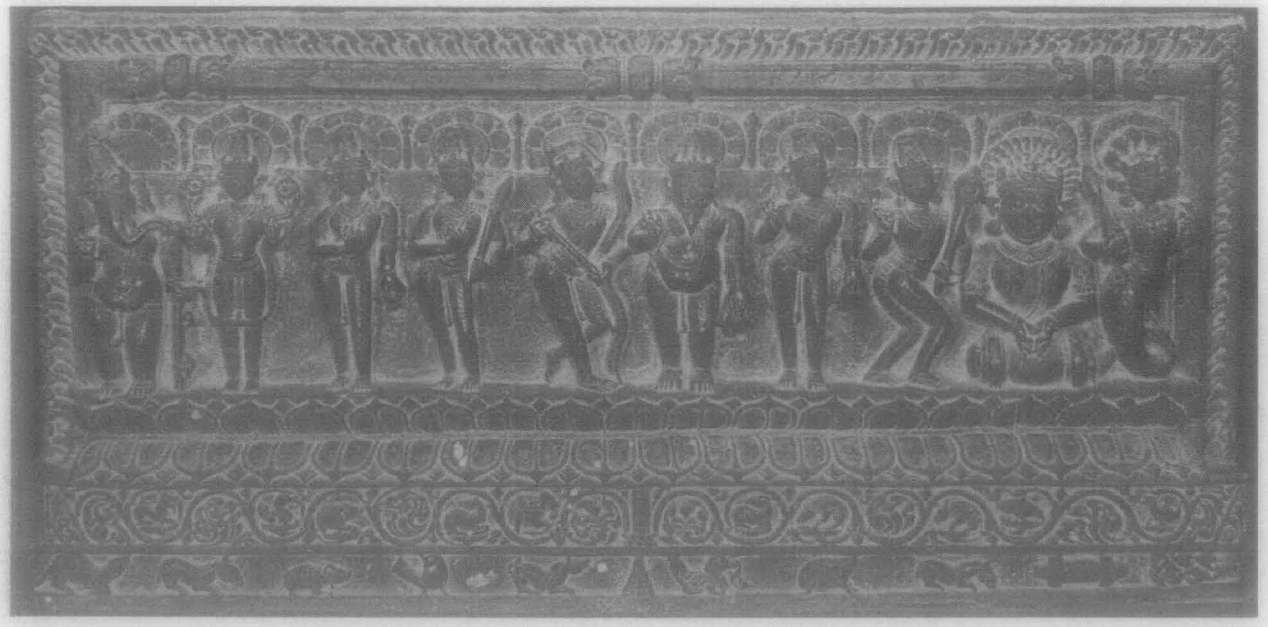
Pl. 21b. Surya, Stone, Surya-Visnu



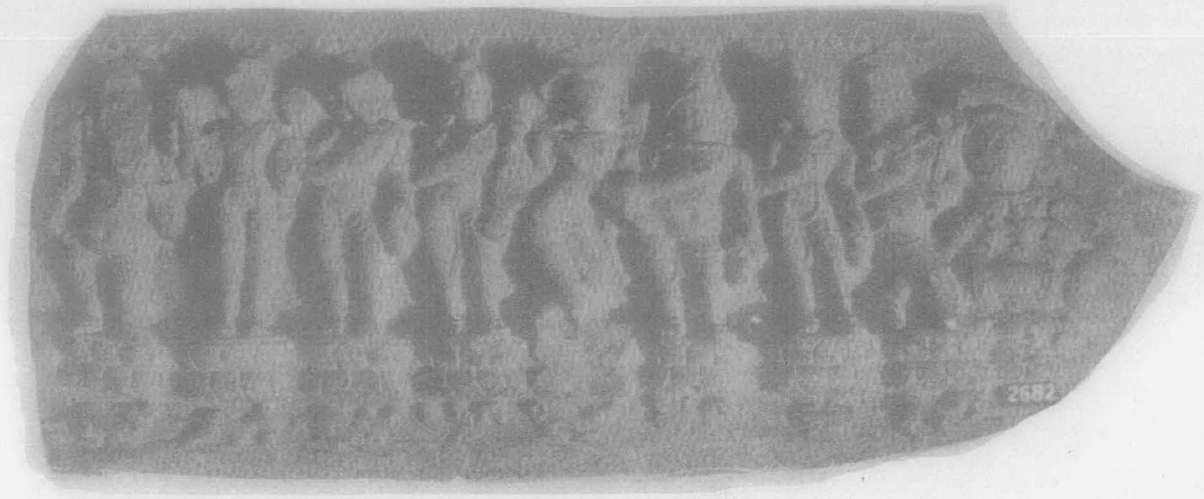
Pl. 22a. Surya-Lokesvara, Stone



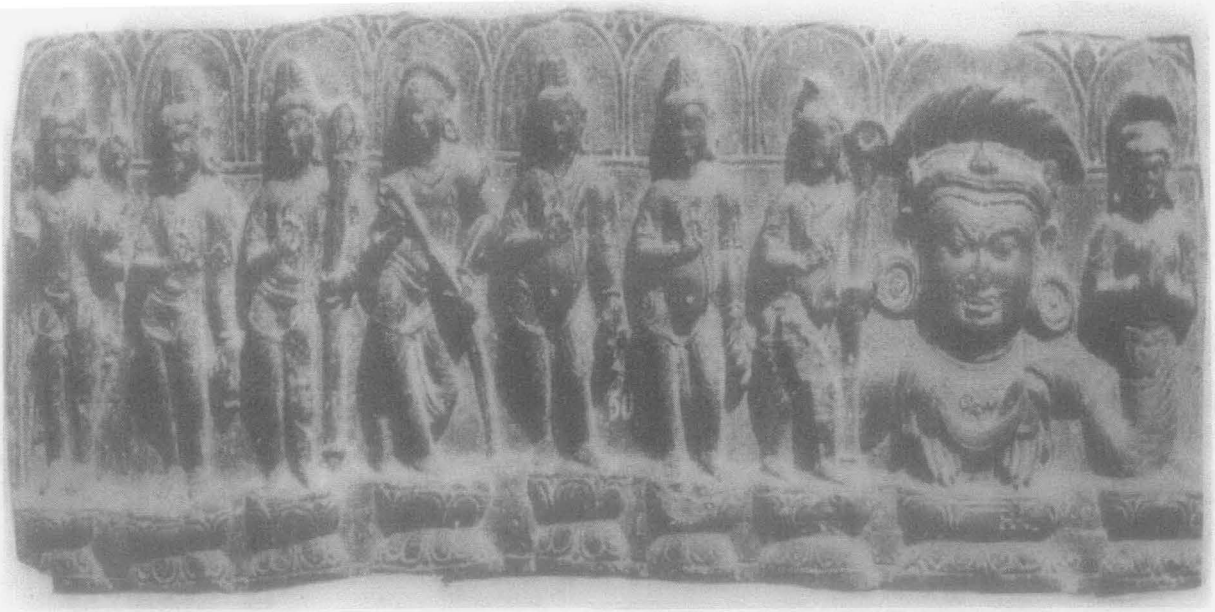
Pl. 22b. Surya, Stone, Hari-Hara-Surya-Buddha



Pl. 23a. Navagraha, Stone, Kankandighi (24 Parganas)



Pl. 23b. Navagraha, Stone, Rajshahi



Pl. 24a. Navagraha, Stone, Balurghat (West Dinajpur)



Pl. 24b. Navagraha, Stone, Akhilya (Rajshahi)



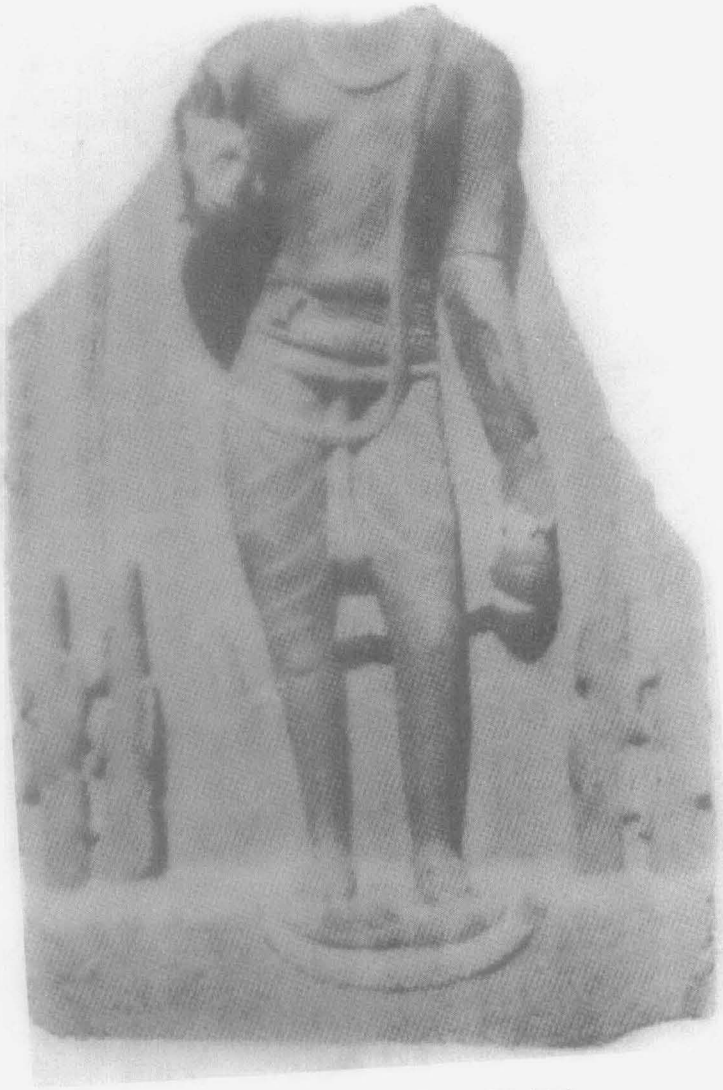
Pl. 25a. Revanta, Stone, Sonapur (West Dinajpur)



Pl. 25b. Revanta, Stone, Ghatnagar (Dinajpur)



Pl. 26a. Revanta, Stone, Chancaripasa (Barisal)



Pl. 26b. Brhaspati, Kandaran (Malda)



Pl. 27a. Pingala, Bronze.



Pl. 27b. Dandi, Bronze.