



Minor Deities of Early-Medieval Bengal: A Survey of Some Inscriptions

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Abstract:

Bengal is a land of cultural synthesis which flourished from earlier period with a distinct regional identity. Ancient Bengal contained the lands of Tripurā, Āssām, Samatāta, Harikela and etc which gave it a broader shape. Many political dynasties like Maurya, Gupta, Pāla, Sena and other important independent kings ruled here. The earliest mention of 'Vaṅga' Janapada is found from a Jain text named 'Bhagavatīsūtra'. The Roman and Greek Geographers also tell about 'Gaṅgāridae' region which is probably identified with the Ganges delta of Bengal. Religion is the integral part of the culture of Bengal. In early-medieval period the popularity of Buddhism in Bengal was started to decline after the end of the Pālas. Jainism never took an important place in the religious belief of Bengal. In this period three Purāṇic religions e.g. Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śaktism became popularized. Codification of *Purāṇas* and the growing concept of Dāna helped these religions to be famous. The wave of Bhaktism affected the minds of common people in a massive way. Beside these main cults many minor deities were also took place in the culture of Bengal. The literary and archaeological sources especially the inscriptions mention about those unimportant gods. The Vedic gods like Indra, Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya, Chandra and etc lost their importance after the later Vedic phase but they are mentioned in Bengal Inscriptions. Also beside them Brahmā, Gaṇapati, Dikpāla, Kārtikeya, Kuvera, Kāmadeva, Navagrahas and so many are worshipped in Bengal. Numerous inscriptions such as Khālīmapura copperplate of Dharmapāla, Nālandā copperplate of Devapāla, Bādala Pillar inscription and Bhāgalapura inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla, Vāṅgarh Praśasti of I Mahīpāla, Sāhitya Pariṣada copperplate of Viśvarūpasena, Idilpore copperplate of Keśavasena, Kāmāulī copperplate of Vaidyadeva, Paśhimbhāga copperplate of Śrīchandra etc mention about these gods and their religious roles in society. Interestingly we find some kinds of divisions concerning their position. Brahmā is an important part of Trimūrti concept but he never became so much popular like Gaṇapati and Sūrya in early medieval Bengal. Gaṇapati and Sūrya were worshipped with Viṣṇu and Śiva. In maximum Hindu ceremonies are started with the hymn of 'Omḍaśadikapālebhyo Namah'. It is the praise of Daśadikpālas. But in Bengal no specific religious communities were born concerning these minor deities. Epigraphs say about the presence of temples belonged to Brahmā and Sūrya. Sculptures and images of many deities are found from this region. Actually the kings and rich people donated villages and lands to the brāhmaṇas especially for the maintenance of temples. For this reason in their inscriptions the minor deities get placed as the symbol of their religious tolerance. I want to focus in

my article on early-medieval Bengal inscriptions which tell about these above mentioned minor deities. Still in today some of them are worshipped with a new and changing manner. So they had a great impact not only on Bengal's culture but also in the various parts of Subcontinent.

Key-Words: Bhakti, *Dharmachakra*, Dikapāla, Durbāsā Community, Gaṅgāridae, Hiraṇyagarbha, Kaliyuga, Magadvijīya, *Pañchopaniṣada*, Saptamātrikās, *Soḍośa Mahādānas*, Trimūrti, Trinayana, Triveṇī Saṅgama, Valī-Charu-Satra, Vaṅga Janapada

Introduction:

Bengal is a cultural zone of Indian Subcontinent which has a broader history. Bengal was very much famous and rich region of India existing from ancient to early-medieval period. The land of 'Bengal' had its own 'Regional Identity' which carried some region-specific geographical features.¹ In the eastern part of India the Bengal region was situated in ancient times with deep forests, highlands, rivers, plain lands and mountains. As 'Niharranjan Ray' puts in '.....at one extreme are the very high mountains, at the other the sea and on the both sides the hard hilly country within all the land is plain'.² It was also intakes the regions of 'Tripurā', 'Āssāma', 'Samataṭa', 'Harikela' etc many which get freedom in modern era. The 'Ganges-Brahmaputra' Delta and 'Bay of Bengal' led the economic prosperity of Bengal. So it is clear that Bengal was started became famous in Indian history from early times but mainly it is highlighted in early-medieval phase. Many political dynasties such as 'Mauryas', 'Guptas', 'Gauḍa Dynasty of Śāśāṅka', 'Pālas', 'Senas' and so on ruled here. Bengal was connected with the countries of 'South-East Asia', 'Persiā' and 'Ārabiā' and with many especially for 'Muslin' trade. The antiquity of this region goes back to the period of Mahājanapadas where a Jain text '*Bhagavatīsūtra*' clearly mentions the appearance of 'Vaṅga' Janapada.³ Also the Greek and Roman Geographers tell about 'Gaṅgāridae' region which is identified with the Ganges Delta of Bengal.

Not only polity and economy but also Bengal had a history of religious synthesis. Buddhism, Jainism and Brāhmaṇism were spread here in a larger scale. But from early-medieval times Brāhmaṇism was started to become very much popular among the mass. In this time the *Purāṇas* were codified and also the kings gave lands, villages to the brāhmaṇas. For these reason 'Brāhmaṇya' and 'Paurāṇic' religions were get popularity from this period. It is also seen that the Vedic deities were started to obsolete such as 'Indra', 'Agni', 'Varuṇa', 'Mitra' etc. Instead of them the minor deities of Vedic literature became major gods and goddess in early-medieval Bengal. The wave of 'Bhakti' movement affected the presence of 'Viṣṇu' and 'Śiva' which grew as popular cults. 'Vaiṣṇavism', 'Śaivism' and 'Śāktism' took the main place in all religions of Bengal. For sometimes Buddhism was flourished in 'Pāla' domain but after them it lost its position. Many literary and archaeological sources clearly discuss about the numerous deities of Bengal. Especially the 'Pāla' and 'Sena' rulers patronized the poets and scholars who wrote these kinds of texts. But a major source is inscriptions which depict the political, religious and cultural thoughts of Bengal kings. In this article the minor gods of Paurāṇic religions like 'Brahmā', 'Gaṇapati', 'Dikapāla', 'Kārtikeya', 'Navagrahas' and etc are mentioned by the help of the inscriptions. They did not get important place in religious system but they existed

parallel with the flow of main religions of Bengal. They had a great impact on culture of early-medieval Bengal.

Brahmā: At first we focus on the cult of Brahmā. In ‘*Rgveda*’ we find the mentions of ‘Brāhmaṇa’ as a symbol of ‘Ritvika’ and it is identified with Brahmā. He is the integral part of ‘Trimūrti’ concept. He was famous in various names such as ‘Prajāpati’, ‘Vṛhaspati’ etc and sometimes identified with ‘Viśvakarmā’ in Vedic period. In Bengal inscriptions Brahmā was mentioned several times. ‘Nidhānpura’ copperplate inscription of Kāmṛpa king ‘Bhāskaravarmana’ (ca. 600-650 AD) tells about Brahmā.⁴ This copperplate of 7th century AD gives a detailed account of land grants given to Brāhmaṇas. He donated ‘Mukutikā’ village for the maintenance of ‘Kalaśapata Śiva’ temple. It tells that Bhāskaravarmana was born by the hold of ‘Lotus God’ Brahmā. He was compared with Brahmā. In this inscription Brahmā mentions as a creator and destroyer of world which is very much contradictory in view.

“Jagadudayakalpanāstaymayhetunā Bhagavatā Kamalasambhavana” //

It is also known that Brahmā in first times with Viṣṇu and Śiva mentioned in ‘*Maitreniya Upaniṣada*’. Brahmā is the second creator of Universe as described in ‘*Mahābhārata*’ and *Purāṇas*. He is also known as ‘Vedantha (God of Vedas), Gyaneśvara’ (God of Knowledge), ‘Chaturamukha’ (Four Faced), ‘Svayambhū’ (Selfborned), ‘Brahmanārāyaṇa’ (Half Brahmā and Half Viṣṇu) and etc as well as he was connected with the myth of ‘Kāma’ and ‘Hiraṇyagarbha’ (The Cosmic Egg).

‘Bādala’ or ‘Garuḍa’ pillar inscription of Pāla king Nārāyaṇapāla (ca. 817-917 AD) tells about Brahmā. After the death of Pāla king Devapāla, nine brāhmaṇya ministers became very powerful who influenced the kings very much. The Buddhist Pāla rulers made their post hereditary which is a unique specimen of their power who influenced the Buddhist Pāla emperors in great ways that they donated many things to the brāhmaṇas. Here a brāhmaṇa named ‘Gurava Misra’ erected this Garuḍa pillar and wrote this inscription on it. It describes the genealogy of the ministers. Also it mentions about Prajāpati Brahmā. Gurava Misra claims that Brahmā was born in his clan as a father and son. By this description actually he legitimized his clan. Also this pillar inscription describes about the donation of king Nārāyaṇapāla. He donated many villages to build a temple for god ‘Naṇṇanārāyaṇa’. But in other side he also erected a Śaiva temple. He patronized Vaiṣṇvism, Śaivism and Buddhism. This pillar is discovered from the village ‘Bādala’ in Dinājpur district of Banglādeśa in 1780 AD. We know that First ‘Charles Wilkins’ and then ‘Kielhorn’ translated this inscription. One of them a Śloka mentions about the glory of Brahmā.

“Pitr̥tvam Svayamāsthāya Putratvamagamata Svayam

Brahmeti Puruṣāna Yasya Var̥ṣe Jañcha Prapedire”.⁵

‘Bāṅgarh’ Prasasti is another source which mentions about Brahmā.⁶ It discovered from ‘Bāṅgarh’ of Dinājpur district of Banglādeśa. It belongs to Pāla king I Nayapāla (ca.1027-43 AD). There is a ‘*Dharmachakra*’ symbol above on this inscription. It tells about ‘Durbāsā’ community of Śaiva saints. A priest of this community Vidyāśiva established ‘Golgī Maṭh’ which was different from ‘Golkī Maṭh’ of Jubbulpore which founded by another Śaiva saint Viśveśara. Pāla king Mahīpāla (ca. 977-1027 AD) the father of Nayapāla, gifted a monastery to Indraśiva

which is corroborated by this inscription. Archaeologically, it is proved that a Śaiva monastery was situated at 'Baṅgarh' in Pāla period. Indraśiva did '*Sodōśa Mahādānas*'. His heir Sarvaśiva was the guru of Nayapāla. Sarvaśiva's heir Mūrtiśiva established a temple which is famous in now-a-days as 'Śivavaṭi'. This temple was also known as 'Bhavanī' temple. King Also Nayapāla donated a village named 'Kuruttapallikā' to a brāhmaṇa 'Kṛṣṇādityāśarmā'. This inscription is started by the salutation of jagatamātā 'Charchikā' which depicts the connection of Pāla kings with Śakta religion. After the death of Mūrtiśiva his heir Rūpaśiva built an image of Mūrtiśiva. Building of an image of a person was unique in early-medieval Bengal. Also, this inscription reflects the art and architecture of ancient Bengal. From this Praśasti, it is clear that Mahīpāla and his son Nayapāla patronized brāhmāṇicāḷ religion. This inscription mentions Brahmā as 'Dhātā'.

'Kṛṣṇadvārikā' temple inscription of Nayapāla tells about god Brahmā. It is discovered by Alexandar Cunningham. It contains total 29 lines. This inscription bears the glory of Lord Viṣṇu and construction of Kṛṣṇadvārikā temple. It mentions Brahmā as 'Prajāpati'. It tells that Prajāpati fulfills the wishes of brāhmāṇas and lived at 'Gayādhām'.⁷ For this reason sometimes Gayā *tīrtha* is called as 'Brahmapurī'. Also Narasiṃha temple inscription clearly highlights that 'Vedhā' (Brahmā) created this purified place Gayā.

Pāla emperor III Vighrapāla's (ca. 1043-70 AD) an inscription is discovered from 'Gayā Akṣayavaṭa' temple. He ascended the throne after death of his father Nayapāla. Also in his period many political powers like 'Cālukyas', King 'VI Vikramāditya', 'Orisā' region etc attacked Bengal. From his period the Pālas were started to decline. In this inscription Brahmā is called as 'Prapitāmaheśvara'.⁸ Also above king erected a temple for Brahmā which is corroborated by this inscription. The presence of the temple of Brahmā was very rare in ancient India not only Bengal. This also tells about various names of Brahmā such as 'Gatheśa', 'Kanakeśvara', 'Ambujabhava' etc. In this mentioned temple actually the images of 'Brahmā', 'Viśvarūpeśvara', 'Gadādhara', 'Śuklavānu', 'Gṛdhreśa', 'Sujanārdana' and 'Vateśa Devamūrti' were established which is corroborated by this inscription. 'Sāhitya Pariṣada' copperplate of Pāla king Viśvarūpasena (ca. 1206-1225 AD)⁹ and 'Idilpura' Praśasti of king Keśavasena¹⁰ (ca. 1225-30 AD) mentions Brahmā as a 'Vāgīśvara'. Even many sacrifices were held at 'Trivenī Saṅgama' of Prayāga for praying and pleasing of Brahmā. It also identifies the popularity of Brāhmaṇya religions in early-medieval period in Bengal and also whole over India.

Not only the Pālas but also in the inscriptions of Senas he is glorified. A famous Sena inscription is 'Vijayasena's (ca. 1098-1160 AD) 'Deopārā' praśasti which is belonged to above mentioned king. It is found from the village of 'Deopārā' in Rājsāhī district of Banglādeśa. It mentions about an installation and beauty of 'Pradyumneśvara' temple. It was a Śaiva temple.¹¹ Also it deals with the genealogy and origin of the Senas. It was written by a poet 'Umāpati Dhar'. Here mainly Śaivism was popularized but also the cult of Brahmā worshipped. Here he is reflected as a creator of Universe along with other minor deities. Beside the Pāla and Sena emperors the 'Chandra' and 'Deva' dynasties of South-Eastern Bengal also worshipped to Brahmā. 'Paśhimbhāga' copperplate of king 'Śrīchandra' (ca. 930-75 AD) is the most important source to understanding this religious process which spread besides the existence of

Buddhism.¹² Śrīchandra was the king of Harikela region of eastern Bengal who expanding his empire to encompass the kingdoms of 'Vaṅga' and 'Samataṭa'. The Harikela army of Śrīchandra successfully fought with the 'Pālas' and possibly the 'Kambojas' of the northern Bengal. His army went to 'Devaparvata', capital of Samataṭa region. Also Śrīchandra built a monastery for worshipping Brahmā.

“Śrīchandrapurā Bhidhanmybrahmapuram Parikalpya Etosmin
Śrīchandrapure Brahmaṇe Etonmatha Prativadha” //

It is interesting to note that in 10th century Bengal built a monastery for Brahmā is very unique. Also another inscription of Śrīchandra is 'Kedārapura' copperplate where Brahmā describes as 'Vedhā'. 'Varmana' dynasty of Bengal took power in 'Vikramapura' region after the decline of 'Chandras' there. A king of this dynasty 'Harivarman' became powerful who was contemporary of Pāla ruler Rāmapāla. His minister Bhavadevabhaṭṭa wrote 'Bhuvaneśvar' Praśasti from which we come to know about 'Viriñchī' who is actually identified with Brahmā.¹³

Above all of these inscriptions different names of Brahmā is noticeable such as 'Svamvu', 'Kamalabhavapadmajoṇi', 'Dhatā', 'Vidhātā', 'Prajāpati' and etc who is expert in four *Vedas*. It is also remembered that behind all names Paurāṇic stories are codified which legitimized his power. 'Saurapurāṇa', 'Matsyapurāṇa', 'Viṣṇupurāṇa', 'Vanaparva' and 'Anuśāsanaparva' of *Mahābhārata*, 'Ayodhyākāṇḍa' and Uttarakāṇḍa of *Rāmāyaṇa* also describe many mythological stories of Brahmā. Actually Brahmā was four headed but Śiva cut his head and for this reason he became turned into three headed god which corroborated from 'Vāmanapurāṇa', 'Kūrmapurāṇa', 'Padmapurāṇa', 'Śivapurāṇa' and 'Skandapurāṇa'. It is also believed that Brahmā did ten sacrifices at 'Vārāṇasī' and particular that place where the sacrifices held became famous as 'Dasāśvamedhghāt'. But which is important is that the presence of a religious community of Brahmā in Bengal. Also monasteries and temples were built for his worship and living for disciples. It is seen that the cult of Brahmā never popular in a massive way like 'Vaiṣṇvism' and 'Śaivism'. According to *Purāṇas* Brahmā made his wife 'Gāyatrī' instead of 'Sāvitrī'. For this reason Devī Sāvitrī cursed him that his cult would never be accepted as a major way. The worship of Brahmā was prevalent especially in the 'Śrīhaṭṭa' region which was South-Eastern Bengal.

Gaṇapati:

Gaṇapati is a deity which frequently mentioned in Bengal inscriptions. We find the mentions of Gaṇeśa in 'Nidhānpura' copperplate of Kāmārūpa king Bhāskaravarman. ¹⁴ Here the genealogy of this king's dynasty is described. Son of king 'Kalyāṇavarman', Gaṇapati is compared with Lord Gaṇeśa. In this inscription two features of Gaṇapati's are described. At first he is mentioned as a donor from whom his 'Sidhivināyaka' form is come. Second feature is his destroyer form where he destroys the 'Kaliyuga'.

'Nārāyaṇapura' copperplate of I Mahīpāla (ca. 913-44 AD) tells about an erection of an image of 'Vināyaka Bhaṭṭāraka' by a trader of Samataṭa, 'Buddhamitra'. ¹⁵ This image is two handed and a tooth oriented. Also he is ornamented with a 'Kaṇṭhāhāra', 'Yagyopovīta', 'Sarpavandha' and Crown or 'Mukuta'. In his legs a symbol of lotus is found. A rat is also sat just down to his one leg. These kinds of

features of Gaṇapati are actually found from ‘*Viṣṇudharmattarapurāṇa*’. Maximum scholars think that this image was a specimen of ‘Paurāṇic Gaṇapati’. But some scholars identified it as a god of ‘*Mahāyāna*’ Buddhism.

‘Siyāṇa’ stone inscription of Pāla king Nayapāla or III Vigrahapāla is discovered from the village ‘Siyāṇa’ of ‘Bīrabhūm’ district in West Bengal.¹⁶ This inscription mainly describes the love for Vaiṣṇavism of the above mentioned king. But here ‘Gaṇeśa’ is mentioned as ‘Vighṇanāyaka’. This tells about the establishment of two Gaṇapati images along with gold ‘*Vedī*’ in a temple of Gaṅgāsāgara. Also ‘Barracopore’ copperplate of Vijayasena describes about the donation of a village to the brāhmaṇas for the maintenance of Lord ‘Maheśvar Bhaṭṭāraka’ temple (Śiva Temple). ‘Gaṇeśa’ is famous as ‘Dviradāsya’ here.¹⁷

From Bengal inscriptions we find various names of Lord Gaṇapati. He was worshipped by the traders and merchants of the society. Many *Purāṇas* like ‘*Vāmanapurāṇa*’, ‘*Skandapurāṇa*’ and etc that Gaṇeśa is the son of ‘Mahādeva’ and ‘Pārvatī’. He is also the husband of ‘Gaṇa’ for which reason he borrows the name of ‘Gaṇapati’. ‘*Mahābhārata*’ describes him as a writer and intellectual person. The most important name of him is ‘Vināyaka’ because he was born without the help of Śiva. He was not born in a physical manner. Her story of birth is mythical. So he called ‘Vināyaka’. But it is also being remembered that the cult of Gaṇapati was mainly famous in the society of traders. Also we know that some temples were built for his worship. But it is debatable to say that any kinds of ‘Gaṇapati Community’ or the community who prayed to only Gaṇeśa was existed in early-medieval Bengal. Also from ‘Pāhārpura’ of Bengal we find terracotta, stone and metal images of ‘Dviradāsya’. The worship of Gaṇapati was not so much prevalent in Bengal but it continued in a smaller way.

Sūrya:

Other deity is Sūrya whose mentions we find from ‘*Rgveda*’ as ‘Sabitā’, ‘Mitra’, ‘Āditya’, ‘Pūsā’, ‘Bhaga’ and etc. ‘*Rgveda*’ mentions Sūrya with particular reverence for the ‘Rising Sun’ one who empowers knowledge and good for all lives. The ‘*Mahābhārata*’ opens its chapter on Sūrya that reverentially calls him as an ‘Eye of the Universe, Soul of all Existence’. But in later times Sūrya worship was not spread like Vaiṣṇavism and may be it happened for the foreign connection of Sūrya. It is believed that first the ‘Magadvijīya’ or ‘Śakadvīpīya’ brāhmaṇas of outside India came here and started the worship of Sūrya. So the Indians took long time to start his worship.

‘Jagadīśapura’ copperplate of ‘Rājsāhī’ district mentions that three men ‘Khemark’, ‘Bhoyila’ and ‘Mahīdāsa’ who donated lands for establishing a temple of ‘Sahasraraśmi’ (Sūrya).¹⁸ Also for the rituals of ‘Valī-Charu-Satra’ of ‘Gulmagandhikā’ region lands were donated. This inscription is dated 447 AD which belonged to the Gupta period. It actually deals with the establishment of Sūrya temple in Bengal which is very important. ‘Nidhānpura’ copperplate of Bhāskaravarmana clearly compares his power with god Sūrya.¹⁹

“Bhuvanapatirivodayā Nurktamaṇḍala Jathājathamuchitakarani Karavitarāṇā Kalitimiraśāñchayayā” //

In 'Vāṅgarh' Praśasti of I Mahīpāla, Gopāladeva a son of King 'Rājyapāla' and queen 'Bhāgyadevī' is compared with Sūryadeva.²⁰ Also 'Kṛṣṇadvārikā' temple inscription of Nayapāla tells that son of Śūdraka e.a. 'Viśvāditya' became powerful like Sūrya.²¹ Also we know about a temple of Mūrtiśiva and on the top of it gold 'Kalaśa' (Pot) was established whose rays were like Sūrya. This information is get from above inscription. Here Sūrya is called as 'Bhānu', 'Arkapati', and 'Dinapati'. 'Kāmāuli' Copperplate of Vaidyadeva also depicts Sūrya as southern eye of Viṣṇu.²² Even the 'Siyāṇa' Stone inscription mentions about a donation of chariot to a Sūrya temple.²³ Chariot is the mount of god Sūrya. 'Gayā Gadādhara' temple inscription of Nayapāla started with the salutation of Sūrya.²⁴ This above temple was established by any of the devotee of Sūrya. 'Gayā Śītalā' temple inscription of Pāla king Govindapāla (ca. 1161-65 AD) is also started by the salutation of Sūrya. But this inscription also mentions about the erections of images belonging to 'Nārāyaṇa', 'Mahādeva', 'Maunaditya', 'Vijayaditya' and 'Kedāreśvar'. Probably 'Maunaditya' and 'Vijayaditya' are the other names of Sun god. The brāhmaṇas of Gayā were very much fond of Sūryadeva and for this reason worshipping of Sūrya was very famous in Gayā.

In Sena inscriptions we find the mentions of Sūrya like in 'Barracpore' copperplate of Vijayasena,²⁵ 'Sāhitya Pariṣada' copperplate of Viśvarūpasena²⁶ and 'Idilpore' copperplate of Keśavasena.²⁷ 'Mādhānagara' copperplate of Lakṣṇasena tells that king gave a village named 'Dāpaṇiyā-Pāṭaka' (Situated near Kāntāpura of Varendrī region of Puṇḍravardhanavūkti) to a brāhmaṇa 'Sāntyāgārika Govindadevaśarmana' belongs to Kauśika Gotra and son of Kumāradevaśarmana.²⁸ Here the 'Trinayana' of Pañcānana Śiva is mentioned as 'Diptārkadhutisampanna'. Also the charioteer of Sūrya is described as 'Anurā'.

From the Bengal inscriptions we find many names like 'Sahasraraśmi', 'Arka', 'Lokanāth', 'Dharma', 'Bhāskara', 'Bhuvanapati', 'Sabitā', 'Ravi', 'Mārtaṇḍa', 'Divākara', 'Mihira', 'Maunaditya', 'Vijayāditya' and so on of Sūrya. In Bengal we find the images and temples of Sūrya but here this cult was never popular. But in Gayā region it was be popularized. Sūrya was started to famous as the 'Saviour from Diseases'. The Sun ray has a power to protect people from Diseases especially from the 'Leprosy' which was prevalent in Bengal on those times. From an inscribed Sūrya image of Dinājpura mentions that "Samasta Rogahanamhartā". It means the importance of Sūrya was not only in religious purpose but also it had an impact on practical lives of common people.

Chandra:

Chandra was also famous in Bengal which is reflected on the inscriptions. In 'Nidhānpura' copperplate of Bhāskaravarmana mentions about the son of 'Mahābhūtavarma' whose face looks like a moon.²⁹ The main worshipping god of Bhāskaravarmana was Śiva but in another hands he also mentioned as 'Śāśisekhara' (Moon). 'Khālimpura' copperplate of Dharmapāla (ca. 775-810 AD) describes about the queen of Gopāla, 'Deddadevī'.³⁰ Here Chandra and his wife Rohinī's love and sanctity as a couple are described. Also Dharmapāla's minister 'Nārāyaṇavarmā' built a temple for Lord 'Naṅṇanārāyaṇa' (Viṣṇu) and for the maintenance of it Dharmapāla donated four villages to him. I Mahīpāla's Vāṅgarh Praśasti mentions about

Chandradeva.³¹ ‘Siyāṇa’ stone inscription of Pāla period shows an image of Chandra who born by himself according to Purāṇic mythologies.³²

‘Deopārā’ Praśasti of Sena king Vijayasena also glorifies the Moon god.³³ ‘Barracpore’ copperplate of Vijayasena describes the beauty and prosperity of him.³⁴ He is powerful and lover likes ‘Kāmadeva’ which are mentioned in this inscription. Actually the Senas believed that Chandra was their ancestral god and from him their ancestors were born. ‘Ānuliā’,³⁵ ‘Govindapura’,³⁶ and ‘Tarpaṇadighī’³⁷ copperplates of Lakṣṇasena describe about the cult of Chandra.

“Anandanmunidhou Chokaranikare Dukhochidātyankito
Kahlāre Hatamahatā Raviputāvekohameveti Dhi
Yasyāmī Amṛtātnh Samudyāntāṣu Prākāśānjaga
Tyātrīdhyan Paramparāparinataṁ Jyotistadāstarīmude”.

In these above three inscriptions Chandra is described as ‘Oṣodhināth’. Also Viśvarūpasena and Keśavasena are described as ‘Somavaṁśapradvīpa’ in their inscriptions. Soma is the other name of Moon god which corroborated from many literary sources. ‘Paśhimbhāga’ copperplate of Chandra king Śrīchandra clearly tells that Chandra was their ancestral god because the name of the dynasty proofs this concept. Also ‘Kāmāuli’ copperplate of Vaidyadeva and also the kings of Deva dynasty e.g. ‘Dāmodaradeva’, ‘Daśarathdeva’ etc gave respect to Chandradeva.

There are many names of Chandra are found such as ‘Mṛgāṅka’, ‘Śaśī’, ‘Śaśadhar’, ‘Śītaraśmi’, ‘Śītakraṇa’, ‘Śītāṁsu’, ‘Indu’, ‘Chandramā’, ‘Soma’, ‘Dvirāja’, ‘Sudhānidhi’, ‘Sudhvaṁśa’, ‘Oṣodhināth’ etc from their inscriptions. ‘Viṣṇupurāṇa’ and ‘Bhāgavatapurāṇa’ tells that Chandra was born as ‘Dvija’ but somewhere he described as a king. Also the most important thing is the dedication of him to his wife Rohiṇī which known mainly from literary sources. In Bengal may be Chandra was not worshipped as a main deity. Only ‘Siyāṇa’ stone inscription tells about an establishment of image of Chandradeva but there is no elaborate description about it. So this cult lost its importance from the period when the Sūrya worship was started to become famous in Bengal.

Indra:

Beside all of these above Purāṇic gods the mention of Indra is frequently found from Bengal inscriptions. Indra is a Vedic deity of Hinduism. The maximum Ślokas (Approx. 250) of ‘R̥gveda’ were written for war god Indra. But in later times he lost his popularity for the coming of new religious thoughts. He was the king of heaven. Bhāskaravarmana’s ‘Nidhānpura’ copperplate mentions about ‘Bhagadatta’ who called as ‘Nṛpatirindrasakha’.³⁸ Indra get kingship among the gods after doing hundred ‘Aśvamedha’ sacrifices and for this reason he was famous as ‘Śatakratu’. ‘Khālimapura’ copperplate of Dharmapāla mentions him as ‘Purandhar’. ‘Bhāgalapura’ copperplate of Nārāyaṇapāla tells the defeating story of Indra by Valīrāja.³⁹ ‘Barracpore’ copperplate of Vijayasena mentions him as ‘Mahīmahendra’.⁴⁰ Also the ‘Sāhitya Pariśada’⁴¹ and ‘Idilpore’⁴² copperplates of Viśvarūpasena and Keśavasena accordingly describe him as ‘Mahīmaghvana’ who gave donations to the brāhmaṇas. Indra is mentioned as ‘Devarāja’, ‘Jāgyika’, ‘Purandhar’, ‘Vajrāyudh’, ‘Asurahantā’, ‘Śachīpati’ in the Bengal inscriptions. Also the *Purāṇas* call him as ‘Vajrāyudh’ and ‘Ākhaṇḍala’. It is also known that ‘Śachī’,

the wife of Indra for her sanctity and dedication to her husband became an 'Mātrikā' of 'Saptamātrikās'. So a mention of Indra is found from *Vedas*, *Epics* and *Purāṇas*. He was described as a hero of many evil incidents and especially for this reason his character among the people was shy which never be popular.

But the *Purāṇas* like '*Matsyapurāṇa*', '*Agñipurāṇa*' and '*Kālikāpurāṇa*' tell about the rules and regulations for build the images of Indra. Indra was survived as a 'Dikapāla' of eastern part of India and in a stone slab of 'Pāhārapura' we find a standing sculpture of him with his mount 'Airāvata'. According to R.C. Majumdar⁴³ and Sukumar Sen⁴⁴ a ceremony called 'Indradvaja' was celebrated in Bengal at medieval period which oriented with Indra. This view is also supported from the writings of 'Govindachandrācharyā'. But probably no separate community was grown up for the worship of Indra. He was existed as a minor god.

Vāyu:

Vāyu is the Hindu deity, father of 'Bhīma' and spiritual father of 'Hanumāna'. He is famous by many names such as 'Anila', 'Vyān', 'Vāta', 'Tanuna', 'Pavana', 'Prāṇa' and etc. after the early Vedic period this god lost its place and became a minor deity of Purāṇic religions. Only in the Vāṅgarh Praśasti of Mūrtīśiva we find mentions about him.⁴⁵

"Vadata maruto Jūyam Sākṣātkṛtākhilāstavaṃ" //

Here we find the mentions of Maruta. 'Maruta' and 'Vāyu' were the different gods but in Paurāṇic period they merged in a same god as Vāyu. He became the Dikpāla of north and western zone. The worship of Vāyu was never held separately in Bengal. But with the worshipping of Hanumāna he was also worshipped.

Varuṇa:

Another important god of Vedic age was Varuṇa who also became Dikpāla in the western part. He was the god of sky, water, justice and truth. Also in '*Rāmāyaṇa*' he was mentioned. 'Muṅgera'⁴⁶ and 'Nālandā'⁴⁷ copperplates of Devapāla clearly tell about 'Varuṇaniketana' which was actually the western part of his empire. The cult of Varuṇa was not so much popular in Bengal. But there was a concept of building the images of Varuṇa by following the described rules of many *Purāṇas* like '*Matsyapurāṇa*', '*Agñipurāṇa*' and so on. We find Many Sculptures of Varuṇa are in Rājsāhī Museum of Bāṅglādeśa and relieves from Pāhārapura temple. But a sculpture of Pāhārapura temple is identified with 'Yama' by K.N. Dikshit.⁴⁸ But Jitendranath Bandhyopadhyay identified it with Varuṇa.⁴⁹ In later days Varuṇa was started to compare with the Lord 'Śanideva' and for this reason he lost the importance in society.

Agñi:

From Vedic literature we get numerous hymns belonged to Agñi. The mention of Agñi is found in two Bengal inscriptions e.a. 'Khāimapura' copperplate of Dharmapāla⁵⁰ and 'Paśhimbhāga' copperplate of Śrīchandra.⁵¹ In Khāimapura copperplate the auspicious love of Agñi and his wife 'Svāhā' are described. Also in Paśhimbhāga copperplate mentions about an establishment of 'Vaiśvānara' image and for it some lands of 'Brahmapura-Chandrapura' was donated. Buddhist king Śrīchandra donated lands for worshipping of 'Vaiśvānara' or 'Agñi' which is unique in those times Bengal. Examples of erection a monastery for Agñi was not only rare in

Bengal but also whole over India. Many *Purāṇas* and inscriptions describe him as ‘Hutabhuka’, ‘Svāhāpati’, and ‘Vaiśvānara’. From the relief of Pāhārpura temple a two handed, ‘*Japamālā*’ and ‘*Kamaṇḍulu*’ oriented standing sculpture of Agni is found.⁵² Also another image of Agni is discovered from the ‘Veṅīsāgara’ region where the flames or rays of Agni are found.⁵³

Kuvera:

Also Kuvera, a god of wealth and prosperity is mentioned in many Bengal inscriptions. He is also the god-king of the semi divine Yakṣas in Hindu mythology. ‘Tripurā’ copperplate of regional king Lokanāth (ca. 663-64 AD) mentions the name of ‘Kuvera’ while giving the descriptions of Nārāyaṇa. Also the ‘Khālimapura’ copperplate of Dharmapāla tells about him along his wife ‘Bhadra’.⁵⁴ They are depicted as great couple. Also in ‘*Rāmāyaṇa*’, ‘*Mahābhārata*’, ‘*Skandapurāṇa*’, ‘*Padmapurāṇa*’, and etc he was mentioned. From Pāhārpura temple we find sculptures of Kuvera.⁵⁵ He was the Dikpāla of northern part and worshipped with Devī ‘Lakṣmī’ and ‘Annapūrṇā’ in Bengal. Only in the ‘Velāva’ copperplate Bhojavarmā mentions about him. We find some sculptures of Yama, a god of death, hell and Dikpāla of southern part.⁵⁶

Dikpāla:

The Guardians of the directions or Dikpālas are the deities who ruled in specific directions according to Hinduism and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. We find the sculptures of Dikpālas from the walls of many temples. There are ‘Aṣṭa’, ‘Nava’, and ‘Daśa’ Dikpālas. We find their representations in many inscriptions of the Bengal. ‘Bādala’ Pillar inscription of Nayapāla mentions Indra as the Dikpāla of eastern part.⁵⁷

“Śakra Purodiśī Patirṇa Digantareṣu”//

Nārāyaṇapāla is compared with the Dikpālas in his Bhāgalapura copperplate.⁵⁸ Also in ‘Sāhitya Pariśada’⁵⁹ and ‘Madanapāḍa’⁶⁰ copperplates of Viśvarūpasena and ‘Idilpore’ grant of Keśavasena depict the various roles of the Dikpālas.⁶¹ But their actual numbers are not mentioned properly. Mainly the ‘Aṣṭadikpālas’ such as ‘Soma’, ‘Agni’, ‘Arka (Sūrya)’, ‘Anila’ (Vāyu), ‘Indra’, ‘Kuvera’, ‘Āpatti’ (Varuṇa), and Yama. In later days these Dikpālas were entered into the worship of Navagrahas in Bengal.

Navagrahas:

We find the mentions of Navagrahas e.g. ‘Sūrya’, ‘Chandra’, ‘Maṅgala’, ‘Budha’, ‘Vṛhaspati’, ‘Śukra’ and ‘Śani’. They are the astronomical bodies as well as the mythical deities of Hinduism and Hindu astrology. From the first half of the 11th century the worship of Navagrahas became started in ‘Rāḍa’ region of Bengal. ‘Siyāṇa’ stone inscription clearly mentions the king (Probably Nayapāla or III Vighrapāla) donated a golden lotus for Navagrahas.⁶²

“Chakre Jo Haimaṁ Navagrahamvojaṁ” //

But among all of these Navagrahas the worship of Sūrya became famous independently by the ‘Śakadvīpīya’ or ‘Magadvījīya’ brāhmaṇas who came in Bengal from outside. But the Navagrahas never get the high positions which the other brāhmaṇas had in Bengal. In Bengal there are rare specimens of Navagraha sculptures as joint form are found. We find these sculptures on the doorjambes of many temples. An image contained with Navagrahas is found from ‘Kaṅkandighī’ excavations of

Bengal. It is believed that by the 'Grahapuja' all the worries were gone and prosperity comes on home and personal life.

Kārtikeya:

Kārtikeya was the god of war and son of 'Śiva' and 'Pārvatī'. Also he is an ancient god traceable from Vedic era. He is mentioned in many early texts such as 'Aṣṭyadhoyī', 'Arthaśāstra', 'Mahābhārata' and so on. He has many names like 'Murugāna', 'Skanda', 'Kumāra' and 'Subrahmaṇya'. He is also mentioned in south Indian literatures. 'Nālandā' copperplate of Devapāla mentions about Kārtikeya as a son of 'Śambhu' and 'Umā'.⁶³ 'Bādala' pillar inscription of Kedara Miśra tells that "Śrīmān Kedaramiśra Guha Iva Vikāśjātarūpa- Prabhābah". Siyāṇa stone inscription mentions about Nayapāla who compared with Skanda.⁶⁴ 'Barracpore' copperplate of Vijayasena describes Kārtikeya as 'Krauñcharī'.⁶⁵ 'Madanapāḍa'⁶⁶ and 'Sāhitya Pariśada'⁶⁷ grants of Viśvarūpasena and 'Idilpore' copperplate of Keśavasena call him as 'Śakti' or 'Śaktidhar' (Warlord).⁶⁸ 'Bhātera' copperplate of Isāṇadeva mentions Kārtikeya as 'Vāhuleya' (Son of Maheśa) and 'Rauhiṇeya' (Son of Chandra and Rohiṇī).⁶⁹ These inscriptions highlight the powerful character of Skanda. He is also the 'Devasenāpati'. 'Ādikhaṇḍa of Rāmāyaṇa' and 'Vanaparva of Mahābhārata' describes the mythical birth story of Kārtikeya. From 200 BCE to Gupta period the worshipping of Skanda became popular in many parts of India. In south India he was more popular than any parts of India. From Bengal we find many images and sculptures of him especially from 'Dinājapura'.⁷⁰ But in Bengal no special community of the devotees of Kārtikeya is found. But he popularly presented in Bengal's culture.

Kāmadeva:

The mention of Kāmadeva is found directly or indirectly from Bengal inscriptions. He was the Hindu god of human love or desire, often portrayed along with his wife Ratī. 'Nālandā' copperplate of Devapāla mentions about 'Madana' and 'Ratī' whose love compared with the couple relation of 'Samarāgravīra' and 'Tārādevī'.⁷¹ Devapāla is described as 'Manmathripu'. 'Barracpore' copperplate of Vijayasena tells that Chandra is the friend of Madana.⁷² 'Govindapura',⁷³ 'Tarpaṇdighī'⁷⁴ and 'Ānuliā' copperplates of Lakṣṇasena mentions Kāmadeva as 'Ratīpati'.⁷⁵ 'Bhuvaneśvar' Praśasti of 'Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva' describes the mythical story of reborn of Kāmadeva after destroying by Mahādeva. The inscriptions tell various names of Kāmadeva like 'Smara', 'Ratīpati', 'Manmathrājā', 'Kusumadhanu' 'Anaṅga' and etc. there is a debate about the birth story of Madana. We find the sculptures of Kāmadeva and also two of them are now in Rājsahī museum. They are belonged to Sena period. Now-a-days the worship of Madana is celebrated in a larger way in North Bengal.

Conclusion:

After the above discussion it is clear that Bengal was the land of cultural synthesis. Religion is the integral part of this culture. From the times of the Pālas this culture was revived in a new manner which corroborated from literary and archaeological sources. Inscriptions are one of the most important sources of describing about culture. From early-medieval Bengal we find numerous copperplate charters of 'Pāla', 'Sena', 'Chandra', 'Deva', 'Varmana' and also etc dynasties. Pāla and Sena were the major dynasties of Bengal who patronized Buddhism as well as Brāhmaṇism. Also

the other dynasties of South-Eastern Bengal patronized Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism. Also the eighteen '*Mahāpurāṇas*' and eighteen '*Upapurāṇas*' were started to codify in those time with deal with wide range of topic, myths, legends and other traditional lore. It reflects polity, society, religion, culture and so many things. *Purāṇas* contain the descriptions of many deities and some of them like 'Viṣṇu', 'Śiva' and female cults which became very popular in early-medieval Bengal. But there were also some gods who never get the top most position among the masses by their religious believes. Especially Vedic gods and goddess lost their importance in this that period. But the inscriptions of Bengal mention about some minor deities of Bengal.

The Vedic gods 'Indra', 'Varuṇa', 'Mitra', 'Agni' are described in Bengal inscriptions. They all were the main deities in Vedic especially Early-Vedic period that lost their positions in later times. Also the mentions of 'Brahmā', Gaṇapati', 'Kārtikeya' and 'Sūrya' are found in those vast ranges of inscriptions. Beside them 'Dikpālas', 'Kāmadeva' and 'Navagrahas' were worshipped in Bengal. Many inscriptions such as 'Khālimapura' copperplate of Dharmapāla, 'Nālandā' copperplate of Devapāla, 'Bādala' Pillar inscription and 'Bhāgalapura' inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla, 'Vāṅgarh' Praśasti of I Mahīpāla, 'Sāhitya Pariśada' copperplate of Viśvarūpasena, 'Idilpore' copperplate of Keśavasena, 'Kāmāulī' copperplate of Vaidyadeva, 'Paśhimbhāga' copperplate of Śrīchandra etc mention about these gods and their religious roles in society. Mainly the kings patronized 'Vaiṣṇavism' and 'Śaivism' but beside it they mentioned about the minor Purāṇic deities. It is proved that they were alive in people's mind which affected their religious and social lives. Interesting thing is that we find some kinds of divisions among the minor gods in behalf of their positions or social status. This is also highlighted in '*Vṛhaddharmapurāṇa*' and '*Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*'.

We know about Brahmā who is the integral part of 'Trimūrti' concept of Hinduism but the cult of him never be popular in a massive way. Even in '*Pañchoponiśada*' he is not mentioned. But besides Brahmā the cults of 'Gaṇapati' and 'Sūrya' became much popular. They were worshipped with 'Viṣṇu', 'Śiva' and 'Śakti'. Bengal inscriptions clearly mention about the 'Navagrahas' except 'Ravi'. 'Graharāja' became very popular for maintain peace and prosperity in household of common people. In maximum Hindu ceremony a hymn likes 'Omṇāśadikapālebhyo Namah' is praised before the starting. It is a prayer for 'Daśa Dikpālas'. Inscriptions bear some of their names also. The Bengal inscriptions clearly tell about all of these deities. But it is also to be remembering that there is no specific religious community born in Bengal in that period. We find mentions of some temples of 'Brahmā' and 'Sūrya'. Also some images and sculptures of 'Dikpālas', Navagrahas', 'Kāmadeva' and 'Kārtikeya' are discovered from temple plaques, doorjambes and etc places.

The kings and rich people donated villages and lands to the brāhmaṇas especially for the maintenance of temples. For this reason in their inscriptions the minor deities get placed as the symbol of their religious tolerance. Sometimes many festivals were celebrated centering their worship. Also in today in tribal society they are worshipped. Especially the worship of 'Kāmadeva' is connected with the great Hindu festival 'Holi Utsava' also in today. It is a cultural side beside the religious importance of these minor gods. But these deities never get a stronger position in early-medieval Bengal beside the 'Bhakti' wave of 'Vaiṣṇavism' and 'Śaivism'. Specific religious

communities were not grown in this period in Bengal. But the point is that they were survived or existed in the minds of common people. They have a great religious, cultural and social impact not only in Bengal but also influenced the whole Indian Subcontinent by their diversities which are beyond doubt.

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