

Sculptural Art of Bengal under Guptas: An Iconographic Survey

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Abstract: This paper is based on field study and survey work, undertaken as an analytical study of the influences of Gupta style of art on Bengal sculptures during the Gupta period. The authors also describe iconographic forms and features of the images of different gods and goddesses found from Bengal which followed the Gupta style of art. A large number of sculptures of the Gupta period have been found from Bengal such as a standing image of Buddha from Biharail (Rajshahi district, Bangladesh), two images of Sūrya, one from Kashipur (South 24 Pargana district, West Bengal) and the other from Deora (Bogra district, North Bengal, Bangladesh), a gold-plated bronze image of Mañjuśrī found from Mahāsthāngarh (Bogra District of Bangladesh), a gilt bronze image is known as Śarvānī found near from Cheuddagram in the district Tipperah, a metal image of Śiva, hailing from Manirtat in South 24 Parganas district, (West Bengal), some of the stucco heads, made of black basalt found from Rajabadidanga at Karnasuvarṇa in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, few Viṣṇu images discovered from modern West Bengal, few Surya images and few images of the goddess Mahishamardinī found from different parts of West Bengal are the best specimens of Bengal sculptures which were largely influenced and inspired by the ideal of the artists of Sārnāth. Although these images bear the features of the Gupta style of art and regional features also reflect on these images.

Keywords: Bengal sculptures, Gupta style of art, Mahishamardinī, largely influenced, Surya, Viṣṇu

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Introduction

The rise of the Gupta's signified the reappearance of a unified rule over the greater portion of Northern India. This led to the resurgence of a national consciousness and this idea of national consciousness spreads throughout the country. It is not a matter of surprise that the period witnessed the efflorescence of Indian genius in all aspects such as art, architecture, sculpture, religion, literature, culture, economy, etc. The indigenous tradition of plastic arts continued its courses undisturbed and recorded significant achievements. The Gupta period witnessed heightening of the aesthetic consciousness leading to the fulfillment and culmination of the earlier trends and tendencies and reached its supreme expression which largely and significantly influenced to the other parts of Indian art and culture. The Gupta style of art deeply associated with regional features of art and developed a new form of style of art during this period and from the 6th century CE onwards this new form of art pervaded in the sculptural art of Jainism, Buddhism and Brahmanism in Bengal. During this time, various sculptures of the iconic forms of the gods and goddesses have been found from different regions of Bengal although these are not large in numbers and these are still available in different parts of Bengal. Images of many gods and goddesses of different religions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Brāhmanical religious pantheon, and few non-religious themes have been found in the sculptural art of Bengal.

Gupta Style of Art: The Ultimate Development of Indian Art and its Characteristics

The period of the Gupta's ushered in heightened intellectual consciousness and in all forms of artistic activity. Literature, sciences, arts and every other fields of life also felt the impulse of this heightened intellectual ferment. As a consequence, a new approach towards art was noticed in an attempt to establish a closer affinity between art and thought, between the outer form and the inner spirit, between mind and body. These create a new aestheticism in the world of senses and deeper realizations through the experiences of art. Art now becomes the cognizant medium of the intellectuals and spiritual conceptions of the people. During this period, the visible images generated the invisible divine concept within minds and the plastic art reaches to a destined spiritual goal. Thus, Gupta sculpture represents the highest expression of the Indian aestheticism, an expression of complete synchronization between art and thought, between form and ideology.

Plasticity is the spirit and breathes of the Indian art and it has justly been admired as one of the great masterpieces of Indian art. The principal theme of the plastic art of this period is concerned mainly with the representation of a disciplined body and conquered mind, and this is true not only the image of *Bodhisattva* or Buddha, but of the other divinities the *Śaivite* head from *Mathurā*, the splendid image of Buddha from *Anurādhāpura*,¹ Ceylon etc. as well.

Plastically, the Gupta sculpture is the logical outcome of the *Kuṣāna* art and *Sārnāth*. An image of Bodhisattva from *Bodhagayā* seems to be the earliest extant remains of the Gupta classical ideal among the sculptures. The image, no doubt, hails from *Bodhagayā* but it is a *Mathurā* origin, which is executed following the plastic tradition of *Mathurā* art. *Sārnāth* was one of the most active cultural centres of the new idiom of art for its soft and delicate modeling, the spirit of calm and peaceful contemplation appears to breathe the enjoyment of the mind and soul.² The main center of Gupta art was *Sārnāth* but the influences and traditions were spread from Tejpur in Assam in the east to the Gujrat-Maharashtra in the west and started from Kashmir to the Deccan. The heavy, stout, stiff, robust

and unattractive image of Bodhisattva was transformed into a fine, elegant, soft, meditative, yogic image of *Bodhisattva* and *Viṣṇu* in the Gupta period. In this transformation, there is a deep, vivid and bluff history of entire Indian thought and meditation, intellection and imagination, thinking and practice and also the concept and proper ideas. The massive images of *Mathurā* are rich in human and physical energy; the images of *Sārnāth* are small in sizes, compare to the images of *Mathurā* in the Gupta period or the 5th-6th century A.D. But their human form, posture, and style are meditative. A very sensuous sensation of superb spirit and miraculous feeling has become energized in touché of imagination and transparent thought in the face of the images.³

The transition of sculptures from the *Kuṣāna* to the Gupta period is well defined and the characteristic differences between the two are easy to ascertain based on the images of Buddha and *Bodhisattva* of the two styles.⁴ The heavy solidity and earthiness of the *Kuṣāna* images exhibit a remarkable contrast to the delicate reposeful and intensity spiritual type of Buddha in the Gupta period.⁵ One of the main features of the Gupta sculptures is the balance that has been achieved by the artists between the beautiful poses and the spiritual expression. The Gupta sculptors presented the human figures at their best. Whether they were spiritual or physical, the human figures displayed elements of robustness and lively. Apart from the form and religious sculptures, terracotta sculptures and decorative sculptures also have well defined in human form. It was always a challenge to present gods and goddesses in a human form as the sanctity of these deities had to be kept intact. The expressions on the faces of such sculptures were devoid of any material pleasure.

The Buddha images of *Sārnāth* are the best specimen of the Gupta sculpture of the product of the classical age and show the highest grade of excellence in Indian art ever reached. It is also treated as the best evidence of the artistic conception of the highest spiritual idols in India. Its main features are not only a delicacy and refinement of form and a relaxed attitude by breaking the body, calmness face, standing figure, slightly on its axis, grace pose of the body in place of erect posture. According to R. P. Chandra,⁶ “The median line instead of being perpendicular and divided body has exactly two equal bends into a graceful curve by the inclination of the torso to one side and throwing the weight of the body on one leg so that one hip is slightly higher than the other.”⁷ The two images of *Sūrya* followed the eastern trend, chief traits of Gupta style have been discovered, one from Kashipur (South 24 Pargana district, West Bengal) and the other from Deora (Bogra district, North Bengal of Bangladesh).

Influences of Gupta Style of Art in Bengal Sculptures and Their Iconographic Features

The Bengal sculptures of the Gupta period were largely influenced and inspired by the ideal of the artists of *Sārnāth*, but it is a phenomenon that the artists of *Sārnāth* represented to the something of their own, probably defined from earlier traditions which have left no visible trace. This modification is described by art critics as the “Eastern Trend” of Gupta art “distinguished by a vivacious emotion.” Stella Kramrisch describes this as the ‘eastern version’ of the classical idiom of *Sārnāth*.⁸ It is characterized by an emotional feeling which evens the sublimity of the *Sārnāth* inspiration fails to suppress. At the same time, a subtle change in plastic content and the figures acquire thereby a sensual expose, hardly to be accepted in the spiritual and impersonal creation of *Sārnāth*.⁹

Several sculptures from different parts of eastern India, the eastern trend in its emotional and sensuous forms are found in a wide area from Bihar in the West to Assam in the East.¹⁰ Such sculptures

are found to be excellent. A large number of sculptures of the Gupta period have been found in Bengal in particular, mention should first be made of a standing image of Buddha from Biharail (Rajshahi district, Bangladesh); now it is safely preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi (*hereinafter*, VRMR) and the assignable date of the image is about c.5th century CE. It is executed in Chunar sandstone and is also the distinctive medium of *Sārnāth*. The image bears the common features similar to the contemporary images from the sacred site.¹¹

The two images of *Sūrya* followed the eastern trend and chief traits of Gupta style have been discovered, one from Kashipur (South 24 Pargana district, West Bengal) and the other from Deora (Bogra district, North Bengal, Bangladesh). The first image is preserved in the Asutosh Museum, Kolkata (*hereinafter*, AMK) and the second figure of the god *Sūrya* is in the VRMR. Both the images are executed in a kind of bluish basalt. These two images represent an almost identical conception in stylistic and physiognomic form. Also, both are related to each other and these may be assigned to the c.6th century CE from an iconographic point of view and resemblance with those of the panels of *Daśāvatāra* temple at Jhansi.¹² The gold-plated bronze image of *Mañjuśrī* found from *Mahāsthāngarh* (Bogra District of Bangladesh), now in the VRMR, also shows definite characteristics of Gupta style. This graceful and exquisitely modeled figure is one of the best specimens of the ‘Bengal School of Sculpture’ of this period.¹³ Its simple naturalism and the exiguity of ornaments offer a refreshing contrast to the undue or plentiful taste for over adoration and perplexity of design which become prominent factors in all artistic attempts of the later period. Based on this ground, the image has been referred to as the c.6th century CE. This is the earliest specimen of gilt bronze of Bengal as well as eastern India. Its gold plating shows the advance skill and artistic dexterity in the casting of metal image.¹⁴

Another important and notable gilt bronze image is known as *Śarvānī*, dedicated by *Prabhāvatī*, queen of *Devakhaḍga* of the *Khadga* dynasty of East Bengal (c.7th century CE) is found near Cheuddagram in the district Tipperah.¹⁵ The eight-handed goddess made of octo-alloys standing erect of the back of the mount, a couchant, lion between two female attendants, on two sides, each holding a flywhisk are the iconographic features of the image. She holds anticlockwise the discus, arrow, sword and conch shell in her right hands from the top, and shield, trident, bow and sell in her left hands following the same order. Another metal image of *Śiva*, hailing from Manirtat in South 24 Parganas district, (West Bengal) perhaps belongs to this group and now it is preserved in under a personal collection.¹⁶ The image shows the god standing on a rectangular lotus pedestal with his *vāhana*, the bull. The god wears various ornaments and is distinguished by *urdhva-līṅga* and *jaṭā-mukuta* (crowned head) which bears the crescent moon on one side. The bull mount, the trident, the *jaṭā* with crescent, the *urdhva-līṅga*- these characteristics leads our eyes to identify the image as Lord *Śiva* without any doubt.¹⁷ It also may be mentioned that some of the stucco heads, made of black basalt belonging to the Gupta to the Post-Gupta period have been discovered from Rajabadidanga at Karnasuvarṇa in Murshidabad district, West Bengal. These are also the notable specimens of Bengal sculptures which followed the Gupta style of art and sculptures.¹⁸

A *Viṣṇu* plaque belongs to the Gupta period discovered from Kankandighi, is safely preserved at Khādi Museum in South 24 Pargana of West Bengal. The four-handed image of *Viṣṇu* (Fig.1) is made of on a thick black basalt slab. Spherical or rotund nimbus on the head is the special character of the

image. It is very interesting to note that there is no other figure or symbol is engraved on the back slab of the image. The figure of *Garūḍa*, the *vāhana* (vehicle) of *Viṣṇu* with folded hands is engraved with some motifs on the lower left side of the image. The god holds *padma* (lotus), *śaṅkha* (conch), *gadā* (maul) and *cakra* (wheel) in his hands, respectively. *Cakra* (wheel) and *gadā* almost touches the lower surface of the land. According to *Śilpaśāstra*, it is presumed that the image represents as 'Purūṣottama', another form of lord *Viṣṇu*. The image may be assigned to the late Gupta period and the Gupta style of art reflects on the image.

A similar type of *Viṣṇu* image followed the Gupta tradition of art has been found from Kakdwip of South 24 Pargana district, West Bengal and now, it is in a personal collection of specimen. (Narottom Halder, Sonarpur of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal). The image shows the god standing in a *samapadasthānaka* pose on a lotus pedestal. A very small size image measuring approximately 2 inches × 4 inches is made of grayish-black stone. The four-handed image holds *cakra* (wheel), *padma* (lotus), *śaṅkha* (conch) and *gadā* (maul) in his hands, respectively and the god is well dressed and bejeweled with various ornaments. The big size eyeballs in the face manifest its gravity. From the iconographic point of view, it appears that the image represents as *Purūṣottama* form of lord *Viṣṇu* and the image belongs to the late Gupta period.¹⁹ A grayish-black mica stone image of *Viṣṇu*, (Fig.2) found from Harinarayanpur village of South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, is a unique specimen of Bengal art. The size of the broken image is approximately 13.5 cm × 7.7 cm × 0.8 cm. The image is largely influenced by the local trends and traditions of art idiom though the Gupta style of art reflects on the image and the image developed and represented it into an extraordinary and unique feature. The eastern regional features of Gupta art appears in the form, composition, and formation on the image. However, body language and feelings of the image are not well defined by the artists.²⁰

Rectangular face, coarse nose, pale lips, a symbol of *tilaka* is in the middle of the flat forehead, half-closed eyes, big eyeballs, medium shaped body, wide chest, small hands compared to the body etc. makes the image as a distinct and individual characteristic. Generally, face with coronet head of the image seems to be very attractive, striking and lively and bears a symbol of a special era. The form, composition, and style of the image are very well executed and elegant. The brightness and flexibility of the face and sharp side vision of the image are very well-known and also something different from the contemporary sculptural specimen of the images. This is one of the finest specimens of the Bengal art during the Gupta period. The image seems to be the execution in between c.5th-c.7th century A.D.

A *Viṣṇu* image of the Gupta period has been unearthed from Baishhata village of Sundarban area of West Bengal and now it is preserved in a private Museum of Nirmalendu Mukhopadhyay at Jadavpur, Kolkata. The four-handed small image is made of red sandstone. The rectangular shaped *uṣṇiṣa* (coronet) of the god *Viṣṇu* is quite long and large. The face and the vision of the eyes of the image create a fear psychosis to the spectators and devotees to God. This image can be treated as an important and notable specimen of the regional style of art and seems to have influenced by the regional style of art of Bihar or Orissa. This beautiful and elegant image probably belongs to the c.5th-6th century A.D.²¹

A broken image of *Viṣṇu* is also discovered from Gobardhanpur village of Sundarban area of West Bengal and now it is housed in a personal collection (Bimal Sahoo, 56 years age, a local curator). The

measurement of the image is approximately 14 cm × 8 cm × 3 cm. It is presumed that the image was executed at the beginning of the Gupta period. This image is also largely influenced by the Gupta style of art. The images of god *Sūrya* with elegant passion and spiritual-consciousness are found at Kashipur, Chakfuldubi, Harinarayanpur of South 24 Pargana district, West Bengal and are also preserved in State Archaeological Museum, Govt. of West Bengal. There are so many beautiful images of *Sūrya* with eastern Indian regional features belonging to the Gupta period have been discovered from Bengal but no image of *Sūrya* is to be compared to the specimen of Kashipur. Though in respect of the period, the image of Kashipur is older than the image of Deowa specimen but the form, composition, and execution of style of the image is far more elegant, deeper in vision and imagination, feeling more relaxed and restrained.²²

The image of the god *Sūrya* (Fig.3) of Chakfuldubi at Harinarayanpur of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, preserved in the State Archaeological Museum, Govt. of West Bengal are small in sizes than the image of Kashipur. Nevertheless, the images are well developed and have the provincial manifestations of the Gupta style of art in respect of *Śilpaśāstra*. It is very important to note that the sun image preserved in the State Archaeological Museum, Kolkata, has foreign influences and it is older than the other images of Sun gods found from Bengal. It may be assigned that the image belongs to the c. 1st - 3rd century A.D almost at the end of the *Kuṣāna* period.²³ An interesting image of twelve-handed goddess *Mahiṣamardīnī* (Fig.4), made of mica-stone, is recently discovered from Chakfuldubi village in the Sundarban region of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. Two animal figures—a *Mahiṣa* (buffalo) and the face of the lion are engraved on the lower pedestal. The image stands on a lotus pedestal in *dvibhaṅga* pose. The goddess is well adorned with various ornaments from head to leg. The goddess also possesses well developed bare bosom and belly, and thin loin with the waistband of the female deity. The goddess holds anti-clockwise a *khaḍga* (sword), a *triśūla* (trident), a *vāna* (bow), a sword and a *gadā* (knob stick/maul) in her right hands, respectively while she holds the face of the buffalo by her main left to forcefully subdue it. The other left hands hold a *vajra* (one type of weapon), *akuthāra* (axe), a *dhanu* (archer), a *dhāla* (shield) and a pasha (one type of weapon), respectively. The right leg is on the shoulder of the *Mahiṣa* (buffalo) and the left leg is very close to the lion on the extreme left edge of the lotus pedestal. The image of the goddess is representing as *Simhavāhinī* (lion as the *vāhana*) because the position of a lion in this sculpture justifiably indicates it. The position of a buffalo in this icon is very interesting and amazing that the position of the buffalo is strangely on the right side of the goddess, not on the left side as usually found in most cases. The first left hand of the image forcefully seizes the mouth of the buffalo so that the mouth leans to the beneath. There is no sign or expression of fear psychosis or terrible modes on her face but have an illusion and fascinating mode in this sculpture.²⁴

From the iconographic point of view, a form of twelve-handed goddesses *Dūrgā* (*Mahiṣamardīnī*) as *Simhavāhinī* is a rare sculpture in Bengal though it is available mentioned in the *Devī-Purāna* and *Śilpaśāstra*. *Simhavāhinī* form of the goddess *Dūrgā* was explored first during the *Kuṣāna* period and it was continued from the Gupta and the post- Gupta period onwards.²⁵ A few stone and bronze sculptures of twelve-handed goddesses have been found in Bengal but no image can be compared to this unique image.²⁶ The assignable date of the image is c.4th-6th century A.D. but the author suggests that the image belongs to the c.9th-10th century A.D.

A contemporary six-handed grayish beautiful image of *Mahiṣāsūramardīnī* (Fig.5) has been found from Kankandighi village of Mathurapur-II Block in the district of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The six-handed goddess holds different weapons in her different hands; all parts of the body are bejeweled and the head is crowned with *jaṭā*. Big spherical face, swollen nose and eyes, coarse-lipped, rounded chin of the image and all parts of the body are decked with valuable ornaments which makes herself as extraordinary female representation in sculpture. The standing image of the goddess *Mahiṣāsūramardīnī* is shown slaying and fighting vigorously with the demon *Mahiṣāsura*. The right and left leg of the image is firmly placed on the destroyed and bifurcated head of the buffalo and the pedestal, respectively. The eight-handed goddess carries a trident, a sword, an arrow, a shield, a bow and an unidentified object in her hands. She strikes the chest of the demon by her trident. The artists try to focus the special moment of the goddess tries to destroy her enemy applying her full forces with blasted and flaming eyes. It indicates the artistic talent and knowledge regarding beautification about *Śilpasastra* of the artists.²⁷ From this sculpture, we may presume that during that time, the practice of engraving a lion in the sculptures was not started then. But, the number of hands is maximized and the *Mahiṣāsura* appears with *Mahiṣa*-exorbitance weapons. The gradual dynamism and development of art are clearly shown or displayed in this sculpture. The simplicity of the whole composition and the elegance of its carving mark is an extremely graceful and it is the finest specimen of the Pre-Pāla period. Simultaneously, the *Kuṣāṇa* style and the Gupta style of art is found reflection in this image which probably belonging to the c.6th-7th century A.D.²⁸

The two-handed sandstone image of the goddess *Mahisamardini*, (Fig.6) found from Sundraban region of West Bengal, is a unique and rare specimen of Bengal sculptures which is executed following by the Gupta style of art. The goddess holds a big shape trident in her right hand which forcefully pierces to the buffalo and she picked up the back of the buffalo. She subdues the head of the buffalo by her right leg and the left leg is placed on the simple pedestal to control her body. Interesting to note that the goddess is adorned by only a necklace, no other ornaments is visible in her whole body. She possesses well developed bosoms, spherical face and thick hands compare to the other female sculptures.²⁹

Another sandstone broken image of six handed *Mahishamardini*, discovered from the same place of West Bengal, is also a unique specimen of Bengal which belongs to the c.3rd-4th century A.D. This image is largely and actively influenced by the Gupta style of art. Similar type of *Mahishamardini*, is found at South Bishnupur Museum (Catalogue of the Museum, SKPS-5) of South 24 Parganas district of west Bengal and the image belongs to the c.5th-6th century A.D. The image of the goddess *Gaṅgā* and *Yamunā* with *saivite dwārapāla gangādhara* and *śivagana* has been found from Kroshjuri village under Raghunathpur-II Block of Purulia district, West Bengal which belonged to the Gupta period. These four specimens of sculptural art of the mother goddess are rare in Bengal sculptures which deeply affected by the Gupta style of art.³⁰ Among the Jaina goddess, the most important and popular goddess *Ambikā*, has been discovered from Chatrabhog village under Mathurapur-I Block in the district of south 24 Parganas of West Bengal and now, it is safely preserved in Kalidas Dutta Smriti Museum at Majilpur. The goddess wears a *jaṭāmukuta* (crown head with knot hair), heavy *hāra* (necklace), round shaped *karnakuṇḍalas* (earrings), armlets and anklets. She has round face, width

forehead, big eyes and fully damaged nose in the image. Her well developed bosom symbolises the maternity. The *prabhāvalī* (upper back slab) is adorned with five or six bunches of mango leaves on head. The presence of a child in her left lap and bunches of a mango leaves create like a canopy on head suggest that the image represents as the goddess *Ambikā*, the chief mother goddess of Jainism. From the iconographic and epigraphic point of view, it may be conjectured that the image may be assigned to the c.6th century A.D.³¹

A Jaina image (Fig.7) is preserved in the Majilpur Museum at Jaynagar which found from Kankandighi of West Bengal. The two-handed, made of sandstone, muscular, gigantic body, wide chest, rectangular big shaped face, well decorated with valuable ornaments and bejeweled coronet head of the image is a remarkable and significant specimen of Gupta style of art of Bengal. Thick nostrils, thick lips, crescent rounded chin, closed or enamored eyes, spherical *karnakundala* (earrings) makes the Jaina image more attractive and interesting. From the iconographic point of view, it appears that the image belongs to the c. 5th -6th century A.D. Although the image bears the features of the Gupta style of art and the regional features also reflect and influence on it.³²

A two-handed headless inscribed image of *pralambapāda* (with leg pendant) Buddha (Fig.8) has been discovered from Mahespur village under Mahespur Police Station of West Bengal. The headless image of Buddha is made of black basalt and is shown seated in *pralambapādāsana* on a lotus pedestal in *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā* or gesture. The upper portion is broken and the size of the image is about 15 cm×14 cm. It is very important and interesting to note that some Prototypes of Bengali and Sanskrit scripts are engraved on the slab. The author thinks that the inscriptions were incised in a later period and the scripts may be assigned the date is c. 8th -9th century A.D, but from its form and style of execution, it appears that the image belongs to the c. 6th century CE. The image was not brought from another region, perhaps it was made by a skilled artist for the fulfillment of a worshiper's desire. The image indicates the artistic dexterity and excellent talent of the artist or the sculptor of this region.

This type of inscribed image of Buddha with '*pralambapāda-dharmacakrapravartana*' gesture is the rarest image of Bengal. *Dhyānī* (Meditative) Buddha is already found in Bengal but the inscribed image belonging to the Gupta or late Gupta period is not available in Bengal. Few inscribed images of the Buddhist god and goddess, explored from different parts of Bengal are the best specimen of Bengal sculptures during the Pāla-Sena period. Few *dharmacakrapravartana* Buddha images have been found from *Sārnāth* but the images are not in *pralambapāda* (with legs pendant) pose.³³ This type of images of *pralambapāda* Buddha in *dharmacakrapravartana* gesture is seen well exquisite in the Viswakarmā Cave painting of Ellora.³⁴

A seating image of *dharmacakrapravartana* Buddha, preserved in the Khādi Museum at Kankandighi of West Bengal is one of the important specimens of Gupta style of art. This beautifully-oriented rich artistic Buddha image (Fig.9), made of grayish-black stone is quite ancient. Very prominent, smiling face, meditative pose and *vyakhyānamudrā* ('*mudrā* of explanation') shows in hands, and self-consciousness of the image makes her very attractive.³⁵ The quite antique image is being focused some special features and wonderful artistic exposure of a particular region. The image represents a wonderful artistic manner. The image of Buddha just followed the '*Bodhgayā*' style of art and assigned to the date is c.5th-6th century A.D.

A small black-radish sand-stone image of the Buddhist goddess ‘*Makara vāhana Tārā*’ has been found from Harinarayanpur village of South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal and now it is preserved in the Khāḍi-Chatrabhog Museum. The image is concerned with bears the sculptural quality of somewhat crude and archaic. A clear squarish appearance is being emphasized in her physiognomy. Square face, flat shoulders, broad lips, round protruding eyes, and angularity in pose and posture allow us not to fit the image to the stack of recognized Hindu deities. Rather, it leads our eyes to ‘Buddhist Goddess *Tārā*. It is a rare variety of *Tārā* can be called as ‘*Tārā Makara vāhana*’.³⁶ This type of rare image is not found anywhere else of Bengal. However, based on the environment, archaeological site, the physical features, style of art, religious tendency, it appears that the image belongs to the c. 3rd century CE to the c.6th century CE.

The great Buddhist-*vihāra* temple was built in the middle of the 8th century CE in the Pāla period and it was patronized by the king *Dharmapāla* of Pāla dynasty. The basement wall of this *vihāra* temple is decorated with 63 stone sculptures and all sides of the wall are covered with innumerable terracotta plaques. Among these 63 sculptures, all stone sculptures do not belong to the same period and the form, style, and execution of these sculptures are not the same features. Most of the sculptures are made of different types of sandstones such as complexion grayish buff, buff, grey, purple, whitish, dark and mottled buff grey basalt and bluish basalt.³⁷ Few of them followed the Gupta style of art of its regional manifestation and most of them demonstrate the diverse original tendency in which one may distinguish beginnings of the Bengal school which subsequently bloomed into the exuberant in the Pāla School.³⁸ Stylistic and iconographic characteristic features and subject matter of the image makes them extraordinary.

Conclusion

It is evident that there is a basic uniformity between the art of Bengal and the contemporary art of North-Ganges of India in respect of its nature and style during the c.5th-6th century A.D. It is very obvious and undeniable fact that effect of *Sārnāth* style of art is seen in sculptures but the regional influence of the east and local characteristics is strikingly also appeared in art and sculptures. This kind of art is also found in North Bengal (ancient *Punḍravardhana*), in Sundarbans area (lower part of Bengal) and a little number in *Rārḥ* region of Bengal during the Gupta period. It must be noted that whenever a new kind of art was found maybe in Northern Bengal or the Sundarbans region or Tejpur or Bankura, the most important thing is that the basic fundamental trend of local forms and Gupta style of art is seen in everywhere in sculptural art.

The art of Bengal was largely and actively influenced by the Gupta style of art until the 6th century CE. Like the other parts of India, Bengal continues maintained to contact with the general trend of art. In course of time, Bengal tried to gradually overcome the influence of the Gupta style of art from the second half of seventh century CE or from the Post-Gupta period which is known to be found in the image of the goddess known as *Śarvānī* of the Queen *Prabhābatī* of *Khāḍga* dynasty and in the small image of god *Sūrya*. The stone sculptures and terracotta plaques which are found in the Paharpur temple regarded or considered the first to be fully recognized in Bengal’s style of sculptures and artistic properties. The full expression of the culture of two centuries of ancient Bengal has obtained the language of culture and the cultural embodiment throughout the only *vihāra*-temple.



Fig. 1

Name of the image: *Viṣṇu*

Find-Spot: Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: Unknown

Dated: c.4th-6th century CE

(Courtesy: Khāḍi Museum, South 24 Parganas)



Fig.2

Name of the image: *Viṣṇu*

Find-Spot: Harinarayanpur village, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 13.5 × 7.7 × 0.8 cm

Dated: c.4th-5th century CE

(Courtesy: Rajib Banu, Behala)



Fig. 3

Name of the image: *Sūrya*

Find-Spot: Chakfuldubi, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: Unknown

Dated: c.1st-3rd century CE

(Courtesy: Kalidas Dutta Smriti Sangrashala, Majilpur, South 24 Parganas, WB)



Fig. 4

Name of the image: *Mahiṣāsuramardini*

Find-Spot: Chakfuldubi, Sagardwip, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 35.56 × 25.40 × 7.86 cm

Dated: c.4th-6th century CE

(Courtesy: Rajib Banu, Behala)



Fig. 5

Name of the image: *Mahiṣāsuramardini*

Find-Spot: Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 12 × 7 cm

Dated: c. 6th-7th century CE

(Courtesy: Khādi Museum)



Fig. 6

Name of the image: *Mahiṣāsuramardini*

Find-Spot: Sundarban, 24 S. Parganas, WB

Size: Unknown

Dated: c. 5th-6th century CE

(Courtesy: Barun P Mandal, Bangladesh)



Fig. 7

Name of the image: Jain Image (Broken)

Find-Spot: Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 18 × 12 cm

Dated: c. 5th-6th century CE

(Courtesy: Majilpur Museum, Jaynagar,
South 24 Parganas, WB)



Fig. 8

Name of the image: Buddha (Headless), Inscribed

Find-Spot: Mahespur, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 15 × 14 cm

Dated: c. 6th century CE

(Courtesy: Baruipur Anchalik Sangrahashala,
Baruipur, WB)



Fig. 9

Name of the image: Buddha

Find-Spot: Kankandighi, South 24 Parganas, WB

Size: 12 × 7 cm

Dated: c.5th-6th century CE

(Courtesy: Khāḍi Museum, South 24 Parganas, WB)

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