Cosmopolitanism and the Goddess Tradition in Bengal: Situating Mukundaram's Candimangalkavya in the Context of 19th Century Bengal

Sudarshana Bhaumik, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to draw a connection between the Candimangalkavya of Mukundaram Chakraborty and the emergence of the cosmopolitan goddess in the form of Durga, Kali, and Jagaddhatri during the 19th Century Bengal. Bengal had a long tradition of goddess worship. This regional tradition had taken shape into two phases: with the coming of the Brahmins during the 5th and 6th Centuries and also between the 15th and 16th Centuries with the composition of the Mangalkavyas. This paper mainly relied on the literary narratives like the Mangalkavyas, Bengal Puranas and also the different vernacular texts. The paper would highlight four objectives: to relate the Mangalkavyas with the goddess tradition in Bengal, secondly to analyze Goddess's role as a granter and legitimizer of royal power, thirdly the making of the cosmopolitan city and its cultural heritage, and lastly goddess and urbanity. On the basis of the ongoing discussion, it can be suggested that Bengal happened to be a cult region. Indeed it was on the shared understanding of a variously represented common cult which laid the foundation of Bengal's regional tradition. In the absence of a central monitoring agency such as the temple of Jagannatha, the cult of the regional goddess, conceived and promoted by the Bengal Puranas, helped to create a common focus and to integrate the highly stratified rural society in Bengal. The annual worship of Durga Puja also repeatedly in the Bengal Puranas but not popularised before the late medieval period, now functioned as the supreme signifier of the religious culture of the Hindu Bengalis to the 'outsider.'

Keywords: Puranas, Matrakas, Yogini, Barowari, Sarbojanin, Mangal Candi

INTRODUCTION

Bengal was renowned for the predominance of the worship of mother goddess from the ancient times. [1] In recent times the worship of goddess Durga was the single most important festival in Bengal's rich and diverse religious calendar. In fact goddess Kali with whom she shared a complementary history was easily more popular in this regard, with huge diasporic populations spread across the world, she was now also a squarely international phenomenon, with her puja being celebrated where there were Hindu families in one place. This was one of the festivals where people participated in irrespective of any religion and language barrier. In that sense, Durga puja had an unmistakable cosmopolitan hue about it. This paper would focus on the making of the cosmopolitan goddess from her tribal inheritance to her wide acceptance as a

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[1] Kum Kum Chatterjee, "Goddess Encounters: Mughals,Monsters and Goddess in Bengal," *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 47, No. 5, March 2013, p. 4.

modern deity of cosmopolitan city life.[2]

The tradition of goddess worship in Bengal acquired its present institutional form during the 17th Century. The forms in which the goddess was best known in recent times had taken shape during the 5th and 6th Centuries and also between the 15th and the 16th Centuries, with the composition of the Bengal *Puranas.* According to Kum Kum Chatterjee, these texts produced a composite deity whose attributes and mythologies were derived from Brahmanical and various non-Brahmanical traditions including Tantric and Buddhist.[3]

The sources of Bengali goddess worship were diverse, and some of them originated in distant parts of India.[4] Goddess Durga was the most impressive and formidable goddess of the Hindu pantheon.[5] Her primary mythological function was to combat demons who threatened the stability of the cosmos. Although the name Durga had been mentioned in Vedic literature, no goddess resembling the warrior goddess of later Hinduism was to be found in these texts. Around the 4th Century A.D. images of Durga slaying, a buffalo begins to become common throughout India. By the medieval period (after the 6th Century), Durga has become a well-known and popularly worshipped deity. Nearly all of Durga's myths associate her with

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[2] Manas Ray, " Goddess in the City: Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata," *Modern Asian Studies,* Cambridge University Press 2017.

[3] Kum Kum Chatterjee, *"*Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal," *op. cit.* p. 4.

[4] Tapati Guha Thakurta, *In the name of the Goddess: The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata,* Primus Books, New Delhi, 2015, p. 3.

[5] According to the Vedas, a mighty demon Durga, tormented the gods and men. Shiva himself could not kill the demon and even the other gods were unsuccessful because Durga was protected by a boon which made it impossible for any male to kill him. So on the request of Shiva, Parvati assumed the form of a warrior and killed the demon and was named Durga. The demon Durga at his death assumed the form of a buffalo. During the early period the identity of Durga as a goddess was enveloped in uncertainty: even during the period of the epics she was called the cowherd chief Nanda's daughter, sister to Vasudeva and wife to Narayana. Her cult and worship must have become prevalent before the later versions of the *Ramayana* were written, in which Rama in dire distress worshipped her out of season and gained victory against Ravanna. The epic *Mahabharata* relates that she dwelt on the Vindhya mountains, rode a lion and was offered oblations of meat and wine. Unlike Parvati, Durga was not the daughter of Himalaya. In one of the Puranas, written at a later date, Durga's name is derived from Durga fortress where she is believed to have dwelt. The great lawmaker and politician, Chanakya, apparently accepted this derivation because he laid down that each fort should have an image of Aparajita the invincible one, who is none but Durga. Again in the *Skandapurana*, Shiva ordered his servant Nandi to place Durga within each fort at Kashi,so that the city was well protected. Durga as one of the forms of the Sati- Parvati – Uma triad, is a benign goddess, consort of Shiva, mother of Kartikeya, Ganesha, Lakshmi and Saraswati. But behind this benign and peaceful image are the feats of demon killing which in different versions are ascribed to her various manifestations like Ambika, Chandika, Kaushiki and Kali. *See* for details, Sukumari Bhattacharya, Legends *of Devi*, Orient Longman 1995, pp. 26-27..

mountains, usually the Himalayans and the Vindhyas. One of her common epithets was Vindhyavasini "she who dwells in the Vindhya mountains." These mountainous regions were areas considered geographically peripheral to civilized society and inaccessible except through heroic efforts. The Vindhyas, in particular, were also regarded as dangerous because of the violent and hostile tribal peoples who dwelled there.

Thus, Durga's historical origin seemed to be among the indigenous non-Aryan cultures of India who lived on the margins of settled society like the *Savaras, Barabars, Pulindas* and other non-Aryan tribes. These tribal people were very much accustomed to non-Aryan habits such as drinking liquor and blood and eating meat.[6] Some of the oldest textual references to the goddess (occurred in Mahabharata and Harivamsa) also described her as a virgin and hunter and warrior deity, residing in inaccessible mountains and forests whose battles were typically against demons, which David Kinsley put it as 'a great battle queen.'[7] This image was popular from as early as the Kushan period (second 4th Century A.D.) and was frequently depicted from the 3rd Century A.D. till the present day in temples built for royal patrons.[8]

The creation of the goddess Durga thus took place in the context of a cosmic crisis precipitated by a demon that the male gods were unable to subdue. She was created because the situation calls for a woman, a superior warrior, demonstrating both martial ability and power. In the battlefield, she often created female helpers like the goddess Kali and a group of ferocious deities known as the *Matrkas* (mothers), who usually number seven.[9] The *matrakas* were popular among the Chalukyas in the 7th Century A.D. They were also represented in the Kailasnatha temple of Kanchipuram dating from the early 8th Century A.D. Along with the *matrakas*, in later times, the cult of sixty-four *yoginis* were also referred in literary texts as attendants of Durgas, among which mention may be made of Yogini temples in Orissa (10th Century A.D.) and central India (9th – 10th Century A.D). These Hindu temple goddesses also featured in varied manifestations in the village.[10] The term *Jogini* was the feminine gender of

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[6] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddess: Visions of the divine feminine in Hindu Religious tradition,* New Delhi 1987, pp. 95-104.

[7] Soma Mukherjee *Folk Deities and Matrika Cults of South -west Bengal,* Vol. 2 R.N. Bhattacharya 2003, p. 45

[8] Heather Elgood, 'Exploring the Roots of Village Hinduism in South Asia,' World Archaeology, Vol. 36 (3), *The Archaeology of Hinduism,* Taylor and Francis, 2004. p. 337.

[9] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddess: Visions of the divine feminine in Hindu Religious tradition, op. cit,* pp. 95-104.

[10] Heather Elgood, Exploring the Roots of Village Hinduism in South Asia', *op. cit.* p. 337.

the word *jogi. Jogini* was also defined as a girl, traditionally or superstitiously, dedicated to the village deities like Yellemma, in an elaborate ceremony like marriage. The lower castes mainly the Madigas regarded the goddess as a symbol of prosperity and fertility. The *jogini* system had started in Karnataka and Andhara Pradesh at a time when the *devdasi* system, reached its climax in the 12th Century and also when Bhakti movement emerged as a separate religious tradition. It was apparent that in this system, the majority of the *joginis,* came from the Madiga community.[11]

Unlike most of the folk goddess, whose identification, with the specific classical goddess had been vague and ambiguous, Yellemma was clearly identified with the classical (*Puranic)* goddess Renuka.[12] The religious links between the *jogini* and Renuka Mathamma, tradition was evident in the myths, where they were related to Renuka through a 'Madiga woman' named Matangi. Despite the relegation of the goddess Matangi to the margins of Renuka Yellamma tradition, the initiated woman became a member of the clan, after a ceremony of purification, with clan fluids and invocation of the outcaste goddess. The *joginis* guided the devotees of Yellamma in their worship both in household and in the temple. However, despite their 'lowly' status, unlike the priest, the Matamma was beyond the pure and impure, as Vijaisri observes, was akin to the goddess.[13] It was because of this notion of purity and pollution, as Margaret Trawick, refers, which has been discussed earlier, that Renuka had her own head, but of the untouchable body.[14]

Since this study aims to explore the evolution of the goddess tradition in Bengal, which has been revealed in the *Mangalkavya* narratives. Therefore, we must take into account the dominant trends of the religious thought process of the indigenous population of Bengal and their assimilation with other religious doctrines. With the coming of the Brahmins; attempts were made to adjust with the prevailing religious tradition of the indigenous population. In this

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[11] Kamal K. Mishra and K. Koteswara Rao, ' Theogamy in Rural India: Socio-Cultural dimensions of the "Yogini" system in Andhra Pradesh', *Indian Anthropologist,* Vol. 32, No ½, (Jan-Dec.2002) pp. 1-24.

[12] For details see, Margaret A. Mills, Peter J. Clans and Sarah Diamond ed.*South Asian Folklore, An Encyclopedia: Afghanisthan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakisthan, Srilanka,* Routledge, New York, 2003.

[13] Priyadarshini Vijaisri, *Dangerous Marginality, Rethinking, Impurity and Power,* ICHR, in association with Primus Books, New Delhi 2015, pp. 82-83, 89.

[14] Margaret Trawick, Gold *Death, Beauty, Struggle Untouchable Women create the World,* University of Pennsylvania Press 2017, 39-41.

process, the primitive goddess tradition was transferred to Saktism.[15]

Geographically, Saktism or goddess worship in India has primarily of two types- the South Indian worship of the goddess Shri Lakshmi and the worship of the goddess Kali. The first type located primarily in southern India sees the goddess as the embodiment of good fortune, fertility, and wealth, and it respects the Brahmanical tradition. The second type was found mostly in northern and eastern India, especially in West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Orissa. It had a complex relationship with the Brahmanical tradition. Three types of Saktism were found mainly in Bengal – folk/ tribal, tantric/yogic, devotional /bhakti. These three forms were mostly interrelated in Bengal.[16]

MANGALKAVYAS AND THE GODDESS TRADITION IN BENGAL

In Benga, the Puranas chose the goddess presumably because of her pervasive presence among the local people and constructed a regional cult which later became one of the major symbols of Bengal's cultural tradition. By regional cult, Kunal Chakrabarti refers to the 'cults of the middle range – more far-reaching than any parochial cult of the little community, yet less inclusive in belief and membership than a world religion in most universal form. [17] John Leavitt has identified at least three major features of a regional cult: annual, seasonal and calendrical cycles of regional rituals.[18] The most interesting feature of the evolution of the goddess tradition in Bengal was the absorption of folk Candi into Puranic Candi. It appears that Bengali Candi was being amalgamated with Sanskrit Goddess as the ancestors of the Bengalis were being amalgamated into the Hindu society of castes administered by kings and Brahmans. The goddess Mangal Candi was produced from this blending as a form of the village goddess that was acceptable to Brahmans. She was simultaneously Sati of the Puranas, Parvati, wife of Siva, Durga, slayer of anti-gods, the village tutelary Candi and the object of devotion and self-denying vows *(vrata)* for women.[19] *Mangal Candi* was the presiding deity of the popular non-

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[15] Kum Kum Chatterjee, " Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal," *op. cit* p. 5

[16] June Mc Daniel *Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal,* Oxford University Press New Delhi 2004, pp. 4, 6.

[17] Kunal Chakrabarti, " The Puranas and the Making of cultural territory of Bengal," *Studies in People's History,* Issue 1, Vol. 5, June 2018, p. 5.

[18] John Leavitt, ' Cultural Holism in the Anthropology of South Asia: The Challenge of Regional Traditions,' *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* 26(1) (January–June 1992), p. 4.

[19] Ralph W. Nicholas *Nights of Gods: Durga Puja and the Legitimization of Power in Rural Bengal,* Orient Blackswan New Delhi, p.28.

Brahmanical women's vrata in Bengal. She was not mentioned in any of the high profile Sanskrit texts outside of Bengal, but she was fairly prominent among the less important goddesses in Bengal Puranas.[20] The *Devi Purana* referred to a goddess n called *Mangala* who was worshipped to ward off evil and to attain happiness. Shashibhusan Dasgupta believes that *Mangala* was the precursor of the later *Mangal Candi.* According to *Brahmavaivartapurana Devaki* worshipped *Bhairavi* the presiding goddess of Mathura and *Sasthi* and *Mangal Candi* on the *upanaya* ceremony of Krsna and Balaram.[21] The *Markandeya Purana* and *Devi Bhagvata* of the 10th and 12th Centuries[22] declared that Siva worshipped *Mangal Candi* with the sacrifice of sheep, goats, buffalo rhinoceros and birds of various kinds. The *Kalika Purana* however, categorically recommended human sacrifice and offering of wine to *Mangal Candi.* This tribal connection had been represented in the *Candimangalkavya* of the 16th Century where the goddess is portrayed as the tutelary deity of the hunters.[23]

From the above discussion, it is thus clear that the *Candimangalkavya* was composed in the s16[th] Century Bengal in her honour and printed collections of *vratakathas* and *panchalis* (folk narratives) of Mangal Candi were produced in large numbers even today.[24] Towards the end of the 16th Century, the goddess was transformed from a fierce warrior to benign mother and daughter. This, according to Mc Dermont, was due to the influence of Vaishanava devotionalism. Here the Bengali *Mangalkavya* genre also functioned as an important catalyst in the process of the 'softening' of the Goddess.[25] The 16th Century reform movement initiated by Chaitanya introduced a very different form of devotion. Tantric practices of dark and mysterious worship were replaced by the idea of ecstatic devotion. Although the Vaishnava movement in Bengal was mainly centred around Krishna, from the 17th Century, elements of Vaishnav Bhakti began to appear within the Tantric tradition.[26]

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[20] Kunal Chakrabarti, "The Puranas and the Making of cultural territory of Bengal," *op. cit.* p. 5.
[21] Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: Puranas and the Making of Religious Tradition of Bengal,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001, p. 239.
[22] P.K. Maity, *Human Fertility Cults and Rituals of Bengal A comparative Study*, Abhinava Publications New Delhi 1989 pp. 81, 83
[23] Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: Puranas and the Making of Religious Tradition of Bengal, op. cit.* pp 239-240
[24] Kunal Chakrabarti, "The Puranas and the Making of cultural territory of Bengal," *op. cit.* p. 5.
[25] Kum Kum Chatterjee, 'Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal,' *op. cit* pp. 8-9.
[26] For details see Tithi Bhattacharya, 'Tracking the Goddess Community and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of 19th Century Calcutta', *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 66, No 4, (Nov 2004).

This process of religious transformation occurred when the Sakta cults sprang up in strong opposition to Saivism. We find Sakta cults were in conflict with the male deities. In this conflict Saivism, the religion centering around the most different, and inactive god had to give way, and Sakta cults gradually gained ground. This conflict seems to have resolved itself in another way in a synthetic transformation in the Radha Krshna cult of Bengal.[27] The conception of Radha was not developed even in the *Bhagvata Purana* (10th Century). But in the *Gitagovinda* of *Jaydeva* (12th Century) and in *Brahmavaivartapurana* (13th Century), we find Radha was becoming a driving force of Vaishnavism. In Bengal and Orissa, especially Sakta Tantric ideas exercised a tremendous influence on Vaishnava ideas and practices. The Sakta goddess Ekanamsa was able to find her way into the Vaishnava religion as the consort of Krishna. Her image between Krshna and Balaram could be seen in the sanctum of Ananta Vasudeva temple at Bhubaneshwar. In the Jaganatha temple at Puri, she was placed between Jaganatha and Balaram as their sister. Jagantha was a tribal god worshipped with primitive tantric rites. Subsequently, he was taken into the fold of Vaishnavism, but the tantric rites associated with this cult continue to exist even today. According to Sakta tantric tradition, the presiding deity of Srikhetra is the goddess Vimala, and Jaganatha was her consort or Bhairav.[28]

Around this time the Goddess Kali also emerged. Kali also had been known since the time of the Epics and the early *Puranas.* She began to gain her characteristic Bengali iconic form and tantric rituals beginning from around the 11th Century.[29] The image of Kali as worshipped in Bengali religious functions was reported to have been visualised by a 16th Century Tantric scholar Krishnananda Agambagish, on the model of a Bengali village housewife of whom he had a sudden glimpse.[30] However, Kali's iconography certainly predated Agambagis. He had quoted earlier that the tantric description of the goddess's appearance in his Tantric digests the *Tantrasara.* But we have independent corroboration from other texts and relics that at least from the 11th Century, Kali had been envisioned in terms very similar to what one sees today. The 10th or 11th Century, *Mahabhagavata Purana,* the 11th Century, *Devibhagavata Purana* and 13th Century *Brihaddharma Purana* were the major

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[27] See for details Shashibhusan Dasgupta,*The Obscure Religious Cults,* Calcutta Firma KLM 1962.
[28] Narendrath Bhattacharya, *History of Sakta Religion,* Munshiram Manoharlal New Delhi 1974, pp. 144-145.
[29] Rachel Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The fortunes of Hindu festivals,* Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 167.
[30] Kumudnath Mullick, *Nadia Kahini* (in Bengali), Calcutta 1986, pp. 116-117.

sources of Kali as a goddess. Thus, one must agree with Pratapaditya Pal, who argues, that it was between the 11th and 14th Centuries, that Kali came to be worshipped with all sorts of Tantric paraphernalia. She thus evolved from a fierce-looking icon symbolising life, death, transformation, and ritual.

Unlike the case of Durga, Candi and Manasa, there was nothing at all written on Kali in the vernacular texts until the 17th and 18th Centuries, when the goddess was incorporated into the *Mangalkavyas.* One could see the growth of Kali in Bengali devotion by looking at her increasingly prominent role in the poem's main love story about *Vidya Sundar.* The *Kalikamangal* authors tended to sweeten and decorate the fierce goddess in a fashion similar to the earlier Sanskrit Tantras. The Kali of *Kalikamangal* gave way by the 18th Century to the Kali of the *Saktapadas,* short lyric, poems of praise, petition and complaint to set to music and sung to the goddess. Ramprasad Sen, who was considered the earliest exponent of the new Sakta poetry tradition, also wrote a *Kalikamangalkavya,* a proof of the literary transition from one genre to another. It was quite obvious that the biggest impetus for the switch from the narrative *Mangalkavya* style to that of short distinct *padas* was the influence of Vaishnava *padabalis.* The *padas* inherited the rich tradition of Tantric images and praises, composed of personal devotion and spiritual enrichment.[31]

GODDESS'S ROLE AS A GRANTER AND LEGITIMISER OF ROYAL POWER

The most interesting aspects of 16th Century Bengal is to relate goddess with the political history of Bengal. That history began with the ritual representation of the authority of local Hindu zamindars and rajas in Bengal under Muslim over lordship. The story of Kalketu of *Candimangalkavy* resembled the account of the emergence and growth of frontier principalities in south-west Bengal. Kum Kum Chatterjee states that with the inception of the Mughal rule over Bengal, we find the continuing association of the goddess with a range of aspiring and successful rajas and landed magnets, particularly in the forested southwestern Bengal. The examples of Raja of Tamluk, Karangarh, Chitua- Barda, Dhalbhum, and Brahmanbhum bear testimony to this.[32]

The goddess Rankini was considered as a live deity in the locality and was worshipped

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[31] Rachell Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The fortunes of Hindu festivals, op. cit.* pp. 163-168.
[32] For details see, Kum Kum Chatterjee, Goddess Encounters; Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 47. No. 5, March 2013

by the Raja of Mahisadal Raj Family as he was blessed by a male child by the grace of Rankini.[33] Goddess Sabitri of Jhagram was the tutelary deity of the Jhagram rulers.[34] In the village of Narayangarh Midnapore, there was a temple dedicated to Brahmani, and it was believed that a person named Gandharvapal had constructed the temple in the Bengali year 671.Gandharvapal was the first king of the local Raj family of Narayangarh.[35] The Gop Rajas had promoted Sakti cult, which represented the most rigorous form of conventional Brahmanical rituals. Karnagarh Rajas were devotees of Mahamaya and Dandesvara Siva. Brahmani was the family deity of the Rajas of Narayangarh.[36]

The Malla rulers of Bishnupur were not an exception to this fact. The Malla Rajas were known to have flourished under the auspices of Durga known by the particular name Mrinmayi. Chittaranjan Dasgupta characterizes Mrinmayi as the presiding deity of the Malla kings of Bishnupur as essentially a fortress protectress 'matrika' goddess. It is believed that power and prosperity of the Malla Rajas were due to the grace of the Mrinmayi who lived in the dense forest. The Goddess Mrinmayi was also similar to the tribal *thakuranis* of Garhjat principalities of Orissa. The Thakuranis were the *Rastradevatas* (tutelary deity of the state) and constituted a link between the Rajas who may have the major bulk of the population in the Garhjat principalities. In the frontier provinces of southwest Bengal, the Malla Rajas acted as a link between the goddess and the local people. This was also the position of Kalketu in the *Candimangal* who due to the grace of the goddess became the raja and protected his subjects.[37]

Mukundaram Chakraborty composed his landmark eulogy to the goddess Candi under the patronage of Bankura Roy who ruled over Brahmanbhum area of Midnapur and was a devotee of the goddess Candi known locally as Joy Chandi Thakurani. A great number of these *devis,* who functioned as the presiding deities of the families of landed chieftains as functioned as protectors of fortresses or military stronghold of these rajas. The fortress of Abhaygarh controlled by the Rajas of Bhanjabhum Baripada of Midnapur was named after the deity *Abhaya* who had been installed within the stronghold. The most interesting point, according to

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[33] P.K. Maity, *Historical Studies in the cult of goddess Manasa, op. cit.* pp. 146-156.
[34] Binoy Ghosh, *Paschim Banga Sanskriti,*(in Bengali) Part II, Prakash Bhaban, Kolkata 1992, pp.44-45, 59, 61-64, 68, 174-175.
[35] P.K. Maity, *Historical Studies in the cult of goddess Manasa,* Punthi Pustak 1956, pp. 146-156.
[36] Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal,* Payrus, Calcutta 1981, p. 92.
[37]Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, 'Literary Sources of Medieval Bengal: A study of few *Mangalkavya* texts,' Occasional Paper 42, *Centre for Studies in Social Sciences,* Calcutta, 1982, pp. 7-8.

Kum Kum Chatterjee, was that all these political adventurers who had a connection with the goddess belonged to low caste or Adivasi origin.[38]

The literary sources like *Candimangal* and *Dharmamangal* centered around the Radha region of Bengal, which testified to the fact that in these Bhum countries all the leading personages like Kalketu or Kaludom made their fortunes by the popular deities and their priests.[39] As a result of this political connection with the goddess, we find, in many places of rural Bengal martial Durga was replaced by various new local names, like Jangalsini Devi, Kamakhya Devi, Sarvamangala devi, Kaluburi, and Ambika Devi. The forms of these local goddesses also differed considerably from what was to become the increasingly standardized *Mahishasurmardini* Durga image of the 15th and 16th Centuries. The non-Brahmanical antecedents of many of these deities are underscored by the fact that the hereditary priests were usually drawn from among the low-status Bagdis, Bauris, Doms, and Majhis, who inhabited these regions. It is difficult to relate these deities with the universal Candi or Durga whose exploits had been described in *Devi Mahatyma*.[40]

THE AGRICULTURAL BASE OF THE GODDESS
This royal aspect greatly diminished in the medieval rite of the east, when harvest rites and motifs, such as the *bilva* and *navapatrika* overshadowed war rituals, suggesting that the community in which the worship was offered was agricultural and concerns over fertility were paramount. These had been mentioned in the Gauda manuals.[41] The many aspects of contemporary Durga and Jagaddhatri puja stood on an agricultural base. Before the popularity of the festivals, in the late medieval period, autumn was the occasion of harvest festivals among the local farming communities.[42] According to Jogesh Chandra Ray Bidyanidhi, the autumnal Durga puja was a *Shardostutsava* a festival which was celebrated after monsoon was over and

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[38] Kum Kum Chatterjee, Goddess Encounters; Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal, *op. cit.* p. 12.

[39] Binod S Das, *Changing Profile of the Frontier Bengal,1750-1833,* Mittal Publications, 1984, pp. 46-47

[40] Kum Kum Chatterjee, 'Goddess Encounters ; Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal, *op. cit.* pp. 9-11, See for details Ekkari Chattopadhayay, *Bardhman Jelar Ithihas O Lokho Sanskriti,* Part II *op. cit.* p. 190-202.

[41] Bihani Sarkar, 'The Rite of Durga in Medieval Bengal: An Introductory Study of Raghunanda's Durgapujattva with texts and translation of the principal rites,' *Journal of Royal Asian Studies,* Series 3, 22, 2 (2012) p. 338.

[42] Rachell, Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu festival, op. cit .*pp. 103-104.

the harvest was brought in. That is why she was also regarded as the goddess of vegetation (*Shakambari*), an association that survived in particular rituals still performed during annual Durga puja. The deity's function as the giver of food nourishment and abundance was captured in her forms as *Annada, Annapurna & Jagaddhattri.* The reference of *Annada* or *Annapurna* was found in the later *Mangalkavya,* namely *Annadamangal.*[43] Of the two elements, the *ghat,* or pot of water, was established in front of the Goddess's image and the *napapatrika* or nine plants were ritually bathed at the commencement of the festivities. The *ghat* was probably older, and the *nabapatrik* was not mentioned in the Devi Mahatyma or Kalika Purana.[44]

The centrality of *Nabapatrika* and the *ghat* even today was indicated by the ritual importance of the goddess image, which was not essential to the efficacy of the worship. Old Bengali families, who had been worshipping Durga for generations and who used their permanent metal images of the goddess used to establish a *ghat* and *napapatrika* to perform the worship. Vishnupur still predominately used pats in its Durga Puja, and the members of Hetampur Raj in the Dubrajpur district of Birbhum and Hasterandi village near Bolpur in Birbhum district used to do the same thing [45]

The agricultural augmentations to the Durga Puja may be connected to the fact, that in Bengal, the goddess and her various forms were historically sacred to particular villages as *gramadevis* (village goddess).The association between the goddess and the village community was still evident in many *pithas*[46] (sacred sites associated with the goddess) Bengal like Kopai, Nalhati, Labhpur, Saithia, Bakreshwar in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal, Kalighat near Kalikata, Murshidabad, Dacca, Jessore and 24 parganas, whereas the Siva legend holds Sati's body parts fell. The Sakti *Pittas* were named differently in different places like Lallateshwar in Nalhati, Kiteshwari in Murshidabad, Kalika in Kalighat, Jessoreshwari in Jessore and others.[47] These sakti *pithas* were very much linked with Tantricism where the worship of Siva along

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[43] Kum Kum Chatterjee, 'Goddess Encounters ; Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal, *op. cit.* pp. 7-9-13.

[44] See, Bimal Chandra Datta, *Durga Puja Sekal theke ekal,* (in Bengali), Ramkrishna Institute of Research and Culture, Calcutta, 1986, p. 52.

[45] Rachell Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal, op. cit* pp. 104-105.

[46] Bihani Sarkar, 'The Rite of Durga in Medieval Bengal: An Introductory Study of Raghunanda's Durgapujattva with texts and translation of the principal rites,' *op. cit.* p. 338.

[47] Sudhir Kumar Mitra, *Hoogly Jelar Ithihas* (in Bengali) Deys Publishing House, Kolkata 2013, p. 280-281.

with Sakti became very significant.[48]

The community surrounding the *pitha* honours the goddess with annual performances of the Durga puja, and her presence was held accountable for a good harvest and the substance of the whole village. An investigation of her Puranic myths revealed the goddess's archaic virginal – marginal character, altered in the medieval period as she was syncretised with the fertility cults of the mother goddess (*matrs, matrka*) popular at the regional level. However, this connection was made even more overt in the later eastern Puranas like the *Kalikapurana,* promoting the shrine of Kamakhaya in Assam. Here the warrior Durga had been identified with the mother goddess Kamakhya (she who is called sexual desire), who was held to energise the *pitha* in Kamrupa (modern Assam), where Sati's reproductive organ was said to have fallen.[49]

IMPORTANCE OF KALIGHAT AS A *PITHA*

Kalighat was one of the most important *pithasthans in* eastern India on the bank of the old bed of the Ganges (*Adi Ganga*), as Sati's toes of the right leg had fallen here.[50] P. Thankappan Nair, however, has argued, that the name Kalighat did not occur in any of the old Puranas or Sanskrit

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[48] There are several old Siva temples on the bank of the Hugli Bhagirathi in the well-known centre of Siva tantrism and Sakta tantrism – Halisahar. Khardah in north 24 parganas though was a well-known centre of Gauriya Vaishnavism, has now an imposing array of twenty-six Siva temples of *at-chala* syle. These were built by the local Biswas family. A big fair is held near the temples on the occasion of Nil Puja during the Bengali month of *Caitra.* In the village of Arjunpur within the jurisdiction of Rajarhat thana, there is an asrama named Kapilmunir asrama and a hermitage called Gorakshanath math, managed by members of *antyaja* caste known as *Jugi,* whose traditional occupation is weaving of *ghamcha* or towel. They all share a common surname. They were once probably Nathpanthi Jogis and Gorakshanath had been their preceptors in the early medieval times. Having gone back to the mainstream of Brahmanical Hinduism, they have come to identify themselves with Saiva tantricism. In the asrama there were separate temples of Goraknath, Kali, Manasa and Siva. Siva of this *asrama* is known as Bhairavnath. The malevolent or *rudra* aspect is typically tantric phenomenon. A very interesting feature of Bhairavnath worship is that Gajan and Nil Puja ceremonies are celebrated during Sivatri in Falgun (February) and not during Chaitra Sankranti. Jaleswar Siva of the village of Jaleswar within the jurisdiction of Gaighata police station lies submerged in a tank called Siva pushkarini throughout the year. His main devotees are Goala or milk men by caste, although the two of them belong to the *antyaj* Bagdi caste, who become *gajan sanyasis* during the festival. The priest however is a Dakhin Radhiya Kayastha. The Siva is offered goat, *sol* and *cheng* fishes. As cited in Barun De, ed. *West Bengal District Gazetteerrs 24 Parganas,* March 1994, pp. 163-166, 168-172, and See for details, Benoy Ghosh, *Paschim Banga Sanskriti,* Part II *op. cit.* p. 174, 178.

[49] Bihani Sarkar, The Rite of Durga in Medieval Bengal: An Introductory Study of Raghunanda's Durgapujattva with texts and translation of the principal rites,' *op. cit.* pp. 338-339.

[50] Subhendu Gopal Bagchi, *Eminent Indian Sakta centres in Eastern India*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta 1980, pp. 17, 24.

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scriptures in the list of *pithas.* Even when we find its mention in popular Bengali folk narratives composed between the end of the 15th and 16th Centuries (e.g., Bipradas Piplai's *Mansamangal* written in 1495 and Mukundaram Chakravarty's *Candimangal* written sometime between 1580 and 1585), its authenticity was quite often challenged by modern historians of Calcutta.[51] It was only in the 16th Century texts like Krishnananda Agambagish's *Brihatantrasar* and *Tantrachuramoni* that Kalighat is mentioned as a pilgrimage center. A later day Purana the *Bhabishya-purana* giving a list of pilgrimage spots mentions "Govindapura *prante cha Kali Suradhani tata,"* which means Kali appears on the banks of river Suradhani-Hoogly.[52]

Geologists, however, confirmed the fact that in the remote past this region of Bengal was under water. Gradually, with alluvial deposition (probably from the 11th to the 16th Centuries) the area developed to firm earth. The exact time from when Kalighat got its recognition as *pith* was still unknown. The *Puranas* though started to furnish the *pitha* legend, but they're also among the list of *pithasthan,* the name of Kalighat was omitted. Most of the *Puranas* mentioned a place named 'Samatata' to mean the forested south Bengal, the present day Kalighat, was possibly included there. Some highly esteemed Tantras did not recognize Kalighat as a *pitha.* In *Pithmala Tantra* and *Nigam Tantra,* a reference of a place named *Kalikshetra* was found which was somewhat bow-shaped and extended about sixteen miles from Bahula (present-day Behela) located at the district of 24 Parganas southwest of Calcutta to Dakshineswar (District Howrah, north-west of Calcutta).[53]

Kalikshetra was flourished amid a forested region. At that time, it was the continuation of Sunderbans. The river Ganga traversed her way in that region. The place was regularly visited by a boatman who used to go to the deep forest of Sundarban for collecting wood and other forest products. Historical records indicate that during the reign of Ballal Sena, in the 12th Century A.D. many devotees came to Kalighat for having a holy dip in the Ganges.[54] Merchant ships passing by used to wait a while near its bank before their journey to distant lands.[55]

With the gradual peopling of the region during the time of Ballal Sena, the influence of

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[51] P. Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17th Century,* Calcutta Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd. 1986, pp. 29-32.
[52] A.K. Ray, *A Short history of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Riddhi, 1982 ; first ed. 1902) p. 14.
[53] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio- Cultural Life of Hindus,* p. 16.
[54] R.M . Sarkar, 'The Patuas of Kalighat- A look into their tradition and change,' *Man in India A Quarterly Journal of Anthropology,* Vol. 74, No .4, Dec 1994, p. 330.
[55] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio- Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* p. 16. See for details, Suman Gupta, *Kalikshetra Kalighat* (in Bengali), Deep Prakasan, Kolkata 2006, p. 45.

the *Kapalikas* began to dwindle, and establishment of tiny villages in and around Kalighat gradually made it accessible to the general devotees.[56] In *Kalighater Oitihasik Katha, Kalikshetra* existed about two thousand years ago, but no other evidence could be cited in this support. Further, when it had achieved the particular name, Kalighat is in obscure. 'Ghat' in the Bengali language means a landing place, a crossing point of river, river, canal or pond. The word 'Kalighat' therefore means a *ghat* of Kali'i.e. goddess Kali's place near a water source.[57] Thus the two terms '*Kalikshetra*' and '*Kalipitha*' were often used to denote this citadel of Saktism . But Kalikshetra denotes a larger area than *Kalipitha*. In the early part of the 16th Century, the poet Mukundaram Chakravarti mentions Kalighat in his famous epic *Candimangalkavya*. Kalighat was then considered a safe place for people in business. They used to carry on a trade through the river Bhagirathi and took shelter here at night.[58] Surajit Sinha, however, observes that in spite of the legends and myths associated with the temple and the goddess, a large number of devotees from all over India used to visit the temple. Even after the impact of two hundred years of western education and urban and commercial and industrial growth in the city of Calcutta, the Kali temple of Kalighat continued to attract large volumes of pilgrims, every day.[59]

BIRTH OF CALCUTTA AND ITS ASSOCIATION THE GODDESS TRADITION
There was a belief that Calcutta has been named after Kali's abode there. The first historical notice regarding Calcutta was found in the *Ain-I-Akbari* written by Abul Fazl in 1596. According to it, that Kalighat was a place within Saptagram, an old port on the river Hooghly. [60] It also referred to Kalikata as one of the three Mahals. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has suggested that the name *Kalikata* means lime shell and he has brought evidence to prove that the place was noted for the manufacture of shell lime. The name was mentioned as *Kalikata* for the first time by Vipradas in his *Manasamangala* (1495 A.D.)[61]

The 15th and 16th Centuries were emphatically the ages of discoveries. In 1599, a company of British merchants applied to Queen Elizabeth for permission of trade with India.

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[56] R.M. Sarkar, 'The Patuas of Kalighat- A look into their tradition and change', *op. cit.* p. 330.
[57] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio-Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* pp. 16-17.
[58] Subhendu Gopal Bagchi, *Eminent Indian Sakta centres in Eastern India*, *op. cit.* p. 17.
[59] Surajit Sinha ed. *Cultural Profile of Calcutta,* The Indian Anthropological Society, Calcutta, 1972, p. 61.
[60] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio- Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* p. 17.
[61] P.C. Bagchi,' Calcutta Past and Present', Published by Honorary Local Secretaries, Reception Committee, *Third Session of the Indian History Congress*, 1939, p. 8

Having received the royal charter, they dispatched the fleet in the following year.[62] Job Charnock, the East India Company's chief, had selected a cluster of three villages in Bengal, along the east bank of the river Hooghly (at the north 'Sutanati), i.e., the area between present-day Bagbazar and Barrabazar at south Govindapur, i.e., area from Esplanade to Hastings and ' Deshi Kolkata' in between Burrabazar to Esplanade, for his trading centre.[63] In 1690 he was offered an asylum at Hooghly by the Nawab, and he deliberately turned out the latter's offer and decided to settle down in Calcutta. [64] This handful of merchants began their operations by building a few factories on the coast of India, one of which was established near a fishing village, about a hundred miles above the mouth of the Ganges, known as Hooghly. The factory was erected in the vicinity of a celebrated heathen temple named Kalighat or the landing place of the goddess Kali. That fishing village was now the famous city of Calcutta, which had received this appellation from the idol temple.[65]This area was damp and full of jungles and pestiferous ponds – a land of wild animals. Calcutta's position improved when it became an independent settlement after being purchased a zamindary in 1698, from the Sabarna Chowdhury's.[66] In 1610, the zamindars of Sabarna Ray Chowdhury first celebrated their 'atchala' Durga Puja. On this 'atchala mandap' the historic conversation regarding the selling of the three villages was held in 1698 with the family members of Sabarna Ray Chowdhury, and Charles, Iyer, the son-in-law of Job Charnock. From this time onwards, the process of urbanization of the present day Calcutta started. Thus, it seemed Calcutta and Durga puja were interrelated.[67]

At that time, Kalighat was a suburb area at the south 'Govindapur' and under the municipal act of 1888 that had been included within Calcutta.[68]The village Govindapur came

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[62] J.J. Weitbrecht, *Protestant Missions in Bengal,* London 1844, pp. 3-4. India Office Records, British Library, London.

[63] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio- Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* p. 17.

[64] He realised that Calcutta being nearer the sea than Hooghly, not only afforded better facilities for trade but also for withdrawal into safety in case of defeat. Its situation on the eastern bank of the river rendered it strategically more secure from Maharattas and Mughals. In 1690, he issued a proclamation inviting various nationalities to come and settle in the Company's zamindaries three villages of Sutanati, Calcutta and Govindapur. He gave them special immunities and offered advantages to induce them to establish themselves in the new settlement. As cited in P.C. Bagchi, op. *cit.* p. 9, also see, Khuswant Singh, *Kalighat To Calcutta 1690-1990,* The Manjushree Foundation, Calcutta, 1990.

[65] J.J. Weitbrecht, *Protestant Missions in Bengal, op. cit.* pp. 3-4.

[66] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio-Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* p. 17.

[67] Anjan Mitra, *Kolkata O Durga Puja,* (in Bengali) Annanda Publishers 2003,p. 49.

[68] Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio- Cultural Life of Hindus, op. cit.* p. 17.

up in the 16th Century when the Seth and Basakh traders migrated here from their earlier trading center at Saptagram. The silting up of the river Saraswati on which Saptagram was situated, necessitated the shifting of their trading center to a more convenient place which happened to be Govindapur on the banks of the Hoogly, which in those days opened up the entry route for the European traders to Bengal. Besides, the village Govindapur was situated close to Sutanati which was inhabited by *tantees* (weavers) whose textiles, known for their fine craftsmanship could be imported. Once these Seth and Basak traders settled down in Govindapur and turned into a trading center, it began to attract attention from other parts of the country. But it was from the early 18th Century that the Kali of Govindapur began to acquire importance among the gentry. The Sabarna Chowdhury zamindars, who by and then had acquired the proprietorship of the area and had settled down in Barisha nearby, were instrumental in developing the site and improving the temple. From the obscure deity of the lower castes, the goddess Kali emerged as a highly respectable object of worship of the upper castes and classes. Her worship was now performed in public instead of in secret as in the past. The shrine also began to attract pilgrims from around Calcutta.[69]

THE MAKING OF A COSMOPOLITAN CITY AND ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE

By the beginning of the 18th Century, Calcutta consisted of European, Calcutta (a part of the old revenue unit or dihi of Kalikata), a residential village with some scared traits (Gobindapur), a traditional Indian bazaar settlement (Bazar Calcutta, later on called Burrabazar) and riverine mart specialising traditionally in cloth trade (Sutanati). These were surrounded by peripheral hamlets *(dihis)* forming a varied range of agricultural and fishing settlements, sacred pots, trading halts or nodal points and jungles of various densities. With the rapid development of Calcutta and the growth of its population, the great bazaar was taking an increasingly complex and cosmopolitan character. The impulse of the bazaar combined with comprador economic and social activity. With the rise of the comprador groups like dewan and banians, the monopoly of the setts and the basaks over textiles began to decline. At the cultural and social level, the compradors, however, were re-enacting a role expected of the 'zamindar-rajas' in the little rajyas (chiefdom) of the earlier period. It was in these accommodate centers or rajyas that

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[69] John Marshman tells us about a deputation from the Government which 'went in procession to Kalighat and made thanks offering to this goddess of the Hindus, in the name of East India Company, for the success which the English have lately obtained in this country. As cited in Raja Binoy Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta,* Riddhi,1977, pp. 64-65

the notions of Hindu cosmology could found some expression. In the new urban set up the banian could very well elevate him, by depicting the role of mythical king. They used to build opulent households or prominent family residences and tended to draw clusters of service people from them. The earliest of such clusters tended to develop in Burrabazar area, where the Sett- Basak families who were suppliers of cotton goods to the East India Company up to the mid-eighteenth had their residencies. Sobharam Basak was the most successful Bengali merchant in Calcutta around the mid-18th Century. He was the patron of the Brahmins and the Vaishnavs and pursued intense religious and traditional social activity in the later years.[70] The Seths began to decline after the Company switched over from the indirect to the direct agency for procurement of goods in 1753.[71] Unlike the Seths and the Basaks, the Debs of Shobabazar did not rise as a group. The fortune of the family was made by Naba Krishna Deb who appeared to be an intermediary between the Indian princess and nobles on the one hand and the Company's government on the other, between 1766-1769.[72]

Thus, the first half of the 19th Century proved to be a golden age for the indigenous merchant. *Banias* or native merchant, working closely with the British, began to establish themselves in the new town. At the same time the rise of East India Company, from the middle of the 18th Century introduced a new principle in the construction of the public image of goddess Durga.[73] The arrival of the British, who, over time, got deeply entangled in the country's social fabric, brought about a transformation in the character of the Puja. By the mid-18th Century, the greatest festival of the Bengalis had become the occasion for these nouveaux riches babus to flaunt their wealth and further their good offices with the Company representatives.[74] Mc Dermott has argued that during the colonial period a new class of wealthy Hindus built mansions that included 'deity platforms' (*thakur dalans*) or 'worship pavilions' (*puja mandaps*) like those of the landholding magnates, and they imported Durga puja into Kolkata.[75] Nabakrishna, the famous bania of Robert Clive, was among the first generation of 'eminent' native whose dwelling houses in Shobabazar were noted for their grandeur and style.

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[70] Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History,* Firma, KLM, Pvt. Ltd, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 7-16, 20.
[71] For details see, N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal,* Vol. 1, 1965.
[72] Pradip Sinha, *op. cit.* p.67.
[73] For celebration of Durga Puja in the 18th Century Bimal Chandra Datta for example devotes a whole chapter in *Durga Puja: Sekel theke Ekal* (1988), pp. 109-37
[74] Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, op. cit.* p. 36.
[75] For details see Rachell Fell Mc. Dermott, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal*, Columbia University Press 2011

Soon after the victory at Plassey, Nabakrishna built his Durga *dalan* at Shobabazar. The public merriment of Nabakrishna's puja was undoubtedly a part of the larger context of the conspicuous consumption by the rich and famous, in the first few decades of the 19th Century.[76] The journals in those days like *The Bengal Hurkaru* on 12th October 1829, gave extensive coverage to amusements with special reference to the attendance of the British guests at Sovabazar.[77]

GODDESS AND URBANITY

By the end of the 18th Century and certainly by the 19th Century, the status of the puja had become more or less determined. They were no longer simple marks of ritual purity but rather huge ostentations pageants bestowing social authority on the new *banias*. The puja fused performance, fantasy, and aspirations in a seemingly unending theatre of dramatic spectacle. Popular songs, music, and dancing forced the wider community irrespective of religion to acknowledge the presence of the goddess. These bands of singers were the famous *baijis, nautch* girls and the new urban poets of contemporary society. The entertainment themselves were crucial in denoting a secular urban status to religion.[78]

In later years, we find the prevalence of two other pujas along with the traditional Durga puja. These were Jagaddhatri and Kali pujas which shared many elements with the foregoing Durga Puja. Rachell Fell think Jagaddhatri puja was prescribed in times of distress when Durga puja could not be held. Jagaddhatri puja occurs exactly one month after Durga Puja, beginning on the seventh day of *kartick* and is celebrated in a manner very similar to that of Durga.[79] Also, her festival was currently more popular in towns outside Kolkata, i.e., Chandanagar, capital itself.[80] Durga was worshipped in several forms as mentioned earlier, and one of that is popular in rural West Bengal, she was goddess Jagaddhatri.[81] It is likely that Jagaddhatri, as a goddess, was once more popular than she is at present for the very first recorded *Baroiyari* puja

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[76] Tithi Bhattacharya, 'Tracking the Goddess: Religion, Community and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of Nineteenth century Calcutta' *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 66, No. 4 (November 2007) pp. 939-940

[77] Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,* Rupa. Co New Delhi 2004, p. 38.

[78] Tithi Bhattacharya, 'Tracking the Goddess: Religion, Community and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of Nineteenth century Calcutta', *op. cit.* pp. 944-950.

[79] Rachell Fell Mc. Dermott, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu festival, op. cit.* pp. 14-15.

[80] Sudhir Kumar Mitra, *Hooghly Jelar Ithihas, op. cit.* pp. 296-297.

[81] June Mc Daniel, *Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls, Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal,* Oxford University Press New Delhi 2004, pp. 219-220.

was performed to her not Durga in 1790.

The ongoing gaiety and mirth that marked these family Pujas of Calcutta, particularly in the 19th Century had been depicted in vivid details by Kaliprasanna Sinha in his literary Bengali masterpiece, '*Hutum Penchar Naksha.*' With a crafty pen, 'Hutum' portrayed the huge expenditure, marking almost every aspect of these family Pujas.[82] In the early days of the city, most established families went back to their native villages during Durga puja to maintain some continuity with the past. By the early decades of the 19th Century, as the city began to assert its identity, this became a source of complaint.[83]

Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's city dweller in *Kalikata Kamalaya* grumblingly questions this practice.[84] It was thus a new civic demand that the inhabitant of the city, a give back to the city a sense of tradition and embeddedness in cultural terms. Durga and her new rituals were thus crucial to the construction of the civic identity of Calcutta, as a city. The splendour and excess of the first half of the Century were however short lived. By the middle of the 19th Century, the local entrepreneurs had been forced out of capital accumulation network of the agency houses of the East India Company. As the native's place in the colonial economy became more and more uncertain, the pujas too in keeping with the times changed its forms and associated practices.[85] Thus from the rural feudatory setup, to the wealthy mansions, of the new merchant, aristocracy of the colonial city producing the new ostentations entity of the *Banedi Bari* (aristocratic household); with these transitions came nomenclatures of the public community Pujas the Barawari Puja and the next Sarbojanin Puja which of course of the 19th and the early 20th Century's gradually defined the contours of modern urban festival.[86]

Abhijeet Dutta however, has stated two vital points for the rise of Barawari pujas. In the first place, he argues, that due to the legislation introduced by Company's government in 1840, the Company's officials were no longer able to participate in the religious festivals of the natives. Secondly, from the end of the first half of the 19th Century, European patronage of the

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[82] Abhijeet Dutta, *Mother Durga, An Icon of Community and Culture,* Reader's Service, Kolkata, 2003, p. 39.
[83] Tithi Bhattacharya,'Tracking the Goddess: Religion, Community and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of Nineteenth century Calcutta', *op. cit.* pp. 944-950
[84] For details see Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Kalikata Kamalaya & Kalilkata Kalpalata* (in Bengali) ed. Bishnu Basu, Calcutta Pratibhash, 1986.
[85] Tithi Bhattacharya, *op. cit.* pp. 944-950.
[86] Tapati Guha Thakurta, *In the Name of the Goddess The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata, op. cit.* p. 3.

Hindu Bengali Babus began to register a moderate decline. Another principal cause fomenting the start of the community or Baroari Pujas in Calcutta and its environs was the fall in the number of Durga Pujas in rich landlord families owing to constant litigation over property matters, among their numerous members or constituents. This caused huge economic loses among members of such families, resulting in many such households permanently stopping the holding of Durga Puja in their residences.[87]

The *barware* puja thus seemed to be an ideal cultural compromise between the new discourse of educated gentry and liberal guilt around the puja splendour. Dissociated from individual glory, the *barwari* ceremony granted to the goddess the true status of a communitarian idol. Sib Krishna Da (1837-73) of Jorasanko was one of the first to initiate the *barwari* form in Calcutta.[88] The emergence of the cosmopolitan Durga has been first noticed in Goptipara, a town near Santipur, where several Brahmans formed an association for the celebration of the pooja independently of the rules of the shastras. They elected twelve men as a committee from which circumstance, it takes its name and solicited subscriptions in all the surrounding villages. In an article on the present celebration of 'Hindoo Poojahs,' published in a missionary newspaper called *Friend of India* in 1820 at Sreerampore, mention is made of "….. A new series of pooja, which has been introduced in Bengal within the last thirty years called Barowaree." Investigations show that the first barawari puja mentioned in the above passage was held in the localities at a much earlier date about 1760.[89]

Jyotirmoyee Sharma, argues that the worship of Jagaddhatri was the most popular annual ceremony in the areas, in those times, and the first barawari puja in Bengal celebrated with a public subscription was Jagaddhatri. It is possible that the barawari puja gained impetus from this time onwards where a great number of lower castes participated. As they did not have rich men among them to sponsor pujas, these castes solicited contributions and then organized ceremonies cooperatively. The performance of Shastric pujas with the subscriptions by the upper castes were, however, notable additions in the Hindu society. Mention has also been made of barawari pujas of Kali and other deities in Calcutta in a Bengali publication in 1862. Currently, Jagaddhatri puja was on the decline, and annual Durga Puja has become the greatest

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[87] Abhijeet Dutta, *Mother Durga, An Icon of Community and Culture, op. cit.* pp. 45-46.
[88] Tithi Bhattacharya, Tracking the Goddess: Religion, Community and Identity in the Durga Puja Ceremonies of Nineteenth century Calcutta,' *op. cit.* pp. 944-950.
[89] Reprinted in the Bengali Daily newspaper, *Ananda Bazar Patrika,* on October 1962.

religious festivals among the Bengali speaking Hindus. It was usually believed that Maharaja Krishna Chandra Dey of Nadia, a contemporary of nawab Siraj-ud-daulah, celebrated Durga puja, each autumn with pomp and grandeur and made its performance fashionable among the landed aristocracy. Literary evidence substantiates that Durga Puja was celebrated in the same style as long as 450 years ago. But there can be little doubt that Maharaja Krishna Chandra as an upholder of Bengali Hindu culture of his time.[90]

The collective organization of Durga Puja gained prominence in Calcutta during the nationalist movement at the beginning of this Century, due to the composition of the song 'Vandemataram.' Thus the term '*baroari*' came to be replaced by the word *Sarbojanin* (for all) from the time of Indian National Congress held in Calcutta in 1910.[91] The first Barowari puja started around 1790, when twelve Brahmin friends in Guptipara about 80 km from Calcutta in the Hooghly district, decided to institute a puja on their own after being denied entry at a household ritual. *The Friend of India* writes in May 1820, "… a new species of Pooja has been introduced into Bengal within the last thirteen years called Barowaree."[92]

There were more instances of community celebrations or *barwari* puja, whereby money was raised in a locality for a common public celebration and worship. While the new, modern and eventually renaissance *bhadralokh* was anxious to distinguish himself from the past "decadence' of Babu Calcutta, but he also intensely longed for the bania's economic vigor and potency. The *barware* puja seemed to be an ideal cultural compromise between the new discourse of educated gentry and liberal guilt around the puja splendour. Dissociated from individual glory, the *barwari* ceremony granted to the goddess the true status of a communitarian idol. In 1926 in the Bagbazar area of Calcutta, the ever popular Durga Puja entered its third phase. Kali Puja followed suit in 1928, and within six years Kali's iconographical presentations had changed to meet the new demand for a publicly accessible goddess.

In the present day Kolkata there were several artisan districts the most famous was Kumartuli, (potter's hub) in the northern part of the city, which was the home of one fifty

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[90] For details see, 'Jyotirmoyee Sharma, 'Puja Associations in West Bengal', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 28. No. 3, (May 1969) pp. 579-594.
[91] Abhijeet Dutta, *Mother Durga, An Icon of Community and Culture, op. cit.* pp. 47-49.
[92] Benoy Ghosh, *Paschimbanger Sanskriti,* Vol 2, Prakash Bhavan, Calcutta, 1978.

artisans, who together had employed one thousand workers.[93] This area in North Calcutta had remained as vital to the festival today as it was in the late 18th Century when the image – makers from Nadia district started settling here.[94] Soon groups of weavers, tailors, coppersmiths, tanners, oil pressers, metal workers, potters and many more arrived in this quarter to serve the indigenous community, with everyday objects, groceries, etc. As they began to form their profession, they acquired Bengali names for their areas, reflecting their trade. Thus, Darjipara, became the settlement of the tailors (darji), Muchipara the settlement of the tanners (muchi), Kulutola housed the oil-pressers(kolu), and Kumortoli became the neighbourhood of the Kumors- the potters of utility earthenware, clay dolls, and icons. The 1876 Census, under the guidance of civil servant and later historian W.W. Hunter, first recorded the potters under ' occupation of lower order' in Calcutta. The Flemish journeymen artist Balthazar Solvyns (1760-1824) recorded the icon makers with other local workers like weavers and sweepers around 1790.[95]

Kumortuli was not just about the image- makers. The goddess had to be armed, dressed, and decorated before she left for pandal.[96] Both the idols of Durga and Kali was sculptured and decorated by teams of Kumars (potters) Sutradhars (carpenters) and Patua chitrakars (painters).[97] The artisans of Kmortoli seemed to have influenced by the classical sculptures from the Greek pantheon. Thus the images of the male deities looked strikingly Apollonian, and naturalistic female figures remained traditionally stylized and curved.[98] N.C Pal the Kumartuli artisan, who was so instrumental in altering Durga's image in a genuinely 'Indian' or 'Orientalist' fashion, also experimented with conventions of Kali's traditional, pratima, during the Kali Puja of 7th November 1934. Pal was the heir to the late 19th Century, Calcutta

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[93] Rachell Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu festival, op. cit.* pp. 105-106, 174-175.
[94] Nadia was traditionally home to the image- makers through generations. A few months before the puja, they would come over to mold the idols at the houses of the babus and return after the festival. Gradually as the number of the pujas in the city increased and more work became available, they stayed back, huddled in the same locality by the river Hooghly. After partition, there was a sudden spurt in the artisan population as immigrants from across the border invaded the area and set up their studios. As cited in Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja, Yesterday, today and Tomorrow, op. cit.* pp. 65-67.
[95] Krishna Dutta, *Image-makers of Kumortoli and the Durga Puja Festival,* Niyogi Books, New Delhi 2016, pp. 24-25.
[96] Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja, Yesterday, today and Tomorrow, op. cit.* pp. 65-67
[97] Rachell Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu festival, op. cit.* pp. 105-106, 174-175.
[98] Krishna Dutta, *Image-makers of Kumortoli and the Durga Puja Festival, op. cit.* pp. 24-25.

style of realism popularised in the mythological paintings of elite artisans like Ravi Varma M.V. Dhurandhar and Bamapada Banerjee. In her study '*The Making of a new Indian Art; Artists, Aesthetics & Nationalism in Bengal*' Tapati Guha Thakurta describes the evolution in Indian aesthetic taste during the 19th Century, made a clean breakthrough from the earlier conventions of the Kalighat pats. Influenced by the colonizer's distaste for native forms and divinities, Bengali artists refined their depictions of Hindu deities to dignify their status and meet the standards of a new artistic ideal.[99]

The next impetus to the organization of Durga puja by voluntary association came with the political independence of India on 15th August 1947. Since 1947 the *Sarvajanin* pujas have impressed the public by emphasizing the decorative aspects of the ceremony. There was competition among the puja committees in producing newer and more artistic images in drawing larger crowds of spectators.[100] One most interesting part of *Sarvajanin Puja* was the pandal making. Pandal construction was an ancient craft developed to create huge magnificent tents as portable palaces of Maharajas on tour. Traditional pandal constructors were known as 'decorators.' A long established community of Dalits, locally known as Doms were the original pandal makers. Most of them used to live in an area of north Kolkata, not very far from Kumortuli, known as Dompara. The pandal constructors used bamboo, ropes, and a variety of cotton and synthetic sheets as basic material. Though this kind of pandal making was most common in the country since the 1990s art school graduates of Kolkata and other major cities of India had been designing and making pandals almost in the manner of art installations. These pandals had started to generate and stimulate ideas and debates on various contemporary issues of global and local politics, scientific, discoveries, imaginary or literary locations, and environmental concerns. This manifestation of pandal craft was popularly known as 'theme pandal.'

CONCLUSION

Based on the ongoing discussion, it can be suggested that Bengal happened to be a cult region. Indeed, it was on the shared understanding of a variously represented common cult which laid the foundation of Bengal's regional tradition. In the absence of a central monitoring agency such as the temple of Jagannatha, the cult of the regional goddess, conceived and promoted by

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[99] Rachell Fell Mc Dermont, *Revelry, Rivalry and Longing for the Goddess of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu festival, op. cit.* pp. 105-106, 174-175.
[100] For details see, Jyotirmoyee Sharma, 'Puja Associations in West Bengal,' *op. cit.* pp. 579-594.

the Bengal *Puranas,* helped to create a common focus and to integrate the highly stratified rural society in Bengal. The annual worship of Durga Puja also repeatedly in the Bengal *Puranas* but not popularised before the late medieval period, now functioned as the supreme signifier of the religious culture of the Hindu Bengalis to the 'outsider.'[101]

The deep interconnections that have been created between the goddess of the *Markandeya Candi* of the 6th Century and the Mangal Candi of the *Candimangalkavya,* of the 16th Century, had been reflected in the autumnal cycle of worship.[102] The goddess's killing of the buffalo demon, came to be thus incorporated within a larger all India mythological canon, of the Ramanayana and its climatic narrative of the triumph of good over evil.[103] The two most widely known myths of the goddess were linked with the belief and ritual pattern of the ordinary people. Basanti Puja and Saradiya Puja featured heavily in these myths; the former takes place in spring, and the latter in the autumn. Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, was a fervent devotee of the goddess and he gave men the model for the worship of Durga, as the goddess of spring. To defeat Ravana, Rama performed the Puja, when he was in trouble, without waiting for the proper time of the annual worship.[104] The time of Rama's worship was considered to be unreasonable. A year in human life amounted to a day on the divine calendar. Six months of the year was a day for gods while the other six was night. Spring was a part of the divine day, while autumn falls in the nocturnal half. Durga used to be awake in spring, and there was no need to invoke her in the vernal version of the puja. (which is not much in practice today). But in autumn, she was to be woken up from sleep before the worship could start. In all these myths about the evolution of her worship, Durga appeared alone. The mother and the wife had been identified as one which was typical of the eastern part of India, where other gods and goddesses had become part of her entourage as her children. The accumulation of a cluster of deities to her side approximating a familial structure and, more significantly, the appropriation of a warrior – goddess as a daughter of the land were phenomena unique to the region, north of the Bay of Bengal.[105]

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[101] Kunal Chakrabarti, "The Puranas and the Making of the Cultural territory of Bengal," *op. cit.* p. 10.
[102] Ralph W. Nicholas, *Nights of Gods, Durga Puja and the Legitimization of power in rural Bengal,* Orient Longman 2013 pp.19,21
[103] Tapati Guha Thakurta, *In the name of the Goddess: The Durga Pujas of Contemporary Kolkata,* p. 3.
[104] Akos Ostor, *The Play of Gods, Locality Ideology, Structure and Time in the Festivals of a Bengali Town, op. cit.* pp. 17-19.
[105] Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, op. cit.* pp. 3-4.

In Bengal, there was an older practice of worshipping the goddess during the springtime. The sculpture and other forms of art of the Pala and Sena periods depict images of the goddess in her *Mahisasurmardini* form where more abstract features of the goddess were glorified. The *Ramcharitam* of Sandhakar Nandy (12th Century) referred to the worship of the goddess *Uma* in the Barendri region in Bengal. (ch 3 verse 25 b) The *Devi Mahatyma* referred to the goddess asking her devotees to worship her in the autumn. According to Bengali Ramanayan of Krittivasa the epic hero Rama seeking the deity's blessings in his upcoming confrontation with Ravanna thereby creating a precedent for celebrating Durga puja during this season instead of spring.[106]

The most pervasive myth of Durga Puja is the goddess's arrival to the dwelling of her father once a year to spend some time with her father's kin. She used to bring her children, leaving her husband's house and stayed with her parents during the annual puja. The householder, who performed the puja, regarded the goddess as his daughter who was given away in marriage and returned every year to the people who share her blood. This aspect of Durga was missing from the major public rituals, where the royal and martial element is emphasized.[107] In Bengal daughters customarily returned to their home villages during Durga Puja. The arrival home of the daughters was cause for great happiness and rejoicing, and their departure after the festival is over, was the occasion of painful scenes of departures. Durga herself had been cast in the role of a returning daughter during her great festival, and many devotional songs are written to welcome her home to bid farewell. These songs contain no mention whatsoever of her roles as a battle queen or cosmic saviour. She was identified as Parvati, who was the wife of Siva. This theme undoubtedly reflected, that the actual situation of many Bengali girls, as David Kinsley observes, for whom life in their husband's village could be difficult in the extreme, particularly in the early years of their marriage. The songs contrasted the poverty that Durga must endure in her husband's care with the way that her parents spoiled her.[108]

In recent times, Durga Puja is the most important festival which symbolizes popular

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[106] Kum Kum Chatterjee, 'Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters and Goddess in Bengal,' *op. cit.* pp. 7-9-13

[107] Akos Ostor, *The Play of Gods, Locality Ideology, Structure and Time in the Festivals of a Bengali Town, op. cit.* pp.17-19, 21-22.

[108] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddess: Visions of the divine feminine in Hindu Religious tradition op. cit.* pp.113-114.

culture. The four days of the puja evolved a universal holiday spirit and festive atmosphere in the state of West Bengal and especially in its capital city Calcutta. The identification of the goddess as a daughter was perhaps what strengthened the emotional bond with the people, which in turn paved the way for the phenomenal growth in the festival's popularity.[109] Durga as a deity and an icon was thus not confined to Calcutta or other parts of India. It had travelled abroad. Between August 2006 and early January 2007, the British Museum held an exhibition and season of events focusing on the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal, including the creation of a traditional Durga icon against the backdrop of the bright modern architecture of the Great Court. Between 12th August and 24th September 2006, visitors to the museum had the opportunity to observe the processes of the icon – making and the refined artistic skills of the Bengali artisans from Kumortoli. After the creation of the image of the community, the community took it to the nearby Camden Centre through the busy streets of central London for five days of worship. It was indeed a memorable experience not only for the diaspora who felt proud of their cultural heritage and helped the museum to conduct the event successfully but also for ordinary spectator witnessing an extraordinary sight.[110]

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[109] Sudeshna Banerjee, *Durga Puja Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, op. cit.* p. 86.
[110] Krishna Dutta, *Image – makers of Kumortoli and the Durga Puja Festival, op. cit.* pp. 93-95, 124-125.