PREFACE

The present work is the outcome of a continuous painstaking field investigations and analytical discussions on the diverse aspects of a popular cult in the deltaic rural Bengal centring round the propitiation of the folk deity Caṇḍī. Of the variegated folk deities found in rural areas of West Bengal, Caṇḍī is seen to be a dominant one, especially in some regions, and she exerts her multifarious influence on the way of life of the rural folk as a whole. The present study highlights the gradual development of the cult of Caṇḍī through the ages and the specific trends of impact on the stratified rural society with different thought-ways. Categorical emphasis has been laid in the different chapters of this treatise, only to understand the nature and extent of the behaviour-patterns of the people in the perspective of the organised propitiation and active participation of the rural folk.

The attempt obviously throws discernible light on some peculiar features and inter-woven textures of the age-old Indian thinkings and life-activities holding to its central theme a mother goddess, who possesses much complicated character on the one hand, and on the other 'She' has been influencing the caste-oriented social relations as well as mental attitudes of the subjects living within an prescribed geographical boundary.
The stratified village-societies having the hinduised traditional religious beliefs and practices studied and analysed on the bed-rock of scriptures and sculptures, rites and rituals, taboos and folk-beliefs, philology, history, philosophy and even psychology of the masses.

Most of the important centres of the cult of Candi found throughout the different districts of West Bengal have been included in the study, except a few insignificant ones, to get the total and true picture of the situation. All these sites were visited by me personally, sometimes multiple visits were paid to some centres depending on the importance of the deities and their cults concerned. There were a few centres almost in the inaccessible areas which were not personally visited but active attempts were made to collect relevant data and informations. The very nature of the study obviously needed a thorough library work for a considerable period, in addition to field investigations. I have tried my level best to analyse the field-data in the background of library-based materials to give a proper form to this study, principally developed on interdisciplinary understandings.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Dr. Probodh Kumar Bhowmick, D.Sc., Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta and also to Dr. Dulal Choudhury, D.Phil., Director, Academy of Folklore, Calcutta for their active help and co-operation in fulfilling certain technical formalities with Calcutta University as well as their encouragement.
in taking up the work based on interdisciplinary view-points.

I am grateful to Dr. Rebati Mohon Sarkar, M.Sc., Ph.D., D.Litt., for supervising the work from the very beginning. Dr. Sarkar has helped me considerably in processing and analysing the vast amount of field-data and in putting these in a new line of approach. Without his active help and guidance it would not be possible for me to complete the work within the prescribed time.

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HOWRAH,
27. 6. 1986

(SIBENDU MANNA)
AN OUTLINE MAP OF
WEST BENGAL
THE REGION UNDER STUDY.

SCALE: 1" = 48 MILE [68 KMS, APPROX]