CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

The worship of the Mother Goddess in India, from hoary past to the very recent period, represents a very significant part of Indian history and civilization. The cultural perspective of India is highly characterized by the multifarious activities of the cult of the Mother Goddess. It is so inextricably interwoven with the life and philosophy of the people that the overall exposition of the Indian tradition becomes impossible without paying considerable importance to this particular tradition-bound features of actions.

The cult of the Mother Goddess is not only related to the everyday life-activities of the people but it opens up a clear perspective of the horizon of traditions and culture of the country as a whole. In consequence of this, a close observance of the course of origin and development of the cult of Mother Goddess reveals a wonderful assimilation of broad-based heterogeneous elements, which, in the latter period have been united with each other by way forming a body of cognate legends and trend of theological and philosophical argumentation.
The archaeological perspective in India offers a broad-based scope for discovering the concrete evidences in favour of thorough existence of the cult in question during the remote period in the past. The objects recovered in the different ancient archaeological sites of Indian sub-continent are marked by the conspicuous practice of the cult throughout the prehistoric as well as historic period. The cult of the Mother Goddess was very much prevalent amongst the oldest known races like Semetic, Hellenic, Teutonic and Nordics alike, in the good old days (Dasgupta : 49 : 1982). The cult in question was so deeply penetrated into the life and activities of the people of India that it became the central theme of the folk philosophy of the country in question. It is traceable right from the Bronze Age with a conspicuous continuation through the various stages of Indian civilization up to the recent period. Various studies in this line reveal that with the march of time the cult of the Mother Goddess has spread throughout all the corners of the country with additions of new thoughts and ideas belonging to the indigenous cultural phases. Sometimes this phenomenon caused a great deal in inflicting changes in the cult itself. At times it witnessed conspicuous metamorphosis and thereby brought forth various complications in the basic nature of the cult.

The everknown ancient civilization in India, that flourished along the bank of the river Indus and its tributaries, is characterized by many ingenious devices both in technology and culture. The
sites relating to these factors are more than eighty in number. This proto-historic culture extended over a wide area upto Rupar in the east on the river Sutlej; to Lothal, a sea-port on the western coast in Saurashtra, and to Broach and Surat in the south. In contrast to this uniform riverine culture spreading over a large area along the river systems of the plains, we find innumerable cognate culture sites, namely, Quetta, Nal, Amri, Zhob, Kulli, Jhukar, Ali Murad, Pandi Wahi, Rana Ghundai, Sutkagen-dor, and so forth. Their culmination was at the three main centres, now known as, Chanhudaro and Mohenjodaro on the bank of the river Indus, and Harappa on the bank of river Rabi. Six and seven strata of antiquities have been unearthed respectively at Harappa and Mohenjodaro. They record the most prominent and remarkable features of civilization in the soil of the Indian sub-continent since an early period of about the third millennium B.C. (Vats : 1958 : 110; Mookherjee : 1970 : 12; Pusalkar : 1951 : 169). This civilization popularly known as "Indus Civilization" or sometimes called as "Harappan Culture". Thus India characteristically marks herself as one of the pioneers in the flourishing of the oldest civilization of the world and in this line she stands parallel to the countries like Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, Egypt and Assyria (Pusalkar : 1957 : 169).

The artifacts found during the excavations at the proto-historic sites of Indus Valley belonging to Bronze Age would amply indicate the importance of the cult of the Mother Goddess in this
country. Amongst the antiquities most prominently noticeable are the various kinds of female figurines, and it is ascertained that the Mother Goddess was an integral part of the 'Harappan' household cult, similar to that which prevailed in Western Asia and Palaeolithic Europe (James: 1957; 238). Further, the Nagarjunkonda in Southern India, has brought light on the remains of the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic periods. These artifacts also help to prove the ceaseless stream of the Mother Goddess in that area.

It is, no doubt, a very difficult task to state and prove as to where the worship of the Mother Goddess originated and flourished first, but it is obviously noticed that the cult in question was not only prevalent but gained conspicuous popularity in all the ancient civilization of the world. It is evidently clear by the exposition of the different civilization that have been flourished in large numbers and over a wide range of the countries between Persia and the Aegean, notably in Elam, Mesopotamia, Trascapasia, Asia Minor, Syria, Cyprus, Palestine, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt (Marshall: 1931; 50). In fact, in India, it still constitutes a basic element of socio-religious sphere of life of the people as a whole.

In the pre-literate society, life at every point and every state was imagined to be ruled by some rhythmic process, the alteration of life and death. In the prehistoric period, religion
centred in and developed around the three most critical and perplexing situations with which 'Early Man' was confronted with his everyday experience — Birth, Death and Means of subsistence in a precarious environment (James: 1957: 229).

The sphere of primitive religion was highly influenced by the multiple supernatural forces — the powers and spirits that shape one's destiny; some of these were ascertained by them as benevolent and others appeared before them as malevolent (Majumdar: 1958: 406). Hence the main object of the religious concept at the very initial stage was to propitiate innumerable spirits, which were believed by the members of the pre-literate society to be closely connected with their very existence in this earthly world, and even after death. It is the case throughout the old world.

Another essential aspect of the religion of the pre-literate society was that each hamlet, settlement or village thought to have been under the protection of some particular spirit who was treated as its "guardian deity" or the "tutelary deity". The concept of the guardian deity, may, in the latter period, be turned into the nucleus of the formation of several folk deities.

After the introduction and gradual growth of the agriculture-based civilization, new religious concepts and movements, ideas and ideals, rites and rituals came into being and these naturally arose from people's vis-a-vis their surroundings. At that time, the life-producing mother was thought to be the central figure in
the human and animal kingdom and gradually extended to the agricultural fields and meadows, when the 'Mother-earth' was imagined to be the womb in which crops were sown and germinated. Subsequently, the Mother Goddess was assigned a spouse to play the role as begetter and she was clearly the chief anthropomorphic object of worship, either depicted alone or in association with her most characteristic emblems and accompaniments — serpents, lions, doves, shells, the double axe, some kinds of trees, and mountains, in which divinity was implicit (Zambotti: 1962: 58).

Further, the 'Mother-Earth' was essentially connected with good luck and prosperity (Dikshit: 1943: 8). The presiding deities of agriculture were mainly treated as female beings, because the idea of fertility and reproduction was primarily connected with the women. As the grain-gathering was women's business, it is presumed that, agriculture was invented by the women folk (Bernal: 1969: 93). Primitive agriculture, that is, gardening — understood as a magico-religious activity, was, therefore, a feminine reserve, probably from Paleolithic onwards (Zambotti: 1962: 58). Accordingly, the women's side of the totemic rituals for increase and reproduction of plants was emphasized and further developed (Bernal: 1969: 98). Obviously, various activities relating to that particular state of economy was controlled by the women folk. Probably all these facts led the members of the pre-literate society to form an idea of female deities or goddesses rather than male-gods (Whitehead: 1921: 150). Moreover, the fertility cult seems to have persisted
right down to the classical times. As civilization developed around the shores of the Mediterranean, a paramount female goddess, the 'Great Mother', took a prominent place in almost every pantheon (Leonard: 1974: 112).

The religion of the aboriginal Indian folk did not advance beyond a crude 'animism' (1) and belief in the presence of the 'guardian deities' was its chief characteristic. We have got almost full-fledged knowledge about the development of the earliest society in India which is highly characterized by the various literary compositions of the Aryans, specially the Rig Vedic literatures. On the other hand, we are not so much well informed about the various internal forces which have bound together with the different spheres of the society that flourished on the bank of the river Indus and its tributaries. It is difficult to form a clear idea about the true contents of the religion from the materials unearthed at Indus Valley sites. Further, it must be remembered that it is a great problem to draw a line between the secular and religious concepts of such an early culture (Vats: 1958: 121). The destruction of the Harappan civilization was brought about by the Aryan invaders, whose date of entry into India has been roughly confirmed between 1500 B.C. to 1000 B.C. (Cf. Robert Heine-Geldren: 1956: 136-40; Pusalker: 1951: 197; Wheeler: 1960: 86). The Aryans in the subsequent period, gradually spread throughout India and introduced new special order and religious institutions, namely, "Vedism". 'Vedism' was the earliest known form of religion followed by the Indian branch of
Aryan family, and in the later period, 'Brahminism', a changed form of religion grew out of 'Vedism'. Brahminism has been modified by the creeds and superstitions of 'Buddhists' and the so-called non-Aryan people including Dravidians, Kolarians and perhaps pre-Kolarians (Monier Williams : 1883 : 2).

In the Vedic period, as we find in the sacred scriptures like Rig Veda, the society has sharply divided into two spheres, namely, the 'Aryans' and the 'Non-Aryans'. These two divisions were highly influenced by manifold interactions. The members of the non-Aryan communities had generally been treated as the 'Dasa-Dasyu', the dark-skinned outlandish barbarians, by the Aryan community.

The Aryan society was mainly composed of the Priests, the Warrior, the Nobility and the Common folk. It is believed that the 'caste system' was introduced by the Aryans and it became much popular in the subsequent period amongst the Indians. Scholars refer to a myth depicted in the holy writ Rig Veda (X.90) which indicates the basis of emergence of the caste system in the then Aryan society. In the said myth, the creation of the four classes or castes, that is, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra narrated in a brief manner. It is evident that the term 'Brahminism' refers to the fact that a definite type of Priest-caste, that is, the Brahmin took the leading part in the sphere of religion developed in the Aryan-speaking region (Weber : 1958 : 4). Obviously, the post-Vedic period saw the growth and consolidation of the power of the Brahmins. Brahmin writers continually discussed and defined the duties and
rights of each caste and its place in the hierarchy (Srinivas: 1965: 503). It is beyond doubt that the vast community composed of non-Aryan folk was placed in the 'Sudra' category, by the Aryans. Sudras originally included the members of the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan societies, who were referred to as 'Dasas', 'Dasyus', 'Kiratas' and 'Misadas', etc., in the subsequent period (Sengupta: 1951: 24; Pusalker: 1951: 261).

Further, it is doubtless that the Rig Veda is the product of the highly priestly class people, who have had almost a monopoly as officials, teachers and scholars of Vedic culture in India. In the holy writ like the Rig Veda, we find not only the classification of the inhabitants but also the names of the different deities of the 'Aryan' pantheon, who, in course of time, were directly absorbed in the world of the vast 'Hindu' theogony. The characters and activities of these deities are narrated with some glorious background in the sacred texts composed in the different periods, from Vedic to recent times.

In India, from hoary past the religion plays a dominant and vital role in the daily life of the common folk. The nature of religion in the historic period can be grouped primarily according to the philosophical views and explanations including all other aspects and characteristics, namely, Vedism, Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism and so forth. The religions of India, in their association with the major part of her people, have conveniently accepted the
name 'Hindu'. The very nature of the religion, as we find in the sacred scriptures of the Aryans or the Hindus, namely, the Vedas, the Saṁhitas, the Āryanakas, the Brāhmanas, etc., were, however, not the only religion practised by the Indian folk. That is, apart from the vast world of Vedic-Aryan theogony or the Hindu-Brahminical pantheon, there lies an extensive field consisting of the deities of the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan communities whose names and genealogy, characters and activities were not referred in the Vedic literatures or such other holy writs composed in the remotest past. This fact may be explained in a way that the deities of the non-Aryan world did not hold any good position in the Aryan society during the Vedic period. But this picture has been changed in the subsequent periods. As the time marches on, the Aryan influence began to penetrate in the different parts of Indian sub-continent and simultaneously the Brahmans, that is, the priestly ministrants including such other high-ranking people had to accept the religious beliefs, crudest rites and cultures practised by the pre-Aryan, non-Aryan common folk including the propitiation of primitive deities in order to maintain their own power and influence over the innumerable common people of India, irrespective of rank and status. But in fact, we hardly possess any explicit literary source of the most ancient time, which would help us to have any clear concept about the religious dogmas and practices of the large section of the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan people of India. This trend of religion may be termed as the popular folk religion and it is obviously the outcome of the interaction of various belief and ideas of indigenous origin. It embraced many
diverse thoughts and ideas, which, in different times, gave birth to many indigenous ideas. In most of the cases this trend is not guided actually by the monastic rules. Though not bounded by the monastic rules and regulations, yet the popular folk religion has been and still remains as one of the main and vital resources of many prevalent religious beliefs, customs and cults, rites and rituals, taboos and manners in India. In fact, the religio-cultural pattern of India is mostly based on the unfolded and checkered history of the common folk, their deities, beliefs and religious faith, rites and rituals, ceremonies and festivals. Still there is enormous scope to study the various folk deities who have the power to cater influence on the livelihood and natural discourse of the common folk.

There was every probability that in the society of good old days, a 'faith' originated or germinated in the minds of the members of the society, merely based on the necessity and experiences of the daily life, which, in the long run, did a great deal in creating the part and parcel of the religious beliefs and practices, ceremonies, rites, rituals and cultus (Fuchs 1963 : 218). In this way innumerable female deities managed to get their conspicuous position in the sphere of Hindu-Brahminical religion subsequently identified as the 'Sakti'\(^5\) or the 'Prakriti' (feminine principle) of the male-god. The female principle, that is, Sakti alias Prakriti, in the Śāṅkhyā\(^6\) philosophy as well as in the Tantric religion, plays an important role with the 'Purusa' (i.e., male counterpart). During
the later Vedic period and Puranic Age there was an attempt of assimilating some pre-Aryan mother goddess forms with 'Prakriti' or the female counterpart of the 'Father-God', who, in course of time, emerges as the Supreme Being (Sinha : 1967 : 50), though there was almost no example of the ancient Aryans, whether in India or elsewhere having elevated a female deity to the supreme position occupied by the Mother Goddess (Farnell : 1911 : 95-96).

Amongst the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan communities of the pre-literate society, the cult of the Mother Goddess gained a very high position, probably for the following grounds:

Firstly, in the pre-literate society, the woman's foremost and essential duty was the rearing up of the children and of imparting to them whatever could be characterized as the heritage of the clan or group;

Secondly, all the cultural traits including the habits, norms of behaviour, inherited traditions, etc., were founded by and transmitted through the females;

Thirdly, the economic role played by women in the primitive agrarian society. At the end of the Palaeolithic period, a pattern of the matriarchal agrarian society became conspicuous and women with all their mysterious prerogatives favoured her endowment with the magical powers which presided over the fertility of the earth and the animal kingdom. It was believed that without
her magical intervention the earth would have remained barren.

Fourthly, owing to the absence of any kind of rigid law or system of marriage there was, in that period, a wide field for promiscuity. Children, as social entities, had their descriptions or status mainly with reference to the mother, and the inheritance was very naturally carried down in the line of the mother. Thus mother became the eminent figure in the then society.

Lastly, woman to the pre-literate society was the symbol of generation and fertility. Her genital organs were thought to be the seats of a mysterious magical power and ultimately it became the life-producing figure. Consequently, the life-producing power of woman became the central theme of religious faith in the earliest phases of evolution of the society.

In the Saṁkhya philosophy, we find that the female principle (i.e., Śakti alias Prakriti) is identified with the 'Supreme Being' conceived as the only source and spring as well as the controller of all the forces and potentialities of nature and human world. Further, Chanda suggested that, we should have to travel beyond the countries dominated by the Vedic Aryans and Avestic Iranians to Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and other countries bordering on the Mediterranean, for a conception of godhead analogous to that of Śakta Devi.
There is a strong resemblance between the Indian Sakta conception of Śakti and Śākta ritual of the followers of 'Vāmācāra' and 'Kulācāra', who practised ceremonial promiscuity on the one hand and the Semetic conception of Cybele, on the other (1916 : 148-49). Chanda also suggested that, 'Śāktism' in India originated under the same social conditions as those under which Astarte or Ashtart was conceived in Syria, Cybele in Asia Minor and Isis in Egypt (1916 : 150). The cult of the Mother Goddess with all its heterogenous and theological fabrications which may be regarded as a contribution to the complex texture of the Hindu-Brahminism, was mainly, if not solely, supplied by the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan inhabitants of this vast land. Virtually, the people who were not included within the fold of the Aryan-speaking stock and usually lived outside the influence of the Vedic-Brahminism, hold the major aspect of what we call to-day the Mother Goddess cult or the 'Śakti cult' in the Indian sub-continent, from north to south, east to west, i.e., throughout the length and breadth of this ancient country (Marshall : 1931 : 57-58; Behara : 1967 : 75; Banerjea : 1966 : 121; Dandekar : 1969 : 237-38).

This cult developed prominently and became stronghold when the social, cultural and religious admixture among the Aryans and pre-Aryans, as well as the non-Aryans was almost complete through a long process involving contact, conflict, and compromise. Certainly, the worship of the Mother Goddess in India had a checkered history deriving new colour or tone in the course of its passage through the
different periods; new ideas of the mother associated with the various new forms of worship developed and established themselves against the older background. The conception of a central goddess revered as 'Sakti Devī' to whom all other female deities were affiliated as her parts or incarnations and the Puranic texts dealing with this concept of the deity, her nature and character, activities and attributes, the very mode of propitiation were the matters of comparatively later origin. The 'Devī' or the goddess has been treated as the symbol of the Primordial Cosmic Power, alias, 'Sakti'. In India, the 'Devī' bears two opposite roles: (i) Malevolent in form and nature; (ii) Benevolent in appearance and activities. These views and trends are still current in India amongst the common masses of people.

Hence, in a broader perspective of socio-religious history of Indian sub-continent, the propitiation of the female deities easily goes back to the earliest-known civilization belonging to the chalcolithic period having a very prominent evidences (Cf. Indus Valley Civilization), but it is really difficult to mention when and where this cult of the Mother Goddess made its first appearance in the ancient tract of Eastern India in general and 'Vaṅga,'(?) in particular.

The social picture of Bengal is highly characterized by the presence of many caste groups with hierarchical gradings principally based on the purity-pollution concept. It is seen that besides the
higher caste groups dominated by the Brahminical traditions there are many lower caste groups, which are less or not influenced by the thoughts and ideas inflicted by the Brahminical perspectives, namely, Kols, the Sabaras, the Hadis, the Doms, the Bauris, the Chandalas, the Muchis, and so on. The first element consists of the 'caste-Hindus' who come from the framework of the Vedic-Brahminical society introduced by the Aryan-speaking people having adequate theological knowledge, power of administration, high rank and status in the socio-economic sphere. The second group of people are believed to be the descendants of the pre-Aryan and Non-Aryan stock. The latter stock is further believed to be the close associates of 'Dāsas', 'Nisādas', 'Kirātas' as referred in the Vedic and such other holy writs; their religion and rites were submerged into and swayed by the new waves of religious thinking followed by highly advanced former group of people. The non-Vedic and non-Aryan religious rites in the subsequent period, placed within the vast sphere of Hindu-Brahminical fold. From the legendary and ethnological evidences, it is proved that, the early settlers in Bengal proper and its adjacent areas, broadly speaking Eastern India, were closely allied tribes of non-Aryan origin, but a gradual process of Aryan infiltrations began in the first millennium B.C. (Roychoudhury : 1963 : 39-40). In fact, almost all the Vedic and allied scriptures, with some exception of 'Aitareya Brāhhamana' and also an 'Āryanaka', did not mention the ancient tract known as 'Vaṅga', that is the province known as Bengal, in
the subsequent historic period. Hence, it may, at best, be ascertained that the Bengalee people possessed culture and civilization of their own though it was non-Vedic and non-Aryan in nature and characteristics (Bagchi : 1963 : 394).

Female deities in the Vedic literatures almost occupied the sub-stratum, that is, the world of divinity was mainly dominated by the male-gods. Now it is ascertained that the rise of female divinities and the introduction of Mother Goddess cult in this part of the world, including the deltaic Bengal, is partly, if not solely, due to the influence of the non-Vedic and non-Aryan Dravidian folk religion (Dandekar : 1969 : 237). Further, the female deities specially those who belong to the 'Sakti cult' existed as independent religious cultus among certain wild tribes of non-Aryan origin (Hazra : 1963 : 16-22; Bhattacharya : 1967 : 56-60), who probably had a vital link with the deltaic Bengal and its adjacent areas. It is also believed that 'Saktism' originated in the outer belt of Aryan dominion like the land known as Vaṅga (Chanda : 1916 : 122; Sur : 1963 : 29).

The concept of a tutelary deity of the village or hamlet is as old as Neolithic times, when settled habitation first came into being (Das : 1969 : 429). India is basically known as the land of villages. The tradition and culture of this country had their origin and gradual development in the villages. Thus the villagers and the villages play an important and vital role in all the spheres
of earthly life, such as, socio-economic pattern, religio-philosophic concept, expression of solidarity in between the neighbours, involvement and mutual exchange in the ceremonies and festivals related with God and Nature, etc., are mainly expressed through the cult of 'Gram-Devatas' or the village-deities. In almost every village of India, there is a 'Gram-Devata' or the 'Gram-Deoti', that is, village deity, who is often identified with one of the different forms of the Mother Goddess. 'She' (i.e., the Mother Goddess in the form of village deity) is propitiated both periodically and annually by the individual persons as also by the entire villagers. It is stated elsewhere that the religion followed by the innumerable common folk is quite different from the Vedic-Brahminical cult. They usually believed in the worship and adoration of various kinds of spirits, plants and trees including inanimate objects, which now-a-days also are the remarkable features of the religion followed by the villagers of India. Before the emergence of industrial urbanization in the modern period, the civilization of India, rested and flourished on the typical pattern of villages in such a way that we may fairly state that the 'Popular Folk Religion' is the only religion which embraces the major sections of the village folk.

On entering deep into the religio-philosophic sphere of deltaic Bengal, it would be seen that the rites and rituals followed by the Aryans could not make a proper entry into the recess of the
homes of Bengal for pretty long time. The progress of Aryanisation
in the deltaic Bengal seems to have been accelerated from the
earliest part of the fourth century B.C. (Sircar : 1952 : 171-2).
Even after the first millennium A.D., when the Aryans had entered and
already settled down into some parts of Eastern India, namely,
Mithila, Videha, etc., (Majumdar : 1963 : 564; Sur : 1963 : 82) the
worship of fertility deity in the form of Mother Goddess, adoration
of indwelling spirits of hamlets and forests, mountains and meadows,
belief in different types of malignant forces responsible for the
incidence of various types of ills and diseases, comprised the
religion of the non-Aryan folk of deltaic Bengal, on this bedrock
of non-Aryan crude and animistic religion were superimposed the
subtle theological ideas, such as, Buddhism, Jainism and Brahminism,
which in the different periods were flourished. In fact, an
imperfect entry of the Aryan rites and cultus was possible in the
Naturally, the beliefs and religious practices followed by the
inhabitants of Bengal were influenced by the Aryan rites; on the
other hand, the crude ideas and so-called barbarous cultus of the
omnipresent non-Aryan folk, constantly pressing hard upon the life
of the Aryans, lastly found a gate-way into the religious activities
and thinkings at many points (Whitehead : 1921 : 12).

It may now be determined that the heterogenous elements both
in the conception of deities and cultus have certainly synthesised
the 'Great' and 'Little' traditions and the whole sphere of culture.
Thus it is seen from the above discussions that in the broader field of India a time-long interaction between the 'Great' and 'Little Tradition' had been taking place. This continuous process has given birth to many new ideas and beliefs through the interactions of different ideas. In Bengal, the trend of this sort of interaction became conspicuous all through the time because of the diversities of human groups living side by side from time immemorial. While evaluating the nature and extent of any cult the pattern of interaction between the two traditions should be given special emphasis. We may now state that in Bengal though the root of any cultus and rite, the concept of the deity and related ceremony are usually inquired into the Vedic and Sanskritic literatures while we consciously forget or avoid the closely meshed socio-religious systems followed by the non-Aryan community from indefinite period. In order to understand the influence of various indigenous cults on the people of India it is necessary to find out the trend of interactions between the beliefs and practices of the two separate tradition — folk and elite or modern. In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to focus this particular trend in the origin and development of the cult of the Candī — a popular Mother Goddess grew in the soil of Bengal.
The very intention of the study is to explore the nature and extent of the cult of a particular Mother Goddess, namely, Caṇḍī in the soil of Bengal delta, especially within the geographical boundary of West Bengal. This perspective is to be brought out through diverse ways including the effective participation of the people in the different stages of the cult. Thus it requires an in-depth study on the workings of the rural communities centering round the cult in question including its historical development.

The systematic study of the folkloristic materials, which are the store-houses of diverse folk manners, beliefs, customs, rites and rituals help us in proper and correct understanding of the folk mentality especially that is closely related to the development and spread of folk deity like Caṇḍī. At the time of unveiling of the folk rites and rituals related to such an important as well as complicated aspect; it must be simultaneously considered that the rites and rituals differ from region to region and society --- so, the impact of ritualistic phenomena in every region and in every society differ certainly from one another, and in every case almost new colour and sensation of the minds of the participants and performers appear in the fields of cultural functions and ceremonies; these may be examined in the different parts of the region or area brought under this study.
The life and philosophy of the rural folk can best be evaluated through the systematic analysis of the ritualistic perspective of the people which is highly illuminated by the rites and activities of the Gram-devatas (village deities) in diverse forms and features. The direct and indirect participation of the various grades of people and their subsequent response to the different stimuli present an integrated picture of the village level society, which needs due attention during the exploration of the various trends of way of life of the rural people.

The 'Gram-devatas' (i.e., village deities) are usually treated as the integral and an essential part of the life of the villagers and their communities. The very nature and character of 'Gram-devatas', their various activities cater deep-rooted influences on the village-society. The systematic study of these village deities not only opens up a wide horizon for understanding the village society in action but also it provides fruitful field in the instant analysis of the impact of modernism on the life as a whole. It may act as an indicating mark about the introduction of the modern thoughts and techniques in lieu of the age-old processes; it may lead us to the fact about the effect of urbanisation and industrialization in the socio-religious spheres of the villages concerned --- as because the village deities, almost in all cases, act as a 'binding force' in the village communities. Hence, the villagers would react if these modern methods, as well as the pattern of livelihood hurt the age-old beliefs, manners and customs. Even now,
the villagers maintain or almost try to maintain the age-old beliefs and practices centering the very pattern of the propitiation of the village deities in spite of innumerable radical changes which have altered their traditional pattern of livelihood and age-old mode of religious thinking.

Actually, it requires a countrywide network to collect and analyse the data as well as to obtain the result of integrated research. It has been shown hereafter that the 'Gram-devatas' are still one of the main pivots of religious ceremonies and festivals, and also behavioural pattern, simultaneously they (i.e. Gram-devatas) work as a 'catalytic agent' not only in between the various dissimilar socio-religious entities, but also the villagers with different diversities. These village-deities may broadly be called as the controllers of not only the ritualistic field, but also economic, social and even the political spheres. It is commonly seen that the pattern of worship of these deities presents an integrated factors of multifarious aspects of human life conditioned by the close association and hand to hand co-operation of the diverse groups of people in a highly stratified background influenced by the purity-pollution concept.
The idea of the existence of the innumerable spirits presiding over the different spheres of human life is probably the root of the origin of the tutelary deity of the villages, that is, the 'Gram-devatas'; from time immemorial man had been depending upon the different benevolent deities for his protection from the surrounding calamities which used to surround him like anything. In the village-India, the outlook of about more than eighty percent of the total population usually stretches on the visible world in which they live permanently, and the invisible world which borders closely upon it, and their ideas about the 'Supreme Being' and the related religion are represented, not by Vedic or Brahminical philosophy, but by the worship of their tutelary deities (i.e., the Gram-devatas) of the villages (Whitehead : 1921 : 139). In order to solve the different problems of his daily life, the Indian folk are regularly in the habit of approaching the various deities to help him in tiding over the ocean of crisis. The core of the primary-level concept of religion in India consists of beliefs in innumerable deities and spirits, and the practices to please or placate them. But there are considerable variations in depth of these beliefs as well as in nature, forms and functions related with these gods and spirits (Das : 1969 : 427). Those conceptions have
not yet become obsolete, while in the pre-literate, non-literate, semi-literate and even in advanced societies in India, there are the regular practice of worship to innumerable deities and spirits.

In the most earliest part of the 20th Century A.D., Gait observed that, in India almost every hamlet had its special tutelary deities (one or more), which presided over the welfare of the community. These were called the 'Gramya Devatas' and were worshipped on the occasion of every religious ceremony and also on special occasions (Gait : 1901 : 215). The shrines of these village deities were usually placed at the foot of a tree, which had been treated as sacred, or the shrines may also be seen in the paddy fields or meadows, or very near the entrance path of the village settlement, even sometimes those were placed at the heart of the settlement. Sometimes a Brahmin priest officiated but in many cases the people frequently conducted the worship themselves.

During the last part of the 19th Century A.D., Murdoch observed that "scarcely a village and scarcely a household in India is without its tutelary divinity, usually represented by some rudely carved image or symbol, located in homely shrines, or over doorways, or, it may be denoted by simple patches of red paint on rocks or under sacred trees or in cross-ways, and always taking the place of the superior gods in the religion of the lower orders" (Murdoch : 1887 : 8). In the first quarter of the 20th Century A.D., Whitehead observed in South India that each village seemed to have been under
the protection of some one spirit, who is its guardian deity (Whitehead: 1921: 11). Almost in the same period, Elmore also observed the same phenomena that the "Dravidian gods are local. Each village has its own deity, a fact which has given rise to the common term of 'Village deities' for these Dravidian gods. Even when one god is found in many places, the people never think of it as a general god with world relations, but only as their local deity" (Elmore: 1925: 10). In the second quarter of the 20th Century A.D., O'Malley also noticed that "nearly every village has its own godling, who is known by a separate name, and his or her jurisdiction is purely local, not extending beyond the village boundaries" (O'Malley: 1935: 139). Crooke, in the last decade of the 19th Century A.D., observed in Northern India that the shrine of the 'Gawn-deota' (village deity) was generally an essential feature of a village settlement. A square-type masonry building having a bulbous head and perhaps an iron spike as a finial, a red flag hung on an adjoining tree often a pipal or some other sacred fig or neem, marked the shrine of the village deity (Crooke: 1896: 101). Das, in Eastern India also observed that "... Every village has a tutelary Goddess, called Gram-Devati or Thakurani. ... The Gram-devati is generally established under the shade of a tree; sometimes a house is constructed for her protection from the rain and the Sun, and sometimes though very rarely, she has not the protection of even a tree. The Goddess is represented by a piece of shapeless stone. Each Goddess has a separate specific name" (Das:}
1903 : 81-2). In the vast territory of Northern India, as well as in Western and Eastern India, the same traditions may easily be found even in the recent days also.

The religious history of India tells us that besides the Brahminical religion guided by *Sruti* (that is, Vedas) and *Smriti* (Law books), there are various popular systems which arose in different parts of the country. Some of these are antagonistic in attitude, and some are almost identical with that of the Vedas, but the rest, though originally non-Vedic yet in later times, are traced into the Vedic-Brahminical fold (Hazra : 1969 : 247). Naturally the Vedic and Puranic gods and goddesses have a special type of jurisdiction, and exclusively different forms of rites, while the 'Gram-devatas' indicate the intricate facts of the village-life and help the villagers to form a spiritual atmosphere keeping balance with their own characteristics, within a limited sphere. Hence, this indigenous pattern of ritualistic perspective formed by the village deities offers invaluable and diverse data to the social scientists which are very much helpful in the proper evaluation of the functions of the rural society.

There are many sub-types of local deities or the village deities, such as ghosts and evil spirits, disease-controller, village-protector, etc.; naturally, they are not accepted by the Vedic-Brahminical orthodox authorities and almost have not referred in the sacred scriptures. The Gram-devatas are generally identified by the
various types of names and forms, which vary from region to region with the variation of rites and rituals, propitiatory and obligatory methods; but it is their activities which seems to be quite constant and almost uniform in nature (Mandelbaum: 1964: 10).

The names of the 'Gram-Devatas' sometimes appear to have an obvious meaning but in many cases they are practically unintelligible or difficult to explain the meaning, to the people themselves (Whitehead: 1921: 21). These names, in most of the cases, are originated from the non-Aryan sources, but in the subsequent period a slow but steady process of 'Brahminazation' tends to affiliate the Sanskritic names in lieu of the original non-Aryan names. It is also further noticed that there are clear indication to reorient the original names of the 'Gram-devatas' by way of contamination, assimilation and harmonizing with the Sanskritic pronunciation and identification of the names.

The myths and folk stories related to the origin of the 'Gram-devatas' indicate the particular state of their origin, nature of adoration and the extent of its influence over the different fields, and these are almost characterized by the exaggerated facts. But, on the other hand, these prevalent myths and folk stories are able to adopt themselves to any local and social climate. They are old and venerable, but they are also new and up-to-date (Deva: 1972: 53). The introduction of the propitiation of a 'Gram-devata' in a particular area and its activities help enormously to analyse the
facts and illuminate the real background of the cultural setting.

In addition to the existence of some universal features the cults of the village deities are characterized by the regional thoughts and behaviour-patterns which vary from one locality to another. It seems that the whole setting of the cults has been fashioned according to the local tradition of caste structure and the social behaviour revolving round this particular aspect. It is to be noted that both kinds of features have been influenced, in course of time, by the impact of the Hindu-Brahminical tradition running parallel to this indigenous tradition for a long time.
IV

The 'Gram-devatas' have an impressive role in creating the prevalent traditions, by way of diverse beliefs, manners and customs, which are able to cater deep-rooted influence in the livelihood of the villagers.

The religious structure, as is marked in the case of India, may broadly be divided into two segments:

Firstly, popular folk religion, and

Secondly, systematic, highly organized and advanced concept of religion having subtle philosophical basis.

These facts may be explained in a way that there are two distinct courses of religions: a work-a-day religion to meet the requirements of everyday existence, and a higher religion, known only to Brahmin, who is called on to officiate on great occasions, which the ordinary man does not attempt to understand (Cf. Bombay Census Report - Part I : 1911 : 66-67).

The ordinary villager usually follow the former type of religion and worship the village godlings to whom he looks for rain, bountiful harvests and escapes from the hands of calamities and diseases, whereas, the latter is restricted to the beliefs and
practices of the so-called advanced groups of mankind (Arya: 1975: 134). The ordinary villagers are usually backward and less intelligent in expressing their ideas and thoughts in comparison with the so-called advanced or elite sections of the society, but they are not totally 'primitive' in nature and character like the tribal folk. The tribal beliefs and religion is quite different from the popular folk religion. The tribal folk prefer to adhere to their own religious beliefs even if they are living in an urban setting.

India, from hoary past, is too much fertile in maintaining and flourishing of multifarious village deities who not only have exerted overall influence in the world of divinity of the common folk of the villages. But sufficient data are not available for reconstructing a comprehensive picture of daily life maintained by the common people in the hoary past, in this part of the globe. All that we can do is to throw some light on its important phases with the help of foreign accounts, sculptural relics, literatures and inscriptions, etc. The literary works which supply most of the particulars about the life of the commoners especially of Eastern India belong to the Twelfth Century A.D. with single exception of the 'Charya Padas' (8) which were probably two centuries earlier. From the analysis of the various evidences it is clearly understood that the common non-literate or semi-literate people have contributed a great deal to maintain her classless character of social life. Rural folk, irrespective of caste, rank and status assemble
at the same congregation to offer community worship to the folk deities. In spite of rapid changes throughout the length and breadth of the Indian sub-continent by way of urbanization and industrialization, the commoners of the villages, the rural societies almost in every part of this vast country are still trying utmost to maintain the indigenous folk cults and rites which have developed some special features due to her own natural character and cultural background.

It is stated elsewhere that the popular folk religion evolve out of the system of propitiation and closely knitted folk festivals, keeping the tutelary deities like Candi at its centre. It has its own indigenous form and character and it certainly differs in many respects from the orthodox Sanskritic-Brahminical ways of adoration. The folk religion has a permanent seat in the core of the hearts of the commoners and it overcasts the very mode of livelihood of the common folk with its ever-expanding hypnotic influence and it permeates all the corners of social entity.

The present study principally highlights the status and role of a typical and a very common Mother Goddess, namely, Candī, in village areas of Bengal. In order to explore this particular aspect in relation to the deity in question the diverse functional aspects in respect of her worship as well as the peoples' participation would be taken into consideration.
In course of study specific attempts have taken up to examine the process of change in the very nature of the deity, the different patterns of participation of the people as well as the overall attitude of the people towards the deity in the midst of various impacts of modernism caused by the industrialization and similar other changing economic phenomena. To trace out the exact position held by the Mother Goddess Candi in the society, myths and popular sayings, prevalent customs and beliefs which are transmitted orally, and its variation from region to region have been discussed at length. In this way, numerous rites and rituals related with the methods of adoration and connected festivals have been collected directly from the field and these have been evaluated in the background of the Post and Pre-Vedic traditional to understand the depth of indigenous nature of Candi and the gradual process of her change due to the impact of the later Brahminical beliefs and ideas. This type of study naturally requires long term and close-set field observations in the different regions. The study in question fulfils all these aspects by organizing field trips and constant analytical observations during the observance of annual festivals and day-to-day worship of the concerned deities.

The interaction and assimilation of purely indigenous, aboriginal and non-Brahminical manners and customs with that of purely Sanskritic-Brahminical systems, practices and beliefs have highlighted the peculiar mode of ever-expanding Brahminical ideas
The appointment of Brahmin priest at Maliara (in the district of Bankura, P.S. Barjora) for the annual festival and adoration; the offering of the sacred thread (paita) to the folk deity Candi at Lauberia (in the district of Birbhum, P.S. Khayrasole); the presence of a Brahmin priest at the time of the ceremonial functions at Pital Kanti (in the district of Medinipur, P.S. Sankrail) and the regular propitiation done by the tribals in successive generation holding a paita (sacred thread); the worship is done by the non-Brahmin person in the casual absence of priest, Brahmin by caste at Brahmatalpara (in the district of Jalpaiguri, Medinipur); the adoration of 'Bhetia Candi' (in P.S. Kharagpur, Dist. Medinipur) by a priest, fisherman by caste and the propitiation of 'Dahar Candi' (in P.S. Narayangarh, Dist. Medinipur) by a lower caste Hindu and such other cases enormously help to reveal the impact of Sanskritic-Brahminical ways, alias the orthodox Hinduism on the folk-ways, rites and rituals related with the 'folk deity Candi'. Many shrines are found at the different regions sponsored by the lower caste people. This fact, may be interpreted in a way, that though the village deities like Candi, have a tendency to identify themselves as the consort of Siva or Vishnu the great god of Hindu pantheon, and the agents of orthodox Brahminical Hinduism have exerted their heavy pressure and influence constantly over the sponsoring authorities of the shrines of the folk deities,
just to accept their leadership and directives closely connected with the regular adoration and ritualistic performances, yet the most commoners, holding the lower or almost the same position in the prevalent caste system, with a perplexed mind and heart, follow and adhere to the indigenous manners and customs, methods and beliefs ignoring the indomitable and all-pervading attempt of the orthodox followers of Sanskritic-Brahminism — that is the 'Little Tradition' is still maintaining its own peculiar and remarkable characteristics despite the large scale impact of the 'Great Tradition'.

The life-philosophy, the ways of livelihood and holistic approach of the different groups holding almost the bottom position in the caste-alignment, namely, Bauri, Bagdi, Dom, Muchi, Lohar, etc., who should be treated as one of the chief architects of the cultural pattern found in a vast area extending from Purulia-Bankura-Birbhum to Hooghly-Howrah and 24-Parganas including Nadia, Maldaha, Bardhamana and Murshidabad could only be obtained through the close scientific study and analysis of the modes of behaviour of the people concerned at the time of the propitiation of the deity in question. By this way, the pulse of the rural folk could be felt in its true sense. The mode of propitiation of various cults, organization of innumerable fairs and festivals and the allied behavioural pattern reveal many facts of sociological importance which are still to be analysed in proper perspectives.
Furthermore, the relinquishment and acceptance of the indigenous customs, manners, beliefs and practices done by the advanced and elite group of people in the caste-alignment, namely, the Sadgop, Sutradhara, Moyra, Karmakara, Swarnakara, Mahisya, Kayastha, Karan and even the Brahmin-priests deserve due attention.

The rude and rustic, unsophisticated and indigenous thinkings and activities usually reflected in the ritualistic performances and the very mode of propitiation followed by the 'Deyashis'

(9) side by side the Sanskritic-Brahminical procedures followed by the Brahmin-priests in the shrines of the village deity Candi unfold the nature of extent of intermingling of the two sets of values and attitudes. These two distinct trends exist contiguously from remotest past and these flows through the present period. The said two systems are followed by the non-Brahmin 'Deyashi' and by the Brahmin-priest. Hence, the two-fold strata composed of popular folk religion and the Sanskritic-Brahminical ways provide the equilibrium in the socio-religious and socio-cultural fields of the land and people studied. Thus the folk deity like the Candi has been influencing the life of the rural folk in the different phases of their activities in the day-to-day living which, if properly evaluated, illuminate the broad horizon of human communities with diverse beliefs, practices and philosophical understanding. In the following chapters of this treatise a concrete step has been taken to throw discernible light on the different phenomena of rural
life through the study and analysis of the nature and extent of Candl's influence of the society of man. It reveals the patterns of interactions of various beliefs and practices of man through the ages, the diverse ideas centering round the various social groups and institutions, economic organisations as well as political activities. All these have been carefully presented to understand the rural society in action and change.
The various races of humanity which entered India in pre-historic period through the corridors situated at the north-western part or any suitable route that existed in this vast sub-continent, at one time or other, in their search for a settlement or livelihood, must have passed a considerable period until they were driven out of their settlements by the comparatively more powerful invaders. However, the first invaders or late-comers of one time gradually settled on the soil of this sub-continent in the pre-historic period and finally tried to make this part of the globe as their homeland. In this regard, it must be clearly understood that no rigid separation is possible as there is considerable overlapping of different ethnic groups. Consequently, some of the basic characteristics of Indian civilization on the side of the material culture would thus seem to be the gifts of the indigenous people, who are commonly known as Proto-Australoids (such as, the use of rude block of stone as a symbol of the divinity --, which in addition, may also have been Dravidian; zoomorphic deities and various place-names appear also to be the products of Austrics or Proto-Australoids); the Dravidians also contributed a great many elements of paramount importance, (such as, the conception of the forces of life and of the Universe in the forms of a Great Mother Goddess and Her male counter-part; the offerings in the puja-rite,
namely, flowers, leaves, fruits, water, etc.) admixed with the thinkings and philosophical ideas of the Aryan-speaking people. In this way, the inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent build up a world of their own simultaneously, mentally, materially and spiritually, whether it be by means of beliefs and practices. It is quite natural that each group of people left its own peculiar characteristics both physical and cultural which helped ultimately to form an uniform concept of civilization, in this part of the world.

The home of the folk culture is the rural settlement and hence the villagers' society and their livelihood are highly characterized by various rites and rituals, customs and traditions. As the impact of ritualistic phenomena on cultural aspects differ from region to region, society to society, hence the social scientists, are required to collect data from the diverse regions and if possible, from the distant corners of a particular tract of land for the sake of forwarding total picture of the land concerned.

In order to collect data on the various aspects of the Ḍī Candī Cult and her impact on the life of the region as a whole different methodological principles had been adopted. Most of the time the common social science methods like various types of interviews and observations were utilized extensively, but at times in consequence of the demand of the situations some methods had been reshaped, as well as remodelled to have the desired results. As the research
universe is large as the whole work is categorically related to the
direct field of investigation, so a few specialized techniques had
been adopted to get maximum data in a short duration. I had to
stay in the villages for a long time and I took all the opportuni­
ties to mix freely with the people for getting accommodation into
the inner recess of their hearts. Yet, according to the require­
ments of the situations, different ways and techniques of investi­
gations in the fields of social sciences and its allied disciplines
have been adopted. 'Generally sources are divided into documentary
and field sources. The latter include living persons who have a
fund of knowledge about or have been in intimate contact with' the
matter and fact over a considerable period of time (Young : 1975 : 136),
while the former sources of information are those 'which
contained in the published or unpublished documents, reports,
statistics, manuscripts, letters, diaries and so on (Ibid).

As the process of observation has long been treated as a
scientific tool to the researchers in the field of social science,
being the primary method of data collection and "used to gather
supplementary material that would help interpret findings obtained
by other techniques" (Wilkinson & Bhandarkar : 1977 : 192). Hence
sincere attempts have been made in the collection of data by way of
observation in the various villages situated in the different
corners within the prescribed geographical location. The investi­
gator was engaged in the field-work throughout the long span of time
commencing from January 1978 to October, 1984. During staying in the different villages I usually took shelter amongst the villagers and by this way I found ample opportunities to make full utilization of "oral-verbal" and "written-verbal" acts, with the proper application of 'unstructured', 'structured' as well as 'focussed interviewing' techniques.

"Group interviews", "individual interviews" and "repeated interviews" were also taken amongst the informants belonging to different age-groups of both the sexes. Key-informant interviewing technique was simultaneously adopted to get the proper idea of numerous customs, rites and rituals relating to the village deity Candi. During the collection of data from the key-informants it was noticed that some of the customs become obsolete though those were once treated as the most essential factors. Key-informants were always selected amongst the age-old living persons, either who had a close line for a considerable period of time or are still maintaining a close connection with the various performances of adoration of the tutelary deity Candi. In some limited cases the key-informants have the experiences obtained by way of eye-witnessing the series of events and facts, as a serious systematic viewer, for a considerable span of time. By this way, a huge amount of data have been gathered, which are closely knitted with prevalent folk literatures, myths, folk sayings, beliefs, superstitions, customs, rites and rituals centering round the folk deity Candi.
During the field survey some mechanical and electronics gadgets like the tape-recorder and camera were used as these modern equipments have already proved to be of immense help by the eminent social scientists and anthropologists.

Tape-recorder was used to collect the folk tales and incantations used in the adoration of the folk deity Cœqi.

The language, at times, may not be enough to express the emotions, whereas the "photographs tend to present accurately a mass of details which are apt to escape the human reporter. The photographic 'eye' views with authenticity and impartiality" (Young: 1975: 178). Furthermore, series of photographs help immensely to record the various human activities as well as surveying and mapping of the research site and also the different jobs related to the folk festivals and ceremonies. Hence, in the present study this visual anthropological research tool had been utilized to a considerable extent to highlight the various corners of the festivals, ceremonies and to obtain the appearance and size of the icon including the architectural pattern of the temples or the sites and surroundings.

In addition to these I put to respondents a questionnaire that is a good number of questions in a definite order on a set of printed forms to gather objective and quantitative data. It is needless to say the questionnaire approach can normally help the specific materials. A kind of mailed questionnaire was prepared and
printed with a general appeal for the supplying of requisite data from the far off places. As it was not possible to cover all the shrines of Capdī distributed over a large tract, so I had to take the help of mailed questionnaire. The names and addresses of the respondents were collected during my field trip through the districts, and afterwards these were sent directly to them. The response in this respect was remarkable.

To the maximum extent, help is taken from the sources usually treated as the secondary data to compare, compile, contrast and verify the various data collected and also prepare socio-historical as well as socio-religious background of different aspects of the study. Dependence on the selective documentary sources is necessary to get the first-hand knowledge on the prospects and problems of the geographical location and area of the study.

Different documents, like District Census Hand Book, District Gazetteers, Village Survey Monographs, Newspapers, Journals, Magazines, Essays and treatise including previous surveys by social scientists and other allied scholars, District records including different previous work on social history of the region under study is widely used at the various stages of research work specially at the time of the finalization of the report. In this completely
field-work based dissertation, secondary data have been used with due importance as well as precaution in order to evaluate properly the merit of the view-point on rural society and its culture.