PREFACE

It was in 1981-82 that I got admission into the M.Phil. programme of Delhi University and completed my dissertation entitled "Prehistoric and Early Historic Archaeology of West Bengal". The study was practically a critical review of the earlier and current researches on the prehistoric and early historic archaeology of West Bengal. While doing this work, I had a feeling that I should personally make a field-study in a chosen area on the basis of which I might examine the hypotheses of scholars regarding the situation of West Bengal in Indian archaeology. The area that has been chosen by me for field-study is the district of Bankura in West Bengal that presents us with a unique geographical-geomorphological setting of archaeology.

Initially, I had a scheme of reconstructing the history of the district of Bankura since prehistoric times. But in course of the progress of my field-investigation, the nature of history that may be reconstructed in the light of archaeology became gradually transparent to me. It is the cultural history, the history of the process of cultural evolution in the district, on which the archaeological discoveries made by our field-investigation may throw substantial light.

There are reasons behind the choice of Bankura as an area of study. Although the modern territorial boundary of this district does not in any way reflect the distribution of ancient Janapadas, the people living in the present territory of Bankura claim to have inherited from the past a culture of their own. The culture demands an analysis from historical point of view. The geographical-geomorphological setting in
which Bankura lies is more or less similar to that of some neighbouring districts. Therefore, the area-study of Bankura may also enlighten us on the process of cultural evolution in those districts. Bankura, like the neighbouring districts of West Bengal, forms a part of the eastern extension of the Chotanagpur plateau and, at the same time, a part of the western extension of the lower Gangetic delta. The population of this area comprises both aboriginal tribes and higher castes. The culture-content of Bankura is distinct from that of other parts of West Bengal. The process of cultural evolution in this area has not progressed on uniform scale throughout.

The field-investigation in the district of Bankura was undertaken by me as early as 1978-79. From 1981-83, the field study in the district was carried out by me on behalf of the Archaeology and Museum Unit, Department of History, Delhi University. While carrying on the investigation, I had to face some problems. Firstly, archaeological finds were made mainly from the surface, for which stratigraphic situation of the finds, especially of the prehistoric period, could hardly be ascertained, although attempts were made at test-probings by digging or section-scraping at a few sites. Secondly, I had to depend, in some cases, on the collections either in a Museum or at the disposal of an individual or an institution. In those cases, the proper find-spots of the archaeological materials could hardly be ascertained. Thirdly, while investigating architectural remains, I found some of the temples in the process of being repaired and restored. Therefore, it was not feasible for us to make necessary notes on the original structure. Fourthly, the sculptural remains in some cases could not be traced in their original find-spots due to their shifting by the local people. Last but not the least,
I had to face the problem of dating of sculptures. On stylistic grounds, it is not always possible to distinguish an early mediaeval specimen from mediaeval or even late mediaeval ones. Despite these problems, my field-investigation has yielded copious materials, the veracity of which is beyond dispute.

The present study has been divided into three major parts, viz. field-investigation, data processing and analysis and finally an evaluation of the archaeological data from the point of view of cultural history. First of all, I have introduced the land and people of the district of Bankura as a prelude to the present study. Each chapter contains a site-report, an analysis of the archaeological remains collected from the field, and an assessment of their bearing on the cultural history. The concluding chapter embodies an attempt to reconstruct the cultural history of Bankura in the light of assessments of the archaeological data made in previous chapters.

The methodology adopted for an analysis of the archaeological data may be indicated. First, the analysis is basically done, in cases of prehistoric antiquities, on the orthodox pattern of typology and technology, although interpretations were by no means based entirely on these attributes. The raw material, the nature of the site and the nature of the occurrences of artifacts along with geomorphology of the terrain are taken into consideration for an overall view of the culture. Second, in connection with the early historic period, we have made a comparative study, keeping in view the historical archaeology of contemporary sites. Third, the architectural and sculptural remains of the early mediaeval period have been subjected to a study on stylistic grounds.
The dating of the sculptures has been attempted on the basis of the hints and suggestions put forward by experts in this special field of study. Brahmanical, Jaina, and Buddhist images have been studied iconographically. In general, the principles of settlement-archaeology and ethno-archaeology have been followed, as and when needed.

While making an attempt to reconstruct the cultural history of Bankura (since earliest times of c. 1300 A.D.) from the archaeological point of view, we have observed the inter-relationship of ecology, economy and culture on the one hand and the existing dichotomy of tribal and elite culture on the other. Although the culture of Bankura, like that of the neighbouring districts, is distinguishable from the culture of other parts of West Bengal, yet it has to be studied in the background of not only West Bengal but also the whole of Eastern India.

Professor S. R. Das, Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University, initiated me in the study of the archaeology of Bankura as early as 1979. Dr. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, Reader in Archaeology, Department of History, Delhi University, was supervisor of my M.Phil. dissertation. I was associated with him in some academic endeavours as well as field-investigations. I am thankful to Professor D. N. Jha, Department of History, Delhi University, for his co-operation and encouragement throughout the period of my present research work. The present work has been carried out under the direct supervision of Professor Bhaskar Chattopadhyay, Department of History, Burdwan University, West Bengal. It was only through his kind help, guidance and constant inspiration that the present thesis could be completed. I have great pleasure to record my acknowledgements to many other academicians, institutions, individuals and local people of Bankura who are named separately.