CHAPTER - II
2.1 **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**:

The district of Bankura has been so named after its Headquarter—Bankura. It was spelt differently in different times. In Rennell's Map (1779) it appeared as 'Bancoorah' to denote a small village. It was also referred to as 'Bakoonda' or sometimes as 'Bankoorah'. Colonel J.E. Gastrell, the Revenue Surveyor, referred the town as 'Bancoorah' in his Statistical and Geographical Report of the district. "According to Local tradition, the town was named after its reputed founder, a chieftain called Banku Rai, from whom the Rais of Badra, a small hamlet of Bankura, claim descent" O'Malley. Another local legend is that the town is so called after Bir Bankura, one of the twenty-two sons of Bir Hambir, Raja of Bishnupur. O'Malley also suggested that the name is a corruption of Bankuda, meaning the five tanks. The National Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji thinks that the word 'Bankura' may have sprung from the Sanskrit root word Vakra, meaning 'crooked' or 'serpentine', which afterwards had transformed into New 'Indo-Aryan' banka, Vanka, banku, vanku. It was used to denote biggishness giving the form Bankuda or Bankura and this could be used as an epithet or sobriquet meaning 'the nice handsome one who is to be treated with respect'.

The origin of the district of Bankura as a single administrative unit does not, however, date earlier than 1765, the year of the grant of the diwani to the East India Company. It may not,
therefore, serve any useful purpose to speculate on the place the territories of the Vishnupur Raj occupied in the previous administrative set up of Bengal or of the Mughal empire. The East India Company obtained the Diwani of Bengal in 1765 and with it the territories of the Raja of Vishnupur came under its control. It appears that sometimes prior to 1785, Vishnupur and Birbhum had been included within the district of Murshidabad (WB). In 1786 Vishnupur and Birbhum were formed into two separate collectorships.

The Statistical Account of Bengal, published in 1876, shows that the district, as then constituted, had an area of only 1,346 Sq. miles. In 1879, Khatra, Raipur and Simlapal police stations were transferred from Manbhum district (Bihar) and the police stations of Sonamukhi, Kotulpur and Indas were retransferred from the district of Barddhaman. The district of Bankura thus attained its present dimension in the year 1879 when the subdivision of Vishnupur was created. The district judgeship, however, still continued to cover West Barddhaman and Bankura and it was not until 1881 that a separate District judgeship was created for Bankura exclusively. Bankura district, as an administrative unit, thus dates from 1881 AD.

2.2 ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS:

The district of Bankura is situated in the Burddhaman Division of West Bengal, India. It is bordered by the district of Medinipur on the south and Puruliya on the west. A small stretch of the southeastern boundary meets Hugli district.
The district covers a total area of 6882.00 Sq. Km. (i.e. 7.75 per cent of the total area of West Bengal) and supports a population of 2,374,815 (1981) which is about 4.35 per cent of West Bengal. The district has an approximate resemblance to an isosceles triangle (stated earlier) with its northern apex at the junction of Barddhaman and Puruliya districts and having an irregular east-west baseline resting on Medinipur and Hugli.

The headquarters of the district is at the municipal town of Bankura. It has two subdivisions: the Sadar (or Bankura) lying in the west and Bishnupur in the east. The Sadar subdivision comprises nearly two-thirds of the total area of the district while the remaining one-third falls within Bishnupur subdivision having its headquarters at the municipal town of the same name. There are 3,825 mouzas (1981) in the district grouped into 19 police stations of which 13 fall in Sadar and 6 in Bishnupur subdivision. The police stations belonging to the former are Bankura, Onda, Taldangra, Simlapal, Raipur, Rantibandh, Khatra, Indpur, Chhatna, Gangajalghati, Mejia and Borjora and those belonging to the latter include Bishnupur, Joypur, Kotulpur, Indas, Patrasair and Sonamukhi. Besides Bankura and Bishnupur, Sonamukhi the headquarters of the police station of that name, is the only other municipal town in the district. Khatra in the Sadar subdivision and Patrasair in the Bishnupur subdivision, which are respectively the headquarters of the police stations of those names, were treated as towns in the 1961 census.

There are 22 blocks in the study district (Map-2).
2.3 GEOLOGY:

The greater part of the district of Bankura is covered by laterite and alluvium, while the gneissose and schistose rocks of Archaean age occur in the western part of the district forming the easterly continuation of the immense area of similar rocks in Puruliya and Chota Nagpur. In addition, sedimentary rocks of the Gondwana system forming the southern part of the district between Mejhia and Biharinath hill, contain some useful seams of coal. Another 10.5 Sq.Km. area of Gondwana rocks occur near village Anandapur (23°26'N; 87°14'E), about 24 kms due north-east of Bankura town. A number of dolerite dykes of Mesozoic age cutting across Gondwana rocks and the Archaean are found in the north-western parts of the district.

The Archaean rocks are dominantly gneissic which are cut across in places by granites, pegmatites and vein-quartz. Small pockets of ilmenite and titaniferous magnetite are associated with the anorthosites—composed almost wholly of the felspar and labradorites. Good outcrops of hornblend-gneisses, traversed by granite veins, are seen in Bankura town and to its west and south-west, while to the east the gneiss becomes gradually covered up with laterite and sandy clays.

Another feature of geological interest is the felspathic quartzite forming the top of the Susunta hill. The southwestern parts of the district contain mica-schists and phyllites which are nothing but the continuations of the Iron Ore Series of Singhbhum and Puruliya. At the trijunction of the districts of Bankura, Medi-
nipur and Puruliya, there is an elliptical area of gneissose granite (known as Kuilapal granite). There are abundant dykes of pegmatite in the granite body; small deposits of muscovite mica occur in the pegmatites.

Laterite interspersed with sand and gravel forms the most characteristic geological feature of the district. There are two types of laterite, viz, the in situ laterite which forms hard, massive beds and blocks and originate by residual weathering of underlying rocks, and the laterite gravels which result from decomposition and rearrangement of the materials of the massive laterite. The laterite gravels show all gradations to a coarse sandy clay containing only a few ferruginous nodules. In this case calcareous Kankar is also frequently associated. Laterite does not cover any large area in the north, although it can be seen near Borjora, and in thin small patches near Bankura town.

Recent alluvium covers major part of Bishnupur subdivision in the east.

Among minerals of economic importance, the occurrence of coal in the extreme north and the deposits of wolfram at Rantibandh police station are worth mentioning. The quartzites of Susunia hill are suitable for use as paving stone and china clay occurs at a number of places associated with the Archaean rocks.

The chronological sequence of the geological formations in the district are:

Recent

Alluvium
2.4 **PHYSIOGRAPHY**

Physiographically the district of Bankura lies between the Chotanagpur Plateau (a continuation of it) and rice producing alluvial plains in the lower Ganga delta. Depending on the topographical characteristics, the district may be classified into three broad physiographic divisions - the undulating and hilly terrain to the west, the rolling upland in the middle and flat to monotonously flat plains in the east. The latter covers the entire subdivision of Bishnupur and some of the eastern police stations of the Sadar Sub-division viz., Simlapal, Taldangra, Gangajalghati and Borjora along the middle of the district. The ground surface gradually rises from...
the east to west giving place to an undulating terrain in the west. Further westward the undulations are more pronounced and the land is interspersed with rocky residual hills and broken up into low ridges and valleys. To the extreme west the elevation becomes still more pronounced as the fringe of the Chotanagpur plateau is reached. This part consists of broken rocky terrain with numerous groups of hills and isolated hillocks. Here the Susunia and Biharinath hills standout distinctly.

The terrain in the western fringe generally consists of hills covered by red and lateritic soils with sparse forest growths. The difference between the deltaic tract to the east and the rolling uplands and isolated hills of the west is strikingly visible. The two important hills of the west are Susunia and the Biharinath. The Susunia which is about 22 kms north-west of Bankura, runs almost due east and west for a length of 3.5 kms and rises to a height of 439.5m above sea-level. It is almost covered with thick low forest. The Biharinath hill is situated in the northwest corner of the district and rises to a height of 447.8m. There are several low hills in the Saltona Police Station. The Mejhia hill is situated on the south bank of the river Damodar. To the south in police stations of Khatra and Raipur are a number of low hills.

There are several low hills in Saltona Police Station but these need no separate mention. In Mejhia Police Station, there is an upheaval locally known as Mejhia hill situated on the south bank of the Damodar river opposite the town of Haniganj in Bardhaman.
2.6 **CLIMATE**

The climate of the district is characterised by an oppressively hot summer, excessive humidity throughout the year and well-defined rainfall during the monsoon months. The seasons are well marked. The cold weather begins from the mid-November and lasts upto the end of February. The summer season lasts from March to May. June to September is the south-west monsoon season. October and the first half of November constitute the post monsoon season. At the beginning and termination of the rainy seasons the climate is oppressive and the weather cloudy and sultry.

The average annual rainfall in the district is 1,300mm. The rainfall during the monsoon months June to September constitute about 78 per cent of the annual rainfall. The rainfall in the district, in general, decreases from the northwest towards the south-east. July and August are the rainiest months. Temperature starts rising rapidly in Bankura from the beginning of March. The summer heat is particularly oppressive due to the high moisture content in the air. Occasionally, the maximum temperature rises to about 47°C or 48°C. There is a welcome relief from the humid heat - although only temporarily - when thundershowers occur. With the onset of south-west monsoon by about the first week of June, the day temperature drops appreciably but the night temperature continues to remain high. Because of oppressive humidity, the weather is often very uncomfortable during the monsoon season, especially in between succeeding spells of rain. The monsoon withdraws early in October when temperatures begin to fall. The drop, particularly in the night temperature,
is more marked from about the middle of November. December is the coldest month in the district with a mean daily minimum temperature of 12° to 13°C. In association with passing western disturbances, spell of cold weather are experienced in winter, when the temperature may go down to as low as 7°C. On the whole, however, the cold season in Bankura is very bracing. The highest maximum temperature in the district is more or less 47°C on May and the lowest temperature is more or less 5°C on February.

Relative humidity is generally high throughout the year. But in the summer months, afternoon humidity is comparatively low.

Skies are moderately cloud covered in May and fully covered during the southwest monsoon season. Cloudiness decreases in October and the skies are clear or so during the rest of the year.

Wind movements are generally light to moderate with a slight increase in force during the summer and monsoon seasons. Winds blow mostly from directions between south and east in May as also during the southwest monsoon season. In October, they are light and variable. Throughout the cold season winds blow mainly from west and north and in March/April they are mostly from south and north-west.

Storms and related depressions originating from Bay of Bengal pass through the district during the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon periods. Thunderstorms occur mostly during the afternoon hours (locally known as kalbaisakhi) in the early part of the hot season accompanied with hail and severe squalls. Their visitations invariably cause a sharp drop in temperature. During the south-west mon-
soon, rain is often associated with thunder. Fog occurs only occasionally during the cold season.

2.7 SOIL:

The district has three major types of soils - red, laterite/lateritic and alluvial. The greater portion of the district towards the east is covered by laterite/lateritic material and alluvium, whereas towards the west are exposed ancient metamorphic rocks like gneiss and schist and rocks of Supra-Panchet, Panchet and Raniganj series belonging to the Gondwana system. Laterite/lateritic gravels and calcareous kankar, occur extensively both on the surface and in the sub-surface horizons.

On the basis of the composition, the soils of Bankura may be grouped into two main groups, namely (i) sedentary, i.e. soils formed from residual parent materials and (ii) transported, i.e. soils formed from transported parent materials. The sedentary soils may further be subdivided into (a) sandy soils (b) gneissic soils, (c) schistose soils and (d) lateritic soils. Similarly, transported soils may be further subdivided into (a) colluvial soils and (b) alluvial soils.

In terms of soil colour, the sedentary soils of the district may be divided into two types, namely red and brown soils. The former found mainly on laterite/lateritic materials supporting sal vegetation are free from $C\alpha C_0^3$, low in base exchange capacity and have a highly unsaturated base. Being rich in kaolinite type of mi-
neral, the $S_iO_2/Al_2O_3$ ratio of this kind of clay varies between 2 and 3 which indicate that it may be derived from the laterites by a process of resilification by ascending ground water. Although the process of laterisation is vivid, these soils cannot be grouped either as laterite or as lateritic soils. Red soils also occur along the margins of hillocks bare of vegetation which, however, differ from those discussed above in having comparatively higher exchangeable calcium and comparatively higher silica-alumina ratio. The brown-soils, on the otherhand, are mainly derived from rocks like sandstone, granite, gneiss and schists etc. and are generally under cultivation. They may be of non-calcareous and calcareous categories. This type may be re-grouped as reddish or lateritic depending on the silica-alumina ratio, silica-sesquioxide ratio, base exchange capacity and exchangeable percentage of lime. In the lateritic soils, ferruginous concretions occur in a definite layer whereas in the red soils they are distributed throughout the profile which makes for all the difference. The calcareous brown soil differs from the red soil type in having $CaO$ at different depths of the profile in the form of lime and kankar. The two preceding categories, representing the young soil type of the district, may also be classified as immature red soil.

There is no separate classification for alluvial soils which have been grouped, according to soil association, as Damodar upland, Damodar flat land etc. A more precise classification is, however, possible by differentiating the old from the new alluvium. The old alluvium remains unaffected by floods and siltation and is character-
ized by profile development. The young alluvial soils, showing very little profile development, are refreshed with silt deposits during floods. Some of them, mainly occurring in the Damodar flatlands, are affected by a high water table and are characterized by a heavy sub-soil and occurrence of brown concretions in the lower horizons.

2.8 NATURAL VEGETATION:

The shape and size of natural vegetation in the district of Bankura vary widely from place to place depending on the configuration of the terrain. In general, the uplands, hillslopes and ridges are forest clad while the low-lying areas and gentle slopes with deep soils are under cultivation. Cultivation has also been extended across the forest fringe in favourable spots. As a result, the forests are now characterized by a lack of compactness. Several long and narrow belts are still found in Sonamukhi, Joypur, Bishnupur and Ranibandh areas.

The eastern portion of the district forms part of the rice plains of Western Bengal, and land under rice cultivation contains the usual marsh weeds of the Gangetic Plain. On ponds, ditches and still streams float aquatic plants, accompanied by many submerged water weeds. The rest of the district is higher, and here the uplands are bare or covered with a scrub-jungle and other thorny shrubs. This scrub-jungle gradually merges into forest, where 'sal' is gregarious, while the low hills are covered by a mixed forest. The condition of 'Sal' forests is far from satisfactory. Everywhere, the marks of past mismanagement are evident.
Old records show that the forests of the district were once a great abode of wild-life. Today wild-life here is practically extinct. The extension of cultivation in haphazard manner had cut up the forests into small blocks and dressed the width of forest belts. Even today forests are constantly being cleared for cultural colonization particularly around the urban agglomerations.