

Introduction

This thesis is about a village society and its relationship with a Hindu kingship in the light of the ritual system of an old temple, which includes service tenures granted by the local Maharaja and the ritual organization based on caste and kinship system in the village. The village; Kshiragram, is famous for being one of 51 sakta-pithas in Bengal, and the village temple (*jogadya-mandir*) was prosperous under the patronage of the Bardhaman Raj in the early eighteenth century.¹ The temple history is, however, far older than this as inferred from the mystical legends of the goddess Jogadya recited by the villagers. The ritual system of the temple is fundamentally designed for sacrifice. In the medieval period, it is said, there used to be human sacrifice in front of the image of the goddess, which is implied now by various ritual evidences remained in the ritual courses.

1. The village society and the temple

a) The village setting

The viiage society consists of eighteen castes. But, there are the three major population strenghs: a) the Ugra-Kshatriya, b) the Bagdi, and c) the Brahman. The Ugra-Kshatriya is dominant landholding caste as well as the largest population strengh in the village. They are the main patron of the Brahman and the other service castes. They claim the status of Kshatriya caste in the village, and are

¹ "Kshiragram" is the literary name of the village. The popular name is "kshirgram"; however, sometime it is called "kshirgan" colloquially. In this thesis, I adopted the formal name; "kshiragram" to refer to the village.

called "aguri" colloquially.² The Bagdi who constitute the majority among the untouchable castes in Rarh area of Bengal, are the second largest population strength in the village. They provide agricultural labourers to the village landholders. In company with the other service castes, they also play an important role in the temple ritual. The village Brahmans are the third largest population strength. They engage themselves mainly in "jajman-purohit" relationship as household priests with the village Ugra-Kshatriyas. In this way, the village society has a caste organization which is woven by the so called "jajmani" relationship of the dominant caste with the family priests and the relationship between the patron and other service castes.

The ritual system consisted of ritual posts and roles of various caste groups and it is organized in a hierarchical order with the Brahman at the top. Under their supervision, the calendarical rituals of the temple are performed in the village. The Brahmans are always referred to as the highest rank in the village and regarded as the authority of ritual practices. It is, however, the Bardhaman Raj who is regarded as the ultimate authority and source of honour to the temple ritual organization. The Raj family is the grantor of the temple service lands as well as the temple properties. Moreover, the Maharaja used to be a large zamindar who was in possession of many estates including the village before Independence. There are, therefore, four important parties included in the temple ritual system; 1) the dominant landholding caste, 2) the Brahman priests, 3) the other service castes, and 4) the Maharaja as the supreme authority. They are interdependent with one another through mutual and sometime asymmetrical relationships such as jajman - priest (*purohit*) [1]-2], patron - service castes [1]-3], kingship - temple ritual organization [3]-1), 2], zamindar(landlord) - farmer (*raiyyat*) [1]-3], and so on.

2 According to the ideal model of the caste system in Bengal, there is neither Kshatriya nor Vaisya [see, e.g. Sarma 1980]. Nevertheless, there are a few castes who claim the status of Kshatriya such as the Rajbangshi in north Bengal, the Tetuliya-Bagdi in south Bengal, and the Mahato in Puruliya. The Ugra-Kshatriya is originated from the agricultural caste [Oldham 1894:17]. They mainly inhabit in the district of Bardhaman as the raiyyat or the jotdar in rural area. Most of the Ugra-Kshatriya in the villages enjoyed the dominance of the landholdings as well as the status of the upper castes. In this point, see Risley, H.H. [1981:12-13] See also, Sanjib Banchu, *Ugrakshatriya Pariciti*. 1986.

These relationships could be summarized in brief as kingship, caste, and ritual organization.

The particular focuses in the thesis are mainly based on the following three materials: the first is the ritual organization consisted of the ritual posts and roles of the Jogadya temple, the second is the system of the ritual duties and rights in the temple ritual and rituals in the localities, the third is the ritual processes, in which each caste and lineage is assigned with the various ritual roles throughout the year. They are inextricably interwoven with each other around the temple ritual courses. It is on these elements that the ritual system of the temple has been based for a long time and they still continue to sustain it. For the beginning, we shall overview the village society and the temple based on the historical accounts.

b) Historical background

During the late Mughal period, the family of the Bardhaman Raj became a zamindar in the village Baikunthapur, near the town of Bardhaman, under the Mughal empire. Soon they began rapid expansion over the present Bardhaman district, and then all over western Bengal. Around the time of the beginning of the British rule, they became the largest zamindar over Bengal in terms of their record of the revenues paid to the government. They exercised great authority over the kingdom in the sense of protection as well as oppression to the people.³ The Raj family rebuilt the Jogadya temple of today in the village during the reign of the Maharaja Kiritchand(1702-1740). After that, they embarked on building many temples over the kingdom.

During the British period, the Maharaja's estate came under the Permanent Settlement(1793) and the Raj family became one of the most powerful zamindar under the British Government. It continued to be so until the Estate Acquisition

³ See, in particular, MacLane [1993: 69-95].

Act(1953), with two interruptions of direct control by the court of ward of the British government.

Under the Bengal Tenancy Act(1985), the rights of owner-cultivators are prescribed in relation with zamindars and it is the first administrative category which stipulates "*raiyat* (farmer)" in Bengal. This was a prerequisite in order to transfer the tenurial rights of the *raiyats* by the intermediary to the direct control under the government. Most of the households of the Ugra-Kshatriya and of the Brahmans in the village fall under this category. It is also important that the Bengal Tenancy Act provided the operation of the Survey and Settlement of each district over the Bengal Presidency, which is the first attempt to survey each plot of the estates systematically and settle the rents on the record book called "*khatiyān*" by the British administrators. The rights of tenants and agricultural labourers, who are mainly scheduled caste (untouchable) of today, were practically prescribed after Independence, especially under the Gram Panchayat administration.

In this way, the village society consists of the compound relations between the kingship and the village society, the dominant caste and the Brahman or the service castes, the zamindar and the farmers, and so on. This gets reflected particularly in the ritual course of the village temple which occupies the central core of the village society. The field-data collected from the village seems, therefore, suggestive to understand village society from the view point of an indigenous political formation. It is the religious aspect of kingship and its impact on village society that were overlooked so far under the influence of the theory on Hindu society by L. Dumont. In this sense, this monograph intends to reconsider the village social form from the view points of kingship, dominant caste, and other service castes in place of the view of village society which is based entirely on a religious dichotomy of pure and impure. It will be important at this stage to outline the recent tendency of anthropological studies on South Asia to place the topic for this dissertation clearly in perspective.

2. Anthropology and village study

a) anthropology in the 1980s

After the publication of *Homo Hierarchicus* (in 1970 in English) by L. Dumont, many anthropologists have tried to criticize the theory of his book. They also started paying attention to the theoretical issues regarding the Hinduism. Thus, the village studies of the social structure model became very few in number compared with in the 1950s. Many anthropologists shifted their attention from the village studies to the studies on the religion since 1980s. This fact, however, raises an important question: Does the decline of the village studies necessarily mean the worthlessness of studying in the village any more or does it simply mean the shortage of the elaborate perspective in the village studies ?

According to Fuller & Jonathan [1990], the issues regarding Hindu society discussed within the post-Dumontian framework as they refer to it, in the 1980s could be understood through the following three key figures; namely Brahman-priest, ascetic renouncer, and kingship. It could be added some other subjects, such as the rethinking on the concept of pure and impure by Sekine [1989], and the relationship between Hinduism and Hindu society which C. Fuller [1979] himself once discussed.

In the framework of L. Dumont, it is well known that the status of the Brahman is fundamentally based on his priestly occupation [1980:47]. Many scholars argue that this opinion is of doubtful acceptability. For example, J. Parry [1980] discussed the degenerated status of funeral priests or the Mahabrahmans at the cremation ground of Benares, the major sacred centre in north India. Because of their permanent role in death ritual and acceptance of *dan* (gift), they are treated "much like Untouchables". Fuller [1984] systematically looked into the matter of the Brahman-priests through the analysis of priest organization at the great centre of the Hindu pilgrimage, the Minaksi temple of Madurai. He presented enough persuasive ethnographical data which demonstrates the relative inferiority of priestly Brahmins to the non-priestly Brahmins.

It was well known that the Kulin-Brahman (*kaulinna-pratha-brahman*) in Bengal holding the titles such as "Mukherjee (*Mukho-upaddayya*)" , "Banerjee (*Bandyo-upaddayya*)" , and "Chatterjee (*Choto-upaddayya*)" , never practiced priesthood, and their superiority was strengthened by the status as bride-taker to the other Brahmans[e.g. Risley 1900]. It is ironic that this wife-taking relationship provided a basis for the argument in the marriage alliance theory presented by L.Dumont[1983]. At any rate, as shown by the theoretical study by Quigley [1993:ch.4], it is now widely accepted that the Brahmans are not always priests in Hindu society and often the "ideal" Brahman is not seen as a priest [see, also Burghart 1990; Heesterman 1985; Van de Veer 1985].

With regard to ascetic renouncers, Dumont thought, as we know, that the renounced ascetics are only an exceptional element in the holistic society of the Hindu, and they correspond to the individuals in western society. This comparison is itself interesting, as this is certainly a comprehensive attempt to contrast Hindu society with western society after Max Weber. However, there is much evidence which suggests that they are never outside of Hindu society. Regarding this point, Van der Veer[1989] has observed through the analysis of the organization of priests and renouncers in the Rama temple, the famous pilgrim centre of Ayodya in Uttar Pradesh, that religious ascetics never exist independently, and earn their economic assistance from the temple management. Burghart [1983] also argues that there is no simple dichotomy between the Brahman householders and the renouncers. Similar studies abound[e.g. Barford 1985; Heesterman 1985; Parry 1982]. We have known of similar examples in the tradition of Bengal, particularly, among the Vaisnava and Muslim. Despite their idea of the egalitarian fraternity among castes, the disciples of Caitanya, a famous sect of Vaisnava (*baishnab*) in Bengal, have reproduced a caste ranking in their sect[Dimock 1966]. It is also well known that there are caste-like hierarchies in the rural Muslim societies[Sengupta 1973].

The ethnohistorical study such as Van der Veer's is actually effective in verifying the static descriptions based on the so-called "ethnographical present"

such as structural analysis represented by L. Dumont. However, the simple historical data clearly needs to be distinguished from the ethnohistorical synthesis; because it sometimes lead to the overemphasis of socio-economic factors and overlook the peculiar religious or ideological factors in the context of Hindu society. This problem is commonly shared not only in South Asian anthropology but also by many contemporary anthropologists. We have tried to avoid oversimplifying both ideological and economical factors since attempts of Levi-Strauss, Geertz, Sahlins, and so on. To quote Sahlins[1985], "there is no phenomenal ground-let alone any heuristic advantage- for considering history and structure as exclusive alternative" .

In this respect, I shall mention two studies, namely *An anthropologist among the Historians*. by Cohn[1987] and *The Hollow Crown*. by Dirks[1987]. The former is based on the anthropological history or the reconstruction of history under the influence of E.Hobsbawm [1983] and it could lead to the field of Sabartan studies, which is an attempt to collaborate between anthropology and history on Indian societies. The latter is an attempt to synthesis of the structure and history as shown in the study by M.Sahlins [1985], which leads to an emerging field of colonial studies[see, also Appadurai 1981; Breckenridge & Van der Veer 1993; Inden 1986,1990; Quigley 1993:ch.1,etc]. In both cases, the approach leads inevitably to the rethinking of history during the colonial period and its impact on the indigenous political forms of pre-colonial India, that is the topic of Hindu kingship.

b) Study on kingship

During the 1980s, many anthropologists focussed their attention to the study on the Hindu kingship, especially to the studies regarding transformations during the British rule. It can be summarized as follows. At the beginning, the discussions chiefly concentrated on the criticism of the concept of encompassed power to the religious values by Dumont. In opposition to Dumont's opinion about a secularized king, the religious functions of the king were pointed out through examples such as the king's role as *ja jman*(patron/*ya jamana* Skt.) of priests, and

his chief position in sacrificial rituals[e.g. Derrett 1976; Fuller 1984:104-6; Heesterman 1995]. On the other hand, Biardeau [1989], taking to the tradition of French Sociology, considers the Brahman-Kshatriya relationship to be the core of the structure of the Hindu society. According to Biardeau, the king is the delegate of the gods and the goddesses on the earth and for the protection of the kingdom, he plays the role of *jajman* in the sacrificial rituals performed by the Brahman priests. Thus, he thinks the king occupies the primary position in the Hindu society.

These theoretical queries led to the reevaluation of the theory of A.M. Hocart. Quigley [1993:ch.6] argues that it is an alternative to the theory of Dumont and tries to provide a new perspective to the caste society on the basis of a reinterpretation of Hocart's theory. This attempt further stimulates the reconstruction of another holistic view on Hindu society on behalf of Homo Hierarchicus[Tanabe 1993].

Hocart considers the caste system as a "sacrificial organization" in which "castes are merely families to whom various offices in the ritual are assigned by heredity" [1950:20]. It is worth noting that three aspects of his theory are connected with the subjects discussed in the thesis. First, Hocart suggests that the king or Kshatriya belongs to "the first caste", because they command other castes to play definite roles in the rituals in performing sacrifices, which regenerate the cosmological order and then secure the prosperity of the community. It is worthwhile to mention here that a keen insight into cosmological analogy of the sacrifice to the world order and prosperity has been presented in the excellent book by Hubert & Mauss[1964]. The second important point in his theory is his emphasis on initiation for caste membership[ibid.:56]. It seems natural that if the caste system is designed for the sacrificial ritual, then initiation is indispensable, because the descent of caste is not a sufficient condition for each member to participate in the ritual. The third point is the idea of the reproduced structures of the kingship in miniature[ibid.:68], which is suggestive enough to recall the later studies on the local political structures[e.g. Cohn 1962; Stein

1980], and the images of the polities[e.g. Geertz 1980; Tambiah 1976]. Regarding this fluid political boundaries, Quigley argues: "caste results when kingship attempts to assert itself against kinship" [1993:129]. This viewpoint would be useful in explaining a relationship between the caste organization and the kingship. It is also connected with the concept: "imperial formation" presented by Inden[1990:ch.6], which enables us to see the indigenous polity of India as an incessant generative process.

Another point to the study on kingship concerns the changing circumstances around the kingship under the British rule. As Fuller [1977;1989] acutely pointed out, the self-sufficient village economy, which has so far been understood to refer to the *jajmani* system, is the result of the colonial administration. Most field workers overlooked the facts that the British government has taken over, especially through the revenue administrations, the position where the Hindu kingships reigned over hierarchical polity of the kingdoms in the medieval period. It is, therefore, misleading if anthropologists describe the villages of today as "traditional culture", because they see the villages which have transformed drastically during about 150 years of the British rule. Inden [1990] considers this matter systematically, and also describes the formation of the western views about the Indian society as a dynamic process of interaction between the west and the east. This forms broadly the argument of Orientalism presented by Asad[1973], Said[1978], and so on.

In contrast to the perspectives of Hindu kingship, some scholars pay attention to the problem of the kingship and the dominant caste in village society. Raheja's [1988a] contribution is most remarkable in this respect. She suggests that the *jajmani* relationship is based on the *dan* (gift) which conveys the inauspiciousness or religious sin from the dominant caste as *jajman* to the Brahman priests. It is well known that Dumont understands *jajmani* relations to be fundamentally encompassed by the concept of pure and impure[1980]. This enables us to reconsider village society as a central and peripheral system, which consists of the relationship of the dominant caste and the other service castes based on the

idea of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. This is important as an alternative to the view represented by Dumont in which the village society is hierarchically structured by an axis between the relation of the Brahman and the untouchables based on the idea of pure and impure.

c) Methodological problems

Notwithstanding these theoretical advancements anthropologists have failed to accumulate sufficient data concerning the organization of polities and their relationship to the village society from the fields of South Asia. There are indeed some reports on the interviews with the ex-Maharaja [Mayer 1981] and the splendid ritual at the former court of Raj [Ostor 1980]. However, during the long-continued British rule, the sovereignties were practically handed over to the British government and, moreover, the handing over was completed in post-Independence India with the abolition of the princely states in 1971. With the establishment of the modern administrations the indigenous organization of the kingship has been changed drastically in rural areas while the ritual systems of the villages basically controlled by the Brahman priests have remained relatively unchanged. It is under such circumstances that many anthropologists began their field research in the 1950s,

This matter has no doubt been appreciated by some anthropologists, but there were very few monographs about it primarily, because of the methodological problems. Since the 1980s, many anthropologists began paying attention to this aspect and they resorted mainly to two methods to tackle these problems. The first is the ethnohistorical approach in which the historical materials preserved in the British offices, such as, state archives and record rooms of the revenue office are used. The analyses of the historical documents of the colonial rule explain the changing processes of the local political systems at that time and also throw light on the former aspect of the Hindu kingship. It has already been mentioned in the studies by Appadurai [1981], Cohn [1987], Dirks [1987], and such others.

In the second approach the ritual data preserved in the Hindu sacred places

are used. These data consist mainly of the ritual systems traditionally followed in the old Hindu temples. Formerly, most of the famous temples were supported by the local kings which used to function as religious centres in the respective kingdoms. Despite post-Independence changes in their patronage from the kings, there still remains some old features kept within the ritual systems of these temples. Many anthropologists have tried to reconstruct an outline of the relationship between the kings and the priests from these ritual systems. The studies by Fuller[1984], Marglin[1985], van der Veer[1989], and so on, are good examples of this kind.

A noticeable trend in the decline of the village studies started in the 1980s as already discussed. Many anthropologists turned from the village studies to the studies on religious centres belonging to the so-called "great traditions". This tendency seems, however, to be confined to the description of the Hindu society, because these studies have mainly depended on a certain system, which was specifically formed within the religious traditions, and they often are quite apart from daily life of rural people. For example, Tanaka [1993] shows the case of the Brahman priests of the Nataraja temple in the famous sacred place; Chidambaram in South India where the priest community forms a self-contained society and they are not dependant either economically or ideologically on the patrons. This case is important to provide a counter evidence in opposition to the view that the ideal Brahman has to be free from the subordinative jajmani relations. It is, however, an exceptional case as the Nataraja temple mainly depends on the donations of the visiting worshippers and is separated from the village society. This case suggests that within a specified system, the superiority of Brahman can be maintained and at the same time, the data from such particular cases should be distinguished from the observations in village society.

It follows from what has been said that more detailed data on the Hindu kingship during the colonial rule and before that is necessary. In this respect, it still seems important to analyze the data in the village enough to overcome these methodological difficulties, to supplement the historical materials with

them, and to reconstruct from both. In this sense, this synthesis of historical studies and village studies is never a regression to the field works in the 1950s and a restriction of their objects exclusively into the religion either. It is through a productive combination with feasible varieties of materials that L. Dumont also could construct such an attractive perspective.

3. Methodology

a) Selection of the research village

Selecting a suitable sample village for the purpose of the present study was not an easy task due to the above mentioned methodological problems. It was after a pilot-survey of six villages of West Bengal that I was able to select the present village, viz., Kshiragram. The present village was selected considering the following four conditions; 1) a village which has an old temple managed by a well organized ritual system, 2) a village isolated from abundant modern transportation facilities thereby turning it into a tourist centre, 3) a village having an adequate population balance among the dominant landholding caste, the Brahman caste, and the unouchables, and 4) a village maintaining a close relationship between the village society and the landlord (zamindar). As already mentioned, the village Kshiragram seemed to satisfy all these conditions.

It was revealed after I started visiting the village that the village was related to the kingship of the Bardhaman Raj even before the Permanent Settlement in many respects, and the temple was under the direct control of the Maharaja till Independence. Furthermore, its relationship with the Maharaja continued in the various ritual processes. It seems, therefore, that it would enable us to understand how the Hindu kingship has been viewed by the villagers and to what extent it has influenced their social life. At the same time, it can provide counterevidences to Dumont's views of village society consisted of the Brahman-untouchable axis.

The pilot survey was done from October, 1992 to March, 1993. During the time, I visited more than one hundred villages in various geographical areas from the frontier villages of Sundarban to the villages on the foothills of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Purulia. Through this survey, I found that ritualistic traditions preserved from the pre-colonial Indian tradition have remained in more traditional forms in the areas where there used to be the strong political forms such as Rarh area and Koch Bihar rather than in frontier villages. I, then, started to visit the villages having temples of sakta-pithas one by one. The reasons were:

First, the cult of sakta is primarily connected with the rituals related to sacrifice. Second, in the rituals of Durgapuja, which were for the most part patronized by the Kshatriyas and the kings, the rituals for sacrifice are often concerned with the rituals of kingship. Third, the cult of sakta generally belongs to the older tradition than the cult of Vaisnava (*baishnab*), which is a popular religious sect centering around the town of Nabadwip in Bengal. The cult of Vaisnava is in contrast with the sakta cult and strictly prohibits any killing (*ahinsa*). Fourth, although there are many places where sacrifices are made in the *puja* rituals, the temples of the sakta cult seem to have well organized ritual systems containing of various caste groups in which sacrifices are made through out the year. Finally, it seemed logical to compare all the sakta-pithas for selecting the most suitable village for the present research purpose. A list of 51 sakta-pithas is given in Appendix-1.

b) Distribution of sakta-pithas of Bengal

According to a Bengali almanac (*panjika*): *P. M. Bagcir Dairektari Panjika*, there are eleven sakta-pithas in West Bengal out of fifty one all over the Indian subcontinent. There are, however, many local legends about those pithas. For example, there are twelve sakta-pithas as existing in West Bengal according to another almanac: *Benimadhah Siler Fhul Panjika*. Besides, the West Bengal District

Gazetteers mentioned thirteen pithas. Of thirteen sakta-pithas, five are reported as existing in the Birbhum district, three in the Bardhaman district, two in Calcutta, one each in the Medinipur district, Hugli district, and Jalpaiguri district. According to a famous text, the *Mahapitahanirupana*, there are fifteen names of pitha which can be identified to the present pithas in West Bengal. Among them, seven pithas are the names added in the later version as discussed later. But, any classical texts never refer to the actual locations in the map, and just mention the names of the goddesses and their fallen limbs of the goddess Sati. Hence, it always remains certain possibilities to regard some local shrines as sakta-pitha in connection with the names of pithas on the texts by the local people. For example, the temple of the goddess Melai Candi, the town of Amta, the Howrah district, is regarded to be a sakta-pitha at which, according to the local people, the left shank of the goddess Sati fell. However, this pitha is usually thought to be the Jayanti temple in the village Baurbhag, Jayantiya pargana, Srihatt, Bangladesh.

Appendix-1 gives a list of the fifty one sakta-pithas commonly recognized in Bengal. It has been compiled from the almanac: *P. M. Bagcir Dairektari Panjika*. This list mentions most of the popular places recognized as sakta-pitha at present. Besides, all pithas of West Bengal mentioned in the various texts and almanacs are shown in Map-1. It is attached a constrative list of these sakta-pithas. The Kalighat temple in Calcutta is very famous, and it is undoubted that the temple of Kalighat has grown with the commercial development of the great city of Calcutta [Roy 1993]. Now, it becomes the great centre for the pilgrimages of the Hindu from all over the Indian subcontinent. But, the situations of the other places are very diverse.

For examples, the Dakshineswar temple in north Calcutta and the Bakreshwar temple in Birbhum are well known as the pilgrim centres in Bengal. The former is very famous in connection with Sri Ramakrishna, the great mystic of Bengal, and the latter is also known for the hot-spring therapy. On the other hand, the Kalipitha, the Jaydurga temple near Katwa, the Kaliganj block, the Nadia district and the

Mangalcandi temple at Kogram, the Mangalkote block, the Bardhaman district are visited only by the neighboring villagers and visitors from outside are rare, though these places were prosperous during the medieval period. It is natural that the temples in places which have developed commercially or have other facilities including conveyance attract people from distant places.

There are a few pithas which are called by the same name and considered as the same sakta-pitha. For example, there are two Phullara temples regarded as a sakta-pitha, one is near the town Labhpur, at Labhpur Block in Birbhum District, and the other is at the village of Dakshindhihi, Nirogram, at Ketugram Block in Bardhaman District. Both these temples have many devout worshippers in the neighboring areas and were under the patronage of the landlords before Independence. The temple at Kankalitala near Bolpur in Birbhum District is identified as a pitha with the name "kanci". It is interesting that there is another sakta-pitha with the name; Kancipuram near Madras in Tamilnadu, which is famous for as "southern Benares". Furthermore, the *Srimadan Gupter Dairektari Panjika* identifies the name of "ujani (ujjayni)" with the famous pilgrimage place of Ujjain, in the western part of Madhya Pradesh, where is famous for the great triennial Kumbha Mela festival. It is, however, usually identified with the village Kogram, Natunhat at Mangalkote Block in Bardhaman District. This place was called *ujani* in the medieval period, and mentioned in the various Bengali folk literatures called the *Mangalkavya*. In particular, this place is famous for as the native place of the heroine Behula in the *Manasamangal*.

c) Field work in the village

The village Khsiragram is located at the centre of the Kshiragram Gram Panchayat area, the eastern end of the Mangalkote block in the Bardhaman District. The whole village consists three mauzas, namely J.L.No.127, No.128, and No.129 in the Mangalkote Block. It takes about thirty minutes by bus from the local town of Katwa and two hours by bus from Bardhaman town. It takes more than six hours

by bus to reach there from Bolpur. This includes the time required for changing buses three times and crossing the river Ajoy by boat.

The total area of the village is 1,268.03 hectares (3,133.26 acres) according to 1991 Census. The total irrigated lands amount to 817.86 hectares (2,020.90 acres), unirrigated lands amount to 461.34 hectares (1,139.96 acres), and the rest is 200.17 hectares (494.61 acres). There are three primary schools, one high school, and one rural health centre in the village. At the outskirts of the village, there is the Gram Panchayat office. Within the jurisdiction of the panchayat office there are seven villages.

The population of the village, according to 1991 Census, is 4263 (Male 2191, Female 2072) and the number of households is 729. A detailed discussion on population composition will be presented in the next chapter.

I began to go to the village Kshiragram from April, 1993. But it was after February, 1994 that I started to stay in the village continuously. Before staying inside the village, I discussed with many persons regarding local administration, parties, colleges and universities concerned with reference to the village and the area. My first stage of field work in the village continued till May, 1995. After that, I visited in October–November of 1995 and January–February of 1996.

d) Description of the thesis

A preliminary statement about the description style in this monograph seems important here. The book, *Writing Culture* by Clifford & Marcus [1986] calls attention to the possibility of misinterpretations caused by the description of ethnographies of status quo based on the so-called "ethnographical present". Regarding this village, the village temple has undergone drastic transformation five times in the past due to the following historical happenings: 1) the invasions by the Muslims, 2) the rebuilding of the temple by the Maharaja Kirtichand (around 1730), 3) the Maratha invasions (1742–1751), 4) the Survey and Settlement by the British government (1927/28), 5) the abolition of the Zamindar (1953).

After the criticisms on the approach of structuralism, many scholars began

to pay attention to various social conditions, which could lead to the structural changes. It is generally agreed now that the description of a certain social process depends on the framework of the interpretation by the researcher. In this monograph, I tried to trace back to the situation in the age of the Maharaja Kirtichand according to the subjects of this study. There is, however, always some doubt about the credibility in the detailed ritual processes, because many parts of them, let alone the social aspect, seem to have transformed already.

The data on the present situation were collected by the direct observations and interviews. The rest, which seem to have changed and in some cases even lost after Independence, were supplemented by the recollections of the villagers and by other historical materials.⁴ In particular, the data on the land tenures of the village have been mainly collected from the land records of 1927/28 preserved in the District Settlement Record Room. As a result, the description of the thesis is basically based on the direct observations by the author, but it is also supplemented by other historical data enough to reconstruct the former state of the temple traced back to the 1920s.

e) Composition of the thesis

The composition of the thesis is as follows. In chapter-I, I have discussed two points: i) the religious aspect of the village and its temple, which characterizes the village as a sacred place, and ii) the social background of the village. In chapter-II, the ritual organization of the temple has been discussed through an examination of the temple properties and the service lands granted by the Maharaja. The ritual cycle of the temple has been examined in chapter-III with special emphasis on the rotation system of the Brahman-sebait. In chapter-IV, the process of Jogadyapuja, which is the biggest ritual occasion in the village in the

⁴ In particular, I owed much to the efforts by the historians in the village. It would be fairly impossible to bring this thesis to the present stage without help of following three books: *Bardhaman: Itihas o Sanskriti*. Sri Jogeshwar Caudhuri, 'Kshiragramer Pracin Oitijjya.' in *Pashcimbanger Puja-Parban o Mela*. the late Sri Satya Narayan Mukhopadhyaya, *Saktimahapitha Karer Kshiragram o Debi Jogadya*. Sri Sanat Kumar Cakrabartti. All these authors came from the village Kshiragram.

lunar month of Baishakh (April-May) has been analyzed, and the organization of the ritual posts has been discussed in this ritual course. In chapter-V, the annual ritual cycle of the village of past and present are examined, which are analytically divided into three parts, namely the rituals connected with the temple, the temple and the localities, and the localities. Chapter-VI concerns the Durgapuja mainly supported by the lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriyas, and gives a description of a typical rotation and succession system of the Duragapuja by each lineage. Chapter-VII is about Manasapuja, which is mainly supported by the village untouchables(scheduled castes). The Manasa temple in the village is granted to the Bagdi-priests by the Maharaja. But the rituals of the goddess Manasa are closely connected with the ritual organization of the Joagadya temple. Finally, a discussion on the influence of the kingship on the temple rituals and the village social life and the villagers' way of recognition have been attempted.