

PREFACE

Among all the early images discovered in Bengal, those of the Sun god numerically, occupy a position second to that of Viṣṇu alone. This clearly shows that the Sun god had been one of the most popular deities in this part of the country in early centuries. However, it is surprising to notice that the Sun-cult of Early Bengal has not received its due attention as is given to other cults. No individual study of the solar cult in Bengal has been done so far, though a few articles have appeared on some of its different aspects here and there. The materials for the study of the Sun-cult still lie hidden in the original sources as well as scattered in innumerable journals. Hence, I have been tempted to tread on this almost untrodden field.

The present study on 'Sun worship and Sun- images in Early Bengal' is the result of quite a few years of an extensive library work and comprehensive field survey that I had painstakingly undertaken. It covers a long period from the pre-Āryan stage of Bengal history to the end of the ancient period i.e. 12th -13th centuries A.D. However, the continuance of the Sun worship in present times at the folk level has also been discussed .

The present thesis has been completed under the able guidance and supervision of Dr. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, Ex-Jadunath Sarkar Professor of History, University of North Bengal and Dr. Shyamal Ch. Guha Roy, Reader in History, Siliguri College, Darjeeling. It was Dr. Bhattacharya who for the first time highlighted the importance of this area of research to me, evinced a keen interest in the subject and guided me for almost the entire span of my research before his retirement. I am deeply beholden to both of them for all the guidance and help that they had so kindly given.

In the completion of the present thesis, I am indebted to a large number of scholars of India and abroad. Among them I must mention the names of Late Prof. Kalyan Kumar Ganguly (Calcutta), Late Prof. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta (Calcutta), Prof. Bratindra Nath Mukherjee (Calcutta), Prof. T. K. Roychoudhury (North Bengal University), Prof. Bhaskar Chattopadhyay (Burdwan University), Prof. V. C. Srivastava (Benaras Hindu University), Prof. L. P Pandey (Himachal Pradesh University), Prof. Shahanara Hussain (Rajshahi University), Late Dr. Mukhlesur Rahaman (Formerly Director, Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi), Dr. Enamul Hoque (Formerly Director-General, Bangladesh National Museum), Dr. Kunal Chakravorty (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and Dr. S. N. Kundu (Burdwan) for their valuable suggestions and other academic help extended so kindly to me whenever I had approached them.

I am also grateful to Prof. Emajuddin Ahmed (Formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Dhaka), Md. Shahajahan (Project Director, Technical Education, Bangladesh), Md. Mozahar Hossain (Formerly Chief Engineer, Rajshahi University) and Late Prof. Santosh Kumar Basu, formerly Curator of the Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University for their help and encouragement. Last but not the least, I express a sense of belonging with my friend Dr. Dilip Kumar Sarkar, Controller of Examinations, North Bengal University for his untiring inspiration for the completion of the research-work I had undertaken nearly a decade back.

I am indeed extremely grateful to the authorities and staff of the Asiatic Society's Library, National Library, Calcutta University Library, Bangiya Sahitya Parisad Library, Indian Museum Library, National Museum Library, North Bengal University Library etc. for the required academic help. I have extensively made use of outstanding objects from

different museums. In course of my investigation of these objects, I have examined the collections of the Varendra Research Museum (Rajshahi), Bangladesh National Museum (Dhaka), Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art (Calcutta University), Directorate of Archaeology (West Bengal), Tamluk Museum and Research Centre (Midnapore), A. K. M. Museum (North Bengal University), Māldā Museum (Māldā), Balurghat College Museum, Dinajpur District Library and lots of other smaller museums in India and Bangladesh. I am extremely grateful to the authorities of these museums and collections for allowing me so kindly to study such materials.

Lastly, with a sense of respect and love I remember my wife Chandralekha and my son Chandrajoy for ungrudgingly facing the hard times with or without me and constantly inspiring me to finish this hard task.

Dow Hill School Qrts.

Kurseong

Darjeeling

30 November, 2004

Bijoy Kumar Sarkar
(Bijoy Kumar Sarkar)