PREFACE

It is a well-known fact that though the ancient Indians excelled in almost all the departments of literature, there was one important exception, namely, History. With the solitary exception of Rājata-rāhiṇī, a history of Kāshmir written by Kalhaṇa in the twelfth century A.D., no other book in Sanskrit or in any language derived from it, deserves the name of History. Some of the Purāṇas give a brief account of the ancient ruling dynasties, and there are a few local chronicles like those of Nepāl and Gujarāt, but they are hardly more than mere lists of kings and dynasties. So far as ancient Bengal is concerned, there is no book even of this type, not to speak of any regular history. The extent of our ignorance regarding the history of ancient Bengal may be judged from the first attempt to write one by Mrityunjay Śarmā, a Paṇḍit of the Fort William College, Calcutta. His book Rāja-taraṅga or Rājāvali, published in 1808, is nothing but a string of fables woven round a number of historical, mythical and imaginary names, and it will suffice to indicate its nature when it is stated that Ballālasena is described as sitting on the throne of Delhi.

With the progress of our knowledge in the nineteenth century regarding the history of ancient India, the idea of writing a proper history of this great sub-continent, and, separately, of the various geographical or linguistic units comprised in it, dawned upon the minds of scholars, both Indian and European. The early successful attempts in this direction were made, among others, by R. C. Dutt (A History of Civilization in Ancient India, 1889), R. G. Bhandarkar (Early History of the Deccan, 1895), and J. F. Fleet (The Dynasties of Kanarese Districts, 1896). The twentieth century, which opened with the publication of V. A. Smith’s Early History of India, gave a great impetus to the writing of the critical history of ancient India, as a whole, or of its various regions.

The first idea of writing a history of ancient Bengal on modern scientific lines may be traced back to 1912, when Lord Carmichael, the first Governor of the newly created Presidency of Bengal, took the initiative in the matter, and invited MM. Haraprasād Śastry to prepare a scheme; but nothing came out of it. A similar attempt was made a few years later at the instance of Rājā Prafulla Nath Tagore of Calcutta. He undertook to bear the entire financial burden of the project.
and requested Mr. R. D. Banerji and a few others, including myself, to undertake it. But this attempt also proved equally abortive.

The failure of these two successive attempts were not, however, without some fruitful results. Almost immediately after the first, Ramaprasad Chanda published Gauḍarājamālā in 1319 B.S. (1913 A.D.), and shortly after the second, R. D. Banerji published his Bāṅglā Itihāsa, Part I (1321 B.S.). But these two individual works, highly valuable though they were, did not remove, and rather accentuated, the need of a comprehensive political and cultural history of ancient Bengal written by the joint efforts of specialists in different branches of the subject. For, it may be noted that the two books mentioned above dealt only with the political history.

The first successful attempt in this direction was made by the University of Dacca. In 1935 it sanctioned the plan to publish a history of Bengal in three volumes, covering, respectively, the political and cultural history during the Hindu, Muslim and British periods. I was appointed the Editor of the first volume, and Sir Jadunath Sarkar, of the second. The first volume dealing with both political and cultural history was completed and sent to the press during my period of office as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dacca, and published in 1943, a few months after my retirement from that post. Only the political history of the Muslim period, edited by Sir Jadunath, was published as Vol. II.

The History of Bengal, Vol. I, edited by me and published by the Dacca University in 1943, may claim to be the first comprehensive political and cultural history of Bengal written jointly by a number of specialists. The book was very well received by scholars and all the published copies were sold out within three or four years. Unfortunately, no attempt was made by the University of Dacca for a long time to bring out a new edition. This was, no doubt, primarily due to the political upheaval caused by the creation of Pakistan. For nearly twenty years or more, the book was out of print and not easily available, but the demand for it was so great that second-hand copy of the book is known to have been sold in the Calcutta market for Rs. 120, Rs. 100 more than the original price.

Some years ago I received a letter from the Registrar, Dacca University, asking for my help and co-operation in re-printing the book. I cannot trace the correspondence, but to the best of my recollection I wrote back saying that as many years have elapsed since its publication and many new facts of history have come to light, the
book requires a thorough revision, and it may even be necessary to re-write some parts. In any case I agreed to edit the revised edition, but pointed out that it would possibly involve a small expenditure by way of paying remuneration to the writers, both old and new (in place of those who died). To this letter I never received any reply. I was approached by many publishers in Calcutta to bring out a revised new edition of the book, but I did not agree, for reasons I need not discuss here.

About four or five years ago I was informed that the University of Dacca has published a reprint of The History of Bengal, Vol. I, edited by me. I could hardly believe it as I had not got any reply to my letter, and expected to receive, if not any formal intimation of their decision to publish it, at least a complimentary copy of the book when published. Nevertheless, I wrote to the Registrar who informed me that a reprint was published. Since then I tried to secure a copy of the reprinted book just to get an idea of the changes, if any, introduced in it. Not only was no copy available in India, but the publishers in Calcutta failed to obtain copies for sale even on pre-payment of the price. An enterprising publisher, who had been repeatedly requesting me to publish a revised edition, somehow got hold of a copy (through the kind help of an American friend) and brought it to me. I was surprised to find that though many parts of the book had become obsolete and many facts and views stated therein had proved to be quite wrong or required a great deal of modification, the new book was literally a reprint of the old one, line by line and page by page, without any alteration even of a single punctuation (except what was done by the printer's devil).

Far greater was my surprise when I read in the “Preface to the Second Impression” (the only addition to the original Vol. I) the following remarks by the Secretary, History of Bengal Publication Committee (originally founded in connection with the first edition, of which I was the Chairman for five years and a half till my retirement):

“It is gratifying to note that the volumes (edited by me and Sir Jadunath Sarkar) were well received by scholars and within a few years of their publication, all copies were sold off. As there was still a great demand for the books, the History of Bengal Publication Committee of the University which has been functioning since its inception with occasional changes in constitution and structure, adopted at a meeting held on 29-4-61 a comprehensive plan to reprint the existing first and second volumes........Accordingly the original
contributors of the first volume were approached with a request to revise their own chapters. To the regret of the History of Bengal Publication Committee it was found that two of the contributors had already been carried away by the cruel hand of death and the response from the others was not quite encouraging. It was felt by the Committee that if they were to wait for the revision of the volume, its publication would have to be postponed for an indefinite period. It was, therefore, decided at a meeting held on 19-9-61, to reprint Volume I of the History without revision."

I myself wrote more than a third of the entire volume, but I do not recollect having ever refused to revise the chapters. The only other contributor, who wrote at least one whole chapter and is still alive, is Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji. On inquiry from him and a few others who wrote parts of a chapter, I learnt that they had not received any request to revise their chapters. In any case it was quite clear to me from the above remarks that there was no chance of a revised edition of *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, being ever published by the University of Dacca. That would mean a considerable diminution in the value of the literary work to which I devoted more than five years of my life. The least that I could do to make my past endeavours at least partially fruitful was to write an up-to-date history of ancient Bengal on the lines I laid down for *The History of Bengal* Vol. I, edited by me and published in 1943. Of course, at the fag end of my life I could not venture to make an effort to publish, along with the help of other scholars, a co-operative work of the same type. So it would be an individual work, and though helped to a large extent by the older work, the heavy responsibility for this one would be entirely mine.

All the chapters in this book are written by me with the exception of Chapter XI—Language and Literature—in which I have incorporated with slight additions and alterations, two articles written by Dr. S. K. De and published in the *New Indian Antiquary*, Vol. I, pp. 1-23 and Vol. II, pp. 264-282, which were also reproduced *verbatim* in *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I published by the University of Dacca. I have also freely reproduced my own writings in that book which cover more than one-third and nearly half of it, of course with suitable modifications, involving considerable additions and alterations necessitated by the discovery of new data. Besides these I have derived considerable help from that book and sometimes quoted long passages from it, but always with due acknowledgements.

I may add that three chapters in the old book written by me also
contain small portions or sections written by others. Of these Chapter IX on Administration, corresponding to Chapter X of the old book, has been completely re-written by me and there is nothing in it not written by me. Some portions of the Chapters XII (Society) and XIV (Bengalis Outside Bengal), corresponding to Chapters XV and XVII of the old book were written by my old pupil, Dr. D. C. Ganguly, who is dead, and Dr. R. C. Hazra. But neither Dr. Hazra nor I can locate those portions now. Dr. Hazra has permitted me to reproduce the whole chapter including his portions with such changes as may be necessary, and I hereby acknowledge my indebtedness to both of them.

It has not been possible to include in this volume all the illustrations used in the old book. For many of these were, and I believe still are, in the museums at Dacca and Rajshahi and other places in East Pakistan to which I have no access, and so they are not available to me.

As many of my old writings have been incorporated in this work, the same abbreviations have been used though there have been several additions.

I may now notice some special features in this volume as compared with the old one. The account of the pre-historic period has been changed almost beyond recognition by utilising the results of the excavations at the pre-historic sites on the Ajay river, such as Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibi and the neighbouring sites. The knowledge of political history as well as of art and geography of ancient Bengal has been enlarged and enriched by excavations at many sites during the last thirty years such as Berā Chāmpā and Rājbādīlāṅgā, and the new data have been fully utilised, probably for the first time in any historical text on ancient Bengal. As a result many views propounded in The History of Bengal Vol. I published by the Dacca University, including those held by me, had to be considerably modified and the history of many new kings and the true chronology and genealogy of some kings and royal dynasties have been furnished for the first time. To cite only a few examples, the history of the kings of the Chandra Dynasty (pp. 199-206) and the Deva Dynasty (pp. 275-278) may be said to have been practically re-written, and many new kings and old dynasties have come into prominence. Thus it has been shown that the first imperial expansion of the kingdom of Bengal did not begin in Śaśāṅka’s

* This was written before the massacre and devastation in East Bengal (now called Bangla Desh) perpetrated by the forces of Pakistan (March, April, May, 1971). Nobody here knows now whether the institutions still exist.
time as has been supposed so long, but its foundations were laid by Gopachandra whose proper place in the history of ancient Bengal has been determined after a prolonged controversy extending over more than sixty years. The problem of Lakshmanasena Era has also been solved after an acrimonious controversy of more than half a century. Many new images have been noticed in the Chapter on Art and a new section has been added on the terracottas. The discovery of several new temples and dated images has profoundly modified the old views on the evolution of architecture and sculpture. The bibliography has been brought up to date.

A separate list of inscriptions found in Bengal has been added in order to facilitate reference to those mentioned in the text. As each of these is indicated by the serial number in the text itself it has been possible to reduce the number of footnotes by eliminating those which contained reference to the inscriptions only. Another innovation has been introduced by transferring the footnotes to the end of the chapter instead of giving them at the bottom of each page.

This book would probably have never been written but for the persistence of the young publisher Sri Gour Kishore Mukherjee, whose constant nagging at last induced me to take up this work at the fag end of my life. I am not sure whether I should thank him for this, for the writing of such a book, unaided, at the age of eighty-three, has proved to be an arduous task, and I am painfully conscious of its many shortcomings for which I can only crave the indulgence of my readers. Two more volumes of this series bringing the history down to 1947 are in contemplation.

I take this opportunity of expressing my obligations to Sri Sailendra Kumar Sen, of G. Bharadwaj & Co., who has gone through the proofs very carefully and not unoften drawn my attention to errors which escaped my notice. I am also thankful to the authorities of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, Superintendent, Archaeological Survey, Eastern Circle, the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, and to Sri Amiya Kumar Banerjee, I. A. S. for supplying me photographs of temples and sculptures for the illustration of this book, and to the authorities of the Kali press which has printed the book very speedily and with great care.

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