

Book Review-3

Prasanta Kumar Mandal, *Dawn of a Civilisation in the Lower Ganges Valley*, Kolkata: Srijan Publishers, 2023, 127, Rs.1800

We had to wait till 1921 to get information on India's old civilisation. With the discovery of archaic materials from Mohenjodaro by Rakhal Das Banerjee in 1921, people of India came to know about a New Civilisation of India called 'Indus Valley Civilisation (presently Harappan Civilisation), through Shri Banerjee's report and writings, although the findings at Harappa in 1920 by Dayaram Sahani who himself associates these findings with the Buddhist period and also before that Cunningham and others found some archaic materials from the site of Harappa. Now Shri Prasanta Kumar Mandal, a researcher in Ancient Indian History and culture and Excavator of Tamralipta Museum & Research Centre, Tamluk, in the recent colourful 3rd book of his trilogy, (i) 'Art and Artifacts of Bone and Antler', in the Lower Ganges Valley' 1993, Tamralipta Museum & Research Centre, (ii) 'Art of the Lower Ganges Valley: A Pictorial Monograph', 2013, Agam Kola Prakshan, New Delhi, and (iii) 'Dawn of a Civilisation in the Lower Ganges Valley' (2023) by Srijan Publishers, Calcutta with more than 224 photo plates takes us to the door of the earliest New Civilisation of India dating back before Mohenjodaro (15,000 – 12,000 B.C.), adding a new dimension to the study of the early artwork of Bengal as well as India. These examples of 'home or mobile art' closely resemble the art of other European countries dating back to the upper Palaeolithic culture of early modern man. All these examples of new findings are kept in his personal collection.

This book by Shri Mandal is based on some unique unknown archaeological remains discovered by himself during the eighties and nineties of the last century from a site at Natsal of Tamluk (presently Haldia Sub-division) on the surface of the easterly river bed of the river Rupnarayan just before its meeting point with the river Hooghly at Geonkhali in the district of Midnapore (now Purba Medinipur) of West Bengal, provides us with crucial information of the old traditions of Indian sub-continent for the first time. Almost similar views are held by renowned scholars like Professor H. D. Sankalia, Professor Nisith Ranjan Roy, the eminent historian, Prof B. N. Mukherjee, Carmichael Professor, AIHC of Calcutta of University and others. The grandfather of Indian archaeology Professor Sankalia, after searching the whole of India being disappointed remarked in 1974 that: "What is still missing is the associated artwork in bone, antler and ivory, painting and engravings on bone and soft stone and,

above all, the remains of Homo Sapiens who in all probability the creator of all this varied work" and Amalananda Ghosh, Ex-Director-General of ASI, remarked (1976) that, "not a single bit of fossil of early man has been reported so far from the sub-continent." As against these remarks Shri Mandal discovered all types of remarkable works of art and artefacts of bone and antler. From 1975 onwards Shri Mandal literally discovered a bone industry that consists of tools made of fossilised and partly fossilised bones representing points, scrapers, blades and point-cum-blades; human mandibles, femur and collarbone and varied works of art, engravings, paintings and even clay modelling on bone, teeth and antler.

With all types of his discovered antiquities, this book of Sri Mandal consists of two parts. The first part deals with the artefacts of bone, tooth and antlers in the form of tools implements and weapons and the second part deals with varied works of art (about 130 photoplates) in the same materials by using the techniques of painting, carvings, clay modelling and pecking etc. Shri Mandal claims in his book that such artefacts of bone, tooth and antler that are discovered at Natsal in the Lower Ganges Valley for the first time in the whole of the Indian sub-continent shed a flood of light on the dim corners of prehistory from the Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic down to the days of chalcolithic and later. The author further mentions that though the bone tools of the Upper Palaeolithic are met in some other places, the works of art in the above-noted materials are for the first time discovered by him at Natshal in the Indian sub-continent. The tangible works of art dealt with in the present book seem to highlight the socio-cultural traditions of the savage people of the then society being handed down to later periods through the ages. At the end of this book, Shri Mandal highlights some specimens where the pictures and symbols, incised or engraved seem to claim to be the forerunner of the art of writing and it may date from the pre-Neolithic period.

The book on India's oldest civilisation is no doubt a pathfinder for students and researchers in the field of archaeology and anthropology. The general readers will also appreciate the book.

Kamal Kumar Kundu
Author, Regional History