

Indians of Eastern Woodlands— The Story of Ancient America

BENOY R. SAMANTA

The United States and Canada were home to true civilization long before the arrival of the first Europeans. When the first Europeans came to this land, they discovered a vast, seemingly untouched continent. However, they discovered a land that had already been discovered. North America had been home to millions of American Indian people for thousands upon thousands of years. This is the story of the first Americans, the Indian people that lived and still live here in the United States and Canada.

Back to when much of North America was locked in the frigid grips of the Ice Age, the precise origin of Native Americans eludes us. Scientific evidence indicates that the first humans came to the North American continent from northern Asia sometime during the last Ice Ages possibly 12,000 to 20,000 years ago. They walked or sailed along the coast of a land bridge once connecting Russia to Alaska. The descendants of these immigrants had spread across both North and South America. After many generations, these people became natives of the land that had never seen humans before. They became Native Americans. As they spread out over the vast continent, the Native Americans adapted to living in different regions and hundreds of different cultures were born. The story of Eastern Woodland is the story of one such

amazing Indian culture that left its mark in the form of mysterious earthwork and thousands of earthen mounds.

Time moves constantly forward by minutes, hours, and days. Time holds the secret of ancient America. We cannot see into the future but, among the mounds the Indians built, we can see into the past. Over very long periods, hours, days, months and even years become less and less important. Then, we measure time by the events that influence or change our lives. As we look into the past, there are many events which help us define history and steps along our travel back into time.

Before the first European explorers, there was no written history north of Mexico. At this point we enter the pre-historic past and our time-line becomes less clear. When Columbus reached the new world in 1492, earthworks in the Ohio Valley were already very old. In fact, many of the mounds were at least 2000 years old. While the Greeks were building temples in the old world, monuments of earth were being erected across eastern North America. Mounds were part of a legacy of an advanced people who built a sophisticated society and constructed immense engineering works. And, this was almost 2000 years ago. But these people left us much more than the mounds we now see. Beneath the surface of the mounds are

treasures from the past. Others, the Mississippian, would follow in the mound building tradition of the Woodland people. Mounds were still being constructed in the fifteen and sixteen hundreds when the first European explorers ventured across the eastern half of the continent.

All told, some 200,000 mounds once dotted eastern North America. The amount of effort involved in their construction is staggering. Some archeologists now believe that the overall work of the mound builders exceeded that of the pyramids and the ancient works of Egypt. But who were the mound builders? Where did they come from? Why did they build mounds? The story is entrenched in time and uncovering the answer requires travelling even further into the past.

Russel Cave

The archaic people were gatherers and hunters, living off whatever the land could provide. We know that they actively hunted such giants as the Ice Age caribous, mammoths, and other large animals; possibly even to extinction. In the Eastern Woodlands, one of the best-preserved records of the past is to be found in the Russel Cave in northern Alabama. For thousands of years, the cave gave shelter to bands of archaic Indians. Carved by a stream which is tunnelled under part of the mountains, Russel Cave's huge overhang has made it a home for the people who may have been the predecessors of the mound builders. Life was hard due to a constant search for food and survival.

These ancient people had no defined agriculture though they probably experimented with growing some crops. As the climate of North America gradually warmed, distinct Indian culture slowly

started emerging. Still, by 4000 years ago, there was no real signs of civilization. Ancient America seemed to be occupied with small bands of hunters and gatherers. And then something happened in the bayous and backwaters of northern Louisiana over 3500 years ago. Poverty Point, the first planned community in ancient America was born and it came seemingly out of nowhere. It was like a bolt of lightning on the pre-historic horizon. Poverty Point had streets, residential areas and a central plaza. It was carefully constructed and had a large ceremonial mound.

Mounds would become a trademark of Indians in the Eastern Woodlands for the next 3000 years. Aerial photography revealed something imperceptible, almost invisible on the ground. Digitally processed imagery from high altitude research aircraft has produced remarkable evidence of an ancient city with streets and residences laid out in the shape of a giant crescent. Six concentric ridges were nearly destroyed over hundreds of years of ploughing but enough remains to help tell the story. Millions of tons of earth were moved basketful by basketful to create six miles of artificial ridges. They rose 10 feet higher than the surroundings and averaged 75 feet in width. Four avenues pierced the ridges and lead to a 37 acre plot at the heart of the city bordered by a river.

Poverty Point

Poverty Point remains an unsolved mystery. There is no evidence that these people had any agriculture and yet somehow the land supported the concentrated population of thousands of people. Poverty Point was highly organized with a trade network which extended at least a thousand miles. They received stones and minerals

from Missouri which they fashioned into tools. Skeletal remains from subtropical birds indicate trading ties with Florida. These birds and pelicans were probably used for their colourful plumages and large feathers. The bayous and rivers linked Poverty Point with other trading communities in a society that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the confluence of the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers.

In the scope of its achievements, Poverty Point stood alone in the year 1500 BC. Altogether, at least 30 million basketfuls of earth were moved to create the settlements. Poverty Point was foremost in massive engineering works of the time. A huge mound constructed just outside the ridges rose to the height of 70 feet. For a thousand years from 1500 to 500 BC, these isolated communities successfully stood the test of time. Even when Poverty Point started to wane, the tradition of mound building would be passed on. The flame of mound building did not die out with Poverty Point. It was rekindled far to the north in the Ohio River Valley.

Many Indian cultures have left little more than footprints behind but one culture was to leave a dramatic and unique mark on the land. By 3000 years ago, the climate in the Ohio River Valley had changed. Instead of the cold of the Ice Age, the climate was very similar to that of today. The people of Central Ohio had ample food supplies. It took perhaps only three hours of labour each day to get enough food to survive. Because of the wealth of the land, something was available here that not many Indian people elsewhere in America had; free time. Everything was favourable for something to happen and it did. 3000 years ago was the beginnings of what Archeologists call the Woodland period; a long period of technical

and social advancements among the people of eastern North America. The first mound was built around 750 BC. About the same time, the Greek civilization was blossoming, one distinct group of Woodland People we now call the Hopewell, constructed large geometric earthwork in Central and Southern Ohio.

The Hopewell culture had three major centres. The first was on both sides of the Ohio River at Portman. Today only a small fraction of that complex earth work remains. The second centre was within the present city of Newark just east of Columbus. There the Hopewell constructed several large geometric figures and connected them with miles of parallel embankments. The third great centre was in the Scioto River Valley. Here the Hopewell constructed some two dozen major enclosures in the shapes of squares, circles and octagons. Yet, we do not know why the Woodland People built these structures. Beyond their earthen architecture, the Woodland People acquired wealth through trade; copper from the southern shore of Lake Superior, silver from East Central Canada, obsidian from the eastern shore region of Wyoming, mica from the Blue Ridge mountains, and shells from warm water of the Gulf of Mexico. The trade network of Woodland People extended across the eastern half of North America. But the essential question remains. Why did they build mounds? And for what purpose?

Why did they build mounds?

The mounds were constructed for a variety of reasons. We know that many contained burials and were constructed for religious and ceremonial purposes. Some may have been constructed for political or economic reasons. Moreover, some of the

Hopewell sites appeared to have been constructed as astronomical observatories with calendar to mark changes as occurring with the seasons. Archeologists have not found any evidence of written language and there is no other way of looking into the minds of these people. Yet, just the existence of the mounds tells us that they had an organized stable society and one capable of undertaking construction projects of monumental scale. With nothing more than wooden digging sticks, stone hoes, clamp shells and baskets, the Hopewell constructed not just mounds but miles upon miles of embankments moving thousands of tons of soil. Mound City near Scioto Valley of Ohio was a very special place. Although it is smaller than most Hopewell sites, it contains more mounds than most of the other earth works. The purposes behind mound city are not clear. It was not the heart of a pre-historic city, though many people lived in the surrounding areas. The Hopewell People had a semi-nomadic lifestyle. This was a civilization built on hunting and gathering where people had to be mobile enough to follow food sources. As one area was gradually depleted of its natural food supply, families or clan group would migrate to other areas.

Edina culture

Still, the Hopewell People were not alone in building mounds. For 700 years, the Edina culture built tall conical mounds throughout the Ohio River Valley. The Edina probably had close ties with the Hopewell. By 400 AD in Europe, the Roman empire was weakening and so too was the Woodland culture in Eastern North America. The mounds were no longer being built. What happened to these people? They did not migrate to distant parts of the country.

When the Roman empire fell, the Romans did not die off or move away. We believe the Woodland people also remained. Though now, like the Romans, they changed the way they did things. They displayed no overall unity for constructing old monuments. Mounds are the most obvious signature of the Woodland People, but mounds take many forms. Most were conical burial mounds. Some had almost vertical sides and were up to 50 feet high. Also, these ancient engineers built long, ridge-topped mounds; earthen embankments; mote-like trenches and magnificent geometric earthwork. There were other shapes also. After the year 500, effigy mounds in the shape of animals were also constructed. One, the great serpent mound in Ohio, takes the form of a huge snake almost a quarter mile long. In almost all cases, mound-builders were very precise and detailed in their work, creating complex monuments and large-scale replicas of animal forms. But the fundamental question remains. Why did they build mounds?

Most effigy mounds could only be fully seen and appreciated from the air. These mounds were more than just burial places. They probably had religious significance. They are statements on earth which have survived the centuries. In fact, mound building became an obsession in Eastern North America for almost 3000 years. Construction took place in river valleys on bluffs and in some cases, fortress-like earthen moulds in enclosed hilltops, perhaps for defensive purposes or for ceremonies. We simply do not know. But we do know that by far the largest and the most impressive earthwork was built across the Mississippi River from present day St. Louis. Emerging from the mist of centuries, they stand as a sentinel of the lost

civilization. These mounds stood at the heart of a great city. Today, we call it Cahokia. This was the metropolis of ancient America, the largest city in the United States before it was the United States. While Europe was mired in the Dark Ages, the people of the Mississippian culture were making rapid cultural and scientific advancements. Cahokia was a city of thousands of people and also a city of grand monuments. This civilization created some of the largest earthworks in the ancient world. Their trade network extended over much of the continent. It was a centre of art, commerce, power and wealth. But who were these people? They obviously had an advanced society organized on a massive scale and capable of both immense engineering works and refined artistic expressions. The fate of this great city and its occupancies are not clear but the legacy they left behind is an intriguing and fascinating look into the past.

Cahokia was near the confluence of the Mississippi Missouri and Illinois Rivers. It is in the centre of an expansive and fertile flood plain, today known as the American Bottom. The rivers, lakes, sluice and marshes provided habitat for many species of fish, waterfowl and aquatic plants. These extensive waterways were actually highways giving access to distant hunting grounds. The rivers were also trade routes where goods were exchanged, and ideas flowed as steadily as the water.

By 800 AD, the Mayan declined in Central America and Europe was in the midst of the Dark Ages. However, in the heartland of North America, conditions were ripe for the flowering of a great civilization. Out of the Woodland culture, another most highly advanced people were to emerge. For the Mississippians, Cahokia was their crowning achievement. For several hundred

years, it was the major centre of culture that spread across the central and southeastern North America. Cahokia was the most unique Indian settlement in North America, north of Mexico. It was during the Mississippian period, the Cahokia developed, became prosperous and eventually declined. Today, we build monuments to our civilization, such as sky scrapers and the St. Louis gateway arch, but a 1000 years ago, the ancient Mississippians were also building monuments, not of glass and steel, but of earth. The most dramatic monuments of Cahokia that survive today are the mounds. From 900 to 1400, Cahokians constructed more than 120 earthen mounds, moving over 55 million cubic feet of earth. Nearly all the mounds excavated at Cahokia were built in stages and appear to have been enlarged and modified over time. Quite often structures were erected upon flattop platform mounds. Archeological excavation suggests that these buildings were temples, dwelling of the elites, counsel lodges, and charnel houses used in burial ceremonies.

Monks Mound

Piercing Cahokia's horizon is Monks Mound, as high as a ten storied building. It is easily the most massive work of mound building and its pre-history is equivalent to that of a sky scrapper. Situated in the middle of the city, this is the largest pre-historic earthen structure in the Western Hemisphere. Cahokia's leaders conducted ceremonies and governed the city from the top of this massive man-made mountain, a platform mound. It covers over 14 acres and rises in four terraces to a height of over 100 feet.

Mound construction is not simply the process of piling up earth. These ancient engineers used soils of various textures to

build different parts of the mounds in order to provide proper drainage and structural integrity. Monks Mound was enlarged several times over a period of 300 years, from 900 to 1200, then modified slightly over the next 100 years.

Cahokia was a true city and buildings covered its landscape. By far the most common buildings at Cahokia were single family dwellings. The Cahokians erected a large number of structures for communal purposes. These include counsel lodges and open-air summer houses, both used for neighbourhood meetings. Elevated granaries and other food storage buildings and sauna-like sweat lodges where people, mostly men, went to purify their bodies and spirits. The most impressive building at Cahokia was a temple of religion and government. The 5000-square-foot home of the great chief on top of the Monk's Mound was large even by today's standards.

The Mississippians were accomplished and prolific builders. Among their most intriguing works was the astronomical sun calendar, which served as a giant computer to keep track of the changes within the seasons, the solar equinoxes and solstices. Enormous sets of post served as markers, as points on the campus to track the movement of the sun and possibly the moon and stars. A firepit was located near one winter solstice post. Fire may have burned here to encourage the sun's return from the south to re-warm and rejuvenate the earth for another annual cycle. A ceramic vessel recovered at the solstice post is decorated with the symbol of the sun and may have been used during their solstice ceremony.

We now know that Cahokia was a fortified city. Surrounding the heart of this ancient metropolis was an impenetrable

2-mile long arcade. The mysteries of Cahokia have been uncovered in many ways. Some clues to the puzzle were not visible on the ground. Early aerial photographs taken at fields near Monks Mound in 1922 revealed linear-like strips that might have been soil disturbances from an ancient wall. Excavation confirmed what the photographs suggested. However, it was not just one wall but a series of four enclosures built one after another over a 150 years period from 1100 to 1250. It was an extra-ordinary task. Each wall required 15,000 to 20,000 logs, one foot in diameter and 20 feet tall. The timber may have been covered with clay to protect against fire in the element. Undoubtedly, the wall created an impressive deterrent. To a degree, the wall may have served as a social barrier, separating the elite insiders, the privileged class and the leaders from those on the outside who the commoners. However, three telltale indicators lead archeologists to believe that it was primarily a defensive structure. The great height of the palisade, the presence of evenly placed bastions from where the archers shot arrows and finally the portions of the wall that were built through the residential area, indicate that dangers were imminent. For those trying to piece together the past, this brings us several questions. Was Cahokia, this unrivalled metropolis, the centre of wealth and power, in danger from outside forces? Were other Indian people also organized on such a massive scale as to present a real threat to this powerful city? The very presence of this stockade indicates this may have been the case.

Scattered throughout Cahokia were plazas, open expanses of parched clay trampled to the consistency of concrete.

Like shopping malls in America today, ancient American craftsmen may have established shops here and this is where day-to-day exchanges of information and ideas would have taken place. By far, the largest of these town squares was to be found in front of Monks Mound. The central plaza probably had an open-air market clustered on the edge and a field where games were played, and people assembled. Archeologists also discovered that much of the plaza area was intentionally filled and levelled to form a large flat expanse. Perhaps the most impressive feature of Cahokia is that this huge ancient expansive metropolis was built entirely by hand. There was no beast of burden as in the old world and amazingly, no Indian civilization developed the wheel. But even more amazing is the organization and sheer manpower necessary to build Cahokia. Thousands upon thousands of trees had to be chopped down with stone axes and transported miles by laborers just to create the stockade.

In 1150, with the estimated population of some 20,000 people, Cahokia was one of the great urban centres of the world. It was larger than London and most other European cities of that time. In fact, it will not be until the year 1800 before another American city, Philadelphia would surpass Cahokia's record. The orderly layout of Cahokia suggests that this was a planned city in the shape of a diamond with Monks Mound at its centre. It was a very crowded city and much more crowded than practically any American city of today. But as in modern cities, people lived in neighbourhoods and the basis of neighbourhood and community organization was the family. These neighbourhoods bustled with outdoor

activities, children playing, women grinding corn and all the comings and goings of daily life. The only quiet time was in the dead of the winter when they lived and worked mostly indoors, patiently waiting spring's return.

There was not one city to rival Cahokia. This city was the great capital of politics, religion, commerce and art. It was unique among all Mississippian communities. Were all of these communities linked and part of a great pre-historic Indian Nation with Cahokia as its capital, or were they separated and independent simply trading goods and ideas? There is no doubt that Cahokia was a cohesive organized society. None of these grand monuments could have been built any other way, nor could they have been built without well-tended fields, capable of feeding the population of tens of thousands. To feed this population required massive amounts of corn on a daily basis. While they raised several varieties of corn, they also cultivated squash, pumpkins, sunflowers and other plants. A typical meal for Mississippians most likely consisted of corn served in varieties of ways, meat and portions of vegetable stews made primarily of squash, nuts, pumpkins, and seasoned with salt and herbs. Those with higher status probably had more meat in their diet. Ironically, their great success with corn had long term negative effects.

With all the population growth, nutrients by stable corn crops eventually led to the depletion of the soil as well as other vital natural resources. Yet, despite its obvious disadvantages, Cahokia was undoubtedly a magnet in the same way as the cities are today. There was an elaborate hierarchy there that gave life a rigid structure and direction. The supreme power of the chief

emanated from a belief in his divine affiliation with the supreme power of the Sun God and the resulting control he wielded over the food surpluses. His priestly advisors were an elite class that directed community leaders and heads of family clans to design and supervise agricultural and building projects. Commoners toiled in the fields and borough pits and manufactured the goods needed to support the lifestyle of the ruling classes. Status, gender, age and kinship, all determined each person's precise role in life. As in many cultures, men and women had distinctly different roles. Men made tools, hunted and fished, while women carried out all the domestic and child-rearing duties, cultivated crops, and made pottery and clothing. Those of higher status were probably less burdened. The monuments and artifacts that we see are as important as in defining the culture. Are there things we cannot see? It is their beliefs. The beliefs and symbols gave life meaning and purpose and explained their grand scheme of existence. Like many Indian cultures, the Mississippian recognized the natural order to the universe and attempted to live in harmony with it.

Cahokia symbolism

Archeologists studied bones and arrowheads to reconstruct the life of this pre-historic people but, with symbolism left behind, they could not get into the minds of these people. According to archeologists, the Mississippian world was one of opposing forces; light and dark, order and anarchy, and good and evil. At Cahokia, the upper classes appeared to have used symbolism to manipulate the activities of the lower classes. One of the highly unusual aspects of the Cahokia symbolism was the extreme

focus on fertility. This is very unusual in the Eastern United States where warfare is generally depicted in symbolism.

The Cahokian's belief in after-life moved them to bury their honoured dead with elaborate rituals and lavish trappings of the life they had led. The dramatic extent of this came to light with the excavation of a small obscure mound, mound 72, just 6 feet high. Archeologists mapped and numbered all the mounds. This bridge top mound was overlooked on many early maps in the area. But later, archeologists who plotted it were intrigued by its unique diagonal axis and position. After years of investigation, mound 72 yielded tens of thousands of artifacts of the remains of 272 burials. Among the burials was an early leader resting on a blanket of 20,000 shell beads. Around him were six attendants and nearby caches of mica, rolled sheets of copper and more than 800 perfectly sharp projectile points.

Most of the population of Cahokia and of other settlements were buried in cemeteries, not mounds. Like many other ancient cultures, understanding the full extent of their beliefs, remains a mystery. Mississippians had no written language or records, and our knowledge of their beliefs was acquired in bits and pieces. We assume that the Mississippians enjoyed music, songs and dance and based on observation of historic tribes, they regularly engaged in games of chants and skills. Music was created through the use of rattles, drums, and flutelike instruments or whistles. Dancing was probably symbolic, like a weaving line of people mimicking a snake. Like Native Americans of the Southeast, they may have also played a stick and ball game, similar to Lacrosse. But the premier sports for the Mississippian was chunky.

In a way, it was their national pastime. Basically, any number of players participated on either of the two teams, though it was usually just one-on-one. A small stone disc was rolled down from one starting point and the opposing team would throw spears to the area at which they thought the disc would end up. Spreading to much of the Native Americans of the Southeast, chunky is believed to have played a major role in joining the different tribes together. Each tribe had unique rules, but the spirit of the game was essentially the same. The sport was taken so seriously, and gambling was so ingrained in the culture of chunky, that losers would even commit suicide in some cases, because they have wagered all of their possessions.

Apparently, tattooing and body-painting were used by both Mississippian men and women to enhance beauty and indicate social standings.

Following established trade routes, Mississippians travelled by foot and canoed vast distances in all directions, acquiring such things as copper from the upper Great Lakes, mica from Southern Appalachians, and seashells from both the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic seaboard. Well-crafted tools and food surpluses were traded for other highly prized raw materials. Copper from the north was shaped into implements, but most often hammered into sheets from which effigies and ornaments were cut. Through their extensive trade network, the Mississippians imported tens of thousands of exotic marine shells used for ornamentations. Trade and ideas flowed during the Mississippian zenith. But despite striking similarities to cultures in Mexico and elsewhere, there is no evidence of direct contacts with any Mexican culture. The

Mississippians seem to have emerged into prominence on their own. Time and elements have, for the most part, destroyed all traces of clothing, baskets, animal skins and other fragile items. Yet, miraculously some of their extremely fine woven clothes have remained preserved by copper salt so charred by fire. But one tool changed their life. Large hoes made corn cultivation efficient and, without efficient agriculture, neither Cahokia nor any of the large Mississippian cities could have developed. The most abundant artifacts found are the fragile remains of pottery, mostly made from local clays and formed through the coiling process. Over the years, Mississippian pottery became more refined and artistic. They also made large thick-walled pans for salt production and stump-ware, whose three, stump-shaped legs were probably used to support the pots over fire. For centuries, forests around Cahokia were sources for the tremendous quantities of wood essential to life there. They had to have wood every day for firewood for thousands of people and for hundreds of years. They were basically depleting the resources of forests around the area.

Though deforestation may not have affected small Mississippian towns, it probably was a contributing factor in Cahokia's eventual demise. The Mississippians made full use of the animals they hunted. Turtle shells became bowls and combs, feathers were used in necklaces, headdresses and capes, skins were used for clothing, bags and blankets. By far, the most important animal was the white tail deer. Besides being the major source of meat, antlers and bones were used for arrow points, tools, and ceremonial headdresses. The inner bark of cedar trees was made

into fine baskets and fabrics. Weavers spun animal hair and silky fibres from animals and plants into threads which they then finger-wove into sashes and other fabrics. Rawhide, incredibly strong, was used to lash tools to handles and braded to make bow strings. Mississippians had managed to build a true civilization based on corn and a simple digging tool, the hoe. They embroidered their civilization with art and wealth of trade items. Yet, even while they continued to build their earth and monuments, it was the beginning of the end. In the 1200s, at the same time the crusades were ending in Europe, the decline and eventual abandonment of Cahokia began. To date, no sign of epidemic or invasion or natural disaster has been uncovered. Why then did this people of unparalleled wealth and power move away? Strangely, Cahokia's very success is what probably led to its downfall.

This huge city over-exploited the natural resources around it. Because agriculture was so successful, it led to overpopulation, pollution, poor sanitation and an increase in contagious diseases. The gradually cooling climate affected food production and surpluses declined. Cahokia's political and economic control waned. Disillusioned and dwindling masses likely rebelled but there is no clear evidence of warfare. This ancient metropolis simply faded away as its people slowly left. By the year 1400, it was all over. What became of this people is unknown. We can only guess who their descendants might be. The Mississippian culture survived the

centuries in isolated villages and city states such as Natchez, Mississippi.

The world changed in 1492. Undoubtedly, the advances of the Europeans would not have been nearly so rapid if the first explorer would have encountered the powerful organized Mississippians. We now know positively that Columbus was not the first European to discover the Americas. Five hundred years earlier, the Vikings had not only discovered America, but they had actually colonized it. Passed down for hundreds of years, the Viking's oral history, the sagas, told of their sailing ventures to a new unknown land. Today, their villages can be seen at lands and meadows in Newfoundland, Canada. That settlement was located on rocky, rugged shores near streams. The sturdy reconstructed stud-homes of the north-explorers suggest that the Vikings intended to stay. It all happened around the year 1000. The Vikings also left behind buttons, broaches and many other signs of their cultures. They brought with them their newly adopted Christian religion but there was probably no attempt to spread the gospel. We do not really know why the Vikings abandoned their settlements, but their sagas tell of their hostile encounters with the native people. It may have been the first battle in the long war that would begin again with Columbus in 1492. Only in this case the Vikings did not have the advantage of guns. The odds were more even, and this possibly was the first fight the ancient Americans won. ■

REFERENCE

A Documentary on Indians of Eastern Woodlands—ancient cities and mound builders of the east.

* An engineer by profession, in his own right, Benoy R. Samanta is also a contemplative writer who champions universal values.