Ganga Katha
SAMAKSHATA
Along the Holy
Ganga River
नमामि गंगे
INTACH

Ganga Katha

SAMAKSHATA

2022

ALONG THE HOLY GANGA RIVER

नमामि गंगे

INTACH

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

Collated By Lokesh Ohri based upon Reports Authored by INTACH
The Reports are Available on the Website of NMCG and Carry References to the Sources referred to therein with due credit

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Ganga Katha

SAMAKSHATA

ALONG THE HOLY GANGA RIVER

2022

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आज़ादी के रंग भारतीय संस्कृति के संग | Azaadi Ke Rang Bharatiya Sanskriti Ke Sang

INTACH Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

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This publication includes summarized text culled from detailed reports prepared by INTACH on 51 districts along the main stem of Ganga on aspects of architectural, cultural and natural heritage.

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"Our civilisation has developed near the rivers. Be it Sindhu, Ganga, Yamuna or Saraswati, our rivers and seas hold economic as well as strategic importance for our country. These are our gateways to the whole world."

Narendra Modi,
Prime Minister of India

This mammoth task of surveying, report writing and photography, led the researchers to explore 51 districts over 43 months, stretching over 2525 sq km. The work was accomplished by the tireless efforts of several teams ably led by outstanding leadership. Experts involved are acknowledged with appreciation and gratitude.

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Message

The centrality of Ma Ganga in the lives of all Indians is undisputable. River Ganga, our national river is the lifeline of the country and symbolizes the culture, faith and sentiments of the people. Not just domestic tourists, the country witnesses several international tourists who are enthralled by the river and its rich and vibrant heritage – embodied in both natural and cultural dimensions.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga has collaborated with INTACH to conduct a study on the cultural mapping of natural, built and intangible heritage in 51 districts along the Ganga. This was an important initiative, as the identification and documentation of the rich natural and socio-cultural heritage of the river would play a critical role in reconnecting our citizens with the river and its heritage, as well as carry forward the concept of Arth Ganga espoused by Hon'ble Prime Minister.

The publication is indicative of the holistic vision of the Namami Gange mission as well as the approach which was adopted by INTACH to carry out the mammoth task. The publication covers all the myriad aspects of the heritage of the River Ganga and is dedicated to all the people who help us to preserve, conserve and rejuvenate it.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat,
Minister for Jal Shakti,
Government of India.

Foreword

Perhaps for the first time ever, a district-to-district documentation of all aspects of heritage along the holy Ganga River has been carried out by INTACH. This deep-dive documentation and research covers 51 districts across different states and physiographic zones, from the upper reaches of the Himalayas to the farthest limits of the Delta.

The work has involved concerted efforts of several researchers across the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. This work has taken several years and what you see in this volume is its distillate. No one publication can cover the immense wealth of heritage that Ganga offers, but what we witness here is a comprehensive and serious effort, to study the entire stem of this holy river in this manner.

Identification of cultural assets along the Ganga will help us link them to the economy, the Arth Ganga, a concept that we have been working on. These cultural assets can easily be identified with this effort and ideas for further employment generation can be developed around them. Within the districts, their built and cultural heritage, their rites and rituals, eminent personalities and cuisines, one can build a thriving economy of cultural tourism and pilgrimage.

The entire documentation is detailed in 153 reports (about 15,000 pages all told) which will be available on the NMCG website.

I appreciate INTACH for bringing out this text of immense value and the ideas outlined here will go a long way in planning and policy development for conserving Ma-Ganga. I am sure that this volume will be of great help to local administrators and officials to help them understand the heritage of districts they are working in, enabling further conservation and development of heritage along the Ganga for the economic growth of the nation.

G. Asok Kumar
Director-General
National Mission for Clean Ganga,
Ministry of Jal Shakti
Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation
Government of India

Development & Ganga
Rejuvenation
Government of India

Message

Critical as it is to ensure the 'nirmalta' [purity] and the 'aviralta' [uninterrupted flow] of the holy Ganga, it is also vital to realize that Ganga is a cultural stream and a better understanding of its natural, built and cultural heritage can only reinforce our actions and resolve to recover a vibrant mother river. INTACH is honoured and privileged to have been given an opportunity to enlarge the understanding of the Ganga and hopes that the voluminous and comprehensive reports of 51 districts, maps, films and publications will provide a better guiding context to development efforts along the main stem of the river.

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) L.K. Gupta, AVSM
Chairman, INTACH

Introduction

Ganga, as we are all aware, is the cradle of Indian civilisation. Untl 1860, Ganga remained the main artery of trade and commerce, leading into the very heart of India. Kaushambi, Kampilya, Tamralipti and Champa were once flourishing riverine ports, perhaps even the richest in the world. The arrival of colonial powers, and consequently, rail and road transport, and the shift of the capital to Delhi altered the Ganga landscape completely. The growth of the rail and road transport network shrank the river borne traffic, thereby affecting the spatial patterns of towns and the riparian economy.

The entire documentation addressing a corridor of 5 km width on each bank of Ganga is detailed in 153 reports (about 15,000 pages all told) which will be available on the NMCG website. The documentation lists architectural heritage, cultural and natural heritage aspects.

In this volume, in about 600 pages we present a flavour of each district's documentation of the Built, Intangible and Natural Heritage of all fifty-one districts along the Ganga. The volume clearly indicates the immense wealth of heritage along the ancient districts like Haridwar, Prayagraj, Kannauj, Varanasi and Murshidabad. It also points to striking heritage sites in colonial cities like Kolkata.

This volume also points towards a lot of undiscovered and unrecognised heritage along the river in little known areas like Devprayag, Bijnor, Amroha, Rajmahal, Chandernagar and Purva Medinipur. There are numerous tourism-circuits waiting to be developed, and a thousand voyages that could be launched on the sacred river itself, to destinations hitherto unexplored.

This book will be of great value to officials in the administration, tourism departments of states, conservation professionals and interested individuals in embarking on journeys of deep explorations, into the magical world of the Ganga. This work can spark the revival of a heritage economy focused on the Mother River, Ganga.

I take this opportunity to express thanks to Shri Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, Former Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga for initiating research aimed at highlighting the heritage aspects of the river.

Thanks are due to NMCG Director General, Shri G. Asok Kumar, and the NMCG team, for supporting this mammoth task.

I would like to express my thanks to the INTACH team, which operated under difficult field conditions and pandemic related issues to accomplish this humongous task.

Strategic interventions made by INTACH Chairman, Maj. Gen. (Retd.) L. K. Gupta (AVSM), and Dr. C. T. Misra, Member Secretary, INTACH, resolved many a difficulty in in crossing the finish line, for which I am thankful.

Manu Bhatnagar
Principal Director,
Natural Heritage Division,
Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage

PRELUDE

Water is sacred. We owe our life to this elixir. Although only a small portion of water flows in riverbeds on the earth's surface, all great civilizations originated along the banks of flowing streams. People prosper and settlements flourish if these currents continue to flow, clean, fresh, and unobstructed. Civilizations threaten their own survival when they cease to respect nature and the natural order of the resources we derive from it.

Of all rivers that sustain humanity, Ganga is the holiest. On its banks, it is possible to reconcile modernity with seemingly archaic rituals and high spiritual philosophy that has deep ancient roots. No wonder, in contemporary times too, Ganga is revered as a goddess and cherished as Ma, Maiya, Devi, Mother. The river exudes a sacred aura, merging landscape and culture, with life rhythms along its course.

Landscapes along the Ganga are undoubtedly captivating, but what is more touching is the bond people share with the mother river. These perennial glacial flows have shaped our cultural identity, which, quite like the river landscapes on its banks, is also fluid. Ganga's immense cultural capital endows to the social fabric of our country, a spiritual and cultural anchor amidst all its mind-boggling diversity.

Springing from a glacial cave 3,892 meters above mean sea level, Mother Ganga rushes onto the plains of Northern India. Drawn to her life-giving waters, civilization has crowded her banks for millennia, harvesting sustenance from the soil that is just another of her several, less appreciated, benedictions. Today, over 600 million people live on her bounty in the Ganga River Basin, a land mass that covers nearly a quarter of India.

But Ganga is more than just a river. Her earthly form embodies her divinity, she is the goddess that grants moksha, deliverance from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Pilgrims converge to the spiritual centres along her banks to bathe, pray and offer oblations. Over centuries, these towns and cities along her banks have developed enduring human networks of clients and customers offering diverse ritual services. The growth of these cities as centres of learning and sources of spiritual solace has led to the growth of unique cultures, crafts, fairs, and festivals. For long, these aspects of the river have been overlooked, especially as means to reconnect people with the task of conserving river landscapes in order, to derive long term human sustenance. While we look to removing pollutants and maintenance of river flow as a means of revitalising the river, perhaps the most significant task would be to reconnect humans with the river, so that every individual begins to comprehend its indispensability to their present and future.

This book is a tribute to the Mother River, a labour of love of years of research and documentation conducted along the river, that seeks to create an inventory of cultural and natural resources along the Ganga. We have walked, flown, driven and slept along the banks, talked to a myriad cross section of people, and made a genuine effort to understand their interactions and emotional connect with the river.

The next step is to ensure recognition and re-calibration of the information collected as an instrument towards preserving the nurturer of

Indian culture, Mother Ganga.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga, or Namami Gange, as it is popularly referred to, with its stated mission of effective abatement of pollution in the river, combined with conservation and rejuvenation of the national river, through this monumental effort in partnership with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage or INTACH, has, for the first time, prepared a comprehensive inventory of built heritage, cultural practices, and natural wealth along the river. This is an effort to know and understand the river as one holistic entity, from its glacial source to its deltaic mouth. The humongous task has thrown up interesting findings and trends whch could help complete the jig-saw puzzle that Ganga revitalisation remains for those engaged in the task of preserving it.

As one turns the pages, what one reads is a distillate from thousands of pages of data, inventory taking, scientific observation, personal interviews, maps, audio-visual documentation, articles, scientific papers, listings, readings of reference material, map making and much more – covering a large landmass, diverse and quite a bit of it, difficult of access.

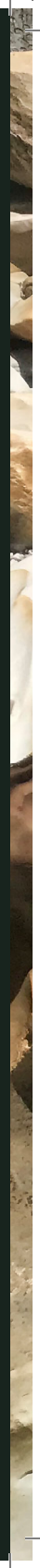
In this volume, whch may be read together with Volume I (Samagrata), we have condensed the entire documentation of the Ganga, to give a flavour of the massive documentation on a district-wise basis. While Volume I covers how Ganga has come to be an epitome of the spirit of Indian-ness, this second volume gives a district-wise detail on the aspects of architecture, culture, and nature, in a holistic manner. Each chapter describes the essence of one of the fifty one districts along the main stem of the river.

We offer this book to you, and to Mother Ganga that flows perennial within all of us, in the hope that it will help us grasp the significance of preserving the Mother River, a task so vital to our own survival.

Lokesh Ohri

Samakshata

Presence



Ganga flows over Granites at Surya Kund, Gangotri

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Ganga
Katha

INTRODUCTION

GANGA

Warp & Weft of India's Fabric

Bharal, The Blue Sheep, is an Expert Rock Climber

The Journey of Ganga Begins from the Glaciers

Just as some parts of the body are considered purer than others, so are certain places on earth held to be auspicious because of their extraordinary power and purity, the efficacy of their water, and because they were frequented by sages.

Mahabharata

Whenever I look at a map of India, the allegory of the country as Bharat Mata comes to mind, the map itself having been represented as a human figure by several artistes. And the first thing you notice on the map of India is the river Ganga. Like a garment flowing in the breeze, wrapped around the shoulder and the upper body, Ganga protects the fragile body of this land against the elements.

Journeys to the banks of Ganga are timeless. They begin with our birth and bring us to this divine water-body, time and again. Each pilgrimage to the Ganga is not only an opportunity for experiencing boundless joy in the presence of the divine river, but also leads to deep reflection upon the human condition. Even as we experience the divinity of pilgrim sites along the Ganga, we realise that the tradition of travelling to the river is thousands of years old. Indian civilization has developed over a period of 5,000 continuous years or more and has no single founder or creed. It consists of a complex system of beliefs and practices; organization is minimal and a hierarchy, non-existent. Not conforming to Western definitions of religion, faith in India suggests a commitment and respect for an ideal way of life, that most of us describe as dharma. It is this quest for dharma that pulls people to the Ganga, time and time again.

On the banks of the river, one can feel the presence of a mindboggling number of devis and devtas. However, the reality is that most people understand that there is a oneness that lies underlies these diversities, and that there could be

many ways to access this oneness. The multitudes of gods are seen as starting points to the spiritual path, and everyone is allowed their own point of view on how to proceed. India has a cultural genius for embracing diversity in a way that it is the recognition of diversity that unites, rather than causing ruptures. God has many faces, and that one divine reality is manifested in multiple ways.

Ordinary folk along the Ganga can also be sometimes seen as adhering to disparate, contradictory theories. They can be sceptics and devotees at the same time. Nowhere is this more apparent than when viewing the thousands of Hindu worshippers in the waters of the Ganga. The pollution and harmful bacteria that have come into the waters do not deter the multitudes from immersing themselves – they maintain that the water is sacred and that it is spiritually pure because it comes from heavens. But, nowadays, even when one finds the multitudes bathing in the river, one observes very few drinking the water, whereas it was mandatory once. Despite the concern for safety, faith in the river remains unshakeable. Even during the times when the Covid pandemic was at its most destructive, pilgrims flocked to the Haridwar Kumbha, in the express belief that no harm can come to them if they seek refuge in the Ganga.

Of several reasons that account for this faith in the river's curative and emancipatory qualities, perhaps the most significant is the fact that more than 600 million people live on her largesse in the Ganga river basin, which covers a quarter of the country's landmass. From the wellspring of the Gaumukh Glacier in the Himalayas to the vastness of the Bay of Bengal, at Sagar Island, Ganga constantly undertakes her 2525 kilometre journey across five states – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Even as I write this, and as and when you read it, Ganga will be flowing, making this journey, attracting millions to her life giving waters.

The Position of Gaumukh , Snout of the Glacier, in 1891, now retreated by 3 kms

Though Gaumukh is generally recognised as the source of Ganga, the river that emerges from here is not yet Ganga. It is the Bhagirathi. Similarly, the river Alaknanda emerges close to the revered shrine of Badrinath, while the Mandakini emerges into the light as a frost laden stream or snowmelt close to sacred spot of Kedarnath. These three and several other Himalayan streams come together at the five sacred spots known as Panchprayag in Uttarakhand, before the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi finally confluence at Devprayag, to form Ganga. She then makes her brisk journey down into the plains of North India, making the decisive crossing at god's gateway, Hardwar.

Ganga continues to chisel away at the Northern Plains, as if carving out her own masterpiece out of this nation called India. She

Himalayan Crow (Chough) With Shivling Peak in Background

traverses more than half the breadth of the country in a journey that has changed this part of the earth into the most bountiful in the world. Her annual monsoonal endowment of mineral rich silt has acted like a salve on the desiccated skin of this land and transformed it into a landscape rich in plant, animal and human life. Covering an area 86,000 square kilometres wide, this is the most populous river basin. It was because of the abundance that she sustained in North India, right from late Harappan period, when settlers turned east from the Indus Valley, that Ganga rose to prominence in Indian culture and religion. The geographical and social focus was now the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, with Ganga becoming the sacred river goddess. That focus has sustained till the present.

Upon her entry into West Bengal, she is riven into two channels at the Farakka Barrage. The larger of the two flows into Bangladesh as the Padma, while the other meanders through West Bengal as the Bhagirathi-Hooghly, to eventually tip into the Bay of Bengal at the Sundarbans, in a many armed embrace of river and sea. Throughout its journey, the river remains steeped in spirituality, while supporting economies and remaining alive in contemporaneity as well as history.

Speaking of history, one of the earliest capitals on the banks of the Ganga was Hastinapur, of the Kuru Kingdom (1200 to 850 BCE), before the river shifted eastwards, leaving the city behind. Jain texts name Kampilya (now around Farukkhabad in Uttar Pradesh), Varanasi and Champa in Eastern Bihar, among India's ancient capitals along the Ganga. Pataliputra, near Patna, grew to be the powerful nucleus of several dynasties from the late Magadha, Nanda Maurya to the Gupta periods. These kingdoms prospered not only from the rich harvest of the Gangetic Plain, but revenues born of trade on the river. Cargoes of grain, textiles and spices

Boats are the Most Common Mode of Transportation to Travel to Diaras

travelled both inland on the Ganga and out to foreign shores via the maritime port of Tamralipti, present day Tamluk in West Bengal. In fact, it was from Tamralipti that Emperor Ashoka dispatched his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Ceylon, Sri Lanka, to preach Buddhism to its people. From here, the Buddhist faith spread across South East Asia.

Sutta Pitaka, second part of the Tripitaka or Pali Canon, recalls foreign trade from 5th century BCE, when ships carried little birds to help make landfall. By the middle of the first millennium, the commercial opportunities presented by the river were grasped by intrepid Europeans who reached into the heart of India through her vein. They came as traders and stayed as settlers. Among the earliest to stake their claim on India were the Portuguese in Bengal. They established a trading post first at Chittagong, now in Bangladesh in 1528, and later at Saptagram on the western bank of the River Hooghly in 1535. They were followed by the Dutch with their settlement at Chinsurah in 1635. The British at Kolkata in 1690, the French at Chandernagore in 1697, and the Danes in Serampore in 1755. Their commercial factories turned into forts and forts grew into towns where western science, industry and civic systems were seeded. But it was eventually the British imprint that stamped its authority and ideology, spreading from Calcutta, its capital city, to the rest of the subcontinent.

Colonialism gave way to independence in the 20th century. With a reshaping of India's physical and political body, technology freed people from the traditional moorings of land and river, permitting them to venture farther from the familiar, warm embrace of the Mother River. While the migrations of the modern age reoriented social values and upturned hierarchies of place so that the vaunted status the river might have once held in history was watered down with time; but not the Ganga. If anything, the river's centrality to the spiritual and material progress of the country has only been reinforced. The Indian Government has an entire ministry dedicated to its revival, the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. In recent years, the government has made public its plans to develop for trade and passenger traffic, the Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River systems between Allahabad up to Haldia in West Bengal, a 1620-kilometre stretch, that was in 1986 designated National Waterway Number One. Sizeable budgets have been allocated to the river to clean it, rejuvenate cultures around it and restore it to its rightful place at the altar of India. Ganga continues to be the fulcrum of national life, a provider that sustains food and faith. And for as long as clean water gushes through her veins, she will remain so.

In the year 2017, the Uttarakhand High Court declared that the river Ganga was a indeed a living entity and must be granted rights similar to humans. Although the judgement was not upheld by the Supreme Court of India, this marks the beginning of a shift from an extractive mindset to one where conservation safeguards can be extended to this lifeline of Indian culture. During the court proceedings it was observed, perhaps rightly so, that legal personhood to river Ganga may not be a great idea, since she is already much more exalted – a divine

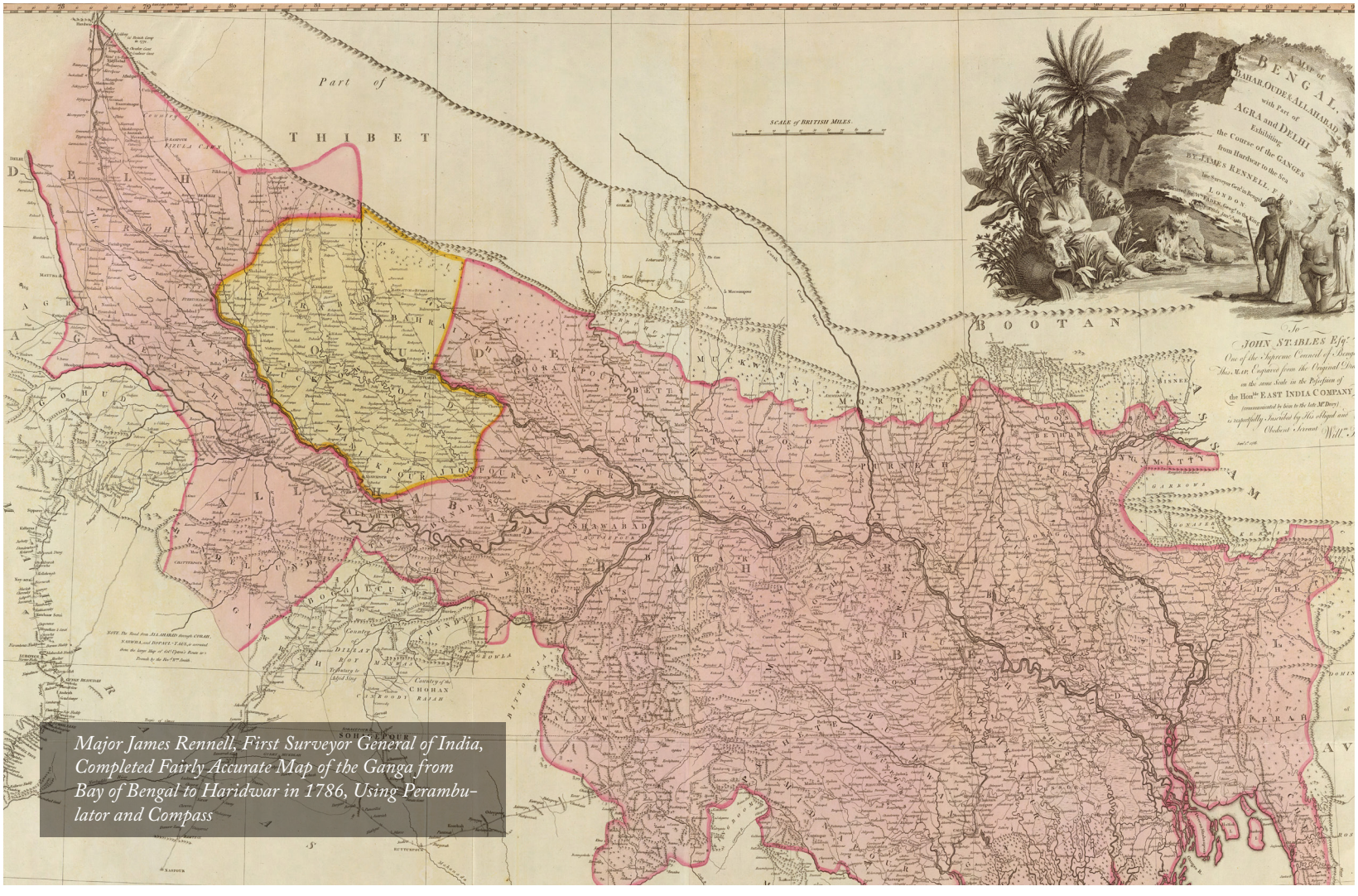
entity to most Indians, a goddess in fact.

But have we cared for the river thus? Have we not taken it for granted? Legal remedies apart, the onus falls upon all Indians to become custodians and guardians of the river that gives us so much. What we need is a complete attitudinal shift, from greed and callousness, to an attitude of respect and harmony, if we are to ensure the survival of Ganga, our other rivers, and indeed ourselves and our generations to come.

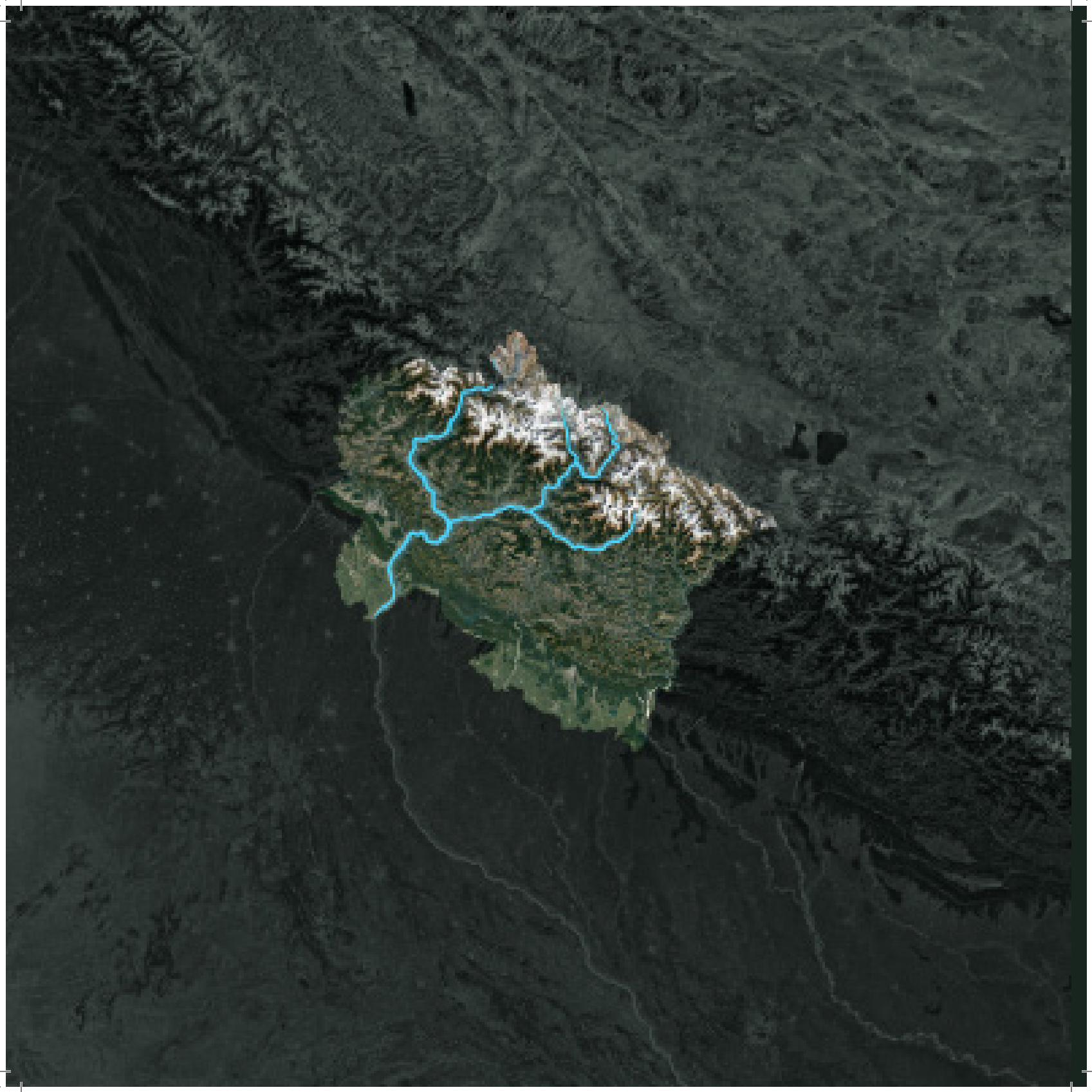
With thoughts of preserving the Mother River, let us embark on a journey that will take us through the entire length of the river, through each district that the river passes. Imagine yourselves to be the sage Bhagirath, who has struggled for eons to ensure the descent of Ganga. Imagine that you have coaxed Shiva into breaking Ganga's fall before it flows on earth. Imagine yourself on a lone boat, with Kewat as your boatman, singing the classical Bhatiyali song of the boatman, the manjhi, taking you down the Ganga from source to mouth.

Now it is time for you to travel the entire course of the river, to make sure it makes its journey to the sea, only to return to the Himalayas with the reversal in the Monsoonal cycles.

But before you take this pilgrimage, a caveat may be added that no one publication can cover all aspects of so vast a land area and so ancient a culture. Let this be a continuous process of exchange of information, to enable us to enrich our knowledge about Ganga.



Major James Rennell, First Surveyor General of India, Completed Fairly Accurate Map of the Ganga from Bay of Bengal to Haridwar in 1786, Using Perambulator and Compass



GANGA THROUGH

UTTARAKHAND

CHAPTER 1

UTTARKASHI

Kashi of the North, Where it All Begins

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Uttarkashi
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

District Uttarkashi in Western Uttarakhand is a land of pilgrimage. The glacial mouth of the Ganga, Gaumukh is located here in the Gangotri National Park. Of the four Char Dhams in the Himalayas, the four principal places of pilgrimage, two – Gangotri and Yamunotri are located here. The district is home to the Jad Bhotiya people and several other *pahadi* groups that practise agro-pastoralism. Transhumance is a common feature.

Once known as Badahaat, or big market, the region was a space of brisk trade across the border with Tibet until the China War in 1962.

The Source *of* Ganga

Gaumukh is actually the source of the Bhagirathi, the principal stream of the Ganga that flows downstream till the district of Tehri. To reach Gaumukh Glacier, one has to trek for 15 kms from Gangotri Temple. One passes through Chirbasa (the landscape of *Chir* trees) and Bhojbasa (the landscape of *Bhojpatra* trees, though these have become scant now). Ringing the glacier are lofty peaks of the Gangotri group of mountains like Chaukhamba, Kedarnath, Thalay Sagar, Shivling, Meru and Bhagirathi I, II and III.

The landscape hosts a complex

Bhagirathi Flowing Through Gangotri Valley

river system too. Numerous unnamed streams join the Bhagirathi River from its source up to the town of Gangotri. At Gangotri, Kedar Ganga originating from Kedar Tal, and Rudra Ganga originating at the Rudugera Peak join the Bhagirathi. Jad Ganga, originating at the Nelong Valley near Nandi Parvat joins Bhagirathi at Lanka. At Bhaironghati, Jhanvi River joins Bhagirathi. Bhaironghati also boasts of the highest bridge of India, Lanka Bridge, with the river flowing 103 feet below the bridge. The Kakora Gad and Jalandhari Gad join the Bhagirathi at the towns of Harsil and Dharali respectively. Siyan Gad, a small tributary joins Bhagirathi at Jhala. The town of Uttarkashi is situated on the confluence of Asi Ganga and Bhagirathi. Bhagirathi River acts as a guiding force all along its course, resulting into formation of varied and fascinating naturally formed structures all along its length. The river shows different structures as caves, gorges, waterfalls, flood plains and numerous other formations. The mud mounds of Chirbasa have stood tall in the midst of frequent landslides in its immediate vicinity.

Re-living *the* Past

Historians believe that Uttarkashi could have been a part of the Kushana Empire. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited Uttarkashi in the 7th century CE, calls it Brahmapura, a kingdom ruled by queens. The area became a part of the Garhwal Kingdom under the Panwar Dynasty who consolidated the 52 fortresses or the *Baoni-Garhs* of Garhwal in the 14th century and went on to rule for the next four centuries until the Gurkhas established their rule in Garhwal in 1804. A year earlier, the town of Uttarkashi had been ravaged by a massive earthquake. When the British defeated the Gurkhas and signed the Treaty of Sagauli with them in 1816, Uttarkashi, part of Tehri Garhwal, came under the Tehri Rule with Rawain, a part of the district, returned to Tehri kings subsequently. In 1960, it was made into a separate district and became a part of Uttarakhand in the year 2000.

The rituals around the river and her temple at Gangotri are performed by the Semwal Brahmins of village Mukhba which is also the winter residence of Goddess Ganga

Bhayudi Bugyal, A Prominent Meadow in Uttarkashi

Mythological Links

Descent *of the* Ganga

Legends tell us that King Bhagirath brought the river from the celestial realms. He was the prince of Sagar Dynasty whose granduncles once mistakenly accused an ascetic, Sage Kapila, of theft. The sage became furious and cursed them to be burnt alive. Since they had died before their pre-ordained time, their souls would not find any rest. When their father, King Sagar, came to know about this, he went to Sage Kapila's *ashram* to ask him to undo the curse. Kapila accepted the apology but said that the ashes of his sons had to be cast into the Ganga, a river that flowed in the heavens. Not wasting any time, King Sagar and his other son started praying to bring the Ganga to earth. But it was his great-great-grandson, Bhagirath, who achieved this.

Since the mighty flow of the Ganga needed to be controlled, Bhagirath decided to seek Lord Shiva's help, who caught Ganga in his matted locks. Author Krittivasa writes in the Bengali Ramayana that when Raja Bhagirath brought the Ganga to earth by releasing her from Lord Shiva's locks, she first fell on the great mountain Sumeru and resided there for twelve years in a dark cave. Trapped in darkness, she asked Bhagirath to plead with Lord Indra to send his elephant Airavat who would cut through the rugged mountain and release her. However, when Airavat arrived for the purpose, he became enchanted by Ganga's beauty and desired her. Goddess Ganga said that she would agree only on one condition that Airavat will have to bear more than two of her waves. Lured by this promise, Airavat tried to withstand the two waves, but they were so powerful that he was nearly drowned. Humbled, he agreed to cut Sumeru into four parts and the Ganga thus fell into four distinct streams namely Vasu, Bhadra, Shveta and Alaknanda.

Events *of* Interest

Magh Mela

The banks of the Ganga in Uttarkashi city have the Manikarnika Ghat which hosts the grand celebration of Magh Mela that begins with the bath on the day of Makar Sankranti, the festival of harvest, where the sun god is worshipped along with many local deities who are bathed in the Bhagirathi and made offerings to. It marks the first day of sun's transit into the *Makara,*

(Capricorn) marking the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of longer days. The procession of the deities is led by *bajgi* drummers and women who dance and sing all along the way. The local deity called Kandaar Devta of Sangrali Village inaugurates the Magh Fair by cutting a ribbon, before which he comes and takes a dip (*snan*) in the Bhagirathi.

Once upon a time, before the 1962 war on the border, the Mela would be choc-a-bloc with Tibetan traders and businessmen from as far away as Peshawar, who would bring their wares for trade. This fair was a great showcase of cross-border trade.

Selku Mela

Another fair is the day-long Selku Mela, primarily celebrated in Mukhba in the month of *Bhadon* or September. It is celebrated to show gratitude to Lord Someshwar and Nanda Devi. They are believed to be the manifestations of Shiva and Parvati. Since most rituals in the Himalayas are embodied, they possess the bodies of certain chosen people. Someshwar is the deity who protects the forests of Harsil-Dharali, and can punish culprits if they abuse local natural resources.

ART *at the* HEART

Wool Workers

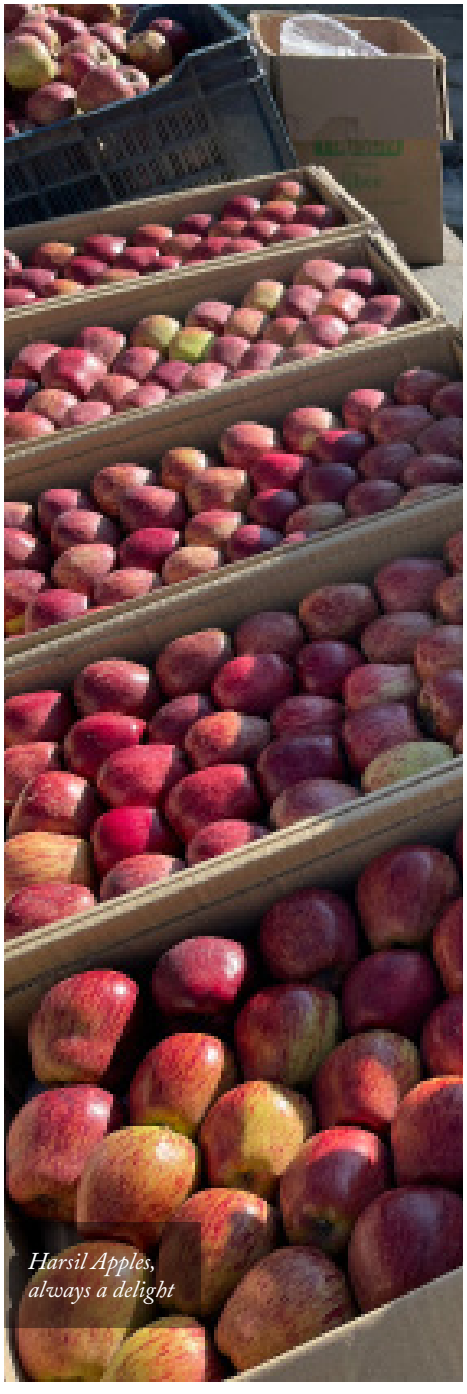
In the upper reaches of Uttarkashi District in the Nelong Valley near Gangotri, the Ganga branches into the Jad Ganga. Nelong forms the border with Tibet. Locals used to trade with Tibetan merchants from the village of Nelong Valley, Zadong, using a wooden walkway called Gartang Gali which has recently been renovated and opened for tourists after it was closed for public access post the 1962 Indo-China War. Most of the Jad Bhotias, then migrated to other areas. However, some continued to stay in their transition village called Bagori, near Harsil, where they retain dual identities of being Hindu as well as Buddhists. The Jad Bhotias are known for weaving and knitting caps and sweaters using white and brown natural wool, which is famous throughout the country. The wool is spun using two types of spinning tools, namely *Takli* (operated with both hands) and *Bageshwari Charkha* (operated with hands and feet).

Terraced Fields in Gangotri Valley

Nelong forms the border with Tibet. Locals used to trade with Tibetan merchants from the village of Nelong Valley, Zadong, using a wooden walkway called Gartang Gali

Raso

Among the most popular art forms of the region is the Raso Dance, per-



Harsil Apples, always a delight

formed by men and women in local fairs. It is a colourful dance form where men and women form separate groups and hold hands with each other in a criss-cross manner matching alternative steps. Traditional Garhwali songs are sung while praising local deities and describing the local landscape.

Gastronomic Delights

Wilson's Apple

One of the most famous delicacies of Uttarkashi is the Wilson's Apple, a variety of the fruit cultivated in Harsil, near Gangotri. Apple cultivation and trade forms a key source of livelihood for many people in this region.

Kidney Beans

Harsil is also famous for its large red kidney beans, the Harsil *Rajma*, that are now sold across the country. The cultivation of the *Rajma* forms the source of livelihood for many families on the banks of the Bhagirathi in Harsil and villages around it. The kidney beans can now also be easily found in the markets of Dehradun where they are regularly traded by local farmers.

The climate is conducive to walnut growth which are traded in the plains.

Uttarkashi is the trekking capital of Uttarakhand hosting some of the most popular treks of the state. One of this is the Auden's Col, considered to be the toughest of treks. Crossing Auden's Col and Mayali Pass, one can reach Gangotri from Kedarnath. Auden's Col is named after geologist John Bicknell Auden who first discovered it in 1935 and crossed it in 1939. He was the older brother of poet W.H. Auden

Millets

Among the local crops one can find Marcha (called *cholai* in Hindi, cooked as a green leafy vegetable and also used as grain for making *rotis*/ breads) and Kodak (called *Mandwa*), a dark coarse grain used for making *rotis* that are often eaten with *chutneys* or sauces made from local leaves. Mandwa is a heavy grain that keeps the body warm during the winter season.

People who Fascinate

Pahadi Wilson

Uttarkashi is home to the stories of

Frederick Wilson, a mercenary soldier who deserted the British army in the middle of the 19th century and came to this part of the world to hide himself from the prying eyes of the British East India Company. Here, he married two local women Raimatta and Gulabi, both from Mukhba Village near Gangotri. Wilson began transporting timber logs from the local forests on the Ganga all the way up to Haridwar where they were collected at depots and traded for the expanding railway network. Wilson reaped riches from the timber business and also minted currency in his own name. He became so powerful that he was called the Raja of Harsil. Locals believe that a curse from the local deity Someshwar, for Wilson had destroyed the *Devta's* sacred forests, ended this chapter in history, with the next generation wiping away the family wealth. Wilson's Bungalow in Harsil was also gutted in a fire incident.

Temples *that* Matter

The Gangotri Temple

Uttarkashi has many magnificent buildings and temples made from stone and wood, one of the most prominent being the Gangotri Temple. Believed to have been established by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century CE, the temple was severely damaged in the 1803 earthquake and rebuilt by the Gurkha Captain Amar Singh Thapa. However, the temple was renovated in 1935 by the Maharaja of Jaipur, Madho Singh, which is why its architecture now somewhat resembles the Rajasthani style. Next to the temple stands a rock called Bhagirath Shila, where it is believed Raja Bhagirath prayed for Ganga's descent. Close to this is a majestic waterfall, Surya Kund, where it is believed that the first rays of the sun fall each day.

The Temple at Gangotri

Vishwanath Temple, Uttarkashi

Another beautiful temple is the Vishwanath Temple of Uttarkashi town, said to have been built by Sage Parshuram and later by King Gangeshwar. It has the divine pillar *Shakti Stambha*, which according to mythological beliefs, was used by the gods against demons for the *samudra manthan*, or the churning of the oceans in search for nectar of immortality. There is another temple called the Shakti temple that stands in the precincts here. This has been referred to as *Sukh-ka-Mandir*, or the temple of happiness, by Atkinson. But the main attraction here is an 8-metre-high trident which is believed to have been thrown at the demons by Goddess Durga. The *trishul*, is made of iron in the upper part and copper in the lower part and is revered as a form of Shakti. One feature of the *trishul* is that it cannot be moved with the entire body's force, but it vibrates the moment one applies pressure with the little finger. The *mahants* here are from the Puri caste of the Dashnam Sanyasi sect. They were given this responsibility by the Kings of Tehri.

Nature's Abundance

Uttarkashi has the Gangotri National Park where one can find many rare species in the wild. The most common animal species found in this region is Himalayan Blue sheep or *Bharal*, which can be spotted in groups. The other large animals that make this landscape their habitat are Snow Leopard, Himalayan Brown Bear and Himalayan Tahr. Large mammals are not spotted easily in the West Himalayan landscape. At lower altitudes, you might just see Mongoose, in mid-altitudes, the ubiquitous Rhesus Macaque, normally in troops of 30-40 and the Terai Langur (between 300 m and 1,600 m) and the Himalayan Langur (between 1,500 m and 3,000 m), can be seen occasionally. The tail-less rodent, Pika, can be sighted commonly.

Numerous avifaunal species can be seen on the way to Gaumukh, including Alpine Chough and Rosefinches. Above 2,000 m altitude, beautiful pheasants can be seen occasionally; the Himalayan Monal, Uttarakhand's state bird, the Koklas Pheasant are common. Chukar Partridge is also spotted.

Amongst the most common butterflies at lower altitudes will be the Pansies. At higher altitudes, above 1,500 m, the Coppers (Common Copper; White-bordered Copper) and the Sapphires (Powdery Green Sapphire, Azure Sapphire) will be spotted.

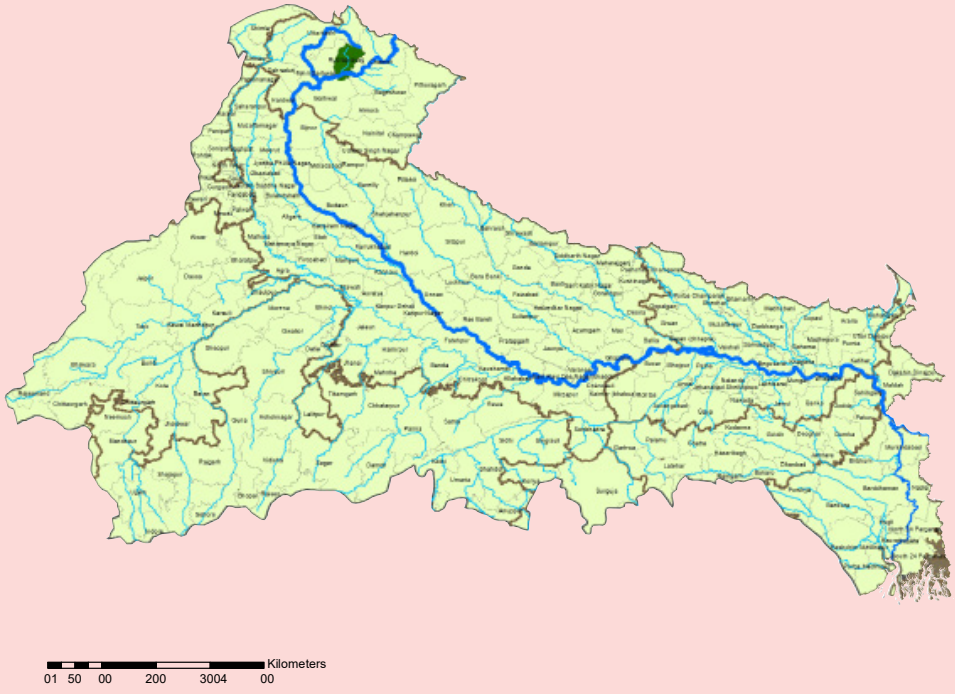
As for trees, in the lower reaches, the exposed riverbed and the islands between active water channels are dominated by trees of *Khair* (*Acacia catechu*), *Shisham* (*Dalbergia sissoo*), *Ber* (*Zizyphus mauritiana*), and *Semal* (*Bombax ceiba*). The banks lining the water channels have plenty of *Gutel* (*Trewia nudiflora*) and *Jamun* (*Syzygium cuminii*) with beds of tall *Kansa* (*Saccharum spontaneum*) grasses and Patera Reeds (*Typha elephantina*). As you ascend beyond Harsil, Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) appears on cooler slopes. Under the shade grow clumps of *Ringal* (*Arundinaria falcata*) – the delicate hill bamboo. Around 2500 m one will find broad-leaved Chestnut (*Aesculus indica*), Moru Oak (*Quercus floribunda*), and Himalayan Maple (*Acer oblongum*). Still higher, the tree layer is abundant in conifers like Himalayan Fir (*Abies pindrow*) and Spruce (*Picea smithiana*), along with *Thuner* (T*axus baccata*) in the understorey. Short of the treeline there are Bhojpatra (B*etula utilis)* trees, their bark peeling in paper-like sheafs. The region is rich in alpine grasses and herbs.

The shy Bharal in Gangotri National Park.

CHAPTER 2

RUDRAPRAYAG

Shiva's Abode



Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Rudraprayag
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

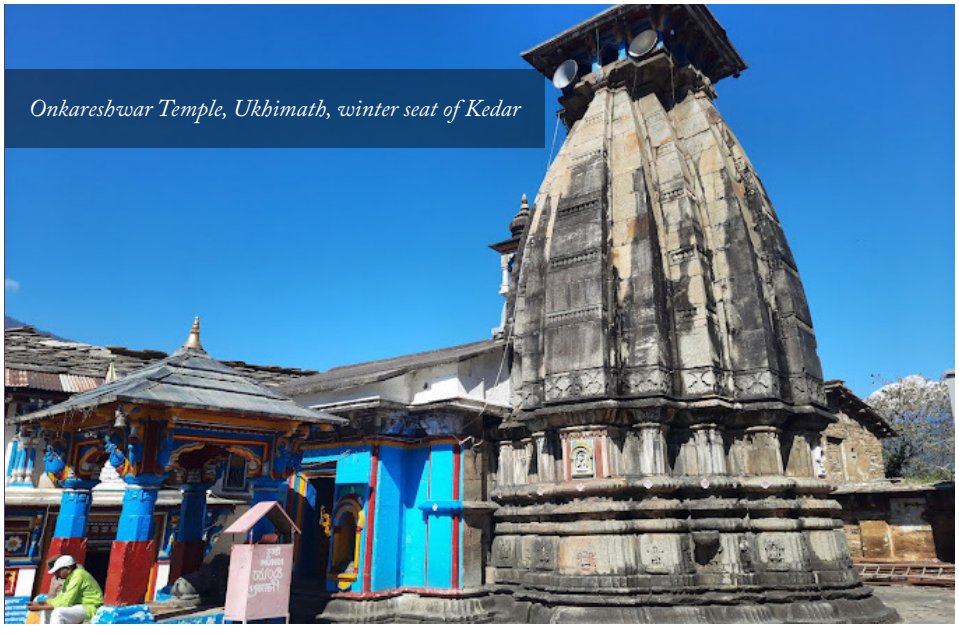
WHERE *on the* GANGA?

District Rudraprayag, lying towards the north of Uttarakhand is a land of pristine mountains, pilgrimage sites and picturesque views of the snow-clad Himalayas. The region is home to many perennial snow-fed rivers emerging from glacial moraines in the Himalayas with the *prayag* or confluence being formed by Alaknanda and Mandakini. The region also falls within the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, thereby leading to its ecological significance. It is believed that Rudraprayag derives its name from Lord Shiva who appeared here in the incarnation of Rudra to bless Narad Muni who practiced penance to please the lord, to master the skill of playing the *Veena* and coax him into revealing the mysteries of music. The district is bounded by Uttarkashi District in the north, Chamoli District in the east, Pauri Garhwal District in the south, and Tehri Garhwal District on the west.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Rudraprayag was under the rulers of Garhwal before independence. In the 8th century CE Kanak Pal, a Rajput prince began a long era of the Panwar dynastic rule. In the 14th century CE, the 52 fortresses

of Garhwal or *Baoni-Garh* were consolidated under King Ajai Pal. In the 17th century, King Fateh Shah of the Panwar Dynasty extended the frontiers of the kingdom till Tibet, but the region came under the Gurkha Rule in 1804. After the Gurkhas were defeated by the British in the Anglo-Gurkha Wars which concluded with the Treaty of Sagauli in 1816, the areas west of Alaknanda River that flows through present Rudraprayag Town (except the Doon Valley) came under the Tehri Kings. In 1997, some parts of Chamoli, Tehri and Pauri districts were merged to form this district.



Onkareshwar Temple, Ukhimath, winter seat of Kedar

Mythological Links

Shiva *as* Rudra

It is said that once sage Narada became so confident of his skill of playing the *Veena* that the other deities asked Lord Krishna to intervene. Krishna informed Narada that Shiva and Parvati were impressed by his *Veena* skills and hearing this, Narada decided to meet the two in the Himalayas. However, while he was on his way, he met several *raginis* or beautiful women who were actually musical notes but looked disfigured. When they blamed Narada's *Veena* playing for their disfigurement, Narada realized his lack of talent and decided to learn music from Shiva, becoming his disciple. The site of this episode is the Rudra Temple at the point of confluence of Mandakini and Alaknanda.

Shiva *as* Kedar

Lord Shiva's home in Rudraprayag, the landscape of Kedarnath on the banks of Mandakini, finds an early reference in the Skanda Purana (7th-8th centuries CE) which mentions that this was the place where Shiva released the Ganga from his matted hair.

Essentially, Shiva's devotees also visit the group of five temples collectively called the *Panch-Kedar* where different body parts of Shiva as a bull are worshipped. The Mahabharata mentions an episode that is believed by devotees to contain the genesis of the *Panch-Kedar*. It is said that when the Pandavas were searching for Lord Shiva to offer penance for fratricide in the Mahabharata War, Shiva hid in the disguised form of a bull at Guptkashi (hence the name, *gupt* literally meaning hidden). However, Nakul and Bheem were quick to identify him and the mighty Bheem held him by his tail. But Lord Shiva managed to escape his grip and subsequently, his arms appeared at Tungnath, his navel appeared at Madhmaheshwar, his hair at Kalpeshwar, his face at Rudranath, and his hump at Kedarnath.

Events *of* Interest

Ganga Dussehra & Sankrant

On both the occasions, devotees take a holy dip on the confluence of the Mandakini and Alaknanda in Rudraprayag. While Ganga Dussehra is celebrated in the month of June (*Jyestha* in the Hindu calendar), Sankrant is in the month of January.

Both days are considered auspicious to bathe in the Ganga and its tributaries across the country.

Hariyali Devi Mela

Hariyali Devi is a revered goddess of Rudraprayag believed to be the incarnation of Mahamaya, the daughter of Devki and the sister of Krishna. When Kansa tried killing Mahamaya, his niece, she rose to the skies and became a thunderbolt of lightning, warning Kansa that his end was near. The fair takes place in September-October. Also hailed as an event of great ecological significance, where the Hariyali Devi landscape, or greenery, is treated as sacred, with several codes prescribed for protecting the forest while entering it.

Madhmaheshwar Mela

The palanquin from Madhmaheshwar, where Shiva's navel appeared when he was hiding from Bheema, travels to Ukhimath every year in the winter season where it stays till the onset of summer. The day it reaches Ukhimath in November, is the day of the fair.

People who Fascinate

One of the most famous tales about Rudraprayag has been penned by hunter turned conservationist Jim Corbett, who shot a man-eating leopard here in 1926. He believed that human bodies left in the open during epidemics had turned the leopards of this region into man-eaters.

Adi Shankaracharya, who established four *mathas* in four corners of India at Dwarka, Rameshwaram, Puri and Badrinath, is believed to have taken *Samadhi* at Kedarnath. Today, a tall statue of

Kaviltha in Rudraprayag is considered the birth place of Sanskrit writer Kalidasa, known for penning Abhigyan Shakuntalam and Meghdoot. Kaviltha homes are adorned with lotus and conch designs, described vividly by the playwright in his works

Walking to work

Himalayan Landscape with Kedarnath Shrine in Background

Alaknanda Originates from the Satopanth Glacier

the *guru* stands near the temple. The Ganga Ashtaka of Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya says,

Maatah jaahnavi shambhusangamilite maulau nidhaayaanjalim,
tvatteere vapushovasaana samaye Naaraaynaanghridvayan
saanandam smarato bhavishyati mama praanaprayaanotsave
bhooyaadbhaktiravichyutaa Hari Hara Brahmaatmika shaashvatee

Oh, mother Jahnavi! Jahnavi, who is one with Shiva, (I pray to you), at the time of death on your bank,
Folding my hands on my head, during the last journey of life, my head prostrating on your bank,
May I happily remember Lord Narayana's holy lotus feet and may my devotion in the difference-less unity of Hari,
Hara and Brahma be undiminished and eternal.

Sacred Sites *that* Matter

Kedarnath Shrine

The Kedarnath Temple on the banks of the Mandakini (3,584 m or 11,758 feet above sea level), is one of the twelve famous *jyotirlingams* in the country. Oral traditions claim that the temple was first built by Pandavas and subsequently renovated by Sage Adi Shankaracharya. It was also renovated by Raja Bhoj of Malwa and the rulers of Garhwal in the pre-independence period. The temple

Violation of codes in sacred landscapes – like cutting too much wood, defecating in the forest or creating any kind of noise, can invite the wrath of the deity

opens traditionally in the months of April-May on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya that marks the Hindu and Jain spring festivals, with a grand ceremony. It closes for the winter season in October-November on Bhaiya Dooj when the deity is taken in a palanquin from Kedarnath to the nearby Ukhimath at the Omkareshwar Temple. The hamlet of Ukhimath derives its name from Usha Math since it is believed to be the place where Usha, the daughter of demon Banasur, married Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Krishna. The head priest (*Rawal*) of the Kedarnath Temple belongs to the Veerashaivajangam community from Karnataka. The *pujas* are carried out by *Rawal's* assistants on his instructions. The *Rawal* moves along with the deity to Ukhimath during the winter season. There are five main priests for the temple, and they become head priests for a term of one year by rotation.

Trijuginarayan

The region is not only known for people's devotion to Shiva but also to

his consort Parvati. Shiva and Parvati are believed to have solemnized their marriage at Trijuginarayan, situated in this district. It is believed that Lord Brahma was the priest at this wedding ceremony and Lord Vishnu lit the holy fire. Trijuginarayan derives its name from this very fire lit by Vishnu, signifying the fire by Narayan/Vishnu burning since times immemorial. The exact location of the wedding is marked by a stone called the Brahma Shila. Many people from around the world visit this sacred place to solemnize their marriages.

Gaurikund

Another spot sacred to worshippers of Parvati is Gaurikund, the *kund* or lake from where one can begin the foot pilgrimage to Kedarnath. The journey to Kedarnath is incomplete without first worshipping Gauri or Parvati here. It is believed that once when Gauri was bathing in this pond, she made her son Ganesha stand guard to not permit anyone in. When Shiva wished to enter, Ganesha refused. Furious at this, Shiva severed Ganesha's head. An inconsolable Parvati demanded her son be brought back to life which is when Shiva replaced the severed head with an elephant's head.

Kalimath Temple

Close to Kedarnath on the Mandakini is Kalimath where goddess Kali had killed the devil Raktabeej and went underground. It is believed that this point became a ditch which was covered by a silver plate permanently, opened only on Navratri. Inside the Kali Temple here, there is no idol and only the silver plate is worshipped. Kalimath is also considered as one of the *Siddha Peethas*. It is related to the Dhari Devi Temple near Srinagar where the upper body of goddess Kali is worshipped. The lower body is worshipped at Kalimath. The priests at this temple are Bhatt and Gaur Brahmins from Kaviltha Village. Kali here is worshipped with Lakshmi and Saraswati.

Jakh Devta Temple

Besides Shiva and Parvati, there are temples dedicated to local deities like Jakh Devta whose temple is situated close to Guptkashi. He is the chief deity of fourteen villages. A huge fair is organized here on Baisakhi when Jakh Devta is believed to come here in human form and dance on fire barefoot, a scene that can be witnessed at the event.

Nature's Abundance

Rudraprayag, situated on the confluence of Mandakini and Alaknanda, hosts many belief systems that aid in conservation of natural resources. It is home to the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary that stretches from Rudraprayag to Chamoli. It is home to the famed Musk Deer and is also called the Musk Deer Sanctuary. The other species found here are Snow Leopard, Himalayan Black Bear, Pika and Giant Red Flying Squirrel.

The area around the Hariyali

Tungnath temple, One of the Panch Kedars and Highest Temple of Shiva

Devi temple is a pristine one, governed by strict codes that also aide in conservation. This sacred natural landscape preserves 98 plant species, representing 88 genera and 46 families. The dominant family is Rosaceae, which recorded the highest (10) number of species. Out of 98 plant species the dominant life form contribution was of herbs (52), shrubs (26) and tree species (21). Almost 82 plant species in the landscape are of medicinal importance, 15 species are used for timber and construction purposes, 19 species with different edible plant parts, such as fruits, flowers, seeds and rhizomes. The local people also preserve many other plant species that are closely associated with religious festivals like *Azadirachta Indica* or *Neem* (used on Sheela Ashtami, Nimb Saptami), *Ficus Bengalensis* or Banyan (worshipped on the fast of Vat Savitri), *Aegle marmelos* or *Bael* (offered to Lord Shiva in the monsoon months and on Shivaratri), and *Ficus religiosa* or Peepal (considered sacred for many ceremonies in Hinduism and Jainism).

Some of the avian species found in Rudraprayag are Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Himalayan Monal, Crested Bunting, Himalayan Snowcock, Goldcrest and Grey-bellied Tesia.

The Rhododendron flowers, locally called *Buransh*, yields a tonic juice from its pinkish-red flowers which on rare trees may be white.

A Buransh or Rhododendron tree laden with flowers

CHAPTER 3

Tehri

The Final Prayag in the Himalaya

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Tehri
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

Where *on the* Ganga?

Tehri derives its name from *Tri-Hari* or the place which can wash three types of sins, namely those arising from *Mana, Vachana* and *Karma* (thoughts, words and deeds). It also means the residence of *Tri-Hari* or three deities, who are said to reside in the three streams of Bhagirathi, Bal Ganga and Bhilangana here. The confluence of the three streams was in Old Tehri but is now submerged in the Tehri Dam. The two prominent Ganga tributaries, Bhagirathi and Alaknanda, meet here in the holy town of Devaprayag to form the Ganga. District Tehri stretches from the snow-clad Jonli peak to the foothills near Rishikesh. Tehri Garhwal is surrounded by Uttarkashi District in the north, Pauri Garhwal District in the south, Rudraprayag District in the east, and Dehradun District in the west.

Re-living *the* Past

Tehri was a part of *Baoni-Garh* or the 52 fortresses of Garhwal that were consolidated under King Ajai Pal in the 14th century CE under the Panwar Dynasty. In the 17th century, with the death of King Mahi-

Ram Jhula Across the Ganga at Muni-ki-Reti

pat Shah, his wife Rani Karnavati began to rule Garhwal, successfully checking the advance of the Mughal armies in the hills. She was known as *Nak Kati Rani* since she used to chop off the noses of her enemies. In 1804, Garhwal came under the rule of the Gurkhas who were defeated by the British and signed the Treaty of Sagauli to conclude the campaign. Under this, Tehri was restored to the King of Garhwal Sudarshan Shah who was now known as the King of Tehri while the other regions in Garhwal, like Pauri and Dehra Dun, came under the British. Sudarshan Shah established his capital at what is now Old Tehri while his successors Pratap Shah, Kirti Shah and Narendra Shah established their capitals at Pratapnagar, Kirtinagar and Narendra Nagar respectively. It became a part of the Punjab States Agency in British India in 1921. The people of Tehri had protested against the prevalent dynastic rule in 1930 but were fired upon on the orders of the king at Tiladi, Kirtinagar. The movement kept gaining ground and finally, the princely state merged with India after independence.

Mythological Links

Devprayag

Devprayag is believed to be the place visited by Lord Rama who performed penance here to attain forgiveness for the sin of killing Ravana. While Lord Rama came here, Lord Lakshman went to Lakshman Jhoola at Muni-Ki-Reti in Rishikesh. Hence, this region is replete with the tales of the brothers. Devprayag is also considered the origin of what we call the Ganga since it is here that the two principal streams of the Ganga, namely the Bhagirathi and

Alaknanda, meet.

Sem Mukhem *and the* Naga Worship Tradition

Tehri is home to a few temples of the Naga Deity. The Sem Mukhem Temple is considered a pilgrimage for those worshipping Nag Devta. Many consider it as the fifth *dham* after Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. The Sem Mukhem fair attracts lakhs of devotees from different parts of the state and beyond. According to folklore, in the *Dwapar Yug*, a brave chieftain by the name of Gangu Ramola used to live at Garh Mukhem. On hearing about his strength, Krishna assumed the guise of a hermit to test him. The lord sought alms at his home but Ramola's wife said that alms could be given only after Gangu returned home from the forest. Angered at this, Lord Krishna turned Ramola and his 180 buffaloes to stone, which can still be seen at the site. She realized who the *Rishi* was, and later, the Lord lost himself in meditation in this sacred and naturally beautiful area. Now, once every three years, thousands of people throng to the fair held here, with their musical instruments.

Another myth goes back to at least 1300 years when a king named Gangu Ramola ruled here. His wife Sunaina was a devotee of Krishna. Since the couple were childless, Krishna appeared in a dream to Sunaina. Krishna appeared before the king, asking for the seven *Sems* or areas over which he ruled. The king refused to oblige even as the queen pleaded with him. Finally, the king was forced to part with the seven *sems*, Pragata Sem, Santraju Sem, Aruni Sem, Bharuni Sem, Gupt Sem, Talbala Sem and Saili Sem. Soon the couple were blessed with twins Sidwa and Bidwa. To celebrate their birth the king built the temple. Sidwa and Bidwa later became masters of *Tantric* arts, learning from Guru Gorakhnath.

Manuscripts at Devprayag Observatory

Events *of* Interest

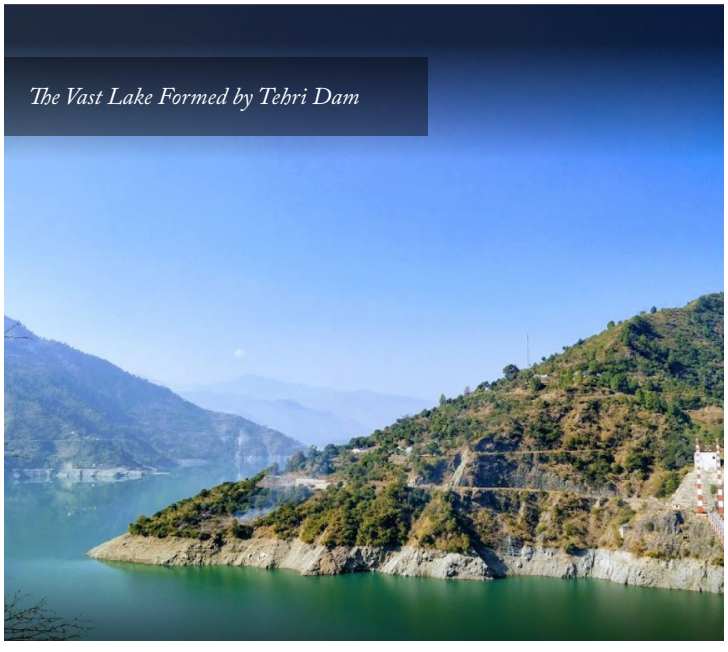
Gangi Kauthig

The *kauthig* or fair at Gangi on the banks of the Bhilangana, a tributary of the Bhagirathi, is a grand occasion where locals worship the village deity Someshwar.

Chandrabadni Mela

Chandrabadni is a temple dedicated to Goddess Sati near Devprayag. It is believed that when Sati, angry at her father for disrespecting her husband Shiva, jumped into the flames of a *yagna* performed by her father, her charred body was carried by Shiva all over the universe. The angry Shiva performed the dance of destruction with his consort's charred body and it is during this that many of her body parts fell on the earth at different places which came to be worshipped as

The Mandapam at Devalgarh



The Vast Lake Formed by Tehri Dam

Shakti Peethas. It is believed that her torso fell at Chandrabadni and today it is one of the most renowned temples for the worshippers of Sati. Each year, in the month of April, a grand fair takes place to worship and honour the deity.

Igaas or Budhi Diwali a month after Diwali to honour Madho Singh Bhandari, a warrior from Maletha, Tehri, who was fighting in Tibet during Diwali. His village celebrated Diwali only when he returned victorious after a month, giving birth to Igaas

Dudhiyal Devi Fair

Beginning mid-November till mid-February, the banks of the Ganga from Tehri to Uttarkashi host the celebration of the Dudhiyal Devi Fair. Local goddess Dudhiyal is placed inside a palanquin and travels across 12 villages. Each village organizes a fair where the goddess' palanquin rests.

Igaas, Budhi Diwali

Igaas or Budhi Diwali is held a month after Diwali to honour Madho Singh Bhandari, a warrior from Maletha, Tehri, who was fighting in Tibet during Diwali. His village celebrated Diwali only when he returned victorious after a month, giving birth to Igaas.

ART *at the* HEART

Ringal Bamboo Craft

One of the most beneficial bamboo species, *Ringal* is a type of Dwarf Bamboo that grows on steep mountain slopes at an elevation of 1800 m-2400 m. Due to its light weight, durability, and flexibility, *Ringal* finds much potential to be used for storage, decoration, and other household tasks. It is used to make baskets of different shapes and sizes giving livelihood to a considerable number of forest dependent communities. *Ringal* is treated using various methods in order to be used for basket making. Only once the *Ringal* is treated, is it used to make any kind of object.

Ruins of a 6th Century Shiva Temple

The Tehri Nuth

Tehri is famed for its large and heavy nose ring, the Tehri *Nuth*, which is made by stringing red and white pearls in a wire of gold. It is gifted to the bride by her maternal uncle. Locals share that the nose ring made by the Panwar families of Tehri were once the most popular and needed much expertise. The weight of the *nuth* has now reduced with brides requesting for a lighter version of the same so that they can wear it for longer hours comfortably during the wedding ceremonies. The *nuth* is worn by married women in case any of their close family members is getting married. The Tehri *nuth* has also been depicted in the murals of the Garhwal School of Painting in Dehradun and Hardwar.

Jhumailo

Jhumailo is a popular form of singing and dancing performed by women in many villages of this region. This is especially performed during local religious ceremonies like religious fairs when the deity is to be worshipped by the entire village. Women also perform and sing Jhumailo songs when they come to their maternal homes after marriage. The swinging dance form is performed by women by forming a circle and holding each other alternatively and swaying slowly to the beats.

Gastronomic Delights

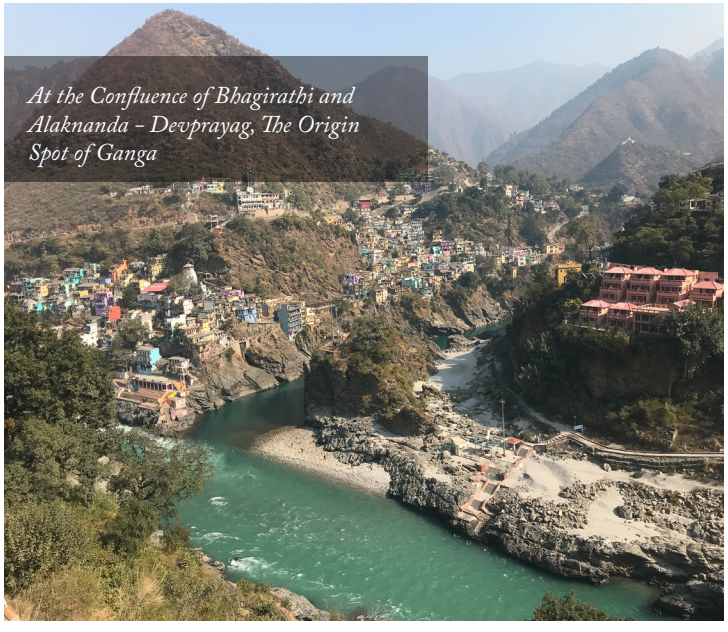
The region of Tehri is known for several fruits like *Kafal* (small red berries), plums, apricots, apples and pear. The region also grows peas, wheat, and potato. Some of the most well-known local dishes include Jhangora Kheer (*Jhangora* or Barnyard Millet found in many parts of the state) and Kandali Ka Saag, the green concoction made from the leaves of stinging nettle.

All across Uttarakhand, dishes made from stinging nettle are very popular. The nettle leaves are boiled to take out the sting

People who Fascinate

Pt. Chakradhar Joshi

Devprayag is encircled by three peaks, Giddhanchal Parvat, Narsinghanchal Parvat and Dashrathanchal Parvat. Here, on the Dashrathanchal, a renowned teacher, Acharya Pt.



At the Confluence of Bhagirathi and Alaknanda - Devprayag, The Origin Spot of Ganga

Festive Celebrations in a Village

Chakradhar Joshi, a scholar in Astronomy, Ayurveda and Astrology, established the Nakshatra Vedh Shala, an observatory, in the year 1946. Not only did he observe celestial bodies from here, but he also published his observations and research on spatial objects and instruments such as Dhruva Yantra, Jalghati Yantra, Dwadasangula Sanku, Souraya Yantra and the Yantra Raja. The observatory is well equipped with several telescopes and books to support research in all the three disciplines of Astronomy, Astrology and Ayurveda. It has a substantial archive too. The observatory also has in its collection about 3000 rare manuscripts.

Sunderlal Bahuguna

Sunderlal Bahuguna, born in Maroda in Tehri, an eminent environmentalist and leader of the Chipko movement also headed the Anti-Tehri Dam Movement. He had been one of the last people to vacate his ancestral home in Tehri when the dam reservoir was filling up, eventually moving to Dehradun in 2004. In his early years, he had been a part of anti-untouchability movements and anti-liquor movements. Bahuguna was a passionate leader revered and much loved by the people of the country. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan.

Vishweshwar Dutt Saklani

Tehri Garhwal has also been home to Vishweshwar Dutt Saklani, popularly known as the Tree Man or *Vriksha Manav* of Uttarakhand. A lover of nature and trees, Saklani planted a total of 50 lakh saplings in Tehri Garhwal during his lifetime believing strongly in the idea that individual action can rejuvenate forests and protect nature. Many people visit Saklana in Tehri today to see his ancestral home and the huge patch of forest planted and once nurtured by him.

Monuments *that* Matter

Rani Mahal

Rani Mahal in Pratapnagar, Tehri, is built on a high elevation affording a view of the Bhagirathi. Pratapnagar was the summer seat of the Tehri Garhwal Kingdom and this palace is a grand structure, built in the vernacular

Pahadi style, combined with elements from the Mughal and neo-colonial styles. The palace has exquisite stained glass work and a few rooms also have sculptures. While one side of the Rani Mahal offers stunning views of snow-capped peaks like Swargarohini, the other side opens on to the magnificent view of the glistening Tehri Lake. Palace and adjoining court house need urgent conservation.

Palethi

Situated close to Devprayag, Palethi is a group of ancient temples, including a magnificent Sun Temple where the Sun God is shown in a half seated position. The temple has inscriptions from the time of Kings Kalyanvarman and Adivarman in Brahmi script. Built around the 6th-7th centuries CE, the complex also has temples of Shiva, Durga and Ganesha along with idols of Ganga and Yamuna.

Budha Kedar

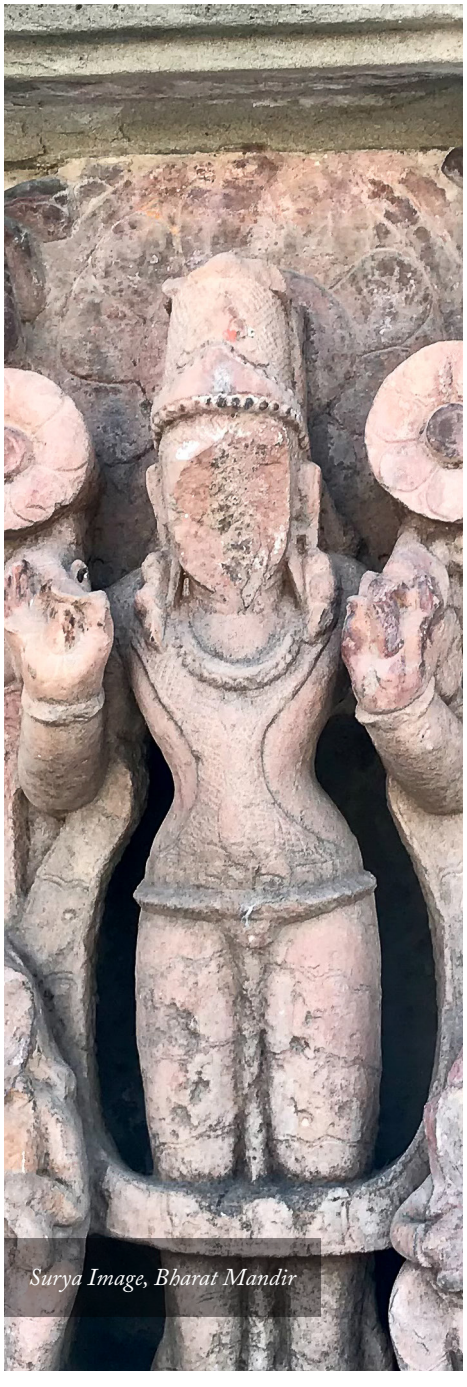
According to legend, it is considered to be the spot where the Pandavas worshipped *Shiva lingam* on the advice of Sage Vyas to seek forgiveness for fratricide and then Lord Shiva appeared here as an old man. The temple of Budha Kedar in Ghansali on the banks of the Bhilangana, has a rock on which are inscribed images of Lord Shiva as an old man, a statue of Lord Ganesha, Pandavas and Draupadi.

Raghunath Temple

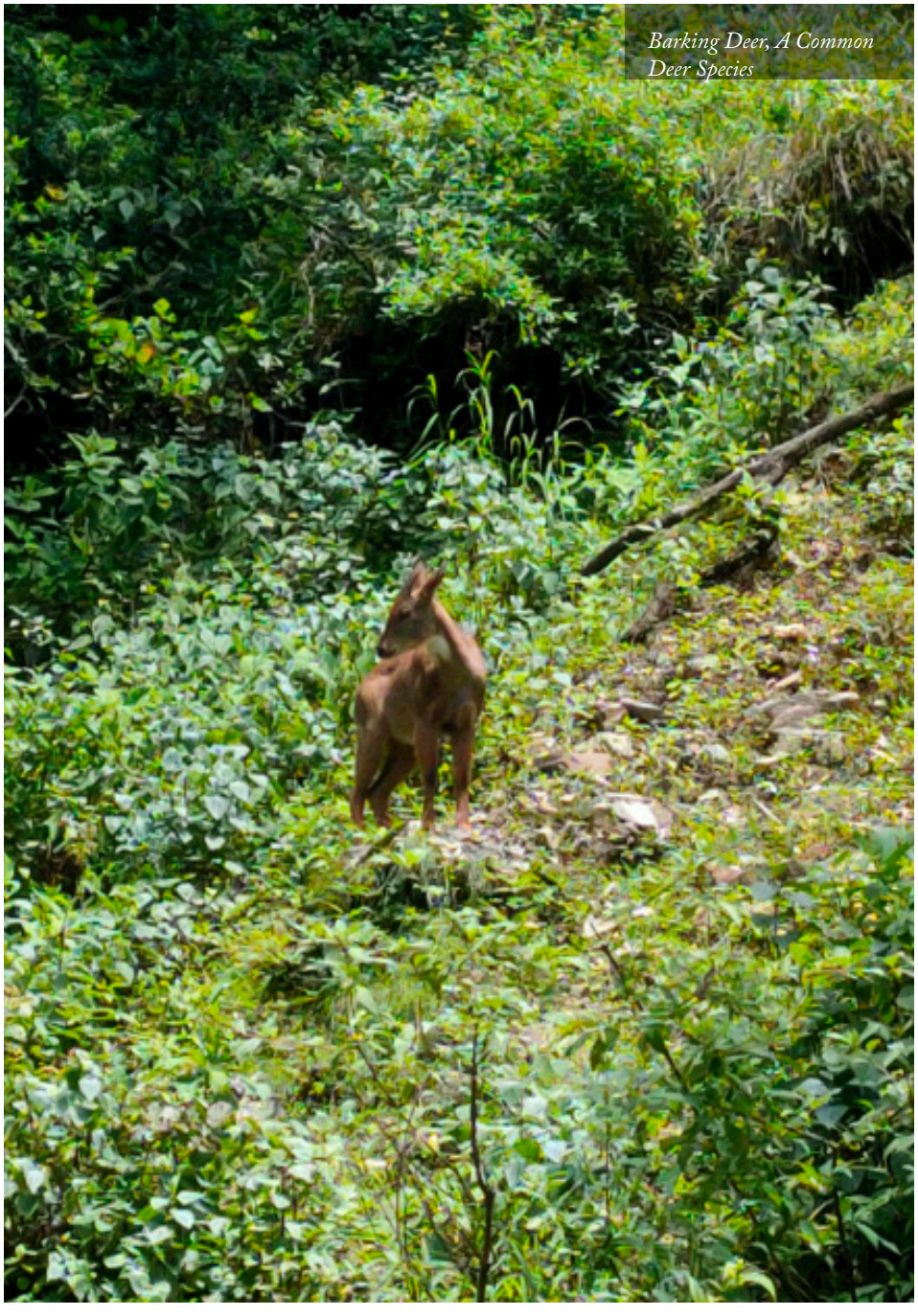
It is situated at the confluence of Alaknanda and Bhagirathi in Devprayag. According to legend, Lord Rama practiced penance and austerities here to efface the stigma of killing Ravana, a Brahmin. The temple was originally constructed by Adi Shankarcharya in the 8th century CE. Rock Inscriptions in Brahmi script are observed at the rear side of the temple which date back to 200-500 CE, mentioning the names of devotees who visited Badrinath or immersed themselves here. According to locals, the temple was shattered by an earthquake in 1803 but was subsequently rebuilt by Daulat Rao Scindia. The precinct has temples of Garuda, Chandeshwar, Adi Shankracharya, Annapurna, Yog Narsingh and Hanuman. It also has a nine feet high stone roof built in Rajasthani style, with a stone throne underneath. Lord Rama's idol is seated here on certain occasions. There are two caves in the complex namely the Vaman Cave having an idol of Lord Kshetrapal and Gopal Cave. Close to the main temple is the temple of the four queens of the ruler Jayakrit Shah (1791-1797) who performed *sati* after the death of the king.

Lakshman Jhula

Apart from mesmerizing temples, the Tehri District is bestowed with some marvels of human engineering. The Lakshman Jhula is one of the most prominent among all. The 450 feet long bridge was built in 1939. It is believed that originally this was a jute rope bridge that Lakshman used to cross the Ganga when Rama and Lakshmana visited this area after



Surya Image, Bharat Mandir



Barking Deer, A Common Deer Species

Tehri is endowed with rich natural habitat with more than 600 species of birds like Khalij Pheasant, Monal, Wild Fowls, Yellow-Footed Green Pigeon, Partridge and Black Francolin

killing Ravana. An ancient temple of Lakshman is approachable through this bridge.

Tehri Dam

This is the tallest dam (260 m high) in India that provides 1000 MW of hydroelectricity. Its 42 sq km reservoir is frequented by tourists and is slowly becoming a prominent hub for adventure tourism in Uttarakhand. The Tehri Dam submerged the old township of Tehri and a new planned township called New Tehri has come up in the hills.

Nature's Abundance

Tehri is endowed with rich natural habitat with more than 600 species of birds like Khalij Pheasant, Monal, Wild Fowls, Yellow-Footed Green Pigeon, Partridge and Black Francolin.

The vegetation can be divided into six main categories of Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests, Sal Forests, Chir Forests, Oak Deodar, Fir and Spruce Forests, and finally the Alpine Pastures *(Bugyals)*.

Some of the animal species here are Monkey, Langur, Wild-Cat, Wild Boar, Fox, Leopards, Black Bear and the Flying Squirrel (locally called *Rinoola*), the critically endangered Musk Deer and Snow Leopard (near Khatling Glacier). According to folklore, the natural habitat is under the purview of deities residing here and any trespassing or activity without the consent of the residing deity can bring the deity's wrath upon the entire village. One such sacred natural landscape is of Chandrabadni Devi where dense Oak Forests dot the landscape. Besides the Chandrabadni Shrine, there are shrines to Jagdambeshwar Devta, Ulkeshwari Devi and Anusuya Devi here. Cutting trees without the permission of these deities or wearing leather are some of the proscriptions, which if violated, can invite the wrath of the deities. Another landscape called Kunjapuri, is believed to be a *siddha peeth* and holds immense value among the locals. Myths have led the landscape to be conserved and as a result, a total of 239 plant species belonging to 78 families and 207 genera can be found here. Out of these, endangered species like *Acer oblongum* or Himalayan Maple and vulnerable species like *Thallictrum foliosum* or Meadow-Rue can be spotted here. The Rue is a medicinal herb used to treat Snakebite, Jaundice and Rheumatism.

The Chandrabadni Temple

Palace of Tehri Royal Family at Rishikesh

Uttarakhand

CHAPTER 4

HARIDWAR

God's Gateway

Legend

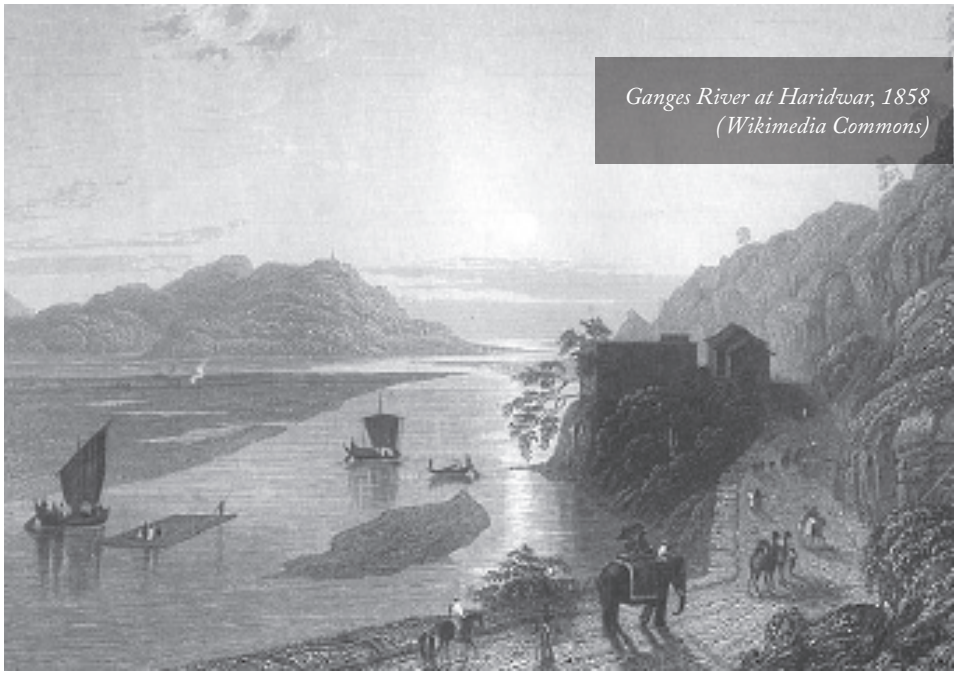
Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Haridwar

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Har-Dwar, or the gateway to Shiva's abode, Kedarnath, is usually referred as such in ancient texts. However, since it also leads to Badrinath, the abode of Lord Vishnu, it is also known as Haridwar. This is the place where many questions of existence find a closure, whether they be rites of passage or rituals of death. Ganga became the prime means of transport connecting North and East India until the middle of the nineteenth century. During 1830 CE, iron steamboats were introduced on the main route of river Ganga, to travel up-country faster than barges. By the middle of the 19th century, the railway line was laid along the Ganga to connect Delhi with Hardwar. Haridwar District shares borders with Muzaffarnagar District to the South, Saharanpur District to the west, Pauri District to the East and the state of Uttar Pradesh to the South.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Haridwar has been mentioned as Mayapuri and Gangadwara in ancient scriptures. In the 1st century BCE, King Vikramaditya of Ujjain built the sacred Har-ki-



Ganges River at Haridwar, 1858 (Wikimedia Commons)

Pairi in the memory of his brother Bhartrihari, who meditated there. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang, who visited India in the 7th century CE mentions the Kumbh Mela of Haridwar (Haridwar is referred to as Mo-yu-lo by him) as the largest religious gathering. Adi Guru Shankaracharya is believed to have visited this region in the 8th century CE when he built the Chandi Devi Temple. In the 14th century, Haridwar was plundered by Timur Lang, the conqueror from Uzbekistan, who passed through this area while on his way to Delhi to fight Tughlaq emperor Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud Shah. During the Mughal period, it is said that Akbar drank water only from the holy Ganga which was delivered to him in sealed jars. His commander-in-chief Raja Man Singh of Amber laid the foundation of the present-day city, renovating Har-ki-Pairi too. Raja Man Singh's *chatri* was recently restored and stands amidst the flowing Ganga at Har-ki-Pairi. His ashes were immersed in the Ganga by Akbar at Brahma Kund. In the British period, the city saw the construction of many *ghats*, while Roorkee, near Haridwar saw the construction of the massive Ganga Canal. After the country's independence, Haridwar was a part of Saharanpur in United Provinces, which were renamed as Uttar Pradesh. The Haridwar district was formed in 1988 and Haridwar became a part of Uttarakhand in 2000.

Mythological Links

Haridwar was earlier known as Mayapuri, after the Maya Devi Temple where it is believed that the navel and heart of Sati fell when Shiva was carrying her charred body. Haridwar is adorned with several ghats on the banks of the Ganga. One such place is the Sati Ghat also believed to be the birthplace of Goddess Sati, the consort of Lord Shiva, who later jumped into her father Daksh Prajapati's sacrificial fire, miffed at the insult to her husband Shiva. Her *samadhi* still stands here.

Legend also recounts that Goddess Ganga descended on the earth following Raja Bhagirath's penance but warned him that she will only follow him until the time he has no doubts about her journey. The moment he stops to check whether the goddess is behind him or not, she will cease to follow him in the form of a goddess and only her waters will flow henceforth along with him. Ganga's fears

Maya Devi Temple is one of the three siddha peethas, the other two being Chandi Devi and Mansa Devi that are situated on either side of the town

came true when Bhagirath actually doubted if the Goddess was following him and the minute he stopped to look back, the goddess disappeared. This incident is believed to have happened at the Sati Ghat after which the goddess ceases to exist in human form and only her holy waters flow. Today, many people use this *ghat* to immerse the ashes of their loved ones after cremation.

Events *of* Interest

The Kumbh Mela

Haridwar is also home to the biggest congregation of mankind, the Kumbh Mela, organized once in 12 years (every 6 years, there is an *Ardha*-Kumbha). The most important part of the Kumbh is the element of a cosmic force called *amrit* or divine nectar. The belief is that taking a dip in the sacred waters during the Kumbh brings the blessing of the nectar. The highlight of the Kumbh is ritual bathing on the occasions of Pausa Poornima, Makara Sankranti, Mauni Amawasya, Basant Panchami, Magha Poornima, Maha Shiva Ratri.

Kanwad Yatra

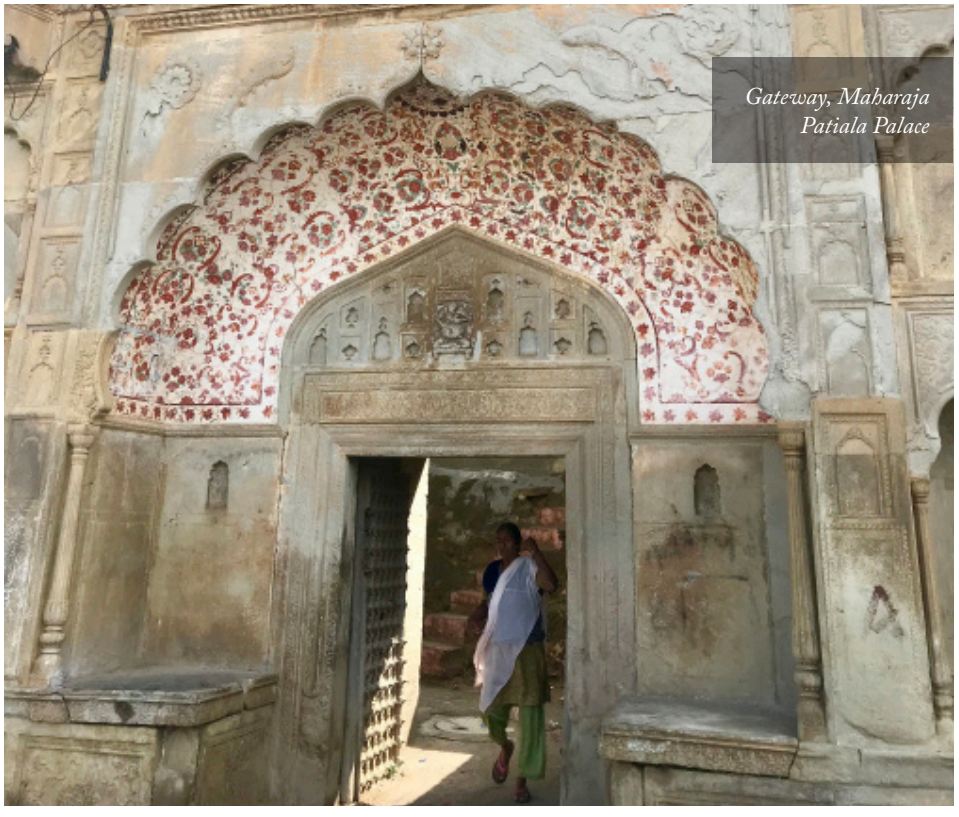
The belief in Lord Shiva comes to a vibrant peak during Sawan or monsoon with the *Kanwad Yatra* when devotees from other states visit Haridwar to fetch Gangajal and offer it to their local *Shivalayas*. The water is carried in pots tied to a pole balanced on either side of the shoulders. Earlier, the poles and pots were made in Haridwar.

Art *at the* Heart

Garhwal School *of* Painting

Haridwar has many structures painted in the style of the Garhwal School of Painting. It developed when Suleiman Shikoh, the nephew of Aurangzeb, was engaged in a battle of succession with him and was given refuge in the hills by the King of Garhwal Prithvi Shah.

Sadhus at Kumbha Mela



Gateway, Maharaja Patiala Palace

Along with him came his *tasvirdars* or painters Shyam Das and Har Das who, influenced by the styles of the Kangra school, Basohli school, Mughal school and Rajput school, developed the Garhwal School of Painting. The chief themes of the murals include tales from Hindu mythology, intricate floral patterns and local fauna and kings and queens.

Gastronomic Delights

The banks of the Ganga here are famous for their traditional vegetarian food, suitable for pilgrim pockets, like Poori-Aloo that are served in most of the shops here. The last rites of people are conducted at Kankhal and Sati Ghat along with a traditional *bhoj* where the priests are served with *saatvik* foods like Poori, Kaddu, Kheer and Raita that are made without onion and garlic, using only salt and turmeric.

Haridwar sweets like Chandrakala and Pedas are also a connoisseur's delight.

People who Fascinate

The Genealogists *of* Haridwar

Haridwar has been home to genealogists who have been maintaining handwritten records of family members of the deceased. There are 2,500 genealogists called *Pandas,* who regularly update family registers (*bahis*) of people who come to Haridwar to perform the last rites of their loved ones. *Pandas* are usually found at Har-Ki-Pairi, jotting down recent births, deaths, and marriages. Most of these handwritten scrolls have been maintained by over 20 generations of

The dates of Kumbh are determined according to the planetary positions, mainly Brihaspati (Jupiter) in relation to the Surya (Sun) and Chandra (Moon). The phenomenon that the Sun is behind the Moon in this phase and its heat and energy results in the release of the nectar generated in the Moon

panda, making it a popular family business in the region. Nowadays, *pandas* are in charge of designated registers categorized as original districts/villages of a particular family's ancestors. According to the Genealogical Society of Utah, USA, Hindu family records dating back to 1194 were once maintained by these Haridwar genealogists.

Proby Cautley

Proby Cautley was a British engineer (1802-1871) who built the ambitious Ganga Canal. Cautley was dismayed that while floods killed people one part of India, famines killed them in another. Hence, he conceived the project of the Upper Ganga Canal with its vast distribution network which changed the economy of its command areas by irrigating the lands of 5000 villages. But perhaps his biggest challenge was to come from the *pandas*, or priests at Haridwar, who strongly objected to Cautley's efforts to block the free flow of the sacred Ganga. He pacified them by leaving a gap in the dam, to allow the waters to flow unchecked at India's most sacred spot, the Har-ki-Paidi To build such an engineering marvel, Sir Proby needed to train hydrologists and engineers and he set up Asia's first engineering college in 1845, the Thomasson College of Civil Engineering, Roorkee, which is today the IIT, Roorkee.

Sir John Underwood-Bateman Champain

Champain was the assistant principal at Thomason College of Engineering, Roorkee in the 1850s. He was a British army officer and engineer who played a vital role in laying the first electric telegraph line from Britain to India through the Persian Gulf. During the great Persian famine of 1870-1872, he arranged for relief through the telegraph staff. He was awarded the sword of honour by the Shah of Persia in 1884. He was made a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, an order of British chivalry.

Sir Ganga Ram

Sir Ganga Ram was an engineer and architect who was an alumna of the Thomason College of Engineering, Roorkee. He is called the father of modern Lahore where he designed and built the Lahore Museum, Lahore General Post Office, Aitchison College, National College of Arts, Ganga Ram hospital, Model Town and Gulberg Town. His *samadhi* stands in Lahore. The Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi is named after him

Group of Sadhus during Kumbha Mela

Many genealogists sit around the Kusha Ghat maintaining records of thousands of families documenting their ancestral villages, the name of all their ancestors with the signature of the one who has last visited to update the records. The centuries old tradition still exists and people from around the world visit the Kusha Ghat to update their family records

Har-ki-Paidi with Man Singh ki Chatri midstream

and was established by members of his family.

Krishna Chandra Sharma

KC Sharma was a radio broadcaster and author who headed the All India Radio from 1980-81. He was born in Haridwar where he received his primary education and subsequently shifted to Benaras. He was honoured with the Shalaka Samman of Hindi Akademi, Delhi.

Monuments *that* Matter

Kusha Ghat

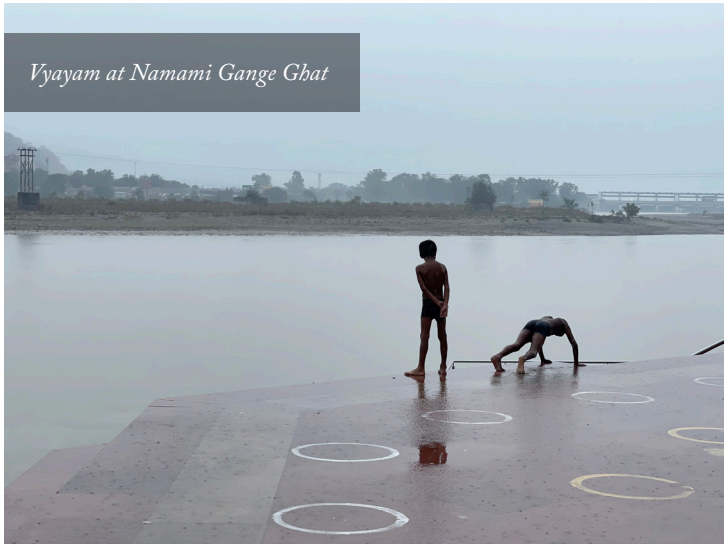
One of the significant *ghats* is the Kusha Ghat built by Maratha Queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore in the 18th century CE. It is a sombre place used by people to immerse the ashes of their loved ones, though marriages also take places here. It is believed that Sage Dattatreya prayed here but later cursed the Ganga after all his belongings were flooded by the river. To calm the saint, the goddess returned his belongings through her waves. This is why people here believe that whatever devotees offer, the Goddess will return, and then, they must make their offerings again.

Daksh Mahadev Temple

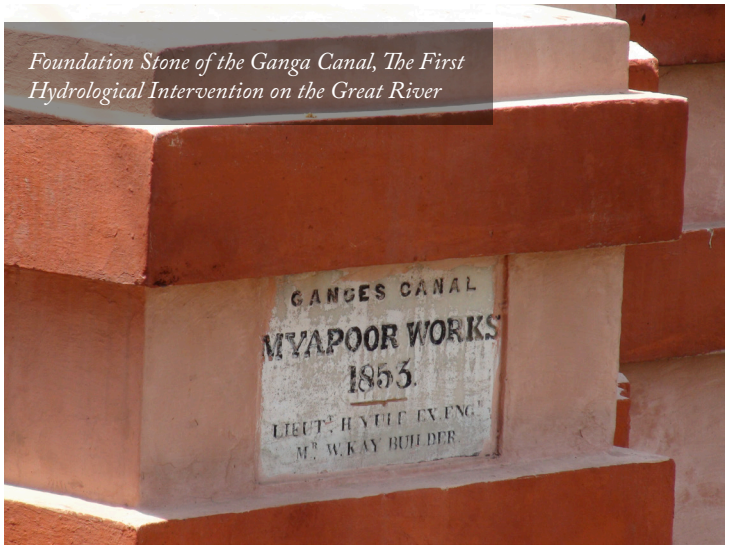
According to legend this temple is located at the spot where King Daksh (father of Goddess Sati) established the temple of Lord Shiva after realizing his universal power. He had insulted Lord Shiva and was later punished for his misdemeanour. This place is one of the most sacred religious spots for Hindus.

Har-ki-Pairi

The *ghat* where millions of people take a dip to atone for their sins was built in 57 BCE by King Vikramaditya, the Emperor of Ujjain, in the memory of his elder brother Bhartihari. The Brit-



Vyayam at Namami Gange Ghat



Foundation Stone of the Ganga Canal, The First Hydrological Intervention on the Great River

ish government started development works at Haridwar by expanding Har-Ki-Pairi and improving the infrastructural facilities here.

Kankhal

The area of Kankhal is adorned with several majestic structures of the 17th and 18th century with most sites built in Rajput and Mughal architecture styles decorated with beautiful wall paintings. Examples include the ornate *Havelis* of Raja Bharamal and Maharaja of Patiala. The town of Kankhal has been mentioned in sacred ancient texts since it is believed to be older and more significant than the town of Haridwar. It is believed to be the birth place of Sati, wife of Lord Shiva. According to the Vayu Purana, this is the place where Goddess Ganga tells Bhagirath that, "I am blessing the places I am flowing through, but as I am flowing through Kankhal, I am the one being blessed". It is also believed that a man achieves salvation if his cremation is performed on the banks of the Ganga in Kankhal.

Ganga Canal

The district has one of the most important structures of the modern period which is the Ganga Canal, a marvel of engineering. It was the lifelong passion of British engineer, Sir Proby Cautley and was constructed between 1842 and 1854. Cautley was dismayed that while floods in the Ganga killed thousands in one part of India, people died of famine in the other. He envisioned this canal as a solution to this imbalance. It was North India's first irrigation system consisting of a main canal 560 kms long with its branches stretching another 492 kms. An engineering feat along the canal is the Solani Aqueduct, India's first aqueduct which masterfully negotiates gradients whereby the canal water crosses above the Solani River letting the river flow undisturbed below. The immensity of the project can be judged from the fact that the first ever railway engine to run in India was brought from England and ran between Piran Kaliyar and Solani in December, 1851 for this project. The engine was called Jenny Lind and still stands outside the Roorkee Railway Station. Today, the canal irrigates 3,100 km^2 in 5,000 villages across the two states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Piran Kaliyar Sharif

The Dargah of Hazrat Makhdum Allauddin Ali Ahmed Sabir, on the outskirts of Roorkee town is situated towards the south of Haridwar. This place is one of the living examples of unity between the Hindu and Muslim religions. Famed for its mystical powers that fulfil the desires of the devout,

the *dargah* is visited by millions of devotees from all religions from India and abroad. The *Urs* is celebrated at this *dargah* every year, from the first day of sighting the moon to the sixteenth day during the *Rabi al-Awwal* month of the Islamic calendar. There has been a tradition of bathing in the Ganga during the *Urs*. The *dargah* honours the memory of the 13th century Sufi saint and mystic Hazrat Alaudin Sabir Kaliyari. It was built by Ibrahim Lodhi in the 16th century. The *Qazi* of the shrine quotes the book of Maulana Kasim which states that the water of Ganga never gets spoiled even when stored for long. He has compared the water of the Ganga to the holy *Zamzam* water of Mecca. It is stated that Maulana Kasim had attained his enlightenment or *basharat* at Gaumukh, where the Ganga originates in Uttarkashi district, upstream of Gangotri.

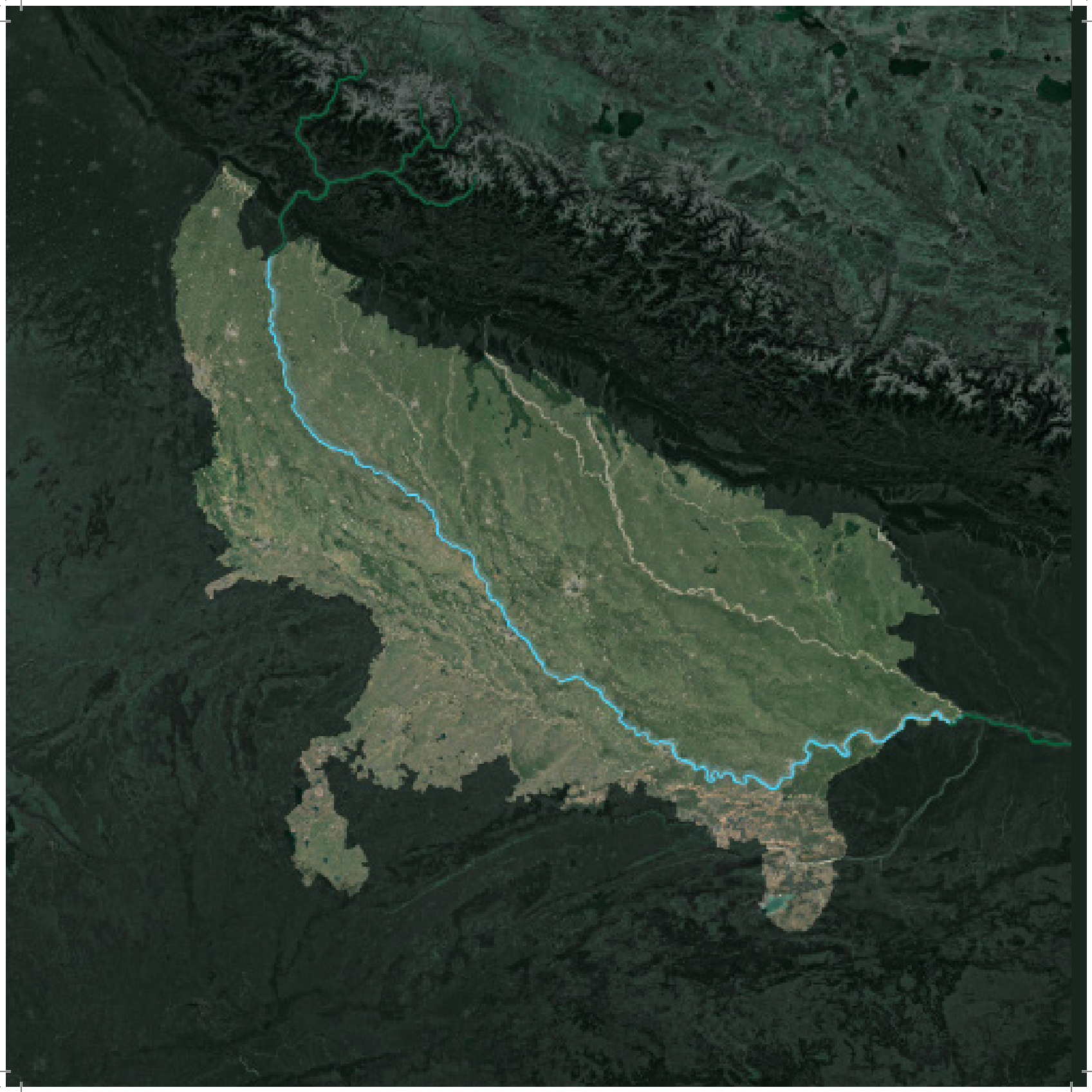
Nature's Abundance

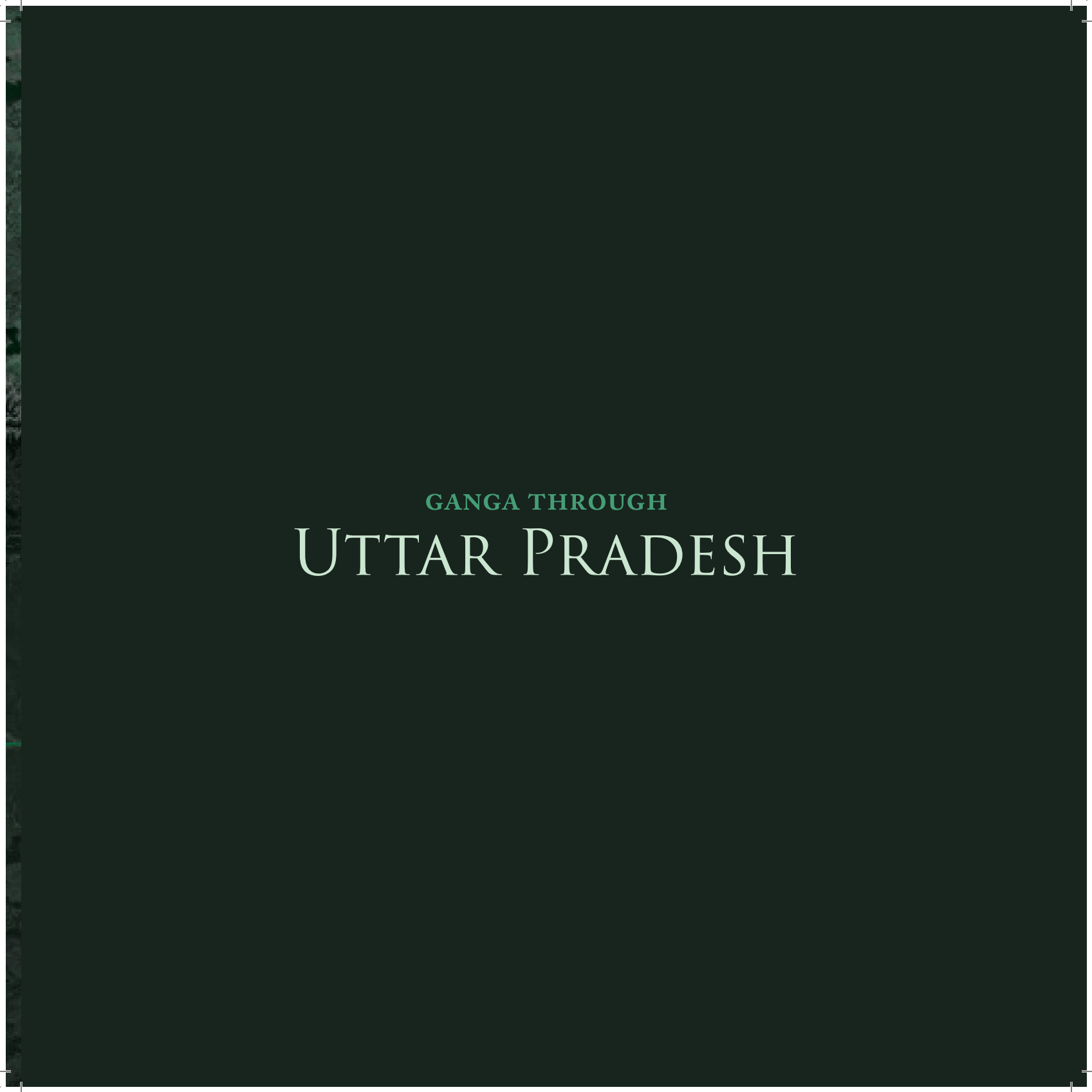
Ganga has two major tributary systems, one on either side which come together to make the landscape a floodplain. Floodplains are formed naturally over hundreds to thousands of years. Hence, maintaining the active flood plain of a river is critical for maintaining good river health and assuring equilibrium in the ecosystem. The nutrient deposition by floods, wetting of floodplain soil, decomposition of organic matter and high activity of microorganisms are some of the main factors that contribute in making this area a fertile zone for agriculture, producing rice, wheat, mustard, *urad* and corn. A rich feature of the floodplains here are the wetlands. Haridwar has two major floodplain lakes, one at Shivpuri, which is home to Muggers or Crocodiles and the saucer-shaped Jhilmil spread over 3783.50 hectares of *terai* marshland, one of the last to remain undisturbed in the state. It is a mosaic of short and tall grasslands, tropical mixed deciduous forests and secondary scrubs.

This region of Rajaji Tiger Reserve is not just the home of big cats, Tigers and Leopards, and their prey, the spotted, barking and swamp deer, but also a prime habitat for large herds of Elephants that roam freely between Rajaji and Corbett Tiger Reserves.

Ganga is an important habitat for numerous freshwater fish on whom many communities depend for their livelihood. Some of these are Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), Katla (*Gibelion catla*), Goonch (*Begarius begarius*), *Singhi* (*Heteropnueustes fossilis*), *Singhara (Sperata seenghala)*, Mahseer (*Tor tor*), Common Carp(*Cyprinus carpio*) and Indian Trout (*Raimas bola*). Another important fish is the exotic Silver Carp introduced in various regions of India for commercial cultivation. Though the consumption and sale of fishes along with any other non-vegetarian product is completely banned in Haridwar and Rishikesh cities, fishing remains a key part of people's livelihood.

A Woodpecker in Rajaji Tiger Reserve





GANGA THROUGH

UTTAR PRADESH

CHAPTER 5

BIJNOR

Land of Cotton Weaving & Woodworking

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Bijnor

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Part of the Meerut Division, Bijnor is bounded by districts Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar and Meerut in the West and separated from the Shiwaliks by the Ganga in the north. Here, it borders the Kalagarh Range of the Corbett National Park. The plains are dissected by a number of smaller rivers and streams, most flowing eastwards. Malini River, which rises in the hills above Kotdwar is the major tributary of Ganga here. Other notable ones are Kotwali Rao, Chhoiya, Ban Nala, Gangan Nadi, Pelkhala Nala, Karula Nala, Khoh River, Ram Ganga, Banaili Nadi and Phika Nadi.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Bijnor has yielded a few Chalcolithic mounds and prehistoric weapons. As a part of the Northern Panchala Kingdom, it has been under the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas, Bactrian Greeks and Kushanas. After the decline of the Guptas in the 5th century CE, the Maukharis came to power here. In the 7th century, Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang stayed here, referring to Mandawar as Mo-ti-pu-lo where he mentions

Idols of deties in the premises of a Temple

more than ten Buddhist monasteries. In Mordhwaj, near Mandawar, remains hinting to the presence of a large Buddhist *chaitya* have been discovered. At a local fort, archaeologists have found 6th century CE Buddhist relics and seals along with three stone heads, one of which is of Jain Tirthankar Parshvanath dating to 7th - 8th century CE. Under the Delhi Sultanate, Bijnor (under Katehr or Rohilkhand Tract) was included in the government of Badaun and was soon conquered by Iltutmish who built a mosque near the Mandawar Fortress. It was then ruled by Sher Shah Suri and the Mughals under whom Nagina was the headquarters of a *mahal/pargana*, as mentioned in the Ain-e-Akbari. In the early 18th century, the Rohilla Pashtuns established their independence in Rohilkhand. Around 1739, Rohilla chief Ali Mohammed Khan made his first annexations in Bijnor. Later, in 1755, soldier Najib Khan who rose to prominence in the Mughal court founded Najibabad and erected the Pathargarh Fort. Najibabad then came under the Awadh Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah when it became a flourishing centre for the cotton industry. In 1801, the then Nawab Saadat Khan, who had assumed power with the help of the British, had to cede Rohilkhand and thus, Bijnor, to the East India Company. In 1857, Rohilkhand became the only region in India where the British were routed. They recaptured it with the Battle of Ambasut, the next year. Bijnor played an active role in the freedom struggle. During the Quit India Movement of 1942 on August 16, thousands of villagers in Nurpur were fired upon by the police when they were on their way to hoist the tricolour at the police station. A huge fair held annually on August 16 commemorates the martyrs of this event.

Mythological Links

Dronacharya

The Panchala kingdom was divided into north and south after Dronacha-

rya engaged in a tussle with Dhrupad or Yagyasena, son of Prishata, the King of Panchala. Once, on being insulted by him, Drona asked his disciples to defeat him and take half his kingdom. They emerged successful and gave it to their guru. Thus, the Ganga became the dividing line and the present district of Bijnor fell under the reign of Drona.

Raja Ben

The name Bijnor is attributed to Raja Ben; a king who never realized revenue or tax from his subjects. He raised resources by selling self-manufactured bijana (fans), hence the name Bijnor. A site called Raja Ben ki Khera in northern Bijnor testifies to this legend.

Sultana Daku

Sultana Daku was a 20th century outlaw and a redoubtable terror who formed the stuff of legends and was known for many robberies and often hid in this region. The famous Najib-ud-Daulah's Fort in Najibabad, the Gateway of Himalayas, was referred to as Sultana Daku's shelter, by the British. The legend has inspired famous Nautanki performance called Sultana Daku.

Jinnaton Wali Masjid, Mandawar

Chhariyon ka mela, devoted to Saint Goga Pir, takes place during the month of Bhadra. Bijnor is believed to be the maternal home of the saint, who is a saint for Hindus and peer for Muslims

Events *of* Interest

Daranagar Fair

The largest fair in Bijnor is held at Daranagar and Goela, an adjoining village at the point where the Ganga first becomes navigable. About 25,000 people assemble for bathing in the river on the full moon of the *Kartik* month.

Ganga Snan Fair

The Ganga *Snan* is a huge event in the month of November where people take a dip in the river in Vidurkuti. In 1924, it was on the occasion of this fair, which also became a platform for the freedom fighters to launch protests, that the then British district magistrate levied a tax on bullock carts coming to the fair, leading to a serious agitation, mass protests and subsequent imposition of fines.

Burha Babu Fair

This fair is held in the month of May to honour Burha Babu, who is said to be an incarnation of Brahma, and protector spirit of women and children.

Painted wall of a Temple

Kartik Purnima & Dev Diwali

Lakhs of pilgrims visit the Kartik Purnima Fair and take a dip at Vidur Kuti apart from performing other rituals like tonsuring of kids, known as *mundan*. Dev Diwali, when Lord Shiva killed demon Tripurasura on Kartik Purnima, is also celebrated here.

ART *at the* HEART

Cotton Industry

The industry flourished at Najibabad under Shuja-ud-Daulah in the 18th century. Many cotton and silk products were transported by land to Surat and Calcutta and further shipped to Persia, East Asia and Europe. Bijnor was a celebrated centre to manufacture *Garha* and *Gazi*, two common cloth varieties. The cross-lined pattern of red and white woven cloth known as *Chauthai* was produced at Chandpur; a novelty among textiles. Afzalgarh today is known for the finest cotton while Nihtaur for best cotton printing. The region is well known for cotton linen.

Woodcraft & Tarkashi

It is believed that in the Mughal era, some carvers moved from Iran to Nagina and nearby villages, where Indian rosewood was available. People from Multan too have been associated with woodcraft for generations although there was also a reputation of metal industry (mainly weapons) in Nagina, Najibabad, and Dhampur. Originally the craftsmen used to carve on the steel section of guns. After the 1857 uprising, manufacture of arms was prohibited. The metal workers transferred their skills to carving on a hard wood and chose ebony. Their style of carving retained the precision needed for metal carving. They also practice *Tarkashi* or inlaying of wood with brass, silver and copper strips. Typically, dark coloured and seasoned Sheesham wood is used as its high oil content allows the inlaid metal to be held securely.

Glassware

Production of Glass vessels is a noteworthy industry at Nagina and Najibabad; small glass phials used to carry Ganga waters from Haridwar are

Van Gujar children

exported from here. The glass makers of Bijnor were the only craftsmen in the state who could make bottles of moulded glass. The glass is greenish-brown in colour, made from an amalgam of reh and saltpetre.

Gastronomic Delights

Crops

Rice, Sugarcane, Millets, Bajra, Maize, Wheat, Barley, Gram, Tobacco and oilseeds are some of the crops that have been grown since ages in the district. The Terai regions of Uttar Pradesh covering 15 districts (Bijnor being one of them) are rich sources of curry leaf too.

People who Fascinate

The Poets & Literati *of* Bijnor

Bijnor has been home to many contemporary poets and authors like Dushyant Kumar (one of the foremost Ghazal writers), Jitendra Mohan Sinha Rahbar (freedom fighter and Urdu poet), Deputy Nazir Ahmad (considered by many as the first Urdu novelist, he also translated the Indian Penal Code in Urdu) and many others. It was also in Bijnor that Maulvi Majid Hasan founded the bi-weekly Urdu language newspaper Medina in 1912 during the freedom struggle. It had its own printing press, the Medina Press.

Monuments *that* Matter

Daranagar & Vidur Kuti

Legend has it that during the war at Kurukshetra, great savant Vidur gave shelter to the widows of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas and rehabilitated them around his *ashram* here on the eastern bank of the Ganga. The place came to be known as Daranagar, or town for women. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad unveiled the statue of Vidur in 1960.

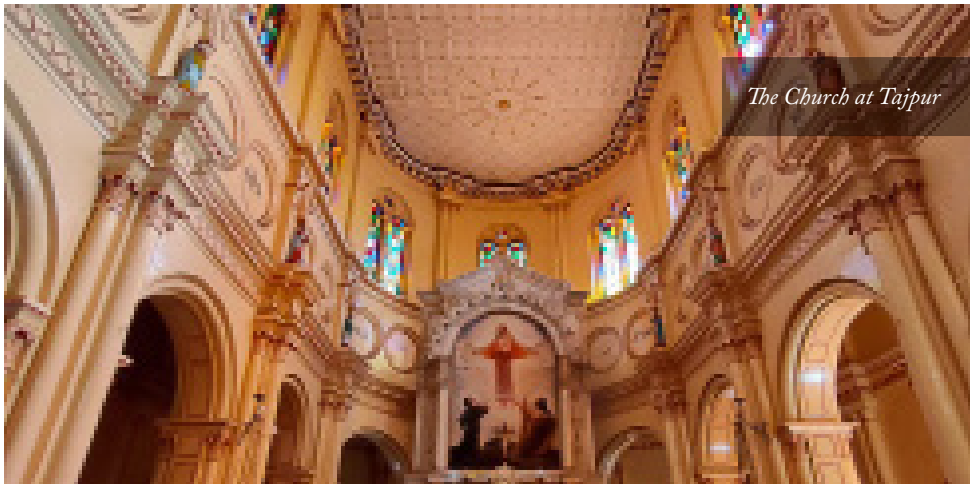
Dhampur

It marks the historic site where Rohilla chief Dunde Khan defeated the Mughals in the 18th century. In 1844, it

supplanted Sherkot as the headquarters of the *pargana* and *tehsil*, since it was more central and accessible. In 1929, Dhampur welcomed Mahatma Gandhi, who addressed a large gathering here enlisting participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Dhampur was once famous for its gunsmiths. A local workman was awarded a prize for matchlocks at the Paris Exhibition of 1867.

Mandawar

Mandawar is an archaeological site that hints at being the *ashram* of sage Kanva where he brought up Shakuntula, the daughter of Vishwamitra. St. Martin and Cunningham have identified it with Mo-ti-pu-lo of the Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang, who visited Mandawar and found that it was the capital of a Sudra Kingdom. This town is famous for having the Buddhist teacher Sungabhadra's monastery dating to the early days of the Common Era. His pupil, Vimal Mitra, lies buried in a mango grove close by on the western bank of the Malini. Mandawar was a stronghold of Hinayana Buddhism. Another fascinating site is the Mandawar ka Mahal, said to be built by Queen Victoria in 1850 as a gift to her Urdu and Farsi tutor, Munshi Ali. About 8 kms from here, close to Kundanpur is the Galkha Devi Temple. It is believed that Rukmini came here to worship and Lord Krishna abducted her.



The Church at Tajpur

Nagina was the headquarters of a tehsil since the beginning of British rule and in 1817 became the seat of the collector of northern Moradabad, the change to Bijnor taking place in 1824, one of the reasons being that the drainage of Nagina was somewhat deficient and malaria as an epidemic was recurrent

Nagina

Nagina became an eminent centre during the Rohilla supremacy when it's old fort and many elegant, though small, mosques were built. The conspicuous Jama Masjid was built around 1867 on an elevated and well-chosen site. The chief public buildings comprise the old Pathan Fort, in which the *tehsil* and registration offices exist, the dispensary, which is a fine brick structure standing on a raised and open site in the south-eastern outskirts of the town.

Najibabad

Najibabad, on the banks of the Malini River, was founded by Rohilla chief Najib-ud-Daulah, who made it the headquarters instead of Jalalabad. In 1755, he built the great fort of Pathargarh or Najafgarh, which is now in ruins. It was a square building surrounded by an embattlement wall, with bastions at each angle and gateways on each side, the chief gate opening towards the town. The tomb of Najib-ud-Daulah stands to the south of Bijnor. Opposite the gateway are the remains of the Nawab's *Naubatkhana*. A spacious building known as Kothi Mubarak Bunyad stands to the northeast. In Jogirampuri near Najibabad, there is the famous Najaf-i-Hind shrine, of Saiyid Raju, a distinguished *Diwan* to whom Emperor Shah Jahan had presented Jogirampuri as a *jagir*. A learned empiricist, he was held in

A Banyan Tree (Ficus bengalensis) With Multiple Prop Roots (Dhinvarpura)*

great reverence in the Mughal court. A *dargah* dedicated to him was built during Aurangzeb's reign and is one of the holiest places for Shia Muslims in India. It attracts people of other faiths as well, when in the last week of May every year, religious discourses (*majlises*) are organized. It is believed that the water from the fountain near the shrine cures many ailments, particularly those of the stomach and the skin.

Sherkot

Sherkot is named after Sher Shah Suri who made it the headquarters of a *pargana*. It is an old settlement of the family of Chauhan Rajputs. Their palatial house with two temples attached stands just outside the town.

Tajpur

In the 18th century, Balram Singh of the Taga Family had acquired large estates in Bashta. His descendant Jagat Singh Bahadur was given the title of Raja by the British.

Bashta

Bashta in Bijnor is home to a Madarsa believed to be the place where Akbar's court's literati Abul Fazl and Abul Faizi gained education. It is said that many visitors used to remove a brick each as a souvenir out of this. Also, Sita is said to have performed the *Agnipariksha*, here at Sita Mandir Math or Sita Samahit Temple. Some say that it is here that the earth tore apart and Sita became one with mother earth.

Other prominent buildings in Bijnor are Radha Krishna Mandir, Panchmukhi Mandir, Shiv Mandir and Chamunda Mandir. Ganj is situated along the Ganga, about 12 kms from the town of Bijnor. Ganj is known for many ancient *ashrams* and temples near the river.

Nature's Abundance

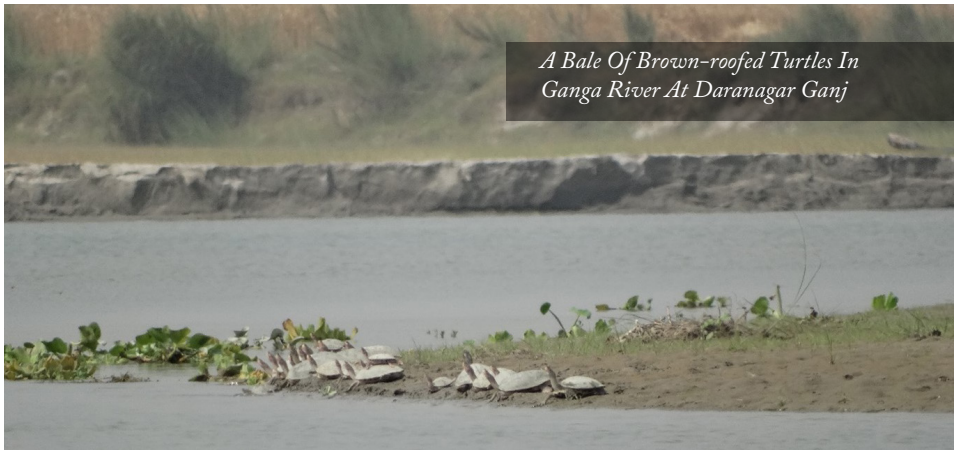
The district is almost a flat alluvial plain having four types of soils, *Bhur* or sandy soil, *Bur Sawai* or Sandy loam soil, *Sawai* or Loam Soil and *Matiyar* or clayey soil. According to riparian communities, the river reclaims its original channel every monsoon, changing the lay of the land as it meanders downstream. Species of Typha, Phragmites, Saccharum, Tamarix, Calotropis, Alternanthera were observed. Sachharum grass holds great economic value and is used to make hedges and thatch roofs and cane furniture.

The common mammals here include Indian Jackal (*Canis aureus indicus*), Bengal Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Indian Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*), Sambar Deer (*Rusa unicolor*), Chital (*Axis axis*). Some major aquatic fauna found in this stretch include the national aquatic animal, the Gangetic

Jama Masjid, Jahanabad Masjid, Teli Wali Masjid, Hadishah, Markaz Masjid and Bahar Wali Masjid are some well-preserved mosques in Bijnor. It is believed that a water mark in Jahanabad mosque warned of the flood in the Ganga in Allahabad and Banaras

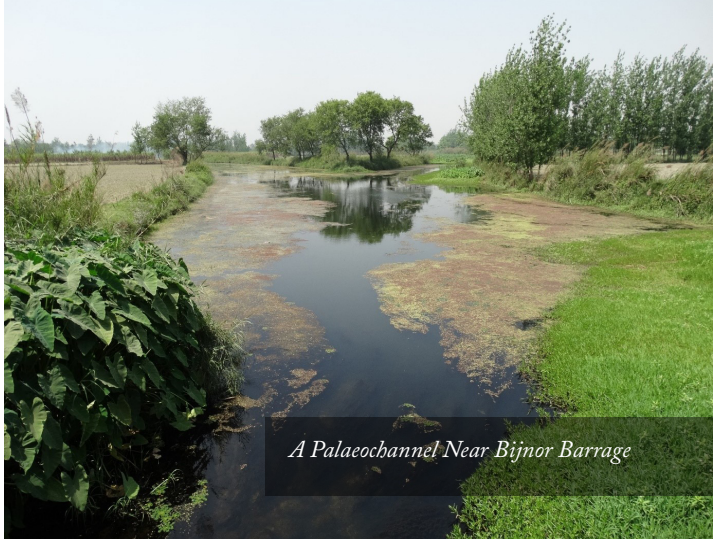
Dolphin and Gharial (both critically endangered in the IUCN Red List) and Turtles. Fishing is an important source of income for fishermen and daily wagers in Bijnor and the most common fish species are Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), Catla (*Labeo catla*), Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), *Singhi (Heteroneustes fossilis), Naini (Cirrhinus mrigala), Singhara (S. seenghala),* Goonch *(Bagarius bagarius), Chilwa (Oxygaster bacaila), Chaal (Chela bacaila), Sauli* or *Sawli (Channa punctata).* Mahasher *(Tor tor)* and Golden Mahaseer*(Tor putitora)* is a rare occurrence here. Recently, the Haiderpur Wetland near Bijnor was declared a Ramsar Site.

Nesting Holes By River Bank Myna In Eroded River Bank



A Bale Of Brown-roofed Turtles In Ganga River At Daranagar Ganj

Batch Of Gharial Being Released Downstream Of Bijnor Barrage



A Palaeochannel Near Bijnor Barrage

CHAPTER 6

MUZAFFARNAGAR

The Sugar Bowl of India

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Mwzaffarnagar

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Muzaffarnagar District, in northern Uttar Pradesh is in the Saharanpur Division. It is named after its headquarters, Muzaffarnagar town, which was founded, under Shah Jahan by his minister Abdul Muzaffar, at the site of an old town Sarot or Sarwat Khan in 1633.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Muzaffarnagar has yielded rich archaeological evidences of pottery like Ochre Coloured (along the Hindon and Kali), Painted Grey Ware (along the Hindon, Kali and Budhi Ganga) and Coarse Grey Ware along with some late Harappan sites and a few coins found from Niamu and Jaroda. It has been a part of empires like the Kurus under Parikshit, Arjun's grandson in the Mahabharata period, the Mauryas, the Sungas, Bactrian Greeks, Sakas, Mitras and Yaudheyas, Kushanas, Maukharis and finally Kannauj. In the medieval period, it came under the Sultanate since Delhi was close by. The Mughal queen, Nur Jahan, had a palace in Nurnagar. Several gold and silver coins of Shahjahan have been found in Sambhalhera and Jan-

Akshay Vat

sath. Muzaffarnagar became a revenue district of the East India Company regime in 1826.

Mythological Links

The Legend *of* Akshay Vat

It is believed that once King Parikshit of Hastinapur committed an error and was cursed to die of snakebite. Sage Sukhdev gathered under the Akshay Vat tree along with 88,000 other sages to narrate the Bhagwat Katha to him to free him of the curse. Revered due to this legend, the tree is believed to fulfil the wishes of those who tie a thread around it. It has been given the title of The Tree of Undying Character.

Legend *of* Sant Baba Gopal Giri

The legend of Sant Baba Gopal Giri is popular at village Kharad. Pleased by his faith, the deities granted Baba with the boon that he can come back to life after death. Many people believe that growing in the Kharad Forest are some herbs that can revive the dead.

Sant Piyara Ji

Piyara ji was a 16th century-saint of the downtrodden. When a quarrel broke out between the Brahmans and Gujars of Sadarpur and the latter are said to have killed some of the brahmans, the ghosts of the murdered men tormented the Gujars, who prayed for the assis-

Baba Giri once dreamt that goddess Shakumbri wished to reside in the forest. He gathered donations from the villagers and constructed a temple for her. Only once Shakumbri Devi began to treat it as her home did Baba Gopal Giri breathe his last

tance of Piyara Ji. He granted their request and declared that Sadarpur belonged to him in a former birth. Piyara Ji claimed the village and changed its name to Andeva, of which Ramdewa is the modern rendering. He died there and was buried in the village.

Saint Goga Pir

Goga Pir, also called Zaharpir and Zahir Diwan, is worshipped throughout the Upper Doab by Hindus and Muslims alike. He is said to be the son of Vacha (a Chauhan Rajput king); some say he may have been the son of Jewar, whose wife provided him with a son after being blessed by Guru Gorakhnath. Some also believe him to be the king of Bikaner. A legend recounts Goga as the opponent against his relative Prithviraj of Delhi. He buried himself alive for having killed Prithviraj, when he threw his spear aimlessly.

Saint Baba Kalu

Baba Kalu is another revered local saint. He was born to a *Kahaar* girl from the community of palanquin bearers, and a monarch. He is represented by a stick decorated with peacock feathers. He is also associated with ghost and demon worship.

Lord Hanuman's birthday is celebrated here with fervour. Hanuman Jayanti falls a few days after Ram Navami and several devotees gather on this day at Hanumatdham at Shukratal

Preparing Jaggery (Gud) - Muzaffarnagar is the Sugar Bowl of India

Events *of* Interest

Apart from Ram Navami, Diwali, Eid, Shab-e-Baraat and Muharram, there are several other celebrations that are significant.

Naga Panchami

Pilgrims flock to the 700-year-old Bhairon Temple to worship *Naga Devta* with milk, flowers and rice. *Maulanas* also visit the temple and take vows. There are many Arabic engravings on the walls of the temple.

Navaratri

Durga Dham that also has a natural cave, has the idol of Goddess Durga and Lord Shiva. It is believed to come alive during the Navaratri, the nine-day festival dedicated to the nine incarnations of Goddess Shakti. Navratri falls twice a year (spring and autumn). The autumnal Navaratri corresponds with *Ramleela* celebrations. Four major *Ramleela* fairs are set-up in the district each year.

Shukteerth

Shukratal/Shukteerth in Jansath is said to be a pilgrimage site for Hindus for more than 5000 years. It is believed to be the site where Parikshit, the grandson of Arjun, heard the sermon of Shrimad Bhagwat delivered by Shuk Deva. It is also the venue of a big fair held annually on Kartik Purnima.

Wood Carving - Signature Craft of Muzaffarnagar

Kaalbhairav Jayanti

Kaalbhairav Jayanti is celebrated in the month of *Agrahayana* (November-December) to worship Batuk Bhairav Baba who is worshipped as an *avatar* of Lord Shiva. It is believed that he is kind and easily bestows wealth and prosperity upon his devotees. Kaal Bhairav's vehicle is a black dog. Therefore, black dogs are valued on the Kaal Bhairav Ashtami. Also, every Shakti Peeth is guarded by Lord Kaal Bhairav. Devotees from Jain and Buddhist communities also worship him.

Nauchandi Mela

After the Nauchandi Mela gets over in Meerut in March-April, the fair shifts to Muzaffarnagar with a new name, *Numaish*, a tradition that began with the British with the *numaish* or display of horses. With time, this became a trade fair. It is today called the Jila Krishi Evam Audyogik Pradarshini.

Urs Gharib

Urs are death anniversaries of saints. On the 5th day of *Shawal*, Urs Gharib Fair is celebrated at village Shoron in Budhana. Others are the Urs of Khwaja Saheb in November-December held at Kairana, Baba Chand Khan ki Roshni Urs on Ramazan in Muzaffarnagar, Mela Nasir Ali at Jansath and the Urs of Mastan Shah in the month of Shawal at Khera Mastan in Budhana. Several other fairs are also organized to honour local saints like Sant Piyara ji, Baba Kalu and Goga Pir. The Chhariyo ka Mela is celebrated in the memory of Goga Pir in all *tehsils* except Budhana and is attended in large numbers.

Jain Festivals

Situated on the outskirts of Muzaffarnagar, Vahelna is an important Jain pilgrimage site. Also called the Shri 1008 Parshvanath Digambar Jain Atisheya Chetra, it has an idol of Lord Parshvanath. Jains celebrate the birth and *nirvana* anniversaries of the last *tirthankara*, Mahavira, the former on the 13th day of the bright half of *Chaitra* and the latter on Diwali Day here. The Ashtanhika Parv, spreading the message of detachment from worldly affairs, is celebrated for 8 days three times a year in the months of *Kartik, Phalgun* and *Ashad*. Another important fair, Jain Uchacho, dedicated to Lord Mahavira, is held at Vahelna in the month of *Bhadra*.

ART *at the* HEART

Paper Cluster

The paper cluster of Muzaffarnagar has around 29 units and is divided into three areas: Bhopa Road, Jansath Road and Shamli. In terms of raw material usage, the mills can be broadly put into

two categories – waste paper based and agro-waste based. Similarly, for finished products too, though the bulk of the mills produce only craft paper, a few of them have started producing writing paper.

Wood Carving

The Saharanpur region is renowned for its wood artisans. It was reportedly Bahlul Lodi who settled some Afghani artisans at the outskirts of Saharanpur in the 15th century. Today, this area produces exquisite wooden furniture, toys, boxes, lamps and lanterns sold in areas like Khata Kheri and Lakad Bazar. Traces of Saharanpur wooden work can be found in Rajasthan's beautiful heritage doors and the furniture of the king of Bahrain. Jalalabad in Shamli, is internationally famous for its wood carving cottage industry.

Literary & Performing Arts

The district of Muzaffarnagar has been connected with many gifted poets like Rahat Indori. Introduced in Muzaffarnagar by Waseem Bareilvi with the words, "*a tarannum shikan shayar*" (a poet who can challenge singing), Indori wrote and published his poems in Hindi and Urdu. Another Urdu poet famous for his *mushairas* is Muzaffar Razmi, who was born at Kairana in Muzaffarnagar.

A popular performing art here is Nautanki. An operatic form of theatre, forming an amalgamation of music, dance, story, dialogue, melodrama and magic, Nautanki enthrals a wide range of audiences. It originated as *Swang* in the late 19th century in Uttar Pradesh (then United Provinces of Agra and Oudh).

Gastronomic Delights

Muzaffarnagar is the Sugar Bowl of India. It is a centre of jaggery trade too. The Economic Survey sheds light on how more than 40% of the population here is agrarian, and the

Jachha Bachha ki Mazar

district has the highest agricultural GDP in Uttar Pradesh. With 13 sugar mills in the district, Khatauli Mill being the largest in Asia, the jaggery market here is Asia's largest.

People who Fascinate

The Saiyids *of* Barha

During the Mughal period, the Saiyids of Barha occupied a prominent position and played a significant role to strengthen the Mughal Empire. According to Ain-i-Akbari the Saiyids of Barha during Akbar's period formed a characteristic element in the population of the Muzaffarnagar district. In the later Mughal era, famous Saiyed brothers, Hasan and Abdulla, had great influence. The main places where the Saiyids of Barha still live are Miranpur, Khatauli, Muzaffarnagar, Jaoli, Tisang, Bakhera, Majhera, Chataura, Sambhalhera, Tilang, Bilaspur, Morna, Sardhaoli, Kaila, Odha and Jansath.

In 2019, a three-day festival called Gur Mahotsav took place in Muzaffarnagar to shed light on a variety of aspects like packaging, promoting jaggery and sugarcane juice, and methods of increasing organic jaggery production

Liaquat Ali Khan

A British era structure here was once owned by Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, whose extended family lived in Jansath, Muzaffarnagar. *Kehkashan*, a white bungalow with manicured lawns and rows of trees located in the Company Bagh area, is presently in the custody of a family from the Purqazi area of Muzaffarnagar, who claim their forefathers bought it from the family of Liaquat Ali Khan.

Mohar Singh

Chaudhary Mohar Singh was a freedom fighter from Shamli in Muzaffarnagar. During the first freedom struggle in 1857, Chaudhary Mohar Singh and the Saiyed-Pathans of Thana Bhawan fought against the British and captured the *tehsil* of Shamli.

Monuments *that* Matter

Jansath

Jansath has several Mughal-era monuments like the Rang Mahal, the house of the Saiyid brothers, Sheesh Mahal, Moti Mahal, Badi and Choti Haveli and Kili Darwaja.

Vahelna Jain Temple

Vahelna holds deep significance as a pilgrimage site for Jains. It has a mosque, a temple dedicated to Shiva, and a Jain temple, all sharing a common wall. It has a 57-feet high *Manasthamb* and a 31-feet monolith statue of Lord Parsvanath. There are several paintings and sculptures inside the complex which depict mythological tales. Additionally, there is a small garden called Tirthankar Vatika where one can find and admire 24 trees representing the 24 Tirthankars of Jainism.

Shukratal Dham

Devotees bathe in the Ganga at Shukratal Dham since they believe this to be the spot where Parikshit, the grandson of Arjun heard the Bhagwat from the sage Shukdev to free himself from a curse. The massive tree Akshay Vat is also a part of the premises. Once upon a time, the shrine and river Ganga were in close proximity with one another; however, at present, the course of the river has shifted.

Nature's Abundance

Muzaffarnagar district is demarcated by river Ganga in the east and by river Yamuna in the west. The major tributary of Ganga here is the Solani River.

The major soil type is sandy

loam. The district can be sub-divided into 5 geographic units namely Sand Bars (along the courses of Ganga and Yamuna rivers, they dynamically change during floods), Flood Plains (formed by the flat, low lying poorly drained area adjacent to the rivers; frequented by floods during monsoons), Ravines (In the western part of the district, it is characterised by the gullies along the rivers Kari, Hindon and Krishni. This is probably due to the erosion of unconsolidated material by localised surface run off forming channels and ultimately giving rise to undulating topography), Younger Alluvial Plains (the gently sloping and slightly undulating terrain having ox-bow lakes, back swamp and paleo-channels forms this geomorphologic unit along the western bank of Ganga and eastern bank of Yamuna Rivers) and Older Alluvial Plain (this has three parts: the tract between Ganga Canal and Kali River, Tract between Kali and Hindon River and the tract between Hindon and Yamuna River).

The district has various kinds of landforms like water logged area (along the main Ganga canal, due to seepage), Back swamp (formed along the flood plains of Ganga river in the north-eastern part of the district around Majlispur and Farukhpur), Paleo-channels (in the western part of the district, cut-off meanders forming ox-bow lakes suggest the buried paleo-channels in the younger alluvial plains) and Levee deposit (characteristic of the Ganga in the eastern part of the district which are older high tracts of the river ranging from 3m to 18m in height).

Shukratal Ghat On Solani River

The Haiderpur Wetland in Muzaffarnagar is a UNESCO Ramsar Site and is one of the largest human-made wetland that was formed in 1984 after the construction of Madhya Ganga Barrage

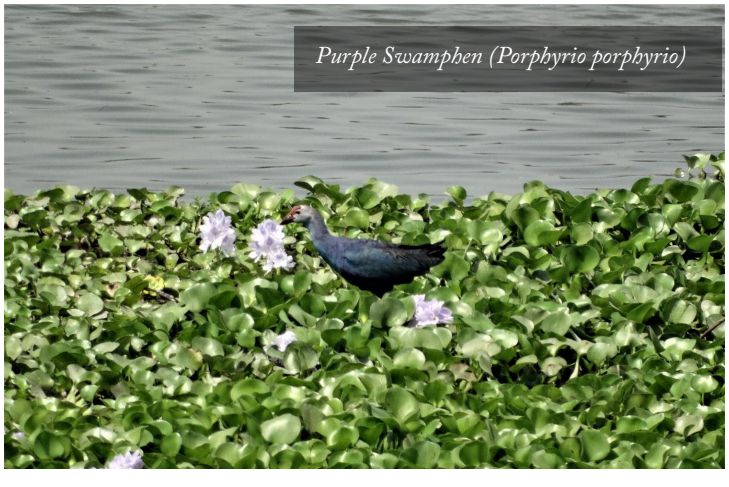
It has rich diversity of flora and fauna. The Haiderpur Wetland in Muzaffarnagar is a UNESCO Ramsar Site and is one of the largest human-made wetlands that was formed in 1984 after the construction of Madhya Ganga Barrage. The region is fed by the Ganges and its tributary Solani, constituting an area of 6,908 hectare within the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in Muzaffarnagar and Bijnor districts. The wetland lies in the strategic Central Asian Flyway which is an important stopover site for the winter migratory birds. It is home to over 320 species of birds, which includes many globally threatened species. Commonly observed avian species include Partridge, Quail, Peafowl, Pigeon, Falcon, Hawk, Spot-billed Duck, Crane, Eagle, Owl, White Vulture, Cuckoo, and Nightingale. Kingfisher, Myna, Red-vented Bulbul, Sparrow, Baya Weaver among others are also found in abundance in the wetland. Among the mammals, Leopard, Wildcats, Crocodile, Gharial, Swamp Deer, Turtles, Monkey, Fox, Nilgai, Jackal, Mongoose, Honey Badger, Barasingha, Wild Boars, Rabbits, Muskrats and Bats in-

habit the wetland and surrounding sanctuary region. Reptiles such as, Monitor Lizard, Python, Indian Cobra, Krait and Viper are found in large numbers. The fishes found here are *Wallago attu*, Mahaseer, Sole, Snow Trout, Rohu, Spotted Barb. Among the flora are plants like *Arjun, Jamun, Khair, Ber, Sheesham* and *Khajur* and grasses like Typha, *Khas* (Vetveria), *Kans, Doob, Munj, Narkul.*

Sauli [Channa punctata] Caught by Fishermen From Ganga River

Haiderpur Wetland View From Bird Watching Tower

A Farmer Pulling His Boat Downstream Of Ganga Barrage



Purple Swamphen (Porphyrio porphyrio)

Turtles Basking on Sand, Muzaffarnagar

CHAPTER 7

Jyotiba Phule Nagar

The Land of Mangoes & Rohu

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

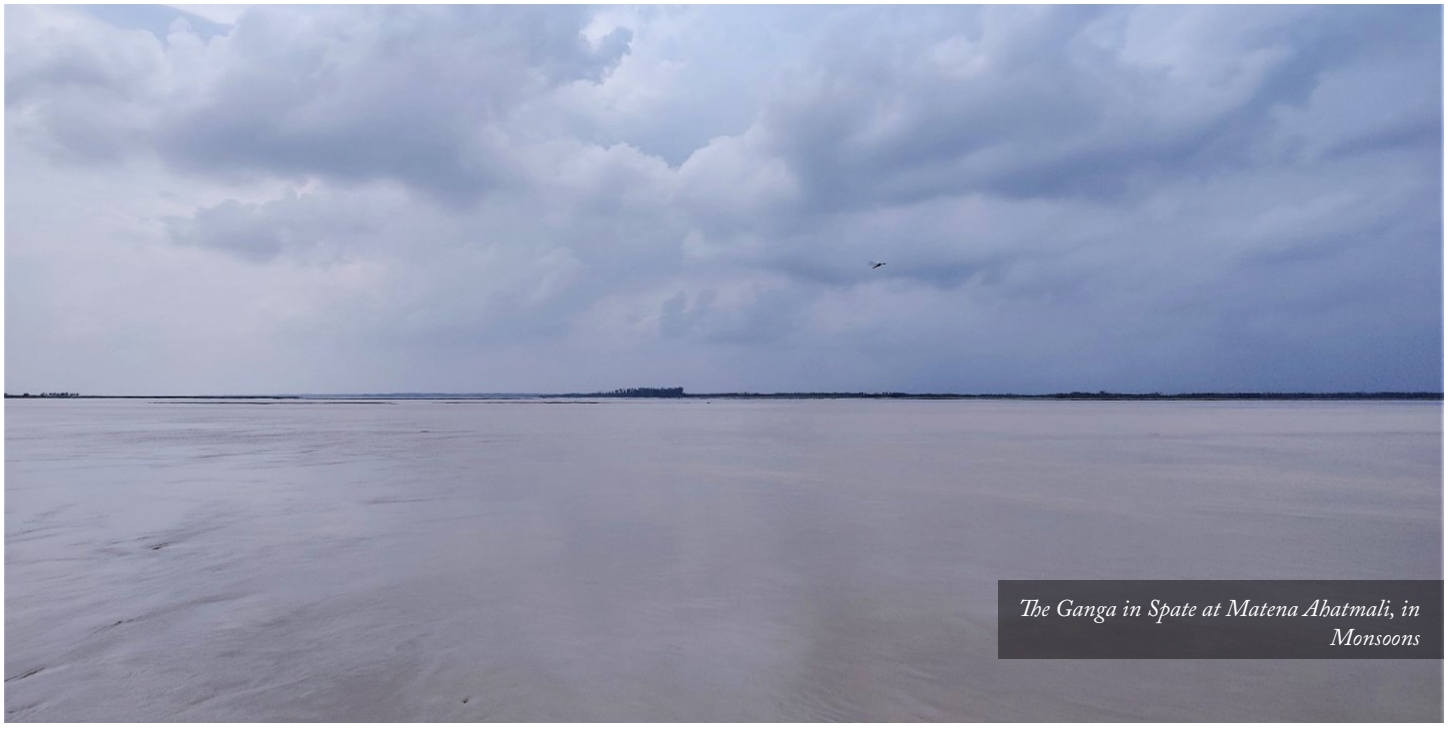
Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Jyotiba Phule Nagar

Where *on the* Ganga?

Part of Moradabad district till 1997, Amroha, in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, is also called Jyotiba Phule Nagar after social reformer Jyotiba Phule. It is surrounded by Bijnor district on the North, Moradabad district on the East, and Sambhal district on the South and bordered by River Ganga on the west. Ganga also functions as a boundary between Amroha and the districts of Bulandshahr, Hapur and Meerut. The district stretches across approximately 88 kms, along the western bank of the Ganga and has four *tehsils* among which Dhanaura (north-western Amroha) and Hasanpur (southern Amroha) lie along the Ganga. Constant change in the river course has produced a lacustrine belt along the stretch with several wetlands.

Re-living *the* Past

It is believed that Amroha was part of an important kingdom during Mahabharata times. Raja Amarjodha, of the Bansi Dynasty, was the ruler of the region around Amroha in 474 BCE. In the 4th century BCE, it came under the rule of Nanda Dynasty



The Ganga in Spate at Matena Ahatmali, in Monsoons

followed by the Mauryas, Greeks, Mitras, Kushanas, Nagas, Guptas and Maukharis. The end of the 7th century marked the establishment of Tomar Dynasty in Sambhal. It is said that the Tomars ruled this region from 8th century till the accession of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. Around 714 CE, Rama Parmara, who was the lord of Ujjain during the period, gifted lands to the members of the 36 Rajput clans. Among them was a member of Kehar Clan to whom he gifted Katehar, the tract later known as the Rohilkhand and included present-day Amroha District. In the mid-11th century, the region was taken over by the Rashtrakutas of Vodamayuta (Badaun), followed by the Katehriya Rajputs, Prithvi Raj Chauhan and eventually the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. In 1305, a battle was fought here when an army of the Delhi Sultanate crushed an invading Mongol army.

Dhanaura was founded by an official of the Oudh Government, Nathe Khan, in 1783. Hasanpur is named after Hasan Khan or Mubarak Khan, who took possession of the place in 1634

The region was briefly under Sher Shah Suri who defeated Humayun but the Mughals re-established their rule here under Akbar. The strategic location of Amroha on the banks of the Ganga facilitated trade and communication. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707 this region was subject to the control of multiple *faujdars*. While the 18th century witnessed the rise of Rohilla Nawab Ali Muhammad Khan, by the end of 1774, the entire Rohillkhand, with the help of the British, came under the influence of Shuja-ud-Daulah, with the British subsequently establishing their

Tomb of Talib Khan

Fisherman Setting Net In Ganga River Depression At Chaupura Khadar

control in 1801. The local residents actively participated in the movements against the British rule here.

Mythological Links

The Name *of* Amroha

It is believed that Amroha comes from the Sanskrit word *Amrovanam*, which means a region of mangoes. The other theory is that Amroha was named by Raja Amarjoda of Bansi dynasty. It is also suggested that Amroha town was founded by the sister of Prithviraj, Amba Devi. It is believed to have been originally named as Ambikanagar. The name Amroha is also said to have been derived from *aam* (mango) and the rohu fish, both of which were offered to the 14th century general, Sharf-ud-din (who, according to some sources, is believed to have founded the region) by the local people, who was then so pleased that he named the place Amrohu, which later became Amroha.

The Scorpions *at* Shah Wilayat Shrine

Shah Wilayat was a Sufi saint who travelled from Iraq to India, but on reaching Amroha, he was told that many spiritual leaders already held sway in the area, which abounded in venomous snakes and scorpions. Hence, he must return. But Shah Wilayat ordained that these scorpions would be harmless at his *dargah*. To this day, the scorpions on his shrine remain harmless and devotees, as a custom, carry them in their hands to seek the blessings of Shah Wilayat and leave them once they complete the rituals.

Meera Baba/Sheikh Saddo

The mid-18th century saint became famous for his power over *Jinns*. After his death, he began to be revered by both the Hindus and the Muslims as Meera Baba and Sheikh Saddo respectively. Today, many devotees from both the faiths worship him at the Vasudev Temple in Amroha where an annual fair also takes place in his honour in

Dholak Manufacturer in Amroha

the months of May-June. He is said to have been buried in the Kaiquabadi Masjid, better known today as the Saddo Mosque. The Vasudev Temple is believed to have been visited by Lord Krishna on his way back from Kurukshetra when he made a Shiva *lingam* with his hands and worshipped it. The *lingam* stands till date.

Events *of* Interest

Tigri Ganga Dham Mela

The fair, held on Kartik Poornima, commemorates the visit of Shravan Kumar who came here with his blind parents on the full moon of *Kartik* month (November). Several people take a dip in the Ganga on the occasion. It is also referred to as the Kumbh Mela of Western Uttar Pradesh.

Fairs *at* Mehboob Ali Tomb & Pir Masjid Tomb

The Mehboob Ali Tomb at Azampur witnesses an annual fair in the months of June-July, with thousands of devotees visiting this place and praying in the mosque inside the Mehboob Ali complex. An annual fair has been taking place at Pir Masjid Tomb on Sambhal Road in Hasanpur since the last 100 years.

Famous Amroha Mangoes

Art *at the* Heart

Traditional Industries

Amroha is known for its traditional industries of pottery making, manufacturing of *Dholak, Katholi,* wooden toys, and handloom. Modern industry includes waste cotton, carpet and *beedi* (hand-rolled cigarette) making industries.

Gastronomic Delights

Agriculture is the major employer with wheat, rice, sugarcane, water melons, musk melons, cucumbers, ground-nut, tomatoes, oil seeds, potatoes, onions, garlic and ginger as chief crops. Other agrarian products include oil seeds, groundnut, sun-hemp, tobacco, various vegetables and fruits. Amroha mangoes are famous all over the world. Two mango varieties *Langda* and *Dassehri* are more popular and supplied all over India from Amroha. The fish catch is also equally good.

People who Fascinate

Kamal Amrohi

Kamal Amrohi was a popular Hindi

Dhanaura Railway Station

filmmaker, screenwriter and Urdu and Hindi poet. He was born in Amroha in 1918. His original name was Syed Amir Haider Kamal Naqvi and he later took the name Kamal Amrohvi or Kamal Amrohi. He is best known for directing films like Mahal, Pakeezah and Razia Sultan.

Jaun Elia & Rais Elia

Jaun Elia was a popular Pakistani poet and writer, born in Amroha in 1931. He migrated to Karachi, Pakistan after the partition of India. Being a communist, his works spoke a lot about class consciousness. He was the cousin of Kamal Amrohi and his elder brother Rais Elia was also a prolific poet, columnist and psychoanalyst, who was also born in Amroha but migrated to Karachi.

Monuments *that* Matter

Basdeo Talao Tank & Bah-ka-Kuan Baoli

Both of these are believed to have been constructed by Raja Kirpanath of the Surajdhwaj dynasty. The *Baoli* is a structure made entirely out of *kankar* or pebbles, except for the brick arches and vaults.

Tombs *of* Amroha

Amroha has several tombs, chief among them being the tomb of Abdul Gaffur Khan, a treasurer in the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar. Banished from the court on charges of treachery, he was later proved innocent and granted the constituency of Azampur. His grandsons are also buried in a tomb nearby. The tombs are monuments of national importance under ASI protection. The tomb has pointed arched niches on six sides, both on the exterior and interior walls. Topped with a moulded dome, the interior has smaller pointed arched niches. Another significant tomb nearby is that of Talib Khan, a high-ranking officer in Akbar's court. Its precinct comprises a rectangular structure with a grave in the centre and is now in a ruined state. It has a stone engraved with the writings of the Quran, topped with a cornice band and parapet.

Mosques *of* Amroha

Amroha is home to many mosques like the 17th century Badi Masjid (built by Zamindar Rustam Khan Dakhni who established the city of Moradabad) and the 18th century Jama Masjid, built to cater to the needs of the farmers who migrated here due to availability of fertile land and water for agriculture along the river Ganga. Another mosque is the Tigri Masjid, a 19th century structure that was built by Zamindar Kale Khan, who established the farming settlement of Tigri.

Durga Temple

Situated in Sherpur Ahatmali, it has a single room with a square plan with *konaka-paga* and *anardha-paga* bearing mouldings on the base. The

temple houses a large statue dedicated to goddess Durga along with a smaller statue dedicated to Goddess Amba. It was built by the farmers who migrated here from the nearby areas.

Kankather Railway Station

This station was a part of the first line that connected Garhmukteshwar to Kankather. The British came to Kankather due to its location along the banks of river Ganga and its close proximity to Delhi. The railway was built along river Ganga as it was the old trade route from east to north. Built in 1938, the station incorporates a station building leading to the platform and 3 residential buildings on site. The booking office is a double storied building with rooms on the right and two rows of segmental arched verandas supported over thick columns in front. It has a jack arched roof. The station is double storied and has rooms linearly planned on the ground floor while the first floor opens to the railway platform. It has a segmental arched veranda, followed by rooms. Another railway station of note is at Dhanaura.

Nature's Abundance

District Amroha is divided into two regions of *Khadar* and Uplands. The *Khadar* region is parallel to the course of the Ganga and Sot. These soils are characterised by generally ash grey to brownish grey on the surface and their texture is sometimes silty-loamy and sometime sandy. The upland region extends from the Moradabad-Amroha district border to westwards up to the Ganga Khadar. The sub-soil can be subdivided into sandy, clayey and loamy. The district is deficient in forests but is well provided with groves. The groves of Mango, *Jamun* or Wild Plum, *Imli* or Tamarind, *Gular, Bel*, Wood Apple, Guava, *Aonla, Barhal, Kathal, Shisham* and *Neem* are chiefly present in the district.

There are considerable patches of riparian vegetation on the upland tracts at Meerapur Ahatmali, Bisawali Musta, Rasulpur Bhawer and aquatic weeds in the swampy areas along the river. Patches of *Kaans,* Common Cattail, *Narkul, Doob*, Giant Cane or Elephant Grass can be seen. The upland tracts and river banks have various species like *Sheesham, Neem*, Banyan, *Jamun,* Siris, Leucaena, *Peepal*, Mango, Bamboo, *Ber* and Eucalyptus. Some herb/shrub species here are India Mallow, Devil's Thorn, Coffee Senna, Goat Weed, Buffel Grass, Setaria, *Khus,* Calotropis and Lantana.

The district has a part of Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary, but most of it is agriculture landscape with little forest cover. Common mammals found here include Indian Leopard, Indian Jackal, Indian Fox, Monkey, Langur, Indian Hare, Nilgai and Wild Boar. Also, one can find the Gangetic Dolphin, Gharial and Turtles here. An October, 2019 Census by Uttar Pradesh Forest Department and WWF-India in five districts namely Bijnor, Meerut, Hapur, Amroha and Bulandshahr recorded 36 Gangetic Dolphins, most being in Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary which stretches from Bijnor Ganga Barrage to Garhmukteshwar.

Fishing is an important source of income for fishermen and daily wagers in Amroha and common fish species are Barwari, Rohu, Catla, Carp, Singhi, Singhara, Gonch, or Sawli and Naini

Some of the microfauna found are Beetles, Dragonflies and Damselflies, Grasshoppers and Crickets, Stick insects and Leaf insects, Butterflies and Moths. Among Dragonflies and Damselflies, Ruddy Marsh Skimmer, Coromandel Marsh Dart, Common Tiger, Common Grass Yellow were frequently sighted. Among the birds, one can find Yellow-wattled Lapwing, White-throated Kingfisher, River Tern, Grey Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Egrets, Cormorants, Indian Pond Heron, Egrets, White-throated Kingfisher, Common Moorhen, White Breasted Waterhen, Jungle Babbler, Indian Robin and Common Tailorbird.

Ganga River enters Amroha near Bakipur Ahatmali, after crossing Bijnor. The river channel is around 0.5 km to 1 km in width here. The length of Ganga River in Amroha district is around 88 kms. From the point where Ganga enters the district, it meanders with a concave turn towards left bank (at Makarempur Khadar) forming a huge island on its opposite side.

Further, it meanders in the same form towards right bank forming island at Akbarpur Khadar. The Ganga River stretch in Amroha from Garhmukteshwar Ganga Bridge at Brijghat falls under Upper Ganga Ramsar Site – a Ramsar wetland.

The channel in Amroha-Hapur is braided with several in-stream sandbars and emergent islands which may be washed out in high flows. These islands and sandbars get immersed with the increased water flow in the river, especially during monsoon season along with the river channels in between them. The width of the islands varies between 200 m – 1 km and length 1 km to 3 km. Post monsoon, they get covered with luxuriant growth of riparian grasses and aquatic vegetation. Plants such as Bush Morning Glory, Tall Reed, *Kaans*, Water Hyacinth, Alligator weed can be seen on some exposed islands.

RiparianVegetation Along Ganga

CHAPTER 8

MEERUT
From Hastinapur to Begum Samru

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Meerut

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Meerut District is located in north-western Uttar Pradesh forming a part of the National Capital Region. It is surrounded by districts Muzaffarnagar to the north, Hapur to the south, Ghaziabad to the south-west, Baghpat to the west, and Bijnor and Amroha to the east. River Ganga flows along the eastern boundary, entering Meerut from Muzaffarnagar district and exiting into Hapur. Uttar Pradesh can be geo-culturally divided into 4 parts - Paschim Pradesh, Bundelkhand, Awadh and Purvanchal. Meerut lies in Paschim Pradesh. Spread over 2590 sq. km, Meerut city is the headquarters of Meerut district. It has 3 *tehsils* - Meerut, Mawana and Sardhana out of which Mawana lies within the 5 km study corridor while Meerut Tehsil has also been documented, although it does not lie along Ganga, due to its significance in the 1857 War of Independence against the British. Ghaziabad (including Hapur) was segregated from Meerut in 1976.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Meerut has rich mythological, historical, religious and

commercial significance, owing to its location along the holy river Ganga. Archaeological excavations in Hastinapur and Rajpur Parasan revealed traces of the Indus Valley Civilization and antiquities of Painted Grey Ware, Ochre Colour Ware and Grey Ware. Gold coins were discovered in Kishorpur to the east of Hastinapur and more that 1500 silver coins in Rani-ka-Mahal in Parikshitgarh to the south of Hastinapur.

In 600 BCE, the district was a part of the Kuru Kingdom, one of the 16 Mahajanapadas and subsequently came under the Mauryas when Emperor Ashoka established one of the Ashokan Pillars in Meerut city. The Ashokan Pillar, at Delhi Ridge, next to the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital, near Delhi University, was carried to Delhi from Meerut by Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351–1388 CE). The Mauryas were succeeded by the Shakas, Ayudhas, Kushanas, Guptas, Vardhanas, Tomars, Chauhans, Gurajara-Pratiharas, Dor-Rajputs, Mahmud of Ghazni, Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. Emperor Akbar built a mint for copper coins in Meerut city. After Aurangzeb, the city came effectively under the control of local chieftains - the Sayyids of Muzaffarnagar in the north, the Jats in the south-east, and the Gujjars along Ganga and in the south-west. Meerut is also visited by several Sikh pilgrims since one of the *Panj Pyares* of Guru Gobind Singh (the five devotees who sacrificed themselves to save the Sikh faith) named Dharam Singh, resided in Saifpura near Hastinapur.

Sugarcane, a Water Guzzling Crop, On Ganga Bank At Makhdumpur Village

Meerut came under the Marathas in the 18th century CE who ceded it to the British in 1803. It gained recognition during the struggle of 1857 which was sparked here by the news of Sepoy Mangal Pandey's capital punishment in Barrackpore. He was a soldier of the Bengal Native Infantry which refused to use the new Enfield cartridges since they were believed to have been greased by animal fat. In Meerut, 90 soldiers under Lieutenant Colonel George Carmichael Smythe demonstrated the use of these cartridges but finally, 85 of them refused and the revolt began. The mutiny spread over the entire area from the neighbourhood of Patna to the borders of Rajasthan. The main centres of the struggle were Kanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Jhansi, Gwalior, and Arrah in Bihar. This marked the beginning of a widespread revolt across North India as these soldiers marched towards Delhi.

To this day, May 10th is observed as a local holiday in Meerut.

Meerut gained recognition during the Struggle of 1857 which was sparked here by the news of Sepoy Mangal Pandey's capital punishment in Barrackpore

Meerut has been home to Moffusilite- a newspaper started by an Australian writer and lawyer, John Lang. He was a lawyer to the Rani of Jhansi in her battle against the British East India Company.. Meerut was also the venue of the controversial Meerut Conspiracy Case in March, 1929, in which several trade unionists, including three Englishmen, were arrested for organizing the Indian-rail strike. This case garnered attention in England, inspiring the 1932 play titled, Meerut Prisoners, which was performed by a Manchester-based street theatre group, the Red Megaphones. The play highlighted the detrimental effects of colonisation and industrialisation. The last session of the Indian National Congress before Indian Independence, was held at Victoria Park in Meerut on 26th November, 1946.

Walter Reinhardt Sombre, an 18th century English mercenary, established himself at Sardhana and some parts of the district came under his rule. Upon his death, they came into the hands of his wife, Begum Samru, a convert Catholic who was born as Farzana Zeb-un-Nissa but became Joanna Nobilis Sombre.

Mythological Links

Meerut

Meerut is derived from *Maya Rashtra*. Maya was the ruler of the *danavas, daityas* and *devas*. He was also a renowned architect. He built the Indraprastha Sabha for Krishna and the Pandavas. Subsequently, the name changed to Mairashtra, and later to Mai-dant-ka-khera. Later, it became Mairaath, and eventually Meerut.

Hastinapur

Hastinapur originates from Sanskrit terms, *Hastina* (elephant) and *puram* (city). Scholars also believe the city to be named after King Hasti, the grandson of King Bharat. Hastinapur is also referred to as Gajapuram, Nagapura, Asandivata, Brahmasthalam, Shanti Nagaram and Kunjarpuram, in multiple ancient texts. Hastinapur, apart from being the fulcrum in the Mahabharata, was also visited by Lord Adinath, also known as Rishabhanatha. He was the first Jain *tirthankar,* who founded the Ikshvaku clan.

Ganga *in* Meerut

It is said that Ganga once flowed by Hastinapur but destroyed the city, and gradually shifted eastward. According to the *Puranas*, King Shantanu of Hastinapur was invited to Indralok by Lord Indra, where Ganga was also present. He was the only human among the deities. A soft breeze ruffled Ganga's clothes. As a sign of respect, all the lords bowed their heads except Shantanu who was mesmerized by her beauty. An angry Lord Brahma cursed Shantanu to be reborn as a Kuru King and marry Ganga. Reborn, he married her under the condition that she shall never be questioned for her actions. The Goddess drowned seven of their sons

Hastinapur originates from Sanskrit terms, Hastina (elephant) and puram (city)

in the river at Hastinapur to save them from the curse of Lord Brahma but while drowning the eighth son Bhishma, she was questioned by Shantanu. Thus, Bhishma was forced to live with the curse of immortality and Ganga abandoned Shantanu.

Ravana's 'Sasuraal'

Meerut was founded by King Maya, the son of Kashyapa and Dana. He married the *apsara* Hema. They performed great penance to Lord Shiva for a daughter. After several years Maya found Mandodari near a well and assumed her to be the daughter gifted to him by Shiva. Mandodari married Ravana, from Ramayana. Thus, Meerut is also known as *Ravana Ka Sasural*, meaning Ravana's wife's natal home.

Legend *of* Shravan

As per Ramayana, King Dashrath accidentally killed Shravan Kumar in Meerut with his arrow. Shravan was taking his aged, blind parents on a pilgrimage. Consequently, his parents cursed King Dasharath to suffer the pain of separation from his children.

The Mahabharata

Meerut was a part of the Kuru Kingdom ruled by King Pandu of the Mahabharata era. The king along with Kunti and Madri, and the Pandava brothers, resided in the forests near Hastinapur. It is also said that Duryodhana built a palace of lac in Bharwana, 35 km from Meerut. After the victory of the Pandavas, Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna took over the throne and founded the village, Pariskhitgarh, located to the south of Hastinapur along the then banks of river Ganga. As per the Matsya and Vayu Puranas, Hastinapur and Nichaksu Villages were destroyed by heavy flooding of river Ganga. As a result, the fifth king to follow King Parikshit shifted the capital of the kingdom to Kaushambi, 630 kms east of Hastinapur.

Events *of* Interest

Nauchandi Mela

Nauchandi Mela is an important month-long fair held after Holi near Chandi Devi Temple in Meerut City. It is believed that Mandodari, the wife of Ravana, worshipped Goddess Chandi which explains the nomenclature. The fair was first celebrated in 1672, as a cattle trade fair. Devotees from all religions visit with fervour.

Hastinapur originates from Sanskrit terms, Hastina (elephant) and puram (city)

Sardhana Christ Fair

It takes place on the first Sunday of November in honour of Mother Mary.

Ganga Snan

The Ganga Snan Festival is held annually near Mawana at the Mukhdumpur Ganga Ghat. It attracts a congregation of over two lakh devotees for the holy dip.

Art *at the* Heart

Ajrada Gharana: *Music Traditions*

The Tabla playing of the Ajrada Gharana is traced to Ajrada Village in Meerut from where the founders of this *gharana* Ustad Kallu Khan and Ustad Meeru Khan hailed. They came to Delhi in 1770 CE and settled over there with the intention of learning and propagating Tabla.

Folk Renditions *of* Uttar Pradesh: *Ragini, Swaang & Dola*

Each *Ragini* is a story sung with musical instruments and limited enactment. The stories deal with family ties, historical experiences, man-woman relationships etc. *Swaang* are also stories traditionally sung by poets for entertainment, one of the interesting and prominent ones being that of Sultana Daku. *Dola* is a unique tradition probably derived from *Dhol*. It used to consist of 30 stories and is a very complex method of singing as each of these stories has parts of three different story formats built into it.

Mollywood *of* Meerut

The cinema industry in Meerut started with comedy programmes recorded on audio tapes, which were quite popular in the 1990s. By the end of the 20th century, they were replaced by CDs, which led to the comedy-audio-video business being taken seriously as a viable career and industry. This industry attracted the attention of major film and music production companies such as T-Series and Moser Baer. An average Mollywood film takes about 20 days to wrap up.

Ayurveda & Medicine

There are 35 medicinal plant species used by the people of Meerut region to treat ailments. *Gedua ki Chhal* (*Aerva lanata*) is a root paste rubbed on the forehead 3-4 times a day to bring relief for headache. *Siras* (*Albizzia lebbeck*) is a dilute root paste given orally till the patient regains consciousness, in case of a snakebite. Its paste is also applied externally on the bite. *Kiromar's* (*Aristolochia bracteolata*) dried roots are given to increase uterine contraction during

labour; it also helps expel roundworms. Many Ayurveda practitioners in the region use these prescriptions.

Printing

Books were being printed here in the 1800s. Even today it is one of the foremost centres of printing enterprise in India.

Scissors

The barber's scissors made in Meerut from metal scrap is the first handmade tool chosen for a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. It can be repaired, unlike other scissors. In the local idiom, the phrase *Dada le, potaa barte* (a product bought by the grandfather, but which continues to be used by his grandson), underscores their quality. All parts of the scissors are pre-used in some other form. For example, the blades are made from recycled carbon steel sourced from scrap metal, which may be salvaged from old railway rolling stock, automobiles or other sources. The handles, made of metal alloys or plastics, are prepared from other wastes such as old utensils. The first such scissors are said to have been made by Asli Akhun, a local blacksmith, around the year 1653. About 600 scissor manufacturing units are situated in Kainchi Bazaar.

Musical Instruments

A small neighbourhood, Jali Kothi, in Meerut provides 95% of Brass Band instruments to wedding bands across India. Nadir Ali and Company began as a wedding band in 1885 when Nadir Ali, a band leader in the British Army raised his own company with his cousin Imam Buksh and began making instruments in 1911. The Nadir Ali and Co. factory is housed in a heritage building with a magnificent fort-like facade and Naushad, Dilip Kumar, Saira Banu, B.R. Chopra, and Muzaffar Ali, all are said to have visited the factory.

Meerut has a rich history of Hindustani classical music of which there is little evidence today. It is the birthplace of great sarangi makers such as Abdul Aziz Behra, whose handcrafted instruments were, and still are, played by masters such as Abdul Latif Khan and Ram Narain and prized by antiquarians.

Sports Goods

The district of Meerut is popular for producing goods like nets, general exercise equipment, boxing equipment, toys and games, carrom boards. There are approximately 3,350 sports goods manufacturing units in the district.

Embroidery Cluster

Historically, the origins of embroidery

in India can be traced to the third century. According to the MSME report of 2008, the embroidery cluster of Meerut is more than a 100-years'-old and covers an area of around 20 kilometres.

Gastronomic Delights

The *Khadirs* along the banks allow a rich cultivation of sugar, cotton, flour and oilseeds. Water melons, musk melons, cucumbers, groundnut, tomatoes, oil seeds, potatoes, onions, garlic and ginger are mainly grown crops. According to riparian communities, the river reclaims its original channel every monsoon season, washing away these agricultural fields and changing their structure as it meanders downstream. Rewadi and Gajak, Makke ki Roti and Sarson ka Saag, and Tilkut, prepared by crushing and mixing Til or Sesame seeds with sugar are popular in Meerut. Tilkut is made during Sakat Chauth in

January. Meerut city is also famous for its Mughal cultural legacy and many connoisseurs of this cuisine travel all the way from Delhi to Sotiganj or Khair Nagar areas of Meerut to sample the simmering Seekh Kebabs. Vegetarian Marwari fare is also served in places.

People who Fascinate

Satish Chandra

A noted historian, he taught at prestigious Indian universities and was the Smuts' Visiting Professor at Cambridge in 1971. He was Professor of History at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He was chairperson of the centre for a few years. He was the Secretary and President of the Indian History Congress.

He was an associate director of research at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme as well as an executive board member at the International Congress of Historical Sciences, both in Paris. He has a number of benchmark publications to his credit.

Rewadi and Gajak, Makke ki Roti and Sarson ka Saag, and Tilkut, prepared by crushing and mixing Til or Sesame seeds with sugar are popular in Meerut

Sumitra Charat Ram

Sumitra Charat Ram (1914–2011), was a noted Indian arts patron, impresario and the founder of Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra established in 1952. She played a key role in the revival of performing arts, especially Kathak, in the post-independence era, for which she received the Padmashri.

Meerut has been home to several renowned film directors and actors like Vishal Bhardwaj, Naseeruddin Shah and Bharat Bhushan.

Monuments *that* Matter

Alamgirpur

An archaeological study reveals the city to date back to 2600-2200 BCE. Four cultural periods with intervening breaks were demarcated, belonging to the Harappan culture.

Sites related *to the* Mahabharata

Vidur-ka-tila was excavated in Hastinapur city. A collection of several mounds, some measuring 50 to 60 feet in height, was named after Vidur. The study led to the belief that the mound was the remains of the ancient kingdom of Hastinapur, capital of Kauravas and Pandavas of Mahabharata. Traces of the street network with brick-lined streets proper drainage systems can be seen. Further excavations in Draupadi ki Rasoi and Draupadi Ghat revealed copper utensils, iron seals, gold and silver ornaments, terracotta discs and oblong-shaped ivory dice used in the game of *Chauparh*, dating to 3000 BCE. Hastinapur also has the Draupadeshwar and Pandureshwar Temples. The Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple is dedicated to Shiva. It is believed to be the place where the Kauravas and Pandavas received their education in the Vedas and Puranas. Legend has it that in the Mahabharata period, Pandu's eldest son Yudhishthira, had established the Shiva *lingam* at the Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple before the war of Mahabharata and prayed to Shiva for blessings.

The Karna Temple is located near the Pandureshwar Temple on an old ravine along the bank of the Ganga. The original Shiva *lingam* inside it is believed to have been established by Karna. This temple is dedicated to Karna as he used to donate alms here after bathing in the Ganga. Earlier, the Ganga used to flow here but slowly it shifted.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has also excavated Barnava, near Meerut, believed to be the place where the Kauravas built the palace of lacquer for the Pandavas.

Qila Parikshitgarh is a significant site in Meerut believed to be the fort of King Parikshit, the grandson of Arjun. The fort was perhaps constructed away from Hastinapur to avoid

Diwan Khana in Behsuma

destruction from floods. Silver coins from the times of Shah Alam II have been found in the fort. A famous pond in Parikshitgarh is Gandhari Tal, said to have been used by Gandhari, the mother of the Kaurava brothers.

The Suraj Kund Park, an amusement park today, is believed to be the place where King Karna dedicated his *Kawach* and *Kundal* (divine armour) to the Sun God. Every year, a fair is organised during Dussehra here.

Jayanti Mata Shakti Peeth

According to the beliefs of the local people, Mata Sati's left thigh fell in Hastinapur, after which the place was named as Jayanti Mata Shakti Peeth.

Behsuma

Behsuma was a locality in the ancient Hastinapur Kingdom. In 18th century CE, Raja Nain Singh, a notable Gurjar king, re-established the town and the architectural landscape of the settlement reflects a Rajputana style. Behsuma has the famous *haveli* of Raja Nain Singh and the community space Diwan Khana. The gateways comprise multifoliate arches, adorned with decorative niches and a *chajja* supported on ornamental brackets. The residences are built in Lakhori brick, following courtyard planning. Behsuma comprises traditional residential structures, built in brick masonry.

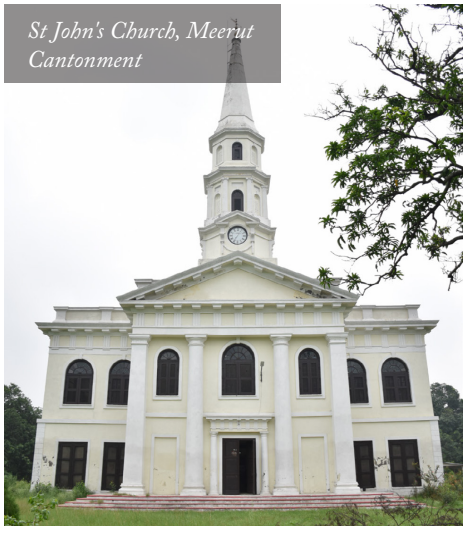
Military Structures & Cantonment

The British gained control of Meerut in 1803 and built several structures, especially the Cantonment, to cater to their needs. St. John's Church was built between 1819-1822. It is the oldest church in North India and is a masterpiece of architecture. There is a cemetery near the church which has the graves of the British officials and their families killed during the revolt of 1857. The church is built in the style of English church architecture which has a large open space for worship. The General Cantonment Hospital was built to cater to the injured soldiers during the war of 1857. The single-storey structure is surrounded by large gardens entered through arcaded verandas with semi-circular arches with an exaggerated keystone.

> ***The St. John's Church was built between 1819-1822. It is the oldest church in North India and is a masterpiece of architecture***

Sardhana Church

The Sardhana Church was constructed in 1822 at the behest of Begum Samru, regarded as the only Roman Catholic ruler in the history of India. She enlisted the services of an Italian architect, Anthony Reghelini, for the building. The church was dedicated to Virgin Mary and cost around Rupees 400,000 to construct. The altar and



St John's Church, Meerut Cantonment

its surrounds are made of marble, set with coloured stones. Much of the interior is also in marble. It was granted the status of Minor Basilica in 1961 by Pope John the 23rd. Due to the miraculous picture of the Mother of Grace here, the tradition of special prayers and an annual fair started in this church.

Colonial Bungalow, Meerut Cantonment

Augarnath Temple

Also called the Kali Paltan Mandir, the Augarnath Temple in Meerut is devoted to Lord Shiva. The War of Indian Independence, 1857, started here. The temple has a memorial, built in honour of the martyrs of the war. According to local priests, the great Maratha rulers used to worship here and seek blessings before proceeding with their campaigns.

Shahpeer Sahab *ki* Dargah

Shahpeer Sahab ki Dargah was built in 1628 by Nur Jahan in honour of Hazrat Shahpeer, the teacher of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. The *dargah* is a structure of red stones and is popular for its unique architecture. It is said that this mausoleum was constructed 24 hours before the death of Hazrat Shahpeer and the work on its construction was stopped midway and therefore, it is still believed to be incomplete. It has been listed as a national heritage monument by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Jain Temples

Hastinapur Teerth Kshetra is believed to be the birthplace of 16th, 17th and 18th *Tirthankaras* namely, Shantinatha, Kunthunatha and Aranatha respectively. Jains also believe that it was here in Hastinapur, the first *tirthankara*, Rishabhanatha, ended his 13-month long penance after receiving sugarcane juice (*ikshu-rasa*) from King Shreyans. Meerut District is home to several sites sacred to and significant for the Jains like Jambudweep Jain Temple, Shwetambar Jain Temple, Prachin Digambar Jain Temple, Astapad Jain Temple and Shri Kailash Parvat Jain Temple.

Shahid Smarak

Shahid Smarak is devoted to the martyrs of India during the first war of freedom in 1857. There are lush green spaces in the Smarak and a Shahid Stambh devoted to the martyred freedom fighters is located in the premises. There is also a museum which preserves and depicts the war of independence through paintings and dioramas.

Nature's Abundance

Ganga along Meerut district follows a north-south directional flow. It is defined by four terrains namely the Hindon Plain (*khadir* plains, cultivated for Rabi crops and melons; Hindon and its network of canals carries water from Ganga to Yamuna, the Central Depression (a shallow depression sloping towards the east and rising upward, till the road interconnecting Meerut to Muzaffarnagar having fertile alluvial plains, comprising loamy soil), the Eastern Uplands (having rolling dunes due to the combination of sand along the Ganga and Kali) and the Ganga *Khadir* (Lying in Mawana Tehsil it is primarily covered in forests. It also

comprises pockets of swampy land, cultivated for rice and cane). Ganga River enters Meerut near villages Khera Ahatmali and Bela after flowing through Bijnor. The length of Ganga River in Meerut district is around 35 kms while the channel is 0.5-1.5 kms wide. The Ganga has two small tributaries here namely Boorhi Ganga, a small swampy irregular stream that is used by the locals to perform rituals and the Kali River East, also called the *Nagin* (probably on account of its serpentine windings).

Meerut also has many wetlands like the Behsuma Talab (mainly used for fishing and having trees like *Pipal, Jamun,* Mango and Banana), Ganeshpur Talab (largely unused but having some trees of Date and *Semal*) and Karimpur Talab (having trees like *Neem* and Eucalyptus). Almost the entire river channel in Meerut has sandbars and islands. The riverine fluvial islands are land masses within a river channel that are separated from the floodplain by water on all sides. They are generally formed by sand or sediments mass by currents during higher level of river flow and are exposed during dry season.

The Meerut plains are fertile and the bread basket of Western Uttar Pradesh. The Mawana Bhur track is more towards the river and full of ravines. Ganga Khadir is a low-lying area, comprising vast stretches of wetlands. These wetlands host aquatic animals and birds. The Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary is a major tourist attraction which is a home to various kinds of animals and plant species. It was established in 1986. The sanctuary has 41 mammal species, 373 bird species, 36 reptile species and 10 species of amphibians. Major mammals are Smooth-Coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*), Swamp Deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Blackbuck (*Antilope cervicapra*), Indian Jackal (*Canis aureus indicus*), Indian Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) and Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*).

Among Butterflies, Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*), Common Grass Yellow (*Eurema hecabe*), and Peacock Pansy Butterfly (*Junionia almanac*) can be seen. Among Dragonflies and Damselflies, Ruddy Marsh Skimmer (*Crocothemis servilla*), Blue Marsh Hawk (*Orthetrum glaucum*), Coromandel Marsh Dart (*Ceriagrion coromandelianum*) can be found.

The Meerut plains are fertile and the bread basket of Western Uttar Pradesh

Meerut is also home to the Gangetic Dolphin (31 of them were recorded in the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in an October, 2019 census), Gharial and Turtles (12 Species have been identified between Bijnor and Kanpur). Among the birds one can find River Tern, River Lapwing, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, White-throated Kingfisher, Asian Openbill, Indian Pond Heron, Egrets and Cormorants (in and around the river) and Purple Swamphen, Common Coot, Common Moorhen and White Breasted Waterhen (in and around swamps and palaeochannels). There are about 60 fish species here like Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), Catla (*Labeo catla*), *Singhara* (*S. seenghala*), Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), *Singhi (Heteroneustes fossilis), Gonch (Bagarius bagarius), Sauli* or *Sawli (Channa striatus)* and (*Channa punctata*), *Naini (Cirrhinus mrigala)* and *Barwari (Wallagu attu).*

The district forms a part of

Behsuma Talab

the sub-tropical deciduous type of vegetation. It comprises small portions of barren or waste land, as most of it is used for agriculture. The *khadirs* of Ganga and Hindon, and the adjacent ravines are rich in vegetation. The trees generally found are S*heesham, Jamun,* Mango, Siris, Tamarind and *Neem*. Some riparian grasses are economically valuable in the district. *Kaans (Saccharum spontaneum), Narkul (Phragmites Karka)* and *Patera (Typha elephantina)* are harvested from Ganga *Khadar* by local people. The Meerut and Hapur district belt is popular for wicker work – especially furniture and household items made of these grasses.

As per Aquifer Mapping and Groundwater Management Plan (Parts of NCR) Report of the CGWB, the NCR area (including Meerut) is a monotonous plain with sporadic occurrences of sand dunes, and sandy ridges, ravine tracts and depressions close to River Ganga.

Narkul Grass (Phragmites Karka) At Ganga River Floodplains, Bhagupur

Ruddy Shelducks On Floodplain From Hastinapur-Nandnaur Bridge

CHAPTER 9

HAPUR
Salvation Land

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Hapur

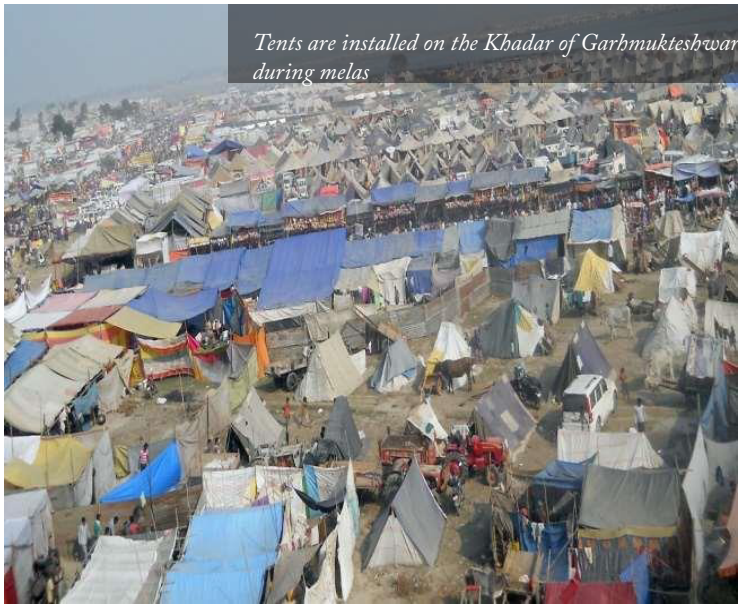
WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Hapur in northern Uttar Pradesh, also called Panchsheel Nagar District, is spread over 660 sq m and lies in the Upper Doab Region of Ganga and Yamuna. It was established in 2011 as a district and its *tehsils* were earlier a part of Meerut and subsequently, Ghaziabad. It is surrounded by Meerut District on the North, Ghaziabad District on the West, and Bulandshahar District on the South. It comprises three *tehsils*, out of which Garhmukteshwar touches the banks of River Ganga and therefore, is a part of the study. Garhmukteshwar is located in Eastern Hapur with its eastern side bound by River Ganga that shifted course in early to mid-20th century which led to the establishment of Brijghat settlement along the riverbank. Brijghat emerged as a new place of pilgrimage, as it hosted the annual celebration of Kartik Poornima. The Ganga first touches Hapur at Kutubpur.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Garhmukteshwar finds mention in Bhagavata Purana and Mahabharata as a *mohal-*

Braj Ghat



Tents are installed on the Khadar of Garhmukteshwar during melas

la in Hastinapur Kingdom. It has been ruled by the Nandas, Mauryas Shungas, Kushanas, Guptas and Maukharis. The district was included in the dominions of King Yashovarman of Kannauj during the first half of the 8th century. After him, the district might have come under the Tomar Rajputs, the Gurjara Pratiharas and Har-dutta, the sixth descendant of the Dor Rajputs. He is also credited as the founder of the town of Hapur, around 983 CE.

After being under the Dor-Rajputs till 1192 CE, Hapur came under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. After switching hands between Mughal courtier Ghaziuddin, Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Rohillas and Shuja-ud-Daula (who had a combined force) and Marathas, Hapur came under British Rule in 1803. Local freedom fighters like Mukaddam Ganga Sahay, Mahatab Singh, Ch. Kude Singh, Uma Dutt Vaidya, Swami Shrinivas, Mange Lal Nagar, Ratan Rai Gautam, and Pandit Vishambhar Dayal played a vital role in the freedom struggle of India. The current Nagar Palika is said to be the *haveli* of landlord Chaudhary Prannath who gave refuge to traders frightened by British persecution.

Mythological Links

Hapur, *the* Name

Hapur comes from Hari/Lord Krishna who rested here during his journey from Mathura to Hastinapur. Another belief suggests that it was founded by Har Dat, the Dor Rajput, around 983 CE. According to the *Jana-Shrutis*, Hapur town was founded by Raja Harishchandra.

Garhmukteshwar & Pooth

Garhmukteshwar, located along the banks of the Ganga, is named after the temple of Mukteshwar Mahadev. During ancient times, it was called Shivallabhpur, since members of the Ballabh community took care of the Shiva Temple here. It is believed to be the place where *ganas* of Vishnu, Jai and Vijai, attained salvation from a curse of sage Durvasa and was also hence called Ganamukteshwar. Garhmukteshwar is known as a sacred place where Goddess Durga came to find peace and solace after killing the demon Raktbeej and destroying other creatures in her rage.

The name Pooth is derived

from Pushpavati, the favourite garden of the Hastinapur Kings. It was said to be part of the Hastinapur Kingdom from the Mahabharata times and it is here that the Pandavas and Kauravas received their education from Dronacharya. Pooth was a part of Khandava Van, a beautiful forest area that was burnt by Lord Krishna, Arjun and Lord Agni to build Indraprastha. Pushpavati Pooth was selected as the first Ganga Gram in 2016 out of 1600 villages in Uttar Pradesh, as a part of the Union Government's Ganga Gram programme under the Namami Gange Mission.

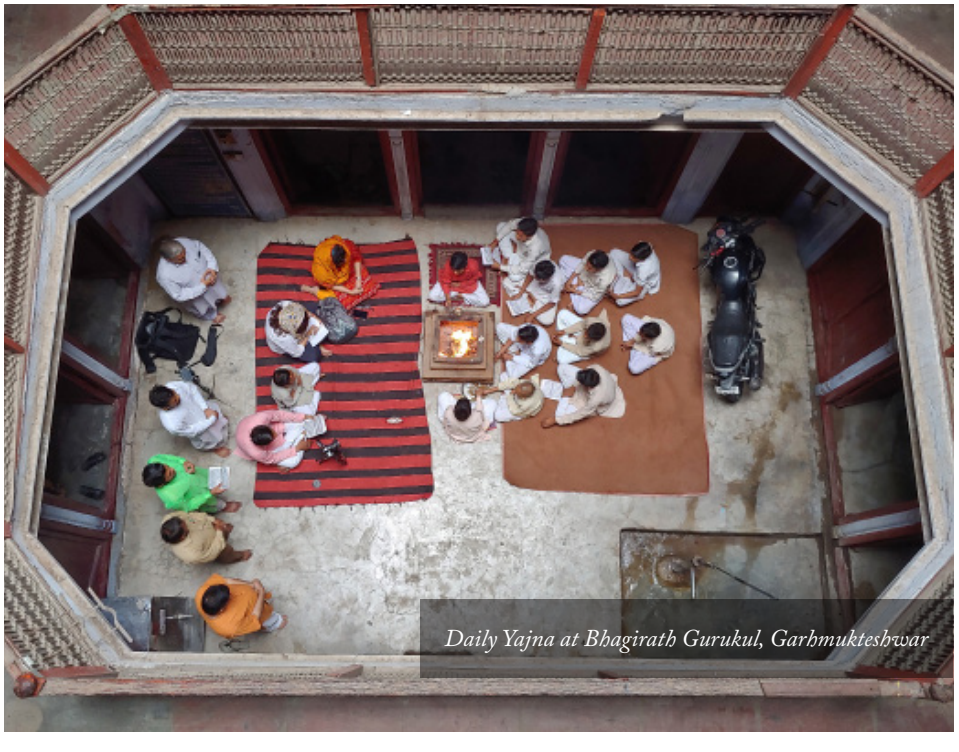
Last Rites

After the Mahabharata war, the Pandavas came to Garhmukteshwar along with Lord Krishna, to perform the ritual of *Pind Daan* for all the people who died fighting for them during the war. According to the Bhagavata Purana, at Ganmuktishwar Tirtha; before Muktishwar Mahadev, one who performs *Pinda Dana* of his ancestors need not perform it at Gaya, Bihar. Till date, it remains an important site for people to perform last rites according to Hindu rituals.

The Pothi System *of* Garh

At Garhmukteshwar, genealogy registers of families are maintained by Brahmin pandits called *Pandas*, who work as professional genealogists. There are about 100 *panda* families in Garhmukteshwar. In several cases, these voluminous *bahis*, have been used to settle legal cases, as these records are held sacrosanct both by the families and the *Pandas*. As Garhmukteshwar was traditionally a site for last rites and *Shraadh* rituals amongst Hindus, it soon also became customary for the family *pandits* to record each visit of the family, along with their *gotra* and other details grouped according to family and hometown. The handwritten data scrolls can be found in both Devanagari and Urdu and some in the local *Panda*-developed script which only they can decipher.

Pothi (Geneaology) records at the residence of Pandit Santosh Kumar Kaushik



Daily Yajna at Bhagirath Gurukul, Garhmukteshwar

Horses and Donkeys are the Highlight of the 'Gadhon ka Mela' at Khadar of Garhmukteshwar

Events *of* Interest

Holy Baths

Garhmukteshwar hosts the famous Kartik Fair or the Garh Ganga Fair for which pilgrims visit the river bank to perform holy rituals and take a dip in the sacred water of river Ganga. The location of the Kartik fair has now been shifted to Brijghat with the change in the course of the river. Another bathing fair is organized on Dussehra. One attraction during these events is a holy tree known as the *Kalpavriksha*, renowned as the Tree of Heaven said to fulfil the wishes of visitors and is among the rare species of holy flora.

Deep Daan

It is an auspicious festival during Kartik Poornima, dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Devotees light *diyas* and many marriages also take place during the festival. *Deep Daan* is also done at the end of *Chaturdashi* to liberate wandering souls. Both the Ganga Saptami (the day on which Ganga originated in heaven) and the Ganga Dussehra (the day on which the Ganga descended on the earth) are celebrated with much fanfare in Garhmukteshwar.

Art *at the* Heart

Moodha Making

Moodhas are cane furniture made mainly using cane and grasses hand-picked by craftsmen from river banks. The *moodhas* made here are exported to around 25 countries. They are versatile, lightweight and weather resistant. The craftsmen residing near Mira ki Reti generally work on shaping the *moodhas* before they are sold by the roadside.

Patera Mat

Patera is the local reed grass that grows on the banks of the Ganga used to make temporary sheds and storehouses. A labour-intensive craft, it is also used to make mats for people to sit on after they take the holy baths in the Ganga. To worship their ancestors and pray for peace for their departed souls, devotees light *diyas* and place it on the *patera* mats floating them in the river.

Gastronomic Delights

Khajla Pheni & Custard Apple, Fenugreek Sauce & Kachoris

Khajla Pheni is one of the most popular desserts of Garhmukteshwar. Khajla is

Women are highly skilled in Modha-making

considered to be the sweet served in festivals like Ganga Dussehra, Kartik Mela and Diwali. The two oldest shops near the Brajghat serving Khajla are Prem ji Sweet shop and Chhote Lal Pehalwan Sweet Shop. Besides, the traditional delicacy of Hapur also includes the combination of Kachori, Sitafal ki Sabzi and Methi ki Chutney.

People who Fascinate

Abdul Haq

Abdul Haq was an Urdu scholar and linguist born in Hapur in 1870. He pressed for Urdu to be made the national language of Pakistan and was called Baba-e-Urdu for his efforts. He migrated to Pakistan post-1947 where he launched journals and established schools.

One can also visit the Meerabai ki Reti, a vast stretch of sands in a golden hue, located opposite the Mukteshwar Temple. Dedicated to ascetic Sheikh Saddo or Meera Baba, this is his shrine where people from both the Hinduism and Islam offer their prayers

Khajla Pheni - A Local Delicacy

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, visited the banks of the Ganga at Garhmukteshwar when he noticed a corpse flowing by. He was carrying some books on anatomy and dissected the corpse to check whether the human body matches its description given in anatomy books. To his dismay, he found that none of the organs conformed to the descriptions in the books. Hence, he tore the anatomy books since he believed in what he saw and not what he was made to read.

Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani'

Veteran poet and shayar, Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani' came to Garhmukteshwar in 1974 in search of a job. Besides opening his bakery here, he started the Mazhar Shayari Committee which organizes several cultural programmes.

Monuments *that* Matter

Many structures in Hapur carry the Maratha and colonial influence. Amongst the residential structures, most old ones belong to the *pandas* and *zamindars* and have a central courtyard with rooms on one side or three sides. Amongst the religious

Jatayu Samaj Dharamshala, Garhmukteshwar tehsil

structures, the temples are mostly dedicated to Lord Shiva or River Ganga built in *Nagara* architectural style or having a veranda in front of the central chamber. The local mosques are architecturally simple with minimal decorative elements and do not support any domes.

Nakka Kuan

Nakka Kuan or Nahusha Koop, was built by King Nahusha of the Mahabharata period who built this sweet water well after being freed from a curse of Sage Agastya. The water of the step well is believed to have medicinal properties and is adjacent to Mukteshwar and Jharkhandeshwar Mahadev temples. It is said that the level of water is in sync with the level of the Ganga. The well is a T-shaped structure with a circular well, about 2m in diameter at the intersection.

Mukteshwar Mahadev Temple

It is said to have been built by King Shivi with the help of Parashurama. It contains a unique Shiva *Linga* and a Peepal tree, underneath which Parashurama is said to have conducted a *havan*. The Gods, wanting to test the compassionate nature of King Shivi, took the form of a hawk and a pigeon. The pigeon chased by the hawk fell on King Shivi's lap seeking his protection. The hawk argued that the pigeon was its food. Shivi offered to compensate with his own flesh and the Gods blessed him thereafter. Another tale recounts that this was built by Parashurama on the request of Pandavas and Lord Krishna to give them *mukti* or deliverance for all those who lost their lives in the Mahabharata War.

Ganga Temple

The 16th-century structure in Garhmukteshwar is built on a hill, accessed through a flight of stairs built using Lakhori bricks (85 out of the original 100 stairs remain). It was built on the banks of the Ganga before it changed its course. It is believed that the steps still resonate the sound of the river water when tapped upon. It also houses a rare Brahma statue. Another Ganga temple is in Pooth.

Shiv Temple/ Chaturbhuj Brahma Temple

Adjacent to the Ganga Temple is the Pracheen Shiv Mandir, previously called the Chaturbhuj Brahma Temple built in the 19th century. It has a small well to its right and a tree in

The Ganga River stretch in Hapur and Bulandshahar Districts falls under the Upper Ganga Ramsar Site

front with plain, narrow *konaka-paga* and *anardha-paga* with a decorative cornice band running along the base of the building.

Ram Mandir

This 16th century temple has a courtyard at the entrance adorned by a pointed-arched double door. The idol of Lord Ram here is rare as he is depicted as dark skinned.

Gol Mandir

Exhibiting distinct Maratha style architecture, this 18th century octagonal temple is built on a high plinth with an onion-shaped dome. It has floral stucco work along the base. The temple was a part of the fort established here by the Maratha rulers in the 18th century. Maratha general Sadashiv Rao also built the Panchayati Temple at Garhmukteshwar.

The Varisht (Senior) varga students perform/demonstrate yoga asanas while the Kanisht (junior) Varga students look on

Meerabai ki Reti

One can also visit the Meerabai ki Reti, a vast stretch of sands in a golden hue, located opposite the Mukteshwar Temple. Dedicated to ascetic Sheikh Saddo or Meera Baba, this is his shrine where people from both the Hinduism and Islam offer their prayers.

Maratha Chhatris, Ganga Ghat, Pooth

Balban's Mosque

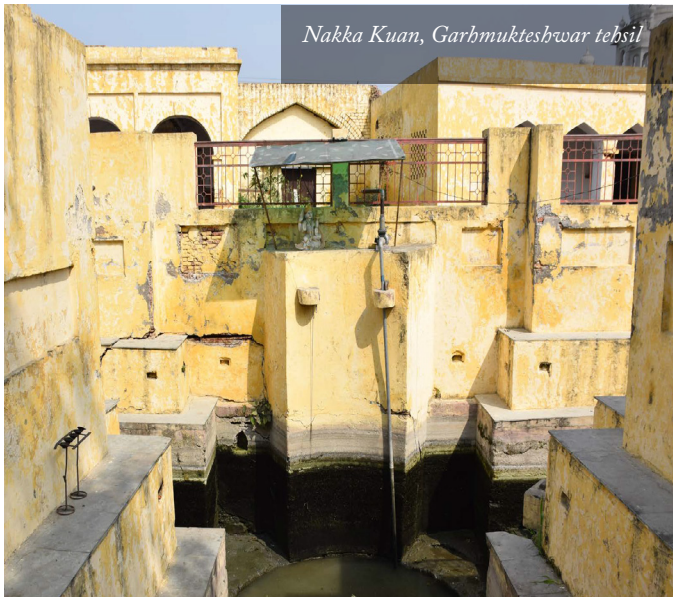
The town also has a mosque built by Balban that has an Arabic inscription dating to 682 Hijri (1283 CE).

Bridge Halt/Brajghat

In 1900, the British built an iron railway bridge at the present Braj Ghat which is derived from the name Bridge Halt. Several people visit Brajghat to immerse the ashes of the deceased and perform the ritual of *Pind Daan* for their ancestors. A clock tower, resembling the one in Haridwar, was also built here in 2004 as a symbol that it used to be an important pilgrimage centre until Haridwar assumed more prominence post-1947.

Gurukul Mahavidyalaya, Pooth

Gururkul Mahavidyalaya, Pooth, is believed to be where Guru Dronacha rya taught the Kuru princes. It also has



Nakka Kuan, Garhmukteshwar tehsil

Erosion Control With Gabions Along Ganga Bank Near Narainpur

a Maratha period guest house. The art of blindfold archery is still taught here along with several other disciplines.

Dargah Sharif

This 19th century Dargah in Garhmukteshwar is dedicated to Data Ganj Bakhsh, an 11th century Sunni Muslim mystic, theologian and preacher who travelled from Iran to India.

Ganga Ghat & Chhatris

The Maratha styled octagonal *chhatris* have multifoliate arched openings and were used as changing rooms by the royals during the 18th century.

Nature's Abundance

Hapur can be divided into two regions of *Khadar* and Uplands. The *Khadar* region soils are characterised by ash grey to brownish grey and their texture is some time silty loamy and sometime sandy. The Upland region soil profile shows good development and alleviation of clay. The region also has two kinds of plains: Younger/Newer Alluvial Plain (the region all along the Ganga and tributaries) and Older Alluvial Plain (the interfluve area between the major rivers and tributaries). There is only one tributary of Ganga River passing through the district, Kali Nadi (East).

Another smaller river – Chhoiya Nala joins Kali Nadi near village Chhapokali. In the Hapur stretch of the Ganga, there are many exposed and partially exposed river islands of varying shapes and sizes. Almost, the entire channel of Ganga River in the district has such islands and sandbars. As per the fluvial island classification proposed by Wyrick & Klingeman (2011), the islands here would fall under 'Braided' category – which means many channels divided by islands and bars, which may be washed out in high flows. These islands and sandbars get immersed with the increased water flow in river – especially during monsoon season along with the river channels in between them.

The Ganga River stretch in Hapur and Bulandshahar Districts falls under the Upper Ganga Ramsar Site. The two important wetlands in the study area are Sherpur Talab and Bhadsiyana Talab. At Sherpur, one can find *Sheesam (Delonix regia), Jamun (Syzygium cumini)*, Pongamia (*Mil-*

lettia pinnata), Bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*), Country Mallow (*Abutilon indicum*), *Kasaunda* (*Senna sophera*), Colocasia (*Colocasia esculenta*), Tall Reed (*Phragmites Karka*) and Castor Oil Plant (*Ricinus communis*). Resident birds such as Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus Himantopus*), Common Moorehen (*Gallinula chloropus*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) can be sighted. At Bhadsiyana near Pooth, the major trees species are *Jamun, Neem, Sheesam,* Mango and *Safeda (Eucalyptus spp.*).

Some herb/shrub species observed are Common Tephrosia (*Tephrosia purpurea*), Coffee Senna (*Cassia occidentalis*), Sickle Pod (*Cassia tora*), Country Mallow (*Abutilon indicum*), Goat Weed (*Ageratum conyzoides*), Buffel Grass (*Cenchus ciliaris*), Calotropis (*Calotropis procera*), Lantana (*Lantana camara*) along with riparian grasses such as Phragmites (*Phragmites karka*) and *Kaans (Saccharum spontaneum*).

Common mammals found in the district include Indian Jackal (*Canis aureus indicus*), Indian Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Rhesus macaque *(Macaca mulatta)*, Langur *(Semnopithecus spp.*), Indian Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*).

Among the aquatic life, one can find the Gangetic Dolphin, Gharial, Turtles and among the avian life, one can find Red-wattled Lapwing, Yellow-wattled Lapwing White-throated Kingfisher, River Tern, Grey Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Cattle Egret, Cormorants, and River Lapwing.

Floating Vegetable Market at Brijghat

Uttar Pradesh

Bhadsiyana Talab – A Major Wetland of Hapur

CHAPTER **10**

BULANDSHAHR

Where the Potter's Wheel turns constantly

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Bulandshahr
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Bulandshahr in Western Uttar Pradesh is located between the Doab region of Rivers Ganga and Yamuna. The name literally means elevated town since it was built on a highland. It is bounded by Hapur in the North, Amroha and Badaun in the East, Gautam Buddha Nagar in the West and Aligarh in the South. It falls under the administrative division of Meerut and is part of the National Capital Region. The main rivers and streams of the district are Ganga, Kali, Karwan and Neem. While Ganga is a perennial river (it borders on the east), the others are seasonal. This district extends approximately 100 kms along the banks of the Ganga. It has seven *tehsils* among which Siana, Anupshahr and Debai touch the banks of River Ganga and thus are a part of the study. Siana was part of the ancient waterways route. Basi, one of the first settlements in *tehsil*, was established during the reign of Sher Shah Suri. Anupshahr was awarded by Mughal Emperor Jehangir to Raja Anup Rai who saved the emperor's life in a hunting expedition. Debai is home to many *ghats* like the Gandhi Ghat, Rajghat, Ramghat and Shiv Ghat. Village Chola located Southwest of Bulandshahr is known for Bibcol Company which produces the Polio Vaccine.

Shiv Ghat, Anupshahr

Re-living *the* Past

Excavations have yielded major Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements in Bulandshahr and Painted Grey Wares dating to 1200 -500 BCE. The region may have been under the Mathura *Satraps* as testified by their coins found from this area and Bulandshahr subsequently came under the Kushanas and the Guptas. Several Buddhist remains have been found from the Gupta period dating between the 5th to 9th centuries. In the 8th century CE, Bulandshahr came under the Tomar dynasty who were taken over by the Dor Rajputs. Har-dutta, the sixth descendant of this dynasty, ruled an extensive tract of region. He is also known as the builder of the Baran or Balai-kot Fort. During this period, the Meos settled towards the southern borders of the district. In order to restore peace, the Dors invited aid in the form of Bargujars who ousted the Meos from Pahasu, Debai and other regions. The Dor Rajputs went on to rule over the region till 1193 CE, until the last descendant of the dynasty was defeated by Qutbuddin Aibak.

Under the Delhi Sultanate, Baran (as Bulandshahr was called until the 18th century) became one of the cantonments of the royal army. It was the capital of Alauddin Khilji for a few days, after which he made Delhi his headquarters. An inscription by him discusses the construction of a mosque in 1311 CE. Significant progress came under the reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq who is also the founder of Khurja, the then largest commercial mart, in Bulandshahr. The 14th century also witnessed the arrival of Gujars from Gujarat, the Rajput tribes, the Bhale Sultans, Chauhans, Ghalots, Panwars, Jadons and Pathans in different parts of the district.

Although, the Mughals eventually defeated the Sultanate, Bulandshahr does not find significant mentions until the period of Emperor

Akbar when the Ain-i-Akbari mentions it as having 17 *parganas* though some inscriptions referring to the period of Emperor Humayun were found. These record the construction of a mosque by Neel Khan during the governorship of a lady named Begam Dildar Aghacha. Jehangir rewarded the territory of Anupshahr to Raja Anup Rai who saved his life during a hunting expedition. Due to constant tensions between Rai's descendants, one of the Ranis destroyed the fort of Anupshahr. The first governor of Baran (1536 CE) was a woman named Bano Begam.

Post-Mughals, the Marathas and the Rohillas came to power but by 1780 CE, it was abandoned by even the *Amil* (revenue officer) Hakdad Khan who built a new one at Rathora under the patronage of popular saint Malamal, thus naming the village Malagarh. Soon, part by part, Bulandshahr went under British Rule in the early 19th century. In the revolt of 1857, the Gujars of Dadri and Sikandarabad provided strong resistance against the British and its people played an active role in the freedom struggle.

Mythological Links

Origins

Bulandshahr originates from Ahar, founded by Janmajeya, the grandson of Arjun and son of Parikshit. He also established a fort at Baran, the older name of the city. In another story, a town called Banchhati was founded by Parmal, a Pandava chief from Ahar. British administrator F. W. Growse reported to find this original settlement in the form of a ruinous mound, which he later transformed into a garden called Moti Bagh, a place that still exists retaining this name. Growse reports another account wherein, these lands used to be the domain of a prominent Naga tribe, under an Ahi-Baran king (*Ahi* means snake and *Baran* comes from *Varan* meaning fort). It is also believed that to avenge his father's death who died of snake bite, Janmajeya performed a sacrifice to eliminate all serpents. The Brahmin residents who performed the sacrificial ritual were granted the land and villages surrounding Ahar, and Janmajeya himself later shifted the capital to Baran.

Lord Krishna & Rukmini & the Pandavas

It is believed that Rukmini's father Bhishmak was the ruler of Ahar and when Lord Krishna abducted Rukmini from the Avantika Devi Temple situated here, her brother Rukmi opposed the alliance even though Rukmini wanted to marry Krishna. This began a war between Balaram, Krishna's elder brother and Rukmi where the latter was defeated. Krishna and Rukmini are believed to have gotten married at this temple. During the Mahabharata, Ahar became the chief town of the Pandavas after their capital Hastinapura was washed away. Ambakeshwar Mahadev Temple, in present day Ahar, is believed to be the place where Pandavas would worship Lord Shiva.

Anupshahr was awarded by Mughal Emperor Jehangir to Raja Anup Rai who saved the emperor's life in a hunting expedition

Dina Sanichar

In 1867, in a forest in the Bulandshahr District, a group of hunters came across a boy walking on all fours with a pack of wolves. The hunters killed the female wolf with whom he was staying to take the boy back to civilization. He was baptized as Dina Sanichar at an orphanage, run by a missionary, Father Erhardt, in Agra.

Events *of* Interest

The District Gazetteer mentions fairs at Ramghat and Anoopshahr on the last day of the month of *Kartik* and on Somvati Amavas. The Ramghat Fair though soon declined in favour of the newer Rajghat, which gained by its favourable position on the railway. Fairs at Ahar and Karanvas are locally important, with people coming from adjacent villages. Besides, there are fairs at Belon in Pargana Dibai, held in honour of Bela Devi during the last week in *Chait* and Kuar, the fair at Pachauta, about six miles west of Bulandshahr, in honour of an Ahar saint

known as Baba Debi Das, the patron of the Lodhs and Chamars, whose women assemble here on Holi and offer petitions against barrenness and in favour of those afflicted with lunacy, their prayers being accompanied by offerings of calves which are appropriated by the attendant priests; and the small fairs in honour of Devi held at Bitha in Siyana during the month of Chait, and at Bandhaur in Dibai.

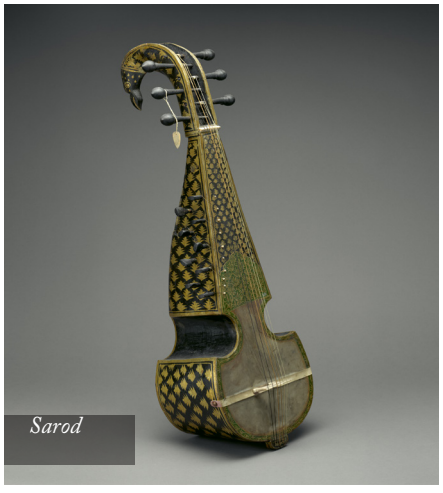
Bulandshahr also hosts the Burha Babu fair. Burha Babu, said to be an incarnation of Brahma, is regarded the patron of women and children and the healer of skin diseases. The fairs are held on the second day of the dark half of the months of *Baisakh, Bhadon* and *Magh*. The chief places of assemblage are Kakaur and Sunpehra in Pargana Sikandarabad, Bildspur in Dankaur, Mangalpur in Ahar, Chachrai in Anoopshahr, Aterna in Pabasu, and Achheja and Kamalpur in Pargana Khurja.

Also, the Sankashti Chaturthi (dedicated to Lord Ganesha), Makar Sankranti, Basant Panchami, Mahashivratri, Hanuman Jayanti, Ganga Saptami, Hariyali Teej and Kartik Purnima are also celebrated here. During Kartik Purnima, the *Shadopchar Puja* is performed, where 16 kinds of offerings are made to God.

ART *at the* HEART

Sarodiyas

Historical sources on the *sarod* (a short-necked plucked lute) describe how these musicians' ancestors (lauded mirasis belonging to the Pathan community) came to India from eastern Afghanistan as mercenaries in the early 18th century, securing employment with the Mughal army as soldiers, singers and instrumentalists and establishing *mohallas* around Shahjahanpur, Rampur, Bulandshahr, Najibabad and Muzzafarnagar, in the province of Rohilkhand. Oral histories describe musicians like Karam Khan (1787–1850) who lived in Bugrasi in Bulandshahr. One of the most renowned Sarod players from the region is Asadullah Kaukab Khan (1858-1915); Khan was from the hereditary lineage of Pathan Bangash *sarodiyas* who settled in Bulandshahr and due to his forefathers' previous service with the Lucknow court, his family lineage became known as the Bulandshahr/Lucknow Sarod Gharana. His son-in-law Sakahawat Hussain Khan was also a disciple of the Bulandshahr-Lucknow Sarod Gharana.


Sarod

Khurja Pottery

Khurja is a small town in Bulandshahr famed for its pottery which has also received a GI Tag in 2015. The industry traces its origin to the last decade of the 14th century CE, when several potters came to India as a part of Timur the Lame's army and settled here. They started making blue pottery, using red clay, giving an engobe of white clay, painting floral designs with cupric oxide and applying a soft glaze containing glass and borax. They used the same type of foot driven kick wheel, which was used in their own country and made mostly tiles and minarets. Many Khurja potters also originate from Multan. There are three types of clay for Khurja namely the yellow loamy clay, the brown clay and the dark bluish clay. The yellow and dark blue clay contain more than seven percent iron and other soluble ingredients and can stand a maximum temperature of about 900°C.

Gastronomic Delights

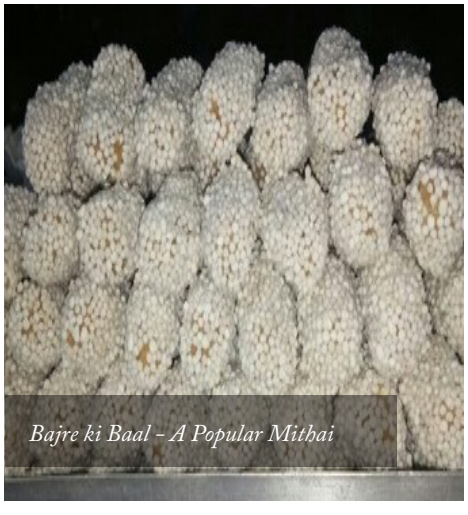
Sugarcane, wheat, maize and potato are the major crops. Mango orchards and milk production are other major sources of income in the district.

Kanji Wada

Kanji is a popular winter drink in North India having fermented water, made from *Rai* (mustard seeds), salt and Red Chilli and sometimes *Heeng* (asafoetida). Usually, red or black carrots are added to this water. Small Wadas, fried pulse flour fritters are soaked in Kanji and served.

Bajre ke Baal

The sweet that resembles the Baal Mithai of Uttarakhand is known as Bajre ki Baal in Bulandshahr District.



Bajre ki Baal - A Popular Mithai

Thread Fishing Technique Used Locally

Indian Carp Near Basi Village

People who Fascinate

Swami Avdheshanand Giri & The Juna Akhada

Spiritual leader and philosopher Swami Avdheshanand Giri of the Juna Akhada was born in Khurja, Bulandshahr. The word *akhada* literally means wrestling ground, when taken into a religious context, it refers to a sect of seers who defend faith. Swami Avdheshanand Giri is the most eloquent exponent on ancient philosophies.

Ashiq Bulandshahri

Muhammad Ashiq Ilahi Bulandshahri Muhajir Madani was a prominent Indian Islamic scholar, born in Bulandshahr in 1924/1925. Some of his works are: Tohfa-e-Khawateen, Marne Ke Baad Kya Hoga, Islami Adab, and Huququl Walidayn.

Intizar Hussain

Urdu author Intizar Hussain was born in Dibai, Bulandshahr, and migrated to Pakistan in 1947. Among the five novels he wrote, Chaand Grahan (1952), Din Aur Daastaan (1959), Basti (1980), Tazkira (1987), Aage Samandar Hai (1995), Basti received global praise. In 2007, Hussain received the Pakistani civil award Sitara-i-Imtiaz and a lifetime achievement award at the Lahore Literary Festival. In 2014, he was made an Officer of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. Post his tragic demise

in 2016, Pakistan Academy of Letters announced the Intizar Hussain Award which would be given to a literary figure every year. The Indian Express termed him the best-known Pakistani writer in the world after Manto.

Kishwar Naheed

Kishwar Naheed (born 1940) is a feminist Urdu poet and writer who was born in Bulandshahr but migrated to Pakistan in 1949. She has received the Sitara-e-Imtiaz for her literary contribution. Kishwar Naheed has also won the prestigious UNESCO award for children's literature. She was the Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts before her retirement.

Hasan Askari

Pakistani scholar and literary critic Hasan Askari was born in Bulandshahr. Initially, he translated western literary, philosophical and metaphysical works into Urdu but soon became a notable critic of the West and proponent of Islamic culture and ideology. Some of his works are Jazirey (1943), Insan aur Admi (1953), Sitara ya Badban (1963), and Vaqt ki Ragini (1969).

Monuments *that* Matter

Most historic residential structures here are medium scale houses belonging to priests or *zamindars*. Most have a rectangular courtyard surrounded by a colonnaded veranda on either two or four sides. Typically, these are built in brick masonry, the older structures having Lakhori bricks. The temples are two types namely *nagara*-style temple with a *mandapa* and *garbhgriha*, and the square-planned temple with influences from the Odisha temple architecture with a *rekha deul* style *shikhara*. The mosques follow the traditional rectangular plan topped with a single or three domes with tall minarets at its corners. Bulandshahr has been more of a religious centre rather than a space for trade or commerce.

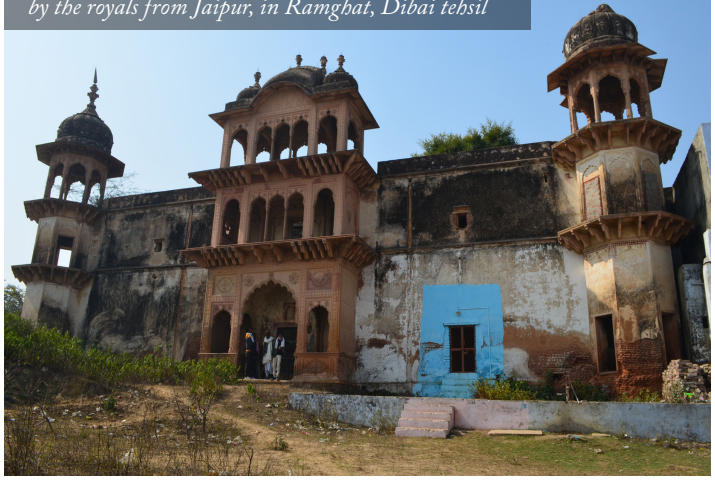
Karnavas

It is named after Karna of Mahabharata who worshipped Goddess Kalayani here. She blessed him with a lot of gold every day, which was promptly distributed by Karna among people.

Belon Temple

Belon Temple is situated in Belon Village near Narora. The name comes from Bilwan referring to a forest of *Bel* trees. The temple, built by Raja Bhup Singh in the 17th century CE, is dedicated to Goddess Belon who is said to have originated from the body of Sati.

Haldiya Kunj, bult in Rajputana architecture style by the royals from Jaipur, in Ramghat, Dibai tehsil



The Fort Unchagaon, Siana tehsil

Kala Aam

The older name of the place was Katle Aam since this intersection was used by the British to publicly hang freedom fighters.

Mud Fort

Built in 1734, Kuchesar Fort or Mud Fort is formed by the restoration of a section of Ajit Singh's ancestral property, which was formerly a part of the princely state of Kuchesar.

Bilal Masjid & Barah Dari Masjid

The 19th century Bilal mosque was built by a local King, who belonged to the Pathan community while the 18th century Barah Dari mosque was also built by a Pathan Zamindar Ismail Khan.

Garhi Bhurta

It was built by Diwan Fatiya Khan who valiantly fought against the British. Since this residence was thought to be a stronghold by the British, half the building was broken down to symbolise the Diwan's defeat.

Rani Ghat & Ruins *of* Rani Ka Garh

The Rani Ghat was built for the queen of King Anup Rai. The remains of the residences of her descendants can still be seen. The remains are of a L-shaped building and has a small room on the left side. It has a rectangular door set within a blind multifoliate pointed arch with ornamental pointed arch shaped niches on either side.

Guru Harirai Bahadur Gurudwara

The gurudwara was built in 1640 CE and Guru Gobind Singh ji's brother, Khadak Singh's *Samadhi* also lies here. A fair is held here every 3 years in June when devotees come here from Punjab.

Rajghat Narora Railway Station & Rajghat Ganga Railway Bridge

Presently owned by the central government, this is a 19th century station. The entrance to the main block is spanned with an arch which has ornamented temple figurines on its left, right and top. This railway station was part of the track which connected Aligarh from Chandausi to Rohilkhand. Rajghat also has a railway bridge built over the Ganga by the British to establish a transportation link between Delhi and Rohilkhand.

Ramghat

It is believed that Lord Balram killed demon Kolasur and took a dip in the Ganga here. The area still has many old settlements with courtyards surrounded by arcaded verandas.

Haldiya Kunj

This palace-like structure was one of the 11 centres built by the queen of Jaipur in the 19th century CE. It was so built that the queen could worship the holy river nearby. It is made from Lakhori bricks and red sandstone and on all corners are octagonal pavilions topped with arcaded chhatris.

Nature's Abundance

Geologically, the district can be divided into two broad units: Younger Alluvium (all along the Ganga River and other streams) and Older Alluvium (occupies the entire upland or interfluve area occurring between major drainages. The soil here ranges from pure sand (*Bhur*) to stiff clays (*Matiar*). The trees which are commonly found in this district are *Shisham, Jamun*, Mango and *Babul*. The shrubs and bushes chiefly found in the district are those of *Arua, Hina, Panwar, Madav, Karaunda* and *Makoh*.

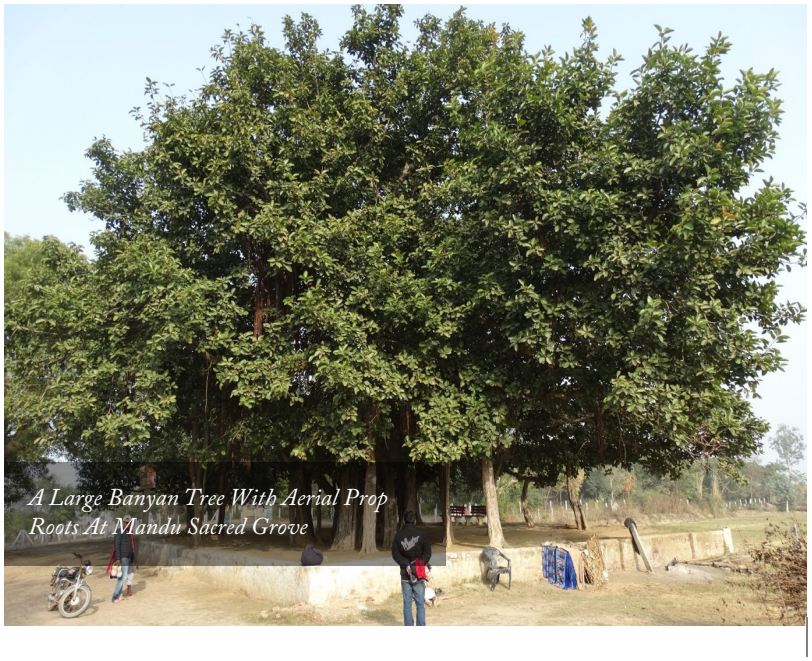
The Ganga enters Bulandshahr at Bhagwanpur village in Siyana after crossing Hapur. It flows almost straight till Mandu and then reaches Mubarikpur and Anupshahr. It again takes a left turn and flows further southeast crossing Narora Barrage where the Lower Ganga Canal (on right bank) diverts water from Ganga for irrigation towards southern Uttar Pradesh. The Ganga River stretch in Bulandshahr falls under Upper Ganga Ramsar Site – a Ramsar wetland declared on 8th November, 2005, due to rich biodiversity and habitats. The designated area starts from Brijghat into Narora in Bulandshahar. The active flood plain of a river is defined

as an area on either side of the river channel with regular flooding on a periodic basis. Ganga floodplains in Bulandshahr are used for agriculture, especially for cucurbits crop such as cucumber, melons, bitter and bottle gourds, tomatoes, pumpkins. Bulandshahr also has many wetlands like Unchagaon Talab, Ponds near Karanvas and floodplain lake near Mohammadpur Khadar. In all the three, one can find trees like *Sheesham, Neem*, Mango and birds like Black-winged Stilt, Common Moorehen, Little Grebe and White-breasted Waterhen. Bulandshahr also has Painted Storks and River Lapwings that fall under IUCN's Near Threatened category and Black-bellied Terns under Endangered Category. Near Unchgaon is the Mandu Sacred Grove that has 11 tree species, 10 medicinally important herbs and 5 climber species. Another sacred grove is near Narora called Siddhwari and it has 12 tree species, 4 shrubs, 6 medicinally important herbs and 5 species of climbers. Both groves have sacred Banyan Trees.

Faunal diversity of the area includes Nilagai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Indian Jackal (*Canis aureus indicus*), Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*), Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*), Bengal Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta)* and Langur (*Semnopithecus spp.*). One can also find the Gangetic Dolphin (most being near Narora) and Turtles (chief being Indian Flapshell Turtle and Brown Roofed Turtles). The most common fish species are Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), Catla (*Labeo catla*), Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), *Singhi (Heteroneustes fossilis), Sidhari (Puntius sarana)* and *Singhara (S. seenghala)*. Mahaseer *(Tor tor)* or Golden Mahaseer*(Tor putitora)* is also popularly known to exist in this stretch of Ganga.

The irrigation in the district is done by tube wells, cavity tube wells, occasionally dug wells and surface water irrigation systems especially canals. The Canal network here has a length of 1879 kms. The major erosion prone sites on Ganga River in Bulandshahr are located upstream of Anupshahr where Ganga, while flowing Southwest, takes a turn to the south. Another erosion prone zone is near Karanwas Village where Ganga moves Southeast.

Black Kite (Milvus migrans) Sighted On An Island Near Basi Village



A Large Banyan Tree With Aerial Prop Roots At Mandu Sacred Grove

CHAPTER 11

BADAUN

A Sufi's Space

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Badaun

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Badaun in Bareilly division, Western Uttar Pradesh, is spread over 4,234 sq kms. The Ganga forms the south-western boundary of the district. In the north, it is bounded by Bareilly and Rampur, in the west by Sambhal (originally a part of Badaun district)and in the east by Shahjahanpur. While Badaun district comprises five *tehsils*, Sambhal district has three. Only three *tehsils* for Badaun District and one *tehsil* for Sambhal District come within the 5-km radius of the river. Sambhal was a part of Badaun until 2011. It is surrounded by Moradabad and Rampur on the East, Badaun from East to South, Aligarh on the South, Bulandshahr on the West and Amroha from the West to North. Located between river Ganga and one of its tributaries Ramganga, the area has other streams like Mahawa, Tikta, Burdmar, Chhoiya, Kamra, Narha and Bhainsaur, making this tract fertile.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

According to local lore, Badaun was founded as Buddhagaon

Badaun Kachla Old Bridge

by an Ahir prince named Buddh in the 10th century. The other names of Badaun were Buddhmau, Vodamau and Bedamau. Sambhal was called Sabrit or Sambhaleshwar in the *Satyug*, Mahadgiri in the *Tretayug* and Pingala in the *Dwaparyug*. The history of the area dates to the Ochre Colour Pottery Culture. The Bisauli copper hoard was accidentally discovered by a farmer while tilling his field and yielded two anthropomorphic figures of, a harpoon and a celt. During excavations within the district, potsherds of Black-Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware, Plain Black and Red Ware, Glazed Ware, Ochre-Coloured Pottery were found. Around the 6th century BCE, the districts formed part of the Panchala Mahajanapada. Post this period, Badaun came under the Nandas, Mauryas, Shungas, Kanvas, Kushanas, Guptas, Maukharis, Vardhanas, Gurjara Pratiharas, Rashtrakutas and Delhi Sultunate. Under the Gurjara, Pratiharas in the 11th century CE, traveller Al-Biruni visited the region and mentions Badaun as one of the most powerful kingdoms. Inscriptions belonging to Muhammad-bin Tughlaq, Firoz Shah Tughlaq and Mubarak Shah have been found in Badaun. The Mughals came to power in the 16th century CE and in 1748, it came under the Rohillas. The Rohillas soon lost control and Badaun came under Shuja-Ud-Daula. But in 1801, the Nawab Vizir of Awadh agreed to surrender Rohilkhand and other territories to the East India Company. Initially, Badaun and Sambhal districts were a part of Moradabad. Badaun was established as a district in 1824. In the 1857 uprising, the British coerced many local leaders like Tafazzul Hussain, Ahmad Hussain, Rafi-ullah Khan, Majid Ali, and Muhammad Shah. The freedom struggle gained momentum in Badaun with the visit of several leaders like Mahatma Gandhi (1921 and 1929), Jawaharlal Nehru (1924), Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai (1925-26). In 1941, when individual *satyagraha* was launched, many people took part in it and even courted arrest.

Mythological Links

Sahaswan *(Badaun)* & **Gunnaur** *(Sambhal)*

Sahaswan was founded by a Hindu chieftain Sahasrabahu on a hunting expedition while Gunnaur was Brahmapuri since a *brahman* held it revenue free from the Raja of Majhaula. In the 13th century, a Persian priest Makhdum Shah and his two disciples settled in this region. When the local *brahmans* and the king set out to chase the priest, he and his forces were blinded. Only with the aid of the priest, they regained their eyesight.

The **Land** *of* **Sufi Saints**

Badaun is known as the land of Sufi saints. The Ziyarat Shareef Mosque in Kakrala was built by Shah Saqlain Miyan. It is considered one of the holiest shrines in India. Here also lie the graves of two *Sayyeds* (Muslim saints), Sayyed Hassan, known as *Bare*

Sarkar, and his brother Shah Vilayat Saheb also known as the Dargah of Hazrat Badruddin Rahmatullah Alhay or *Chhote Sarkar*. Within a small distance, there is another grave belonging to their sister Banno Bi. On Thursdays or J*ummeraat*, women in a state of trance or extreme suffering, call the Assar-go from grave to grave, hoping to find a remedy. Nizamuddin Auliya, the apostolic Sufi saint of the Chisti *silsilah* (order), was born in Badaun in 1238 CE. He was the chief disciple of Shaikh Farziuddin Ganjshakar who had appointed him as his *Khalifa* or the successor. Some of his most famous followers were the Delhi Sultans, Alauddin Khalji, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, and the general and literary giant, Amir Khusrau. Several devotees visit these shrines to gain the blessings of the saints.

Events *of* Interest

Kakora Fair

The Kadar Chowk was a sandy area dominated by *Kakora* Grass about 500 years ago. This grass had tremendous medicinal benefits that prompted a Muslim King who was suffering from a skin disease, to visit this place and apply *Kakora* Juice followed by a dip in the Ganga. He immediately got relief and was ultimately cured from his disease that led him to build the Kakora Devi Temple along with native Hindu Kings. A huge fair, Kakora Mela lasting for almost half a month takes place at Kadarganj Ghat. Pilgrims visit to worship the Goddess and take bath in Ganga River during the months of October-November. It is also called the mini Kumbh Mela because of the huge congregation.

Phul Dol festival

On the eighth day after Holi on Chaitra Krishna Ashtami, people take out processions where deities are decorated and are placed inside palanquins. It was started in 1900 when after the harvest season and the coming of the spring, this was celebrated to infuse new spirit at work. Many *Chaupais* are sung to ward off any evil or misery on people or nature.

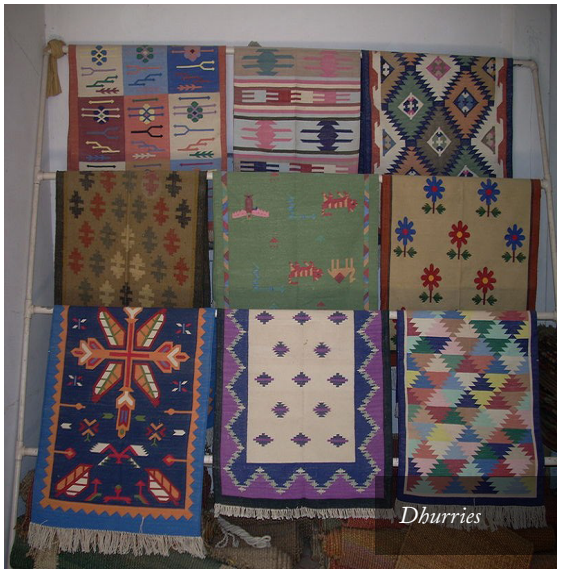
Art *at the* Heart

Carpet Making

In the training centres established by the Government in Islamnagar, Imalia and Usawan in Badaun, weavers are organized into co-operative societies who make *dhurries* in different weaving patterns for different purposes. Traditionally done by women, carpets are weaved on a *punja* or pit loom with wool. After the designs are prepared wool hanks are detangled and then the dyed and the un-dyed yarn are put on the warp.

Zari-Zardozi Work

Zari-zardozi (*Zar* means gold and *Dozi* means embroidery) is a popular form of metal embroidery prominently seen in the Bisoli, Dataganj and Badaun Tehsils of Badaun, where almost 35% of the families are involved in this handicraft. It is considered as the largest cottage industry of the district. This intricate and ornate embroidery work was largely done to cater to royalty. It travelled to India from Central Asia sometime in the 12th century. Generally done on velvets, brocades and silks, this intricate embroidery is done with silver and golden thread, kardana pearl, beads, spangles, *kora kasab*, mirrors, *nakshi*, nos, and fish wire. Locally it is also called *Karchobi*. It is done by first drawing the layout of the design on butter paper, which is then later perforated with a needle. The design thus outlined is then traced on the fabric. For this, a powder mixed in kerosene oil is rubbed on the stencil made out of butter paper, which then


Dhurries

Songs like the Banna-Banni are sung during marriage

transfers the design on the cloth laid out in a wooden frame, the *Adda Bichana*. This wooden frame is made of wooden planks are held together with nuts and bolts. Then the fabric is stretched and wound up tightly with a strong thread along the width of the frame of the *Adda Bichana*. This process is called *Taankna*. The next step is transferring the pattern to be embroidered onto the fabric. This process is called *Chapayi*. Once the design is taken on the fabric, the artisan starts following the pattern for embroidering with the help of needles of various sizes.

Folk-songs & Music

Phag, Malhar and *Kajri* are some of the popular folk styles here. Along with *Kajri,* the *Alha* is also sung and recited during the monsoon. However, *Alha* is mostly recited by individuals rather than by a group wherein the musical instruments or the *Vadyanakkarak* are also handled by the individual during the performance. The women folk of the district sing songs dedicated to specific ritualistic observances. Songs like the *Banna-Banni* are sung during marriage. Another form of folk music called the *Soarta* is also sung on Dussehra. Another popular form of folk dance and song is *Nautanki*. These are mostly open-air plays inspired by mythology and local folklore.

Gastronomic Delights

Some major crops grown in this region include Rice, Wheat, Maize, *Bajra, Urad, Arhar*, Sugarcane along with various pulses and vegetables such as Potato, Tomato and Green Peas.

People who Fascinate

Ustaad Nisaar Hussain Khan

Born in 1906, in Badaun, Ustaad Nisaar Hussain Khan is considered as one of the *gharanedar ustads* of Hindustani classical music. He was awarded with the Padma Bhushan in 1971. Some of his famous disciples are Ustads Ghulam Mustafa Khan and Rashid Khan.

Inayat Hussain Khan

Inayat Hussain Khan, born in 1849 in Sahaswan, Badaun, was a proficient musician and a vocalist. A *beenakar, vaggeykar*, he was also the founder of the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana of music. He learnt music from his father Mehboob Khan, who was a musician in the royal court of Rampur. He is known to have composed under the pen names of *Inayat-piya* or *Inayat-miya*. Some of his popular compositions are Tadapat Raina Din (*Maru Bihag*), Jhanana Jhanana (*Chhaya Nat*) and Papi Dadurba Bulai (*Gaur Malhar*). He is known to have been the court musician at the Nizam's Durbar in Hyderabad as well as in the Durbar of the King of Nepal, Bir Shamsher Rana.

Ziauddin Nakhshabi

Ziyauddin Nakhshabi was a renowned poet and writer and a Sufi, hailing from Badaun. He is known for writing texts on Sufism. Born in Nakhshab, Uzbekistan, he migrated to India and stayed at Badaun. Zia Nakshabi was the first person to have translated a Sanskrit work into Persian, the famous Tutinama, that chronicles the tales of a Parrot told to a woman, whose husband is in a distant land, written during the time of the Delhi Sultan, Muhammad bin Tughlaq. He also translated the old Indian treatise on sexology, the Kok Shastra, into Persian. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of Kashmir had the famous historical work Rajatarangini and the Mahabharata translated into Persian by Ziauddin Nakhshabi.

Abd Al-Qadir Badauni

Abd al-Qadir Badauni (1540- 1596) was a renowned Indo-Persian historian in the court of Akbar. He moved to Badaun in 1562 and joined Akbar in 1573-74. Akbar had entrusted upon him the task to translate the Mahabharata from Sanskrit into

Persian, Ramzanama. However, his most notable work is the Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, a frank account of his disagreement and a strong dislike towards the new liberal measures and innovations that Akbar was introducing.

Fani Badayuni

Fani Badayuni (1879-1941), the Urdu poet, whose original name was Shaukat Ali Khan, was born in Islam Nagar, Badaun. Most of his works have been lost in obscurity. Only some of is his later works that were put together in the collections Diwan-e-Fani, Baqiat-e-Fani, and Irfaniyaat-e-Fani are known.

Ismat Chughtai

Legendary Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai was born in Badaun District in 1921 and wrote relentlessly about female sexuality, class conflict, middle class morality and homosexuality. She started writing at the age of 11. Her first story Fasadi (The Trouble Maker) was published in the distinguished journal Saqi in 1939.

Urmilesh Shankhdhar

Urmilesh Shankhdhar was a renowned Hindi poet, writer and lyricist who was a Professor of Hindi at the Nehru Memorial Shivnarayan Das Memorial College in Badaun. He is credited with introducing the Badaun Mahotsav, a cultural fest of Badaun and for founding many literary organizations such as Manch, Anchala, Yuvjan, and Kavita Chali Gaanv Ki Ore. He has received various honorary titles such as Geet Gandharva, Kavi Bhushan, Rashtra Kavi (National Poet), Sahitya Saraswat, Acharyashree and Yugacharan, Bharat Shree, Loktantrik Geetkar (Democratic Poet).

Ikhlas Khan Ka Roza

Shakeel Badayuni

Born on 3rd August, 1916 in Badaun, he is known for his immense contribution to Bollywood music and his Urdu poetry as well as Hindi and Persian. His pairing with music director Naushad produced some immortal songs. Having composed lyrics for songs of as many as 89 movies and many *ghazals*, he was one of the most acclaimed writers of his time, thus he was honoured by the Government of India with the title of Geetkar-e-Azam.

Monuments *that* Matter

Many old buildings within Sambhal District are located in Gunnaur and Dafthara Villages. The oldest building documented on site dates to 18th century CE. It was built by a local naming Masjiduddin Ginnauri who travelled through Gunnaur. While many local structures like *dharamsalas* can be found here due to proximity to the Ganga, some British institutional buildings can also be found like a railway station at Babrala, Sambhal.

Ikhlas Khan Ka Roza

Known as the mini Taj Mahal of Badaun, Roza-Ikhlas Khan is a mausoleum of Nawab Ikhlas Khan in Jawaharpuri. His wife constructed this

Some tributaries of the Ganga here are Sot (historically called Yaar-i-Wafadar, or faithful friend, bestowed on it by Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah when his army got respite from heat and thirst while travelling from Sambhal to Badaun) and Bhainsaur (a small stream that originates near Islamnagar)

tomb or *Roza* in his memory in 1690. This nationally protected monument under the protection of the ASI has four *minars* with *chhatris* on top on all four sides. It has five graves belonging to the members of the family, the mortal remains of Ikhlas Khan's wife, their son Shahwaz Khan.

The Jama Masjid Shamsi

Located in the higher part of the old city known as the Maulvi Tola Muhalla it is the highest structure in the town of Badaun. This mosque is the third oldest existing and seventh largest mosque of the country after Delhi's Jama Masjid. It is also a Monument of National Importance and a National Heritage Site. The Masjid was started by Iltutmish, the ruler of Delhi Sultanate and the first governor of the district. The construction was carried out under the supervision of his son Ruknuddin. This mosque was later restored by Muhammad bin Tughlaq in 1326 CE. A central large dome surmounts the octagonal mosque on the top. On either side, there are vaulted chambers, divided into five bays. The sides have recessed arches and on the western side, there is a *mihrab*, which indicates the direction of Mecca, the direction in which Muslims pray. Sheikh Khuba Koka, the foster brother of Jahangir, is known to have restored the dome.

Sheikhpur Fort

It was developed by the Faridi branch of Farooqi Sheikhs who inhabited this region during the reign of Mughal Emperor Akbar. Shaikh Salim Chisti belonged to this family. However, it was Shaikh Ibrahim Ali Farooqui also known as Nawab Mohtashim Khan, elder son of Nawab Qutubuddin Koka, foster brother of Jahangir and grandson of Salim Chisti, who had received Badaun as *jagir from Emperor Jahangir. He had b*uilt this fort in Sheikhpur, known by the same name.

Nature's Abundance

The region forms a part of Central Ganga Plain and lies within the *doab* region of Ganga and Ramganga. Physiographically, it can be divided into *Khadar* (low lying area occupying a narrow belt adjacent to river Ganga); *Bhur* (towards north-east of *Khadar* with comparatively higher elevation); and *Katchar* (towards north-east of *Bhur*, a levelled and perfectly homogenous expanse of good fertile loam). Similar to its earlier stretch, the river is extremely braided at different points in Badaun due to presence of several *diaras* and sandbars, many of which are larger in sizes as compared to those of Sambhal. Ganga is braided into two major streams here, one of which lies adjoining Kasganj where Lahara Ghat is located and the other adjoins Badaun where villages such as Nagla Baran and Jamani are located. Crops such as mustard and wheat along with different vegetables and fruits were grown on this island. Some sandbars were observed around Kachhla Ghat too.

Some tributaries of the Ganga here are Sot (historically called *Yaar-i-Wafadar*, or faithful friend, bestowed on it by Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah when his army got respite from heat and thirst while travelling from Sambhal to Badaun) and Bhainsaur (a small stream that originates near Islamnagar). There are also 52 wetlands in the region.

The common tree species in the region are *Babool, Neem*, Siris, *Peepal* and *Bargad.* Two major forest patches are located near Kakora and Allipur Maththaiya Villages. Upon interaction with the forest department officials and local residents, it was recorded that these used to be dense forests once dominated by trees such as *Butea monosperma (Dhak*) which whose leaves were used for making bowls and whose flowers were used for making dyes, along with other native vegetation. However, their number has declined.

Badaun-Sambhal has Wild Boars, Jackals, and Monkeys. Gangetic Dolphins, Nilgai, Turtles, Gharials, Golden Jackal, Indian Rock Python (Near Threatened), Bengal Monitor (Near threatened), Red Sand Boa (near threatened) and Indian Cobra. Some commonly found birds are White throated kingfisher, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, House Sparrow, Jungle Crow, Common Myna, Bank Myna, Asian Pied Starling, Common Pigeon, Common Babbler, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove and White Wagtail.

Fish like *Rohu, Katla, Tengara, Baam, Pothiya, Barari, Baam* and *Sidhari* can also be found here.

Two major types of boats were also observed in the study region – smaller hand rowed wooden boats principally used at sites such as Kachhla Ghat, especially during auspicious occasions for tourists and pilgrims and metal boats. While *Sakhua (Shorea robusta)* is the chief wood choice in these boats, other options such as *Babool* and Mango are also explored depending upon prices and availability.

A Child Near Hussainpur Kham Village Showing Baam Fish Caught From Ganga River

Sand Bars As Observed from Kacchla Ganga Bridge

CHAPTER 12

ALIGARH

City of Locks & a Hub of Education

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Aligarh

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Aligarh District in Western Uttar Pradesh is spread over 3650 sq km and its older name was Koil. It is surrounded by, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr and Sambhal on the North, Badaun and Kasganj on the north-east and east respectively, Hathras on the south-east and the south, Mathura on the south and south-west and Haryana on the west. It has five *tehsils* Atrauli, Koil, Garbhana, Iglas and Khair, out of which Atrauli comes within the 5 km radius of the Ganga. Aligarh was earlier a part of Farrukhabad and became a separate district in 1804. Ganga forms the eastern boundary of Aligarh. The river courses along the district's border, from North to South, for about 16 kms. The Lower Ganga Canal (built by the East India Company in 1855) and the Anupshahr Ganga Canal branch pass through the district. The major rivers flowing through or along Aligarh are the Ganga, Yamuna, Karwan and Kali.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Aligarh can be dated back to Ochre Colour Pottery (OCP) culture (2000 BCE- 1500 BCE).

Typical Floodplain Vegetation Near Sankara

During excavations, three single culture OCP sites were found : Lai Qila, Kazempur, and Kharkhoda. The district was then subjected to the influence of Sungas, Kushanas (pottery fragments have been found from the Sunga-Kushana period), Guptas (coins have been found at Shahgarh) and Dor Rajputs (9th century CE). Around the 11th century CE, the Meos entered the district and settled towards the southern borders of Bulandshahr. To restore peace, the Dors invited aid from Bargujars, who were successful in ousting the Meos.

The year 1206 CE marks the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate. In 1342 CE, the famous Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta is said to have travelled through this area on his way to China and in his account Kitab-ur-Rehla records that this area was a fine town with mango groves which is why this place is also called *Sabzabad* or the green city. The Sultanate Rule was ended by Babur in 1526 CE. Under Akbar, Agra Sirkar was divided into four *dasturs*, with Koil being one of them. During the reign of Farrukhsiyar (1713-19) and Muhammad Shah, Sabit Khan was the governor of the region. He rebuilt the old fort of Koil and named it Sabitgarh. In 1754, Suraj Mal Jat took possession of Sabitgarh and changed its name to Ramgarh. In 1776, Najaf Khan collected a large army and drove out the Jats from Koil. Further additions were made by his successor and the region's *Amir-ul-Umra* Afrasyab Khan to the Ramgarh Fort which he renamed as Aligarh. The area soon came under the Marathas who were defeated by the British at the Battle of Aligarh in 1803.

During the 1857 Revolt, the city gave a tough fight to the British whose initial position was very precarious; they had made the military factory at Madrak, the base. From 2nd July to 24th August 1857, the rebels had completely disrupted the British administration and established what is in colonial parlance known as the rebel government. It was in mid-August that the British managed to regain their position after they attacked the rebels under the leader Ghaus Khan and Maulvi Abdul Jalil.

During excavations, three single culture OCP sites were found: Lai Qila, Kazempur, and Kharkhoda.

Mythological Links

The ancient name of the area is said to be Harigarh. It was later renamed Kohl or Koil, referring to the tribal people who once inhabited this forested region. The name also refers to a demon killed by Balarama, Krishna's brother, in these forests. The city and the fort went through numerous name changes before it was named Aligarh by Afrasyab Khan.

According to Edwin T. Atkinson, as per another legend, this place was inhabited by the Dor Rajputs in 372 CE who were the feudatories of the Tomar Clan. It is believed that this area came under the domain of Kali, brother of Vikrama Sen who held the neighbouring Baran in Bulandshahr. Both are said to be the subjects of Raja Anang Pal of the Tomar Clan. Koil was under the suzerainty of a line of successors of Vikrama Sen. One of the descendants, Raja Budh Sen is believed to be the hero of a popular legend. It is said that once, mounted on his horse, he was going to Delhi from Jalali, and stopped near a *jhil* (a small water body). While he was waiting for his retinue to arrive, he was attacked by a fox, who persistently kept barking at him despite being wounded by the king's sword. Seeing the courage of the fox, the followers of the king pointed out that there must be something in the air and soil of this place which made the fox stand its ground against the king. Believing this to be true, Raja Budh Sen is said to have laid the foundation of this city and a fort known as the Dor Fortress, which was then made his capital and remained so for successive generations.

Events *of* Interest

Ramlilas

Ramlila fairs are the largest gatherings in the area celebrated by people at Koil, Hathras, Khair, Sikandra Rao and Beswan Divisions.

Barahi Fair

It is dedicated to the Goddess Barahi.

Phul Dol festival

On the eighth day after Holi on Chaitra Krishna Ashtami, people take out processions where palanquins are made and decorated with flowers and the deities are decorated and are placed inside the palanquin. People, in such processions, sing songs dedicated to the deities, the gods and the goddesses, praising the richness of their culture. It is believed that this festival was started in 1900 when after the harvest season and the coming of the spring it was celebrated to infuse new spirit at work. Another aspect of the Phul Dol festival is that *Chaupais* are sung to ward off any evil or misery on people or nature.

Art *at the* Heart

Dhurries

Panja Dhurries or the *Jainamuz* (the ones used to sit on while offering prayers), the ones with plain striped designs; are woven in plain weaving technique using the well-faced tapestry technique. Sometimes they are decorated by Arabic sentences or monograms. *Dhurrie* weaving of Aligarh is usually more of a coarse kind and at times they also use camel's hair.

Lock Making

Lock making is Aligarh's leading industry, so much so that it is called the City of Locks. In the 17th century CE, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb had built a garrison here which later developed into a cluster for locksmiths. In 1890, local entrepreneurs started the production of locks on a small scale. Johnson and Co. was the first English locks' firm that was set up. Reportedly, there are now 2000 lock manufacturing artisan units in Aligarh employing over more than 200,000 employees. Locks

Exquisite Locks of Aligarh

in Aligarh are manufactured not just as a commodity catering to safety and security needs, but it is also one of the major craft traditions. Exquisite locks with intricate and beautiful designs are made of brass with triple locking mechanism. They have unique designs ranging from fish hanging from a rod, a camel to an owl with big eyes that do not just fulfil decorative needs but are also sturdy and durable. The base material of these handmade locks is brass, and the moulds used are also made of brass, which is used in the sand-casting process. The object is then filed; after which buffing machines are then used for polishing, varying from antique, copper finish to normal brass, and the product is then ready for use. On an average 30 to 40 locks and their respective keys are manufactured in a day by one unit.

Brass Statues

Aligarh is a prime centre to make brass idols. Obtained from melting minerals or old scrap, the raw material is either given shape while heating it or by pouring the metal in a mould of sand. Mostly brass, copper and zinc are used as they are light and usually non-corrosive. They are heated and when they reach the red hot molten stage, they are poured in the mould so that the body of the statue is ready. The heads of the statues are made and cut out separately and then it is polished to amplify the lustre effect on the idols.

Idol Making

Aligarh is famous for its idols of Plaster of Paris, a white powder made of Calcium-Sulphate and Gypsum. First the rubber moulds are given the required design or pattern based on the Plaster of Paste idol that is to be made. The sheets of rubber are then punched through the technique of engraving. The sheets are then tied with coir or jute and black rubber tapes to prevent the overflow of excess amount of Plaster of Paris paste when poured. Once, the mould is tied firmly, the Plaster of Paris paste is poured. This solution is then properly and evenly spread and wobbled so that it reaches every corner, and it is then left to dry. After the idols have dried, they are washed properly with water. In the final stage, the idols are painted with enamel paint.

Decorative Dolls

These decorative dolls are made from cloth and waste materials. They are commonly made by the women in villages with locally available materials in small groups usually from de-husked coconut, Formica sheets, velvet cloth, decorative laces and silver coated foam sheets. The body is made from de-husked coconut which is then wrapped with a cloth. These two things are secured with a thread and then fixed on a thermocol base. This entire piece is then wrapped with a thick layer of newspapers. The head of the doll is made separately out of clay, which is later attached with the body made of coconut. After that the doll is dressed up with velvet cloth.

Applique Work

Applique work is a predominant art form of Aligarh where craftsmen cut pieces of cloth of different colours, fabrics and texture into patterns and sew them onto a variety of cloth materials like muslin, georgette, tissue

Exquisite locks with intricate and beautiful designs are made of brass with triple locking mechanism

cloth in the form of a design. This particular craft work is also economical as it eliminates the need to embroider a costlier artwork. In one of the major applique styles called *Phoolpatti ka Kaam*, the fabric is cut into motifs of flowers and leaves and then they are hemmed onto the fabric. Stems are embroidered in stem stitch. Local narratives say that the *Phoolpatti ka Kaam* can be dated back to the Mughal era when it was done on the blouses of the *begums* of *Nawabs*. First, the fabric is cut as per required dimensions and folded to obtain the desirable shape and then they are embellished with sequins called *chamkis*, which are inserted through the fusible technique or by hemming on to the base fabric. The appliqued pieces are designed and stitched to the base fabric. The appliqued pieces here are made in the floral and leaf called *phool-patti* design. In the other kind, fabrics are cut with evenly spaced intervals in a strip of fabric, which is tucked under to leave a row of triangular points like tooth edges.

People who Fascinate

Mehdis *of* Aligarh

The Mehdis of Aligarh, master in tailoring *sherwanis* for men. They had set up shop at Tasveer Mahal in 1947. *Sherwanis* are long-sleeved coats that are mostly worn by men over shirts. These coats are long, they fall below the knees and are buttoned at the front. This was an attire meant for the nobility or the royal family since medieval times. Mehdi Hasan has served as a tailor to former presidents of India like Sh. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, Sh. V.V. Giri, and Dr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. He is also reputed to have stitched almost 175 *sherwanis* for the former president of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain. He is said to have always donned the *sherwanis* stitched by Mehdi Hasan in his long political career of seventeen years. Presidents, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Sh. Pranab Mukherjee as well as Sh. Ram Nath Kovind have also worn *sherwanis* made by the Mehdis.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan

Reformist and educationist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan came from a family of nobles of the Mughal Court. In 1869 when he went to England, he was highly impressed by the English education system and felt that in order to improve conditions back home it was pertinent to embrace modern scientific western education. He started the Aligarh Movement since he knew that Aligarh had a sizeable Urdu-speaking nobility. He established the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh on 24th May, 1875, the foundation of which was laid by the then Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton, with Theodore Beck as the principal. The College committee believed that British Rule was benevolent for the Indian subjects and this institution would infuse loyalty among the students who would be appreciative of the goodwill of the British Government. After Syed Ahmed Khan passed away in 1898, the triumvirate of Theodore Beck, Mohsinul Mulk and Aftab Khan took over and they proposed the idea of converting the college into a university for the Muslims. With the turn of the century things began to change. In 1920, when the Caliph was challenged by the British, when the Ottoman Empire was destroyed, and the involvement of the British Indian Empire in World War I happened; all of which led to the rise of the Khilafat Agitation. After Mahatma Gandhi had joined hands with the agitation and the clarion call of Non-Cooperation was given in 1920, all British government aided institutions were abandoned and the Aligarh Muslim University was reinvigorated in September 1920. Dr. Zakir Hussain, Former President of India, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, popularly known as Frontier Gandhi, Prof. Irfan Habib, leading historian of Medieval India, Zafar Iqbal, Hockey player, Naseeruddin Shah, famous theatre and film actor and Javed Akhtar, famous writer

Sankara Bridge at Aligarh

Aligarh Fort - Bridge across the Moat

and lyricist are some well-known alumni of this university.

Monuments *that* Matter

Pyavali Bridge

The brick bridge was built in the 19th century CE over the Lower Ganga Canal connecting Pyavali Village to other areas. The 220 m bridge has segmental arches supported on capsule-shaped piers also built with brick. The arches are adorned with a decorative stepped cornice band above the arches.

Shankargarh Fort- Atrauli

The fort was built by local king Vaidya in 14th century CE. It acted as a moat from one side. But he was defeated by King Shankar Singh who changed its name to Shankargarh ka Qila. The site is presently a mound with the traces of Lakhori brick structures surrounding it.

Aligarh Fort

Built by Muhammad, son of Governor Umar, in 1525, it represents Islamic influences on architecture. Also known Baunasaur Quila or the Ramgarh Quila it was taken over by the British in 1803.

Jama Masjid

Aligarh's Jama Masjid is located inside the campus of the Aligarh Muslim University. It was constructed in 1879 by Syed Ahmed Khan. Behind the mosque lies his tomb. The campus also has a museum dedicated to him.

Teerthdham Mangalayatan

Located on Aligarh-Agra highway, Teerthdham Mangalayatan is a Jain pilgrimage complex developed by Shri Adinath Kund Digamber Jain Trust. It consists of 5 other temples inside the temple complex dedicated to the Jain *tirthankars* (Lord Mahavir, Lord Adinath, Lord Bahubali, Lord Adinath Swami Mansthamb and Lord Jinwani).

Baba Barchi Bahadur Dargah

Considered one of the most important shrines for the Barelvi Branch of Sufism, it was built about 600 years ago.

Nature's Abundance

Ganga River enters Aligarh near Jasupur Ganj. The river channel is around 1 km to 1.5 km wide. The East Kali River (rises in Muzaffarnagar) and the Nim River (rises in Bulandshahr) are the major tributaries of the Ganga here. The Ganga floodplains (the area on either side of the river channel with periodic flooding) are flat with depressions, ravines, paleochannels and agriculture fields. Among the wetlands are the Lahara Salempur Talab located on the main road leading to the Lower Ganga Canal and the Hardoi Talab located on the eastern edge of Hardoi. Aligarh has braided river islands used for agriculture by local farmers. Cucurbits such as cucumber, melons, bitter and bottle gourds, tomatoes, pumpkins are grown and known as Palez. Brown-roofed turtles can be seen basking on exposed islands and sandbars.

Fishermen Selling Fish At A Local Market Caught From Ganga River

Along the river, one can observe *Kaans*, Common Cattail, *Narkul, Sheesham, Neem*, Banyan, *Jamun, Peepal*, Mango and *Ber.* Some herb/shrub species observed are Tephrosia, Prickly Malvastrum, Creeping Woodsorrel, Congress Grass, Goat Weed, India Mallow, Country Mallow, Devil's Thorn, Coffee Senna, Setaria, *Khus* and Calotropis.

Common mammals presently found in the district include Indian Leopard, Indian Jackal, Indian Fox, Monkey, Langur and Indian Hare. The Aligarh Gazetteer also mentions about Indian wolves which are no more sighted in the district. Among Butterflies, Common Leopard Butterfly, Common Rose, Plain Tiger and Peacock pansy can be found. Among Dragonflies and Damselflies, Ruddy Marsh Skimmer, Blue Marsh Hawk, Coromandel Marsh Dart are found in Aligarh District.

In the Sankara Ganga Bridge stretch, the Gangetic dolphins can be seen very often, especially during the monsoon season when the water level is high.

The most common fish species are *Barwari*, Rohu, Catla, Carp, *Singhi, Singhara, Gonch*, *Sawli* and *Naini*.

In the Sankara Ganga Bridge stretch, the Gangetic Dolphin can be seen very often, especially during the monsoon season when the water level is high

Shekha Bird Sanctuary

Shekha Bird Sanctuary located close to Shekha Jheel is home to thousands of migratory and local birds. The lake is a perennial water body that came into existence after the Upper Ganges Canal was formed in 1875.

Brown-roofed Turtle Basking

Ferry Boats at Sankara Bridge

CHAPTER 13

Kanshiram Nagar

Where the Earth was once Concealed

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Kanshiram Nagar

Where *on the* Ganga?

Kanshi Ram Nagar (previously Kasganj named after *Kans* or catkins forest) is in the historical region of Braj in Western Uttar Pradesh in the Ganga-Kali Doab. The district was established on April 17th, 2008 by dividing Etah District. It is on the southern bank of the Ganga. It is surrounded by Aligarh District to the west, Badaun to the north, across Ganga, Sahawar Tehsil of Kanshiram Nagar district to the east, and Etah District to the south. Kasganj City is the headquarters of the *tehsil*. The district is divided into three *tehsils* namely Kasganj, Sahawar and Patiyali. To the south of the district, two parallel Lower Ganga Canals run across the Kali Nadi to carry water with the help of a bridge. The Ganga has changed its course several times in the past which led to the formation of tributaries and lakes across Kasganj. The ancient course of the Ganga is marked by the Burhi Ganga here.

Re-living *the* Past

Kanshiram Nagar was inhabited by tribes like the Bhars, Ahirs and Kans. Several ancient artefacts

Har Ki Pauri In Soron

Lahara Ghat

have been found at Atranji Khera, along with Painted Grey Ware, on the southern banks of Kali Nadi. It is also believed
that Lord Buddha visited this site. In the times of Mahabharata, Panchala was the capital of ancient Sukhar Kshetra (present Kasnhiram Nagar). The *Naga Akhara* at Shukar Kshetra is the representation of Agnidev. It is conserved at the Kundal Ghat of Haripadi Ganga. Some important sculptures dating to the Gupta period have also been found like the sculpture of a *tapaswi* (saint) and a *Dowarik Stree ki Murti* made of red sandstone. There is also a *Chaturbhuji* idol of Agnidev and one of Mahakali at Gridhvat Tirthsthal. Some ancient artifacts have been found at Yogeshwar Temple. The region was under Harshvardhana and finds mention in the accounts of 7th century Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang while coins also reveal the presence of the Pratihara Dynasty dating to the period of King Bholdev I of the 9th century CE. The region came under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals in the medieval period but was established as Khasganj by Nawab Yaqoot Ali Khan, from the family of Nawabs of Farrukhabad. The city was also called Yaqoot Ganj in the early 16th century. According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol XV (1908) by William Wilson Hunter, Kasganj was ruled by James V. Gardner who was initially employed by the Marathas but later by the British. Between the 18th and the 19th centuries, the area went under the Marathas and the Nawabs of Farrukhabad before finally coming under the British in 1803 CE. During the Anglo-Burmese war (1823), Bhimsen, a local *zamindar* of Kasganj, led a British army. He fought the Kongwang Dynasty, and conquered their fort. The last Nawab of Farrukhabad sold Kasganj to Colonel James Gardner and subsequently, the Colonel's son, Suleiman Shikoh Gardner sold the land to Dilsukh Rai, a former agent of the family.

Mythological Links

Soron

It is believed that the demon Hira-

It is believed that Brahmarishi Kapil did intense penance of Lord Varaha in a cave of Kasganj

During the Anglo-Burmese war (1823), Bhimsen, a local zamindar of Kasganj, led a British army. He fought the Kongwang Dynasty, and conquered their fort

nyaksha stole the earth and hid it in the Kund of Soron. The third incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Lord Varaha killed the demon and restored the earth to its original place. Consequently, Soron celebrates the victory of good over evil to date.

Events *of* Interest

Ekadashi Parwa Margshirsh Mela

This is the most popular fair in Kasganj organized on *Ekadashi* when Lord Varaha is worshipped and devotes take a ritual dip in the Ganga. An important part of this fair is the Shivraj Pashu-mela that happens in the vicinity of the Vataknath and Sitaram Temple. This is known for animal trade, especially horses.

Somvati Amavasya

On the auspicious occasion of Somvati Amavasya, pilgrims come from all over the country for the *Yatra* of Shukar Kshetra. Apart from bathing, some of them also perform *pinda daan*.

Kavad/Kanwar Mela

During the *Kanwar,* devotees of Lord Shiva and pray to the Bhagirathi River and collect *Gangajal* to carry to their local Shiva Temples. When they return to their hometown or native places, they perform *Rudra Abhishek* of Lord Shiva. Some devotees perform the *yatra* barefoot and some by rolling over and over again on the surface of the earth to show their devotion to Lord Shiva.

Tulsi Jayanti

It is organized on the west bank of the Ganga in the memory of Tulsidas.

Art *at the* Heart

Malla-Yuddha: *The* Art *of* Wrestling

Malla Yuddha is being practiced since times immemorial in Kasganj. *Gurus* like Pandit Upendra Kumar and Surendranath Vallabh Bhatt are famous teachers of this form.

Talwar-Vidya: *The* Art *of* Swordsmanship

This knowledge of sword fighting is practiced at Shukar Kshetra under the tutelage of local *gurus.* Its presentation takes place on auspicious occasions like Ram Navami, Dusshera and Navratri. The local Batuknath Temple has a *talwar-vidya akhara* established by Gopinath Mishra. The Yogeshwar Temple also has a similar *akhara* established by swordsmen Narayana and Gumaniram. Sometimes, it is practiced by wearing costumes depicting Goddess Kali and the act presents reverence to the glory and strength of the goddess.

Zari- Zardozi

Zardozi or metal embroidery comes from two Persian words, *Zar* (gold) and *Dozi* (work). It involves making intricate designs using gold and silver threads. Designs are decorated with studded pearls and precious stones. Zardozi became a popular craft under the patronage of the Mughal royals who wore zardozi.

Mewa Pedas at Kasganj

Sculpture of an Unknown Deity

Gastronomic Delights

Satwik Cusine

Kasganj, being a part of Brijbhoomi, is known for *Satwik* food. Asafoetida or *heeng* is used heavily in the cuisine of this region. The food is also lighter in comparison to Rampuri and Awadhi cuisine and many dishes are prepared without garlic and onion. Besides, milk-based desserts like Malai Ghewar and Kurchan are also popular.

People who Fascinate

Guru Narsinh & Tulsidas

Guru Narsinh, also known as Narhari was the teacher of saints and poets Tulsidas and poet Nanaddas. The place where Narsinh taught his disciples is believed to be Chaudhariyaan at Kasganj. Goswami Tulsidas, born in Sukhar Kshetra at Soronj, went on to become a legendary saint and poet who wrote the Ramcharitmanas in vernacular Awadhi language, a retelling of the Ramayana. Tulsidas also wrote many *dohaas* explaining his *bhakti* philosophy.

Litterateurs & Scholars

Litterateurs like Pandit Mevaram Mishra, Pandit Angad Ram Shastri, Pandit Dasrath Shastri, Pandit Hariyash Shastri and Pandit Bhairav Nath Upadhyayay who have written extensively on topics like religion and *Ayurveda* in Hindi and Sanskrit were born and educated in Kanshiram Nagar.

From the Field *of* Music

Kanshiram Nagar has been home to many personalities from the field of music like Tabla player and rhythm composer Pyarelal Maheshwari, who worked for various films including *Babul ki Galiyan, Ganga Tera Pani Amrit, Dhakan, Ek Mahal Ho Sapno Ka* and *Chingari*. Renowned flautist Master Habib Rahi, musician and instrumentalist Yogendra Kumar Samadhiya and folk singer Shivji Dikshit were also born here.

Monuments *that* Matter

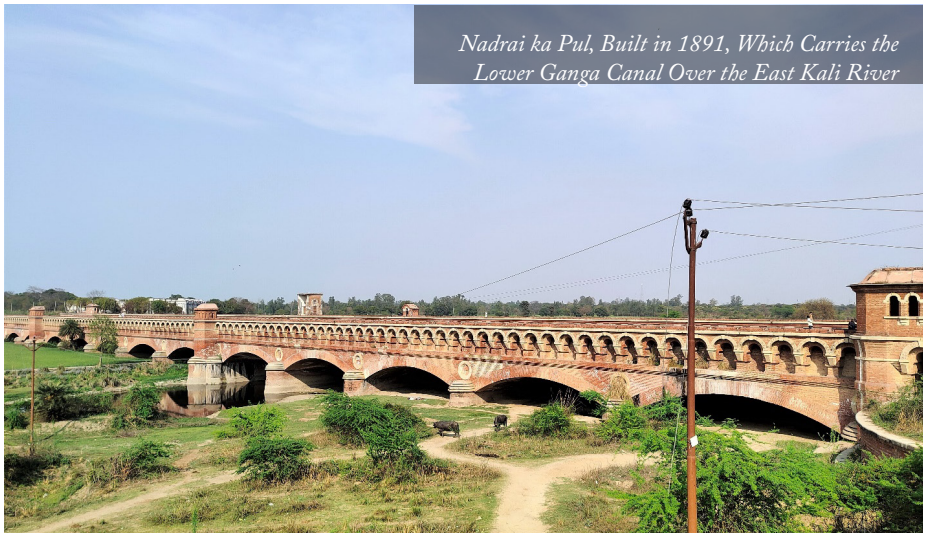
The district showcases two distinct types of architectural influences namely those of the *Nawabs* of Farrukhabad and the Marathas. The temples in this region mostly comprise only the *garbh-griha*, square or hexagonal in plan with multifoliate arches along their entrance facade. They are built on a low platform.

Adi Varah Mandir

On the eastern banks of the Ganga, God Varah, the third avatar of Lord Vishnu, is worshipped in the Adi Varah Mandir. It was renovated around 200 years ago under the patronage of the King of Nepal and many devotees come from Nepal to visit it. It is said that if any devotee daubs its surface with cow dung or simply wipes the floor, his prayers are answered. Many other ancient temples are located in its vicinity like Maa Bhagirathi Ganga temple, Raghunath Temple and Shri Baldauji Mandir, dedicated to Balaram.

Shri Shyam Varaha Mandir

Lord Shyam Varaha is worshipped in this magnificent temple on the northern bank of Ganga which has beautiful



Nadrai ka Pul, Built in 1891, Which Carries the Lower Ganga Canal Over the East Kali River

idols of Lord Varaha and Bhagwati Lakshmi. On the auspicious occasion of *Margashirsh Mah ki Dwadashi*, a tableau of Lord Varah is also organized.

Someshwar Mandir

Located in the south direction towards the bank of Haripada Ganga, Lord Shiva is worshipped here. On the auspicious day of *Chaitrashukal Chaturdashi*, devotees keep fast and perform the ritual of sacred bathing at the Somtirth.

Teli Jatiya Ganga Mandir

An idol of Maa Bhagirathi made up of white stone is worshipped in this temple.

Tulsi Smarak Mandir

On the west bank of the Ganga, a statue of Tulsidas is placed which depicts him in his youth. The names of the successors of Tulsidas Ji and his Guru Narsinh Ji are also mentioned here.

Dwarika Dheesh Mandir

The grand temple of Lord Krishna has beautiful carvings and sculptures.

Mahaprabhu Valabhacharya Mandir

Dedicated to Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, it is also called *Mahaprabhu Ji ki Baithak*. It has step marks of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya and mementoes of his son Vithalnath and grandson Gokulnath.

Brahmrishi Kapilmuni Cave

It is believed that Brahmarishi Kapil did intense penance of Lord Varaha in a cave of Kasganj. The cave is located on a hill top in Kasganj.

Shri Sitaram Mandir

Related to the Solankis or the Chalukyas, this temple is famous by the name *Raja Somdutt ki Yagyashala*. The four corners of this temple are beautifully stone carved.

Lehara Ganga Ghat

Located in the vicinity of Bhagwati Bhagirathi temple, this *ghat* also has one of the oldest temples of Kasganj the Lehareshwar Mahadev Temple. It is believed that the *ghat* has faced many calamities but the temple has remained intact.

Nadrai Bridge

Nadrai Bridge, also known as Jhaal Bridge is constructed on the Ganga Canal and Kali River. It was constructed from 1853-1889. The length of the bridge is 346 metres and its discharge capacity is 7095 cusecs. A famous temple of Chamunda Devi is located in this region where devotees come in huge numbers to visit during the festival of Navratri.

Har ki Pauri, Soron

An ancient settlement, Soron houses the temple dedicated to Lord Varaha (the Boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu). Close to the temple is the holy pond called Har ki Pauri where people immerse the ashes of the dead. A memorial of Saint Tulsidas also stands here. Soron has two ponds dedicated to the sun and the moon respectively called Surya Kund and Chandra Kund.

Nature's Abundance

The district has a flat terrain with a few gentle undulations. It may be divided into three geomorphic units, Flood Plain, Younger Alluvial Plain and Older Alluvial Plain. The main tributaries of the Ganga here are the East Kali River (originates in Muzzafarnagar) and Burhi Ganga. A palaeo-channel of the Ganga can be seen near Datalana Kham. The district falls in the Western Plain Zone/Upper Gangetic Plain Zone with the major soils being loam, silt, silty loam and fine soil. One can find several grasses here like *Kans* and *Moonj*. These Saccharum species are tall, perennial wild grasses growing up to 3 m. They form extensive root networks that bind the soil/pebbles and form tall thick clumps with high biomass tufts. Along with the riverine island at Sotua, numerous sand bars are also present in the Ganga river stretch of study region. One such sandbar was observed below the Kadarganj Ganga bridge. It is profusely cultivated upon with crops such as Melons, Cucumber and *Parwal* along with other vegetables.

Kanshiram Nagar has about 57 different wetlands, one of which, 5.5 km long, is likely a part of an erstwhile oxbow lake near Kakabegpur. The common tree species in the region are *Babool, Neem, Peepal* and Banyan.

Recently, the Kasganj Forest Department planted two forests namely the Ganga Van and the Bhagirathi Van where various deer species along with Nilgai and wild boars can be found. Besides this, one can spot the Gangetic Dolphin near Nadrai Bridge.

A total of 94 different bird species were sighted during the study in this region, out of which 39 were wetland birds while remaining 55 species were of forest and grassland including 4 species of raptors. Some of these are White Throated kingfisher, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Bank Myna, Asian Pied Starling, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove and White Wagtail. Some migratory birds spotted here are the Common, Wood and Green Sandpipers, Common Pochard, Black-tailed Godwit (Near Threatened), Steppe Eagle, Great Cormorant and Black-Winged Stilt. The major fish species here are Rohu, Katla, T*engara, Bam, Pothiya, Barari* and *Sidhari*.

Major water bearing formations in the area are sand of various grades, silt and *kankar*. The water depth varies from 5 ft below ground level (Kadarganj Ghat) to 50 ft below ground level (Soron) in the study region and it kept on increasing as the distance from Ganga River increased. The use of wells in earlier years was quite common in this region which has declined significantly giving way to handpumps and motor-based systems.

Bhagirathi Van, A Riparian Forestation

A Flock of Bar Headed Geese

CHAPTER 14

SHAHJAHANPUR
Land of Martyrs

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Shajahanpur

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Shahjahanpur was founded in 1647 and named after the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. Spread over 4575 sq. kms in the southeast corner of Rohilkhand, Shahjahanpur was carved out as a separate district from Bareilly in 1813 and is bounded in the northwest by Pilibhit and in the east and southeast by Kheri and Hardoi districts respectively. Towards its south is Farrukhabad separated by river Ganga and to the west, Bareilly and Badaun. The Ganga, Ramganga, Gomti and Garra are important rivers in the district.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

According to the *Puranas*, the history of the region begins with King Pururavas of the Aila dynasty whose great-grandson Yayati also ruled here. Shahjahanpur was under the Gupta Empire in the 4th century CE as established from numismatic evidence found of Ahichchatra coins discovered in Mati, Khutar. Ahichchatra Bhukti was a province of the Gupta Empire that was governed by the Kumaramatya. After the downfall of the Guptas, this region was ruled by Harsha, Yasovarman, Nagabhatta II, Bhoja I and Mahendrapala I. In medieval times, Shahjahanpur is

The ruins of fort at Tilhar

Dragnet based Fishing

said to be a part of the greater region of Katehar. Since it was on the main route used by the Sultanate and Mughal armies, it was initially established as a garrison. In the 14th century CE, the region of Gola was under the governorship of Hisam-ul-Mulk. Subsequently, it came under Alauddin Alam Shah, Bahlol Lodi and Sikandar Lodi. The disintegration of the Mughal Empire gave rise to several independent principalities in north India like Farrukhabad, Awadh, Bundelkhand and Rohilkhand. Later Shahjahanpur along with the entire Rohilkhand came under influence of the Bangash and Rohilla Pathans. The province of Rohilkhand including Shahjahanpur was ceded to the British East India Company when the rule of Nawab Wazir Sadat Ali Khan came to an end with the treaty of Lucknow in 1801. The district played a huge role in the revolt of 1857. Revolutionaries like Nana Saheb Peshwa, Mauli Ahmed Ullah Shah from Faizabad, Shahzad from Delhi and Khan Bahadur Khan from Bareilly met here to plan the movement. In 1925, Bismil, along with other revolutionaries of the Hindustan Republican Army met in Shahjahanpur and decided to loot the government treasury carried in the trains. On 9th August, 1925, Bismil and other revolutionaries, namely Ashfaqullah Khan, Rajendra Lahiri, Thakur Roshan Singh, Sachindra Bakshi, Chandrashekhar Azad, Keshab Chakravarty, Banwari Lal, Murari Lal Gupta, Mukundi Lal and Manmathnath Gupta attacked and robbed a government train in Kakori near Lucknow.

Mythological Links

It is said that in ancient times, this region was inhabited by aboriginal tribes such as Ahirs, Gujars, Pasis, Bhils, Bhihars and Arakhs. A mythical king Raja Ben or Vena used to rule over the region. People attribute the ruins of the old fort at Mati to Raja Ben.

Events *of* Interest

Shahjahanpur *ka* Laatsahab *(Holi)*

In Shahjahanpur, a ritual called *Juloos* is performed during Holi. In *Juloos* ritualistically, a man is selected to be the *Laatsahab* of that year and he is bombarded with shoes and sticks and all sorts of things with the sole purpose of hitting him. Besides, festivals like Vasant Panchami and Hanuman Jayanti are celebrated with huge gatherings.

Art *at the* Heart

Kajri, Nautanki, Alha, Hori, Sohar

On the third day in the second half of the *Bhadra* month, women sing *Kajri* through the night and form a semi-circle to dance just before the advent of Monsoon. *Nautanki* is a folk operatic theatre which is a convergence of many traditions like *Bhagat, Swaang*. In it, *Nakkara*, a percussion instrument announces the start of the performance, bringing the audience into the performing space which can vary from the village square to the marketplace. The audience sits around a raised platform (sometimes constructed) on which a night-long performance takes place. The atmosphere of the performance is informal and interactive. The stories vary from episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata to Arabic tales like Laila Majnu. Heightened poetry consists of metric patterns of different syllables like *Doha, Tabilmaand, Khamsa, Dedtuki, BehreTabil*, and *Chaubola* which are recited in this performance. It incorporates people from various castes and communities such as Khangar, Pal, Thakur, Darzi, Gadehr, Nai, Pasi, Chamar, Kahar and Brahmin Valmiki, Dholi, Jato, Mirasi, Bandh and Kalamat, and Muslim communities. The women performers are mostly from the Bedin, Sonar, Barin and Lodhi communities. The *Nats* are also involved in acrobatic and comic acts.

The *Alha*, is a famous ballad narrating the heroic deeds of Alha and Udal, the two warrior brothers who served Raja Parmal of Mahoba. It highlights principles of morality, chivalry and nobility.

Hori songs, sung on Holi recount the love pranks of Radha-Krishna.

North India also has a strong tradition of singing *Sohar* songs when a son is born in a family. This has influenced the Muslim culture too and a form of *Sohar* song has gained popularity in Muslim families as well.

North India also has a strong tradition of singing Sohar songs when a son is born in a family

Shahjahanpur Gharana

Shahjahanpur Gharana has produced many Sarod players or *Sarodiyas*. Its glory lies in the immense contribution made by Ustad Murad Ali Khan, Ustad Mohammed Ameer Khan, Pandit Radhika Mohan Moitra and Pandit Buddha Dev Dasgupta. Sarod legend Amjad Ali Khan also belongs to Shahjahanpur Gharana. The *Gharana* can be traced to the Bangash Tribe of Afghanistan that migrated to India approximately 200 years ago and brought along with them the Afghan *Rabab*. Ghulam Ali Khan along with his cousins Enayet Ali and Niyamatullah laid the foundation of this *Gharana*. The Bangash community became influenced by Indian music through Zafar Khan, a descendant of Tansen.

Carpet Making

Shahjahanpur is one of the main centres of carpet making in the country. In the colonial period, huge demand from outside the country led to the growth of the carpet industry here. Finer weave in the carpets is achieved by using twisted cotton thread, jute twine is used for rougher qualities.

Woodworking/ Woodcarving

Shahjahanpur is renowned for its woodcraft that chiefly uses *Sheesham*. However, other woods like mango, Walnut, *Deodar*, Ebony and Sandalwood are also used.

Ceramics

Shahjahanpur is famous for its ceramic work. A ceramic is any kind of hard, brittle, heat resistant and corrosion-resistant material made by shaping and firing inorganic non-metallic materials like clay at a high temperature.

People who Fascinate

Ram Prasad Bismil

Ram Prasad Bismil is a renowned freedom fighter and poet from Shahjahanpur. His poems were written under the pen names Ram, Agyat and Bismil. He was hugely inspired by 'Satyarth Prakash', written by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Bismil was one of the founding members of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association (HSRA). He translated the books, 'Catherine' from English and '*Bolshevikon ki Kartoot*' from Bengali. In 1918, he spearheaded the Mainpuri Conspiracy where he distributed revolutionary pamphlets and published literature not permitted by the British government. He masterminded the Kakori Train Robbery and was hanged to death for acting against the British Raj in 1927. A memorial exists in Shahjahanpur to commemorate his contribution.

Ashfaqullah Khan

Ashfaqullah Khan was a freedom fighter and poet who wrote under the pen name Hasrat. He was born in 1900 in Shahjahanpur. Khan and Bismil were close allies and he was also involved in the 1925 Kakori Train Robbery.

Murari Lal Gupta

Murari Lal Gupta with a fake name of Murari Sharma had also actively participated in the Kakori Train Robbery; he went underground and could not be traced out by the police till the end of the case. His son Damodar Swaroop Gupta became a famous revolutionary poet with the pen name of Vidrohi.

Other Revolutionaries

Shahjahanpur is also known as *Shaheedon Ki Nagari* or *Shaheed Gadh*. On 9th August, 1925 the British Treasury was robbed near Kakori Railway Station. On 26th December, 1925, 40 persons were arrested in this case from all over India. Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil, Thakur Roshan Singh, Banarsi Lal, Lala Har Govind, Prem Krishna Khanna, Indu Bhushan Mitra, Ram Dutta Shukla, Madan Lal and Ram Ratan Shukla among them were from Shahjahanpur District. The Shaheed Udyan Park is built to remember their contribution.

> ***Ram Prasad Bismil is a renowned freedom fighter and poet from Shahjahanpur. His poems were written under the pen name Ram, Agyat & Bismil***

Monuments *that* Matter

Hanuman Temple

Considered to be the identity of Shahjahanpur, an almost 100-feet tall statue of Lord Hanuman is installed on a podium at this temple. It lies on river Khannaut.

Shahi Masjid, Khudaganj

Ashfaqullah Khan's Mausoleum & Ancestral Home

Freedom fighter Ashfaqullah Khan's mausoleum is located at Shahjahanpur and dedicated to Maulavi Ahmadullah Shah. Shah was known as the Lighthouse of Rebellion in the Awadh region. Many British officials like George Bruce Malleson and Thomas Seaton mentioned the courage, valour and strong spirit of Ahmadullah.

Tulsi Math

It is believed to be the home of the great poet and saint, Tulsidas, the renowned author of Ramcharitmanas which is the Hindi-Awadhi version of the Sanskrit Ramayana. It is also believed that Tulsidas was the reincarnation of Shri Valmiki as he rewrote the Ramayana. At this place, various plants of Tulsi are grown. Alakhnath Temple is also situated close by.

Ghats

The word *Ghat* signifies places with steps leading down to the water along the holy river Ganga and its tributaries. These ghats possess special significance in Hindu mythology and are primarily used for bathing and performing Hindu religious rituals. Some ' are also used for cremation.

Tilhar

The old city of Tilhar is situated in Shahjahanpur. It was known by the name of Kamaan Nagar during the rule of Emperor Jahangir as the city supplied bows to the Mughal armies. Tilhar was named after Trilok Chandra who also constructed a fort here. The ruins of this fort can be seen in Dataganj Mohalla. There is another fort named Dodrajpur built by Raja Dudhraj, his successor. Mangal Khan who also ruled this place, established a fort in the village of Mansurpur located in the vicinity of Tilhar. In 1857, the British government occupied it and transformed it into a *tehsil*.

Nature's Abundance

The area of Shahjahanpur can be divided into the Older Alluvium (*Bangar* surface) and the low land floodplain (*Khaddar* surface). The northern part of the district merges imperceptibly into *Terai*, marked by thick forests and marshy lands. The soils in this district are deep and well-drained, with loamy surface. The Ganga River adjoins Shahjahanpur for a small stretch of about 9 kms with Ramganga being its major tributary. The chief floodplain grasses growing throughout the region are *Kans, Moonj* and *Doob*. Shahjahanpur has about 51 wetlands, one being near Gutaiti Dakhin Village. In the district, one can find Wild Boars, Nilgai and Gangetic Dolphins. Birds like Little Egret, Great Egret, Indian Pond Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Common Moorhen, Little Cormorant,

Asian Pied Starling, Common Myna, Red-wattled Lapwing and Eurasian Collared Dove can be most frequently sighted.

One of the biggest riverine islands in the region is an irregular shaped island between Farrukhabad and Shahjahanpur about 10-11 kms in length and 2-3 kms wide dominated by agricultural fields. The major fish here include Rohu, Katla, *Tengara, Bam* and *Sidhari*. Sukhania in Shahjahanpur has some erosion prone sites too.

Brown Roofed Turtle Caught In The Fishing Net

Hand Rowed Boats Used For Transportation Of Saccharum Grasses From Riverine Islands To The Banks

Ganga River Bank Erosion As Observed Near Sukhania

CHAPTER 15

FARRUKHABAD

Where Music, Potatoes & Savouries Coexist

Legend

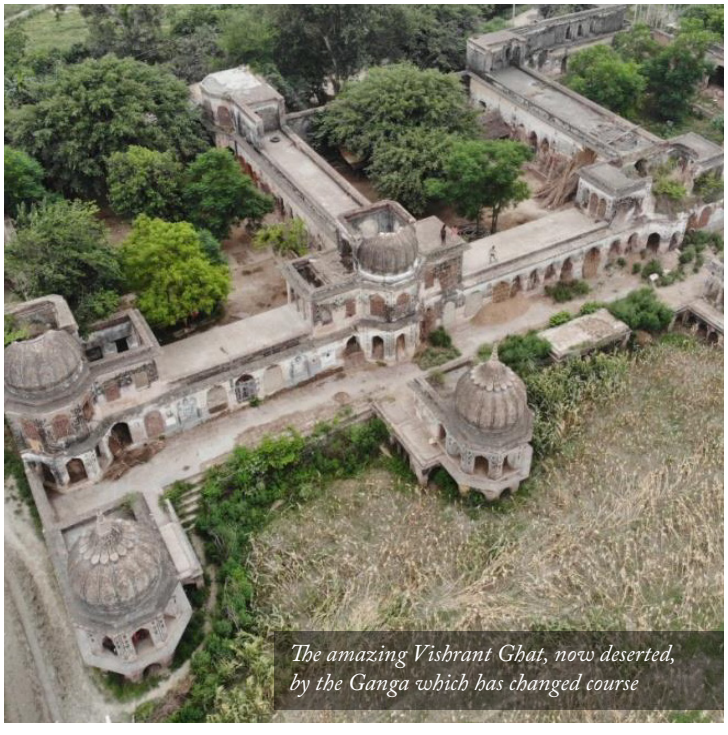
Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Farrukhabad

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Farrukhabad in Western Uttar Pradesh's upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab region is spread over 2181 sq kms. It lies on the southern banks of Ganga. It is bounded by Badaun and Shahjahanpur on the north, Hardoi on the east, Kannauj on the south, and Etah and Mainpuri on the west. It is divided into three *tehsils* Kaimganj, Amritpur and Farrukhabad. Out of these only Kaimganj and Amritpur tehsils lie within the 5 km area. The river has shifted its course drastically in Farrukhabad. Thus, many historic settlements exist at a distance of 3 km to 6 km from Ganga. Kali and Ramganga are important tributaries of the Ganga here.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Many ancient mounds are connected with the *Thatheras*, a community of brass and copper utensil making artisans who, according to belief, held large tracts of country and were dispossessed by the later rulers. Hardoi itself is believed to be built on one such mound. In the 9th-10th centuries, the Raikwars came here and founded Srinagar which was later named as Bilgram. In the 11th century CE, Sayid Salar Masaud, who passed through the district on his way



The amazing Vishrant Ghat, now deserted, by the Ganga which has changed course

The purpoted site of Raja Drupad's Palace locally known as Raja Drupad ka Teela

from Kannauj to Satrikh in 1032 CE, is said to have sent one detachment of his army to Kannauj against the *Thatheras* of Bawan. Another expedition was sent to Mallanwan, where there is a tomb of one of the martyrs in the Uncha Tila Muhalla. From Satrikh he sent out armies to conquer all the surrounding areas, and Mir Sayid Aziz-ud-din, now known as the *Lal Pir*, went to Gopamau, then held by the *Thatheras*. A battle was fought at the place called Shahidganj, in which the *Lal Pir* was victorious. He held Gopamau for two years, but was overthrown after the defeat and death of Sayid Salar at Bahraich. This expedition was but a raid, for afterwards the district again came under the rulers of Kannauj but soon Qutub-ud-din Aibak captured Hardoi from Jaichand. His successor, Shams-ud-din Altamsh, fortified the town and built the quarter now known as Chishtpur.

After the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat by Babur, Kannauj and all the country beyond the Ganga was in the hands of the Afghans

Very few references of the region are found in history of the Sultanate period but the Jaunpur kings held the territory till the days of Bahlol Lodi, who again brought Hardoi under the rule of Delhi. After the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat by Babur, Kannauj and all the country beyond the Ganga was in the hands of the Afghans. Their leader was Bahadur Khan, son of Darya Khan Lodi, who assumed the title of Muhammad Shah. In 1527 Babur advanced towards Kannauj, having heard that the Afghans were on the east bank of the Ganga opposite that place and were preparing to oppose his passage. He threw a bridge over the river, defeated the Afghans, and marched to Lucknow, crossing Sandila. The district remained more or less

Chintamani Talab

under the control of Babur and his son, Humayun, till the rise of Sher Shah. Sher Shah held the area until his death after which the region once again came under the Mughals. Akbar took into his service the Sombansis of Barwan, whose gallantry in the Deccan obtained for them the title of Khan and the rent free grant of the *Pargana*. In the days of Akbar, Hardoi was divided between the *Sarkars* of Lucknow and Khairabad.

In the 19th century CE, chaos descended upon Hardoi. In 1857, the first signs of the revolt occurred in Sandila. The Raikwars of Ruia and Rudamau were the first to rebel, as they were the last to yield. They at once descended upon Mallanwan, burned the court house, and destroyed the records. One of the major centres in the region which was very active during the Revolt of 1857 was a small village situated on the North of Madhoganj town, about 2 km away from Ruia Garhi. King Narpat Singh was the ruler of the place and actively participated in the revolt defeating the British four times, before being killed.

Around 1921, the *Eka* Movement or Unity Movement, a peasant movement, surfaced in Hardoi, Bahraich and Sitapur, heralded by Madari Pasi. The main reason for the movement was high rent, which was generally higher than 50% of recorded rent in some areas. The *Eka* meetings were marked by a religious ritual in which a hole that represented River Ganga was dug in the ground and filled with water, a priest was brought in to preside and assembled peasants vowed that they would pay only recorded rent but pay it on time, would not leave when ejected, would refuse to do forced labour, would give no help to criminals and abide by the Panchayat decisions, they would not pay the revenue without receipt and would remain united under any circumstance. The movement was crushed a year later.

During India's struggle for freedom, there were several leaders from Hardoi who have contributed to the cause like Babu Mohan Lal Verma who was appointed as Head of Congress Seva Dal in 1932 for the Hardoi District. He served multiple jail terms for raising his voice against the British.

Mythological Links

Drupad, Draupadi & Farrukhabad

Farrukhabad region was the kingdom of Raja Drupad, the father of Draupadi. It is believed that Draupadi's swayamvar happened here. Guru Dronacharya stopped at Farrukhabad while on his way to Kampil to visit King Drupad's fort. Here, he built a statue of the daughter of Shri Mangla Gauri, which is in present-day Gurugaon Devi Mandir. Kampilya, about 45 kms from Farrukhabad, also has the Draupadi Kund believed to be the site where Drupada organized a *Yajna* from the fire of which Drishtyadumna and Draupadi were born. An ancient site is believed to be the palace of King Drupad.

Chhoti Kashi

It is believed that after Kashi, Farrukhabad has the maximum number of *Shivalayas* which is why it is called *Aparakashi* or *Chhoti Kashi*. There is a mythological belief regarding the Shiva *lingam* established at the Rameshwar Mahadev Temple—that it is a Shiva *lingam* known as *Triyambak* which was worshipped by Kuber, *Dhanadhish*. Later, Ravana conquered Kuber and took this Shiva *lingam* on his *Pushpaka Vimana* to Lanka and worshipped it by the name of Chandishwar. During her stay in Lanka, Sita worshipped this Shiva *lingam* in Ashoka Vatika. It is said that Lord Rama brought it back to Ayodhya after the Lanka victory. He entrusted his younger brother Shatrughana to install this Shiva *lingam* at a holy site while going to slay Lavanasura in Mathura. Shatrughana installed this Shiva *lingam* at Gangatat Kampil. Due to this belief, the location got the recognition of *Upajyortiling*, second after the Shiva *lingam* established in *Setu Bandha* Rameswaram. The Kanwar Mela runs for a month along the Ganga and *Kanwariya* devotees offer Ganga water at Rameshwar Nath temple with complete faith and reverence. There are about 200 Shiva temples in Farrukhabad.

The Ancient Settlements in Mythology

Kampil was the capital of Panchala Kingdom, the birthplace of the Sage Kapila who is the prophet of *Sankhya* philosophy. It is also the birthplace

The ritual of Pahravan on the Ganga

of Lord Vimalnatha, the 13th Jain Tirthankara. People believe that in an ancient gathering of about 100 sages in the Himalayas, the brothers of Dehumya Deval Vishwamitra, Dhaumya and Chyavan were present as representatives of Kannauj, Kampil, and Panchal. Here medicines were found in the forest groves. That is why Maharishi Charak chose Kampil to compose the Charak Samhita. In Shamshabad is the ancient temple of Chaumukhi Mahadev, with two Shiva *lingams*. Shamshabad was also known as Sargdari or Swargadwari. The village Baksuri here was the city of the Mahabharata monster Bakasur. The Dhaumya Rishi Ashram is on the banks of the Ganga in Fatehgarh, where Yudhishthira received the *Akshaya Patra*. The village Naukhanda is believed to have witnessed the splitting of the horn on the head of Shringi Rishi, who performed the *pratishti* sacrifice for the birth of Lord Rama. It is also believed that Chyavan Rishi's Ashram is on the banks of the Ganga in Chiyasar while the *ashram* of Dhanvantari, the originator of *Ayurveda* is also close by.

Ritual *of* Pahravan

During major festivals like Magh Mela, Mauni Amavasya, Ganga Jayanti, Ganga Dussehra or Ramnagariya Mela at Panchal Ghat, Farukkhabad witnesses an interesting sacred ritual that is performed by the women on the river Ganga. Known as *Pahravan*, an idol of Ganga is dressed by women, along with the singing of folk songs or *Mangal*. A

The Dhaumya Rishi Ashram is on the banks of the Ganga in Fatehgarh, where Yudhishthira received the Akshaya Patra

garland of *dhotis/saris* is made and is stretched from one bank to the other bank of the river Ganga by the devotees after performing *Solah Shringar* of Goddess Ganga.

Events *of* Interest

Ramnagariya Mela

Held during the *Magh* month, Kalpavas is performed where devotees bathe thrice, eat *satvik* food and worship the Ganga singing hymns throughout the day.

Art *at the* Heart

Folk Songs *of* Farrukhabad *&* Mukariyan

The *Qissa* or storytelling of Tota Maina, Ghasiram Pandit-Bulaki Das Nai etc. is famous while folk songs like Vanshidhar Shesh are also sung. *Mukariyan* is a form of riddle poetry in which, while retracting from what was said earlier, something else should be said. Amir Khusrau's *Mukari* in Hindi are popular. This is also called *Kaha Mukari*.

The Ballad *of* Alha

The ballad recounts the intertwined fates of the three principal Rajput Kingdoms—Delhi, ruled by Prithviraj Chauhan, Kannauj, ruled by Jaichand Rathore, and Mahoba, ruled by the Chandel King Paramardideva. The protagonists are the brothers Alha and Udal, who serve the Chandel King in the defence of Mahoba against its enemies. The brothers also fight against the fathers of the girls they wish to marry. In North India, the *Alha Khand* called the *Parmal Raso*, composed by Jagnik, is believed to be recited the most, after Ramcharitmanas. It now presents the singular appearance of a poem composed in the 12th century, yet containing such English words as pistol, bomb, and sappers and miners. It is recited during the Monsoon months when the farmer, after hard labour in the field, gets a few precious moments of leisure. *Alha* singers perform with *Dholak* and *Manjiras*.

Farrukhabad Gharana

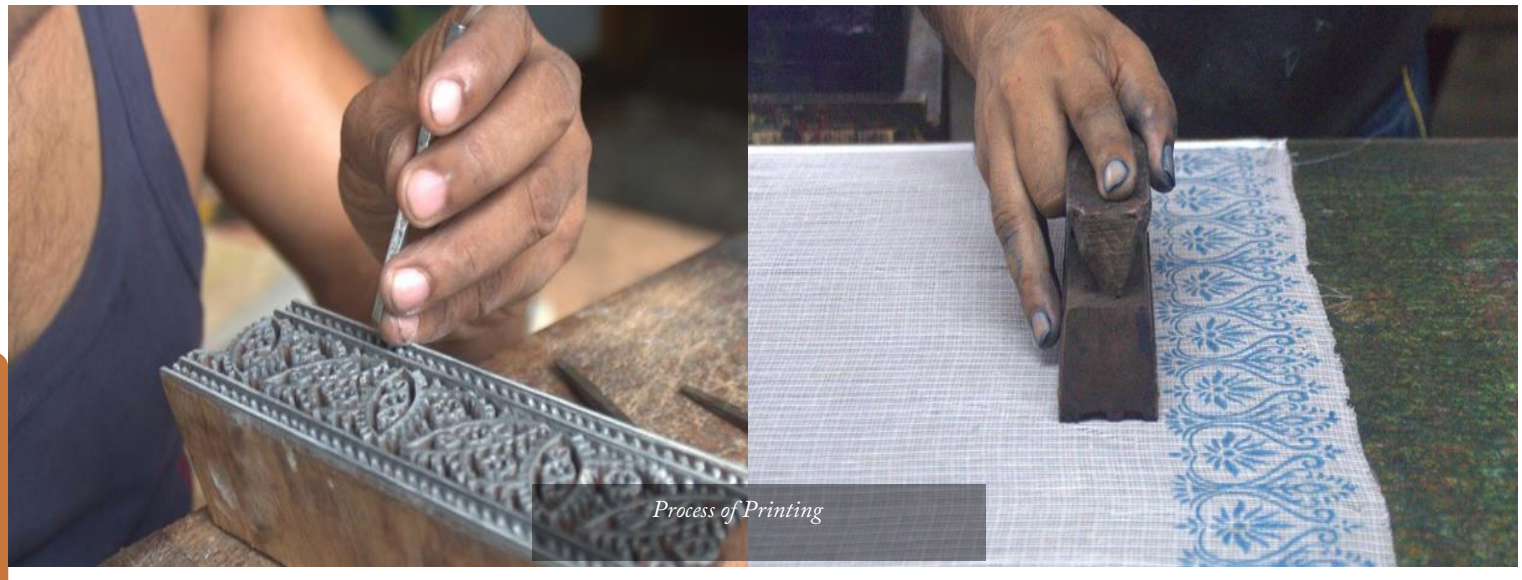
The Farrukhabad Gharana is considered to be the oldest of the six schools of Tabla. It is known for the *Purbi Baj*, or Eastern Style characterized by an extensive use of resonant strokes played on the *sur* of the *dayan* (part of the instrument played by the right hand). Ustad Haji Vilayet Ali Khan is hailed as the founder and the first *Khalifa* of this school. He received his education in this field from contemporary Ustad Bakhshu Khan, the Khalifa of the Lucknow Gharana. It is said that when Vilayet Ali married Moti Bibi, the daughter of Ustad Bakhshu Khan, he was given 500 compositions (*gat*) as dowry. These compositions are famously remembered as the Dowry Compositions (*Dahej ki Gat*). Four sons of Ustad Vilayet Ali—Ustad Nisar Hussain Khan, Ustad Amaan Ali Khan, Ustad Hussain Ali Khan and Ustad Nanhe Ali Khan—are said to have substantially contributed to the development of Farrukhabad Gharana. Tabla legend Pandit Shankar Ghosh and son Bickram Ghosh are from this *Gharana*.

Languages *&* Dialects *in* Farrukhabad

The official language of Farrukhabad is Hindi, spoken with a distinct Kannauji dialect, with Urdu occupying the position of additional official language. Four brothers from Tikampur of Kanpur, who lived in mid-17th century, Chintamani Tripathi, Matiram Tripathi, Bhushan Tripathi, and Nilkanth Tripathi, were well-known authors who wrote in Kannauji.

Printing

Besides Zari, the printing of the area is famous. The printing industry was established in Farrukhabad more than a century ago. The technique evolved gradually, initially done using a potato by engraving the design on its surface. The vegetable and other natural dyes were used then to print the design on fabric. The potato was eventually replaced by a wood stencil, and this is how block printing began. The Sadh Community in Farrukhabad is credited for making the textile industry what it is today. They were the first craftsmen and artisans who experimented with the process. The Farrukhabad Prints are also well-known in the block-printing industry, and have been



Process of Printing

given recognition under the One District, One Product programme of the UP Government, as well as GI status.

Boat-Making

There are around 500 families in the village of Sota Bahadurpur, Farukkhabad, that are engaged in boat making. The boats are usually made of Eucalyptus wood which is procured from the jungles of Lakhimpur Kheri and Tin sheets from Kanpur District. A boat can cost anywhere from Rs 40,000-90,000 starting from as basic as 15 feet to 90 feet in length. During festivals like Ramnagriya Mela and rituals like *Pahravan* Ritual and during floods, the demand for boats is at its peak.

Ayurveda

According to Kampilya Mahatamya, in the land of Panchala, on the banks of the Ganga, there was the capital city, Kampilya, where many brahmins had their homes. One day, during the month of *Asadha*, the sage Punarvasu, Muni of the *gotra* of Atri, went out of the city with his disciple Agnivesa, in his turn teacher of Dronacharya, and taught him the knowledge of medicine in oral form. Then Agnivesa taught it to his own disciples. As the mode of transmission was purely oral and the compilation was not done at one place but while wandering, the doctrine is called Charaka-Samhita. This is the fundamental work of the Indian medicinal system. The literature of Charak Samhita was composed at Kampilya

Gastronomic Delights

The Potato Capital of India

The major crops here are Pea, Gram, Barley, Wheat, Millet, Sunflower, Tobacco, Mango, Guava and Betel

Medicinal utensils on display at Dr. Ramkrishna Rajput Museum

Nut. But Farrukhabad is the Potato Capital of India. Potato farming started here in the 19th century. Potato was probably introduced around the 16th century, in the American continents and introduced in India in the 17th century when the Portuguese opened trade routes. In Uttar Pradesh it was brought by Major Frederick Young (1786-1874), an army officer at Dehradun, at the beginning of the

The Thin Slivers of Kapurkand

19th century. Farrukhabad produces more than 50 varieties of potato and is the largest supplier of potatoes in the country.

Kapurkand

It is a famous traditional sweet made with grated rings/fine slices of *Lauki* or Bottle Gourd, with *Gulab ark*, Water, and *Chasni* or sugar syrup. It is similar to sweet noodles.

Dahi Gujiya

Prepared during Holi, Dahi Gujiya is made of *Urad Dal* (Split and skinned black gram), Curd, Tamarind and various other Indian spices.

Dalmoth Namkeen

Dalmoth started trading in Farrukhabad around 1922 during the British Rule, but it was not so popular at the time. While the British were served the savoury, as a snack with tea, Indians did not have any special interest in it. As the British attracted the people towards tea, Indians started taking interest in milk whey as well as tea, and accompanying snacks. By the year 1950, tea and the business of Dalmoth also started increasing. Today, there are about 40 Dalmoth shops in the city.

Yakhni Manda

Yakhni (*ghee*) *Manda* (flour) is similar to Rumali Roti and is served with non-vegetarian gravy dishes. It is a Mughlai delicacy made in Kaimganj. It is credited to Nawab Rashid Khan of Akbarabad who established Mau Rashidabad Village in Kaimganj.

People who Fascinate

Ramnarayan Dubey

Ramnarayan Dubey Azad was a freedom fighter born in Farrukhabad. He was sentenced to two years and 6 months house arrest during the Salt *Satyagrah* (1930).

Mahadevi Verma

Legendary writer and scholar Mahadevi Verma was born in Farrukhabad in 1907 and married at the tender age of nine. She met her mentor Subhadra Kumari Chauhan in Allahabad from where she did her schooling. Her classic work *Srinkhalaa kee Kadiyaan* is rated as one of the best collections about the condition of Indian women. She is hailed as one of the four major poets of *Chhayavaad* (an era of neo-romanticism in Hindi literature), the other three being Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, Sumitranandan Pant, and Jaishankar Prasad. In 1979, she was made a fellow at the Sahitya Akademi, becoming the first woman to be awarded such a distinction. Her collection of poems, Yama received the Gyanpeeth Award in 1982. She was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1988.

Ghulam Rabbani 'Taban'

Born in Kaimganj, Farrukhabad, Ghulam Rabbani Taban was one of the greatest Urdu poets of the 20th century. His political leanings got him into trouble with the British authorities, who eventually sent him to jail. Post-Independence, Taban was once again sent to jail during the course of the Sino-India war in 1962 due to his communist leanings.

Shiv Om Ambar

A renowned poet, academician, writer and teacher, Dr. Ambar was born in 1952 in Farrukhabad and has been awarded the Sahitya Bhushan Samman by Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan, Shri Hedgevar Pragya Samman, Kolkata and Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Puraskaar.

Anwar Farrukhabadi

Sufi poet Anwar Farukkhabadi was born in Mohalla Nakhas, Farrukhabad in 1928. He wrote more than two thousand songs in Bollywood.

Sadh Community

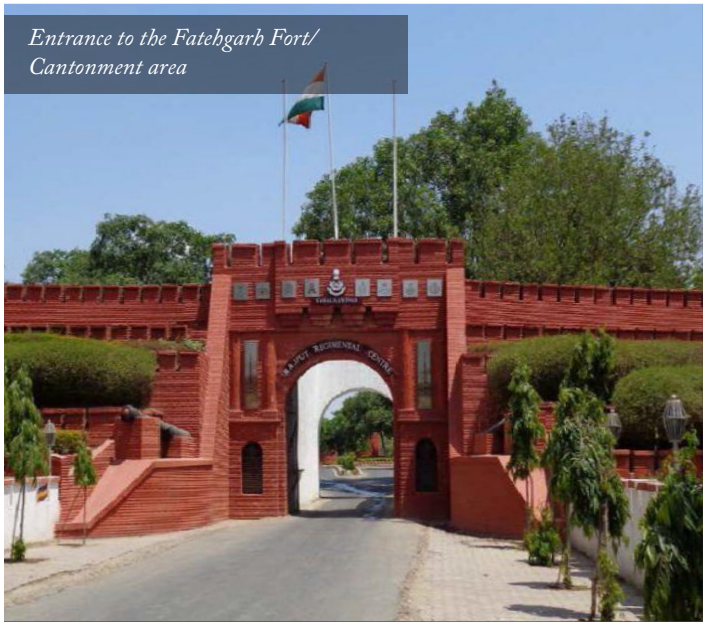
The Sadh/Satnamis are a Bhakti-era sect who have no concept of birth and death and thus it is neither celebrated or mourned. In 1714, when Nawab Bangash Muhammad Khan laid the foundation of Farrukhabad, he constructed a separate Sadhwara Mohalla for the Sadhs where they have resided almost exclusively since then. At present the total population of the Sadh community is around 15,000 out of which around 1500 reside in Farrukhabad. The Alamgir Nama, the autobiography of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, describes a rebellion in 1672 led by mendicant Satnami leaders (members from the Sadh community). They were referred to as *Mundiyas* (those with shaved heads) by the common people. In later times, the Sadh community became engaged in the textile business and specialized in curtains and cotton bedsheets which were also exported. Their world-famous design print, the Tree of Life, made on cotton bedsheets, remained in demand for a long time for its aesthetics and traditional craftsmanship. The particular print is no more in existence.

Monuments *that* Matter

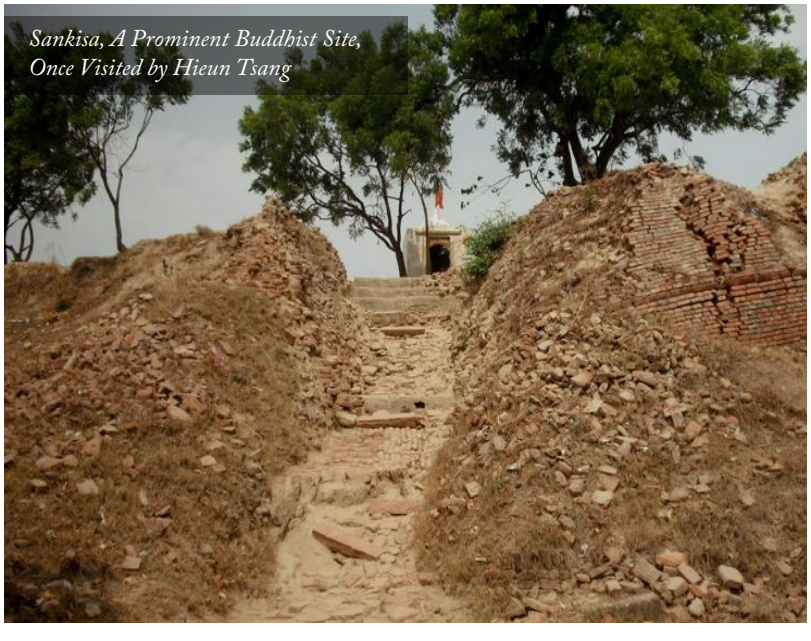
Since majority of the towns around Farrukhabad were settled by Nawab Muhammad Khan Bangash the built heritage found dates from the 18th century. Farrukhabad also has some defence structures like the Bhojpur Fort and Fatehgarh Fort since it was an important trade town and many rulers tried to gain control over it.

The Historic Town *of* Farrukhabad

The old town of Farrukhabad formed a triangle and had high embankment walls, up to 20 feet high and 10 -12 feet thick, having bastions at intervals. The north side of the triangle was along the Ganga cliff and the other two sides were for defence. The walled fort had 12 gates - Ganga, Pain and Kutub in the north, Mau at the meeting of north and south-western, Jasmai and Khandiya on south-western, Madar Lal, Kadiri and Amethi on south-eastern and Dhalawal and Tarain which were closed very early. There were two main Sarais, Lal Sarai and Mau Sarai, built close to their respective gates. The Lal Sarai was built



Entrance to the Fatehgarh Fort/ Cantonment area



Sankisa, A Prominent Buddhist Site, Once Visited by Hieun Tsang

by Nawab Mohammad Khan Bangash and the Mau Sarai was built by his wife, Bibi Sahiba. The residences of businessmen were mainly in the eastern half along the highway, including Kotwali and Tripolia. These were low lime-cemented houses, only a few built in brick masonry. There are wells in almost every house. In the north-west part of the city, in Nekpur Khurd, the tombs of the Nawab's family were built within gardens. The tomb of Nawab Ahmad (son of Nawab Mohammad Khan Bangash), Bibi Sahiba and some others were built within *Bihish Bagh* or Garden of Paradise. Outside the city walls, the tomb of Nawab Mohammad Bangash Khan, Kaim Khan (son of Nawab Mohammad Khan Bangash), Nasir Khan, governor of Kabul and some others were built in *Hayat Bagh or Garden of Life. There were other* gardens like *Aish* Bagh or Pleasure Garden, Pain Bagh and the *Naulakha* (grove of 9 lakh trees) were all built within the city walls, north of the Nawab's fort.

Farrukhabad being a very important trading centre along the Ganga had many rest houses called Vishrants, out of which 24 survive today

Vishrants *&* **Ghats** *of* **Farrukhabad:** Testimony *of* Trade *via the* Ganga

Farrukhabad being a very important trading centre along the Ganga had many rest houses called *Vishrants*, out of which 10 survive today. These multi-storey *Vishrants* are beautiful buildings with a dome as superstructure. In Farrukhabad, about 36 *Ghats* along with Vishrants were also built from Kampil to the ancient stream, the Budhi Ganga (old Ganga), to Khudaganj. The trading comprised of salt, indigo, *sora* or saltpetre, opium, textiles, utensils. Apart from trade, religious and cultural activities, fairs and festivals such as Ganga Mela, Magh Mela, and other social celebrations that saw a huge gathering of people on these *ghats*, also established their importance. In Jhannilal, Seth Shah Ji's Vishrant, Toca Ghat, Panchal Ghat, Qila Ghat, Rani Ghat, Bargadia Ghat, Kachehri Ghat, Dhumghat (Dhaumya Ghat), Shasta Rishi Ashram Sundarpur Ghat, Singirampur of Maratha Family of Shamsabad in Farrukhabad, the *Vishrants* were very beautifully laid out. Following the Rajputana, Mughal and Colonial styles, the ghats are made of red stone. In their domes, Rajasthani and Awadh painting style is visible. Religious paintings depict scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata; also seen are images of the Nawabs of the Mughal era, folk arts and folk life.

The **Historic Town** *of* **Fatehgarh**

Nawab Muhammad Khan Bangash built the Fatehgarh fort for defence across the Ganga. The fort has mud walls with 12 bastions on the river side and a moat towards the landside, crossed using a drawbridge. It later extended into the European Cantonment. The native town was located south of the parade ground. The market was across the native town and about 1.5 km long with shops on either side. The Grand Trunk Road, when enters into Fatehgarh, becomes the Rohilkhand Trunk Road which passes through the *bazaar*, goes around the parade ground and towards Ghatiya Ghat (now Panchal Ghat).

Kaleshwar Nath Temple

It is believed that it was consecrated by Draupadi after her *Swayamwara*. It is in Kaimganj.

Raja Bhoj ka Qila

The site is surrounded by residences and farm fields. It is located on the western bank of river Ganga. In 1632 CE, when Ganga left the edge of the fort, the fort started falling. Traditionally, forts were located near rivers as they were a ready source of water for troops and livestock, and also a natural defence provided by the river water.

Shahi Jama Masjid *&* **Sarai**

It is located in Khudaganj settlement. The *Sarai* was made by Sher Shah

Suri for travellers. A mosque was built along the *Sarai* to cater to religious needs. It is accessed by metal gates set within pointed arches enclosed in a bigger pointed arch. Rectangular minarets are situated on the corners of the structure. The parapet of the building has smaller domes. The prayer hall is topped by three domes followed by an inverted lotus flower motif.

All Souls Church

Built in 1857, it is said that Jindan Kaur, mother of Maharaja Dilip Singh, was imprisoned in this church. During the 1857 Mutiny, under Nawab Tafjul Hussain Khan, the revolutionaries killed 32 Christians and the church has been built in their memory.

Tomb of Nawab Rasheed Khan

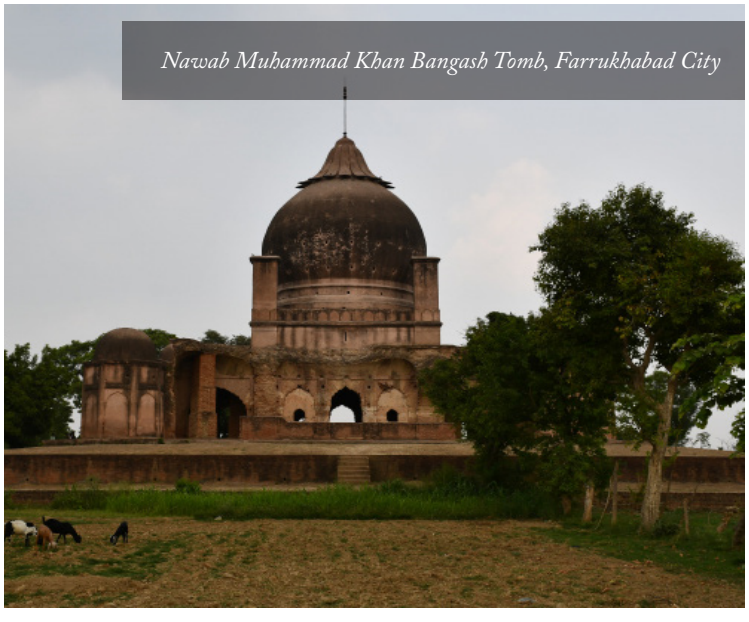
Nawab Rasheed Khan built this tomb when he was alive and after his death was buried here in 1649 CE. The tomb shows features of Mughal architecture, with the grave itself displaying some Bengali features. The walls of the tomb have beautiful floral patterns and designs made in lime. The monument was protected by the ASI in 2014.

Mohammad Bangash Khan Tomb

Bangash Khan was the first Nawab of Farrukhabad. He was a *Bawan Hazari Sardar* (Commander of 52,000 men strong force) in the Mughal Army. In 1714 CE, The tomb was built by Nawab Mohammad Khan Bangash while he was alive. It is a single storey structure accessed by all four sides having arcaded corridors with multifoliate arches. The corridors lead to a central area where is grave is placed.

Nature's Abundance

Farrukhabad can be divided into four sub micro-regions: Ganga-Ramganga *Khaddar* (extending parallel to the Ganga river in a narrow strip, which is wider in north and tapers down towards south), Farrukhabad-Kaimganj Plain (situated in the northern part of the district covering parts of Kaimganj and Farrukhabad *Tehsils*), Lower Kali Plain (situated in central part of the district covering southern part of Farrukhabad and northern parts of Chhibramau and Kannauj *Tehsils*), and Isan Plain (situated in southern part covering major portions of Chhibramau and Kannauj *Tehsils*). Ganga River enters Farrukhabad just after crossing Ataina Ghat where it separates it from Badaun and Shahjahanpur. Throughout its course in the district, Ganga is braided due to presence of irregularly shaped riverine islands. Massive shifts



Nawab Muhammad Khan Bangash Tomb, Farrukhabad City

Dried Up Draupadi Kund

have taken place in the course of the river. The Vishrant Ghat used to be a landing site for goods and provided resting places for passengers and boatmen. The shift in Ganga river course has left this Ghat to be an isolated structure now.

A palaeo channel of Ganga River, locally referred as *Sota* or *Kala Sota* can be seen near Ballipatti Ranigaon in Farrukhabad. Farrukhabad falls in the UP-4 Central Plain agro-climatic zone with the major soils being deep, loamy soils, deep stratified loamy soils, deep, fine soils and deep sandy soils. The chief floodplain grasses growing throughout study region of Farrukhabad are *Kans, Munj/ Sarkanda* and *Durva*. Farrukhabad also has about 98 wetlands like Kuthla Jheel (an oxbow lake between Ganga and Ramganga) and Chintamani Talab (whose water is believed to cure diseases like Leprosy).

Gangetic Dolphins, Nilgai and Wild Boars along with birds like White-breasted Waterhen, Common Moorhen, Little Cormorant, Asian Pied Starling, Red-wattled Lapwing and Eurasian Collared Dove can be frequently sighted. Major fish here are Rohu, Katla, *Tengara, Bam* and *Sidhari*.

Part of Sota Paleochannel Near Ballipatti Raigaon

Cast Net Fishing

Mud Houses at Kaimganj

CHAPTER 16

HARDOI

Land of Bhakt Prahlad

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Hardoi

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Hardoi in Central Uttar Pradesh is bordered by Shahjahanpur and Lakhimpur Kheri in the north, Lucknow and Unnao in the south, Farrukhabad, Kannauj and Kanpur on the west and Sitapur on the east separated by Gomti River. It has 5 *Tehsils* namely Hardoi, Shahabad, Bilgram, Sandila and Sawayajpur. Ganga is the major river in this district forming the south-western boundary and separating it from Farrukhabad, Kannauj and Kanpur. It enters Hardoi near Gadanpur village and then flows south-eastwards. Currently there are two bridges over the Ganga in the district – Mehendipur Ghat Bridge and the newly built bridge near Kusumkhor Village in Kannauj. The course of Ganga has often shifted resulting in transfer of alluvial lands from one district to another.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Many ancient mounds are connected with the *Thatheras*, a community of brass and copper utensil making artisans who, according to belief, held large tracts of country and were dispossessed by the later rulers. Hardoi itself is believed to be built on one such mound. In the 9th-10th centuries, the Raikwars came here

An Indian Softshell Turtle spotted near Kacchua Talab

Oxbow Lake Near Arwal Paschim Village

and founded Srinagar which was later named as Bilgram. In the 11th century CE, Sayid Salar Masaud, who passed through the district on his way from Kannauj to Satrikh in 1032 CE, is said to have sent one detachment of his army to Kannauj against the *Thatheras* of Bawan. Another expedition was sent to Mallanwan, where there is a tomb of one of the martyrs in the Uncha Tila Muhalla. The district again came under the rulers of Kannauj but soon Qutub-ud-din Aibak captured Hardoi from Jaichand. It got its firm footing under his successor, Shams-ud-din Altamsh, who fortified the town and built the quarter now known as Chishtpur.

Very few references of the region are found in history of the Sultanate period but Jaunpur kings held the territory till the days of Bahlol Lodi, who again brought Hardoi under the rule of Delhi. After the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat by Babur, Kannauj and all the country beyond the Ganga was in the hands of the Afghan nobles. Their leader was Bahadur Khan, son of Darya Khan Lodi, who assumed the title of Muhammad Shah. In 1527 Babur advanced towards Kannauj, having heard that the Afghans were on the east bank of the Ganga opposite that place and were preparing to oppose his passage. He threw a bridge over the river, defeated the Afghans, and marched to Lucknow, crossing Sandila. The district remained more or less under the control of Babur and his son, Humayun, till the rise of Sher Shah. Sher Shah held the area until his death after which the region once again came under the Mughals. Akbar took into his service the Sombansis of Barwan, whose gallantry in the Deccan obtained them the title of Khan and the rent free grant of the Pargana. In the days of Akbar, Hardoi was divided between the Sarkars of Lucknow and Khairabad.

In the 19th century CE, chaos descended upon Hardoi. In 1857, the first signs of the revolt occurred in Sandila. The Raikwars of Ruia and Rudamau were the first to rebel, as they were the last to yield. They at

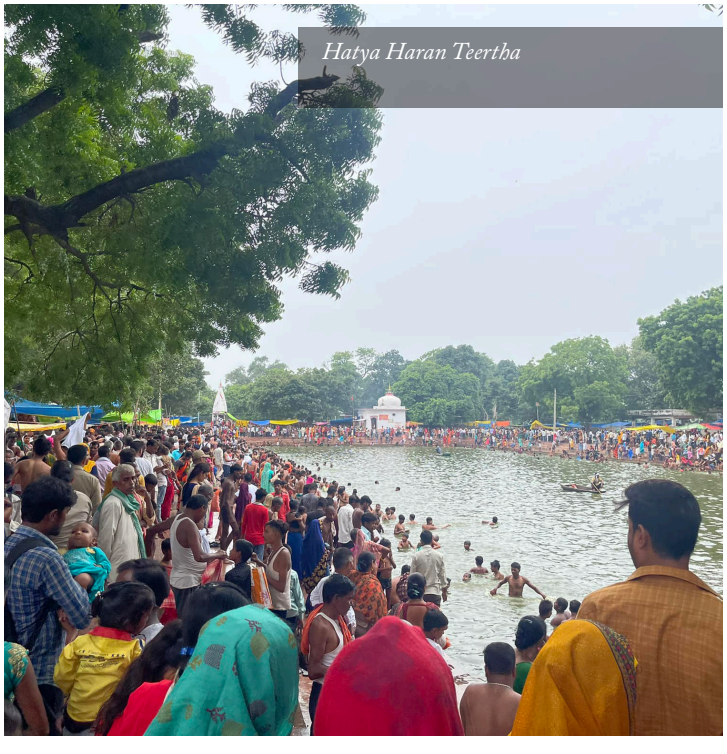
once descended upon Mallanwan, burned the court house, and destroyed the records. One of the major centres in the region which was very active during the Revolt of 1857 was a small village situated on the North of Madhoganj town, about 2 km away from Ruia Garhi. King Narpat Singh was the ruler of the place and actively participated in the revolt defeating the British four times, before being killed.

Around 1921, the *Eka* Movement or Unity Movement, a peasant movement, surfaced in Hardoi, Bahraich and Sitapur, heralded by Madari Pasi. The main reason for the movement was high rent, which was generally higher than 50% of recorded rent in some areas. The *Eka* meetings were marked by a religious ritual in which a hole that represented River Ganga was dug in the ground and filled with water, a priest was brought in to preside and assembled peasants vowed that they would pay only recorded rent but pay it on time, would not leave when ejected, would refuse to do forced labour, would give no help to criminals and abide by the Panchayat decisions, they would not pay the revenue without receipt and would remain united under any circumstance. The movement was crushed a year later.

Mythological Links

Legends recount this to be the empire of demon Hiranyakashyapu who was killed by the Narasimha incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It is believed from *Puranas* that Hiranyakashyap ruled this area and he was an enemy of God Vishnu, hence the name *Haridrohi*, which over time become Hardoi. The city still has a *ghat* named Prahlad Ghat. According to some scholars, the term Hardoi originated from the term *Haridwaya* which means two gods. Since there were two gods, Vamana (in the regime of King Bali) and Nara-

Ganga River As Seen Near Sarhiyapur Pan



Hatya Haran Teertha

The Hatya Haran Teerth located in the holy Namisharanya Parikrama area in the Sandila Tehsil, is believed to be the spot where Lord Rama bathed to perform penance for the sin of brah- man-hatya after killing Ravana

simha (in the regime of King Hiranyakashyap) that were incarnated, the place came to be called Haridwaya and later, Hardoi. There is another legend that says that there was a chieftain named Harnakas. Yet another story says that Hardoi was founded by Hardev Baksa. There still exists a *mohalla* in his name. As per one more opinion there was a great saint Hardev Baba from whom the district derived its name.

According to mythology Bilgram has been named after a demon named Bil, slain by the Sheikhs. In another legend it is said it was named after Ilal, son of Bilal, who was slain by Balaram, brother of Krishna.

The Hatya Haran Teerth located in the holy Namisharnya Parikrama area in the Sandila Tehsil, is believed to be the spot where Lord Rama bathed to perform penance for the sin of *brahman-hatya* after killing Ravana.

Events *of* Interest

The 1904, Aligarh Gazetteer mentions how people took holy dips at Barsuya in Shahabad though the ritual does not seem to have been organized since then and at Hattia Haran in Gundwa. Gundwa is a halting place in the pilgrimage circuit of Misrikh in Sitapur.

Art *at the* Heart

Pottery

Hardoi has good quality clay which is usually mixed with river sand to enable it to stand the heat of the kiln. That of Bilgram takes the form of *gharras*, coloured and ornamented in green, yellow, and silver; small decorative pots called *amritbas*, and other painted vessels, all glazed in red and dark green. At Sandila, pretty painted flower pots are made.

Cloth Weaving

Hardoi is known for cloth weaving and making products like loin-cloth, *gamcha* and shirts. The weavers in Mallawan annually manufacture products worth 70 crores. This sector employs about 5000 weavers.

Yeast

SAF Yeast Co. Ltd., set up in Sandila Tehsil, is India's largest yeast-producing unit. The company apart from producing baker's yeast also produces yeast for applications like winemaking, feed yeast, probiotic yeast, yeast extract, yeast-based natural flavours, distillery, and pharmaceuticals.

Other industries

The major industries here include Handloom Industries and Flour and Sugar Mills. Hardoi is famous for agro-based industries too. Bilgram was once noted for shoes and also for the brass *Paan* boxes made there.

People who Fascinate

Jagdish Gupt

He was a well-known Hindi poet of the *Nayi Kavita* generation. His main poetry collection is Nav Ke Panv, Aditya Ekant, Him Vidh, Shabd Dansh, Shambuk, and Yugm. He was honoured by the government with the Braj Sahitya Mandal of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Syed Fazl ul Hasan Hasrat Mohani

Syed Fazl-ul-Hasan known by his pen name Hasrat Mohani, was an activist, freedom fighter and noted Urdu poet. He coined the notable slogan Inquilab Zindabad in 1921. Together with Swami Kumaranand, he is regarded as the first person to demand complete independence for India in 1921 at the Ahmedabad Session of the Indian National Congress.

Zia Faruqi

Urdu poet Zia Faruqui was born in Sandila, Hardoi. His literary contributions include Kanpur Nama, mentioning the two-and-a-half-century literary history of Kanpur and also bringing to light the linguistic antiquity of Kanpur, Raqs-e-Ghubar (Verified Memoirs) (Awarded by UP Urdu Academy), Pas-e-Gard Safar, Dasht-e-Shab (Awarded by UP Urdu Academy), Lafz-Rang, Tazkira-e-Muarrikhin, and Dastan Rang.

Monuments *that* Matter

Bilgram

Bilgram was developed in the 9th or 10th century CE by Raikwar King Raja Sri Ram and was known as Srinagar then. However, many mosques, *dargahs* and *imambadas* came into existence during the period of the influence of the Saiyids. Bilgram has temples like the Billeshwari Temple, Durgaji Temple, Ram Janki Temple and Shitla Mata Temple. The notable mosques are Wasti Mosque, Jama Masjid and Saray Masjid. There are also a few *dargahs* dedicated to saints like Khanqaah Qadri Wahidi Zahidi, Hazrat Peer Shaheed Mard Baba, Sayyed Meer Abdul Wahid Bilgrami, Hazrat Abbas Bilgrami, Hazrat Zahuruddin Shah, Jind Peer, Alam Shah Baba Dhaka Sharif, Dada Miyan. The chief *ghats* here are the Raj Ghat and the Ganga Ghat.

A Resdence in Bilgram

Sawayajpur Tehsil

The region has Hardev Raja Temple, Siddanath Temple, Sri Jharkhandeshwar Mahadev, Shiv Mandir Raviyapur, Baba Lakshman Das Mandir, Govardhan Mandir, Shree Balaji Mandir, Jama Masjid, Dargah Sharif Hazrat Raushan Miyan, Dargah Hazrat Peer Shaheed Mard Baba, Khankaah Niazia Pali, Shrine of Mirza Baba.

Mallawan

Another important settlement of Hardoi District which was developed during this period is Mallawan. Though it was earlier a Buddhist site, however it developed into a town under the rule of Syed Salar Masud.

Bawan-Puri, Hardoi

To the east of Bawan Village is the Nakatiya Devi Temple. It is said about this temple that the idol of Kusumbi Devi was broken in attacks; since then, it is known as Nakatiya Devi.

Tomb *of* Nawab Diler Khan, Shahabad

Shahabad was among the biggest cities of Awadh but declined rapidly. It is the site of the Tomb of Diler Khan, a governor under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Joseph Tiefenthaler, one of the earliest European geographers to write on India, visited the town in 1770 and described it as a town of a considerable size, with a palace of bricks in the middle strengthened by

Bada Imambada, Bilgram

Victoria Hall

towers like a fortress, with a vestibule and a covered colonnade. This palace used to be known as Badi Deorhi. Although the palace no longer exists, the two grand gateways are still standing.

Nature's Abundance

The soil type in Hardoi is mainly alluvial with the texture varying from sandy loam, loam to clay loam soils. The district can be geographically divided into three subdivisions namely the Western Low Land (Harpalpur, Bharkhani and Sandi, parts of CD blocks, Bilgram, Madhoganj and Mallawan on the banks of Ramganga and Garra), North up Sub-Division (parts of Madhoganj, Bilgram, Mallawan and the total region of Sandila, Kachanna, Kanthauvan Bharawan, Bahardar on the banks of the Sai River) and central level (Sursa, Bawan, Ahrori, Tadiyawan, Pihani, Shahabad Tondarpur and Hariyawan CD blocks).

Roza Sadar Jahan, Pilani

The biggest riverine island in the study region is spear head shaped about 12 kms long and 1-3.5 km wide. Rich alluvial soil deposited by Ganga and its tributaries in this region have made such islands extremely fertile. Another irregularly shaped island is near Kutuapur Pansala. The island was mainly covered with vegetation dominated by Saccharum grasses. A group of irregularly shaped riverine islands can also be seen near Arwal Paschim, mainly covered with dense riparian vegetation dominated by Saccharum grasses and other plants like *Babool, Neem, Peepal*, Wild *Ber* and *Taad*. Agriculture on these islands is patchy with watermelon being the major produce during non-monsoon season.

The main tributaries of the Ganga here are Ramganga and Garra. The Ganga Floodplain at Hardoi is under extensive cultivation of wheat and rice. Some of the floodplain grasses growing here are *Kans, Moonj, Durwa* and Indian Thorny Bamboo.

Hardoi has wetlands like Kacchua Talab, a conservation site for Indian softshell turtle listed as endangered by the IUCN. The stretch between Kannauj/Hardoi to Kanpur is known to be the habitat of Indian Soft Shell turtle, Narrow Head Soft Shell turtle, Three Stripped Roofed turtle, Red Crowned Roof Turtle and Indian Peacock Soft Shell Turtle. These are generally found in middle and lower stretches of Ganga. There are occasions when Crocodiles were seen in the wetlands surrounding the Ganga.

Besides, due to the shift in course of Ramganga River, two oxbow lakes have been formed near Murwa Shaha Buddinpur and Arwal Paschim Villages. The water from these lakes is principally used for irrigating agricultural fields in the surroundings along with other purposes such as bathing cattle, washing clothes and performing religious activities. Fishing from these lakes is an important activity and the major fish caught from these lakes include – *Padin* (*Wallago attu*), Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), *Degara/Degar (Sperata sp.), Baam (Anguilla bengalensis), Cheena (Cyprinus carpio)* and *Sidhari(Puntius spp.)*. Another oxbow lake was observed near Katri Kareh-ka Village. People claim this to be a channel of Ganga River which got cut off due to shifting of its main channel. The main trees found in the district are *Sheesham, Kanji, Babool, Dhak, Mahua, Semal, Mango, Shaal, Neem* and *Jamun*. The wild animals found in the districts are Jackal, Nilgai, Mongoose, Fishing Cat, Monkeys and Blackbucks.

A field survey recorded 63 bird species including 23 wetland birds and 40 forest and grassland birds in Hardoi. Among these, 4 birds feature in the IUCN Red List – Eurasian Curlew and River Lapwing (Near Threatened), River Tern (Vulnerable) and Pallas's Fish Eagle (Endangered).

Bilgram is also home to the Sandi Bird Sanctuary. With over 40,000 waterfowl recorded in 2018, the site, which is rich in aquatic vegetation, provides a fertile home for Waterfowl, Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*), and Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*). Within the Sanctuary, the vulnerable Sarus Crane (*Grus Antigone*) has a population of 200.

Nilgai Herd Damaging the Crops - A Widespread Problem

A Sacred Peepal Tree At Rajghat

CHAPTER 17

KANNAUJ

Grasse of the East

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Kannauj

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Located in the mid Ganga-Yamuna Doab region, Kannauj is a part of the Kanpur Division surrounded by Farrukhabad to the west, Mainpuri to the south-west, Auraiya to the south, Kanpur Dehat and Kanpur Nagar to the south-east and east. Hardoi District lies to the north, on the opposite banks of River Ganga. Kannauj has three *tehsils* - Kannauj, Chhibramau and Tirwa, out of which the first two lie within the 5 km along the banks of Ganga. The Ganga flows along the northern banks of the district, with a north-easterly flow. It enters from Chhibramau, exiting from Kannauj *Tehsil*. River Kali also passes through the *Tehsil*, meandering along its western and northern sides, merging into Ganga in Mehandi Pur. The Ganga shifts course frequently here. For many centuries, the Ganga used to flow away from Kannauj City, until 1911 when it came back to its original bank.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

In ancient literature, the city was known as Kushasthala, Kushika and Kusumpur, Kangora (name given by Ptolemy) and Kanyakubja. The antiquity of Kannauj dates back to more than 2000 years, evident in the excavated pottery fragments. Around

600 BCE, Kannauj was a part of the 16 ancient *Mahajanapadas*. It came under South Panchala Kingdom, separated from North Panchala by the Ganga. Fa-Hien, who visited Kannauj under the Guptas, writes that Lord Buddha travelled through Kannauj and preached here. Subsequently, Kannauj came under the Nanda, Maurya, Sunga, Mitra, Kushana and Gupta Empires in succession. Mauryan Emperor Ashoka built two *stupas* at the place where Lord Buddha is believed to have given his sermon. Currently, a mound exists on the north-western and south-eastern extents of present-day Kannauj City to mark these sites. It was also the capital of both the Maukhari and the Pushyabhuti Dynasties. Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, visited Pushyabhuti and King Harsha in Kannauj in 643 CE and mentions Kah-Pi-Ta (Kapitha, identified with Sankisa where Mauryan Emperor Ashoka installed a stone pillar) as an important place here.

The perfume industry of Kannauj was founded during Harsha's rule. After his death, the city was targeted by the Gurjara-Pratiharas (predominant in the west), Palas (east) and Rashtrakutas (south). Ultimately, King Rajyapal of the Gurjara-Pratihara clan ruled over Kannauj.

Kannauj was then ruled by the Pratihara, Gahadavalas (Gahadavala ruler Jaichandra built a fort here), the various houses of the Delhi Sultanate, Afghans (Sher Shah Suri), Jaunpur Sultans, the Mughals. In 1556 CE, Mughal Emperor Akbar came to power and divided Agra into multiple divisions, Kannauj being the headquarters of one of them. It then came under the Farrukhabad Nawabs and later in 1801 under the British. The people of the district actively participated in the struggle for independence. It was separated as an independent district from Farrukhabad in 1997.

Mauryan Emperor Ashoka built two stupas at the place where Lord Buddha is believed to have given his sermon

Alha Udal Performance

Mythological Links

The Founding *of* Kannauj

The *Puranas* mention mythological King Kushnabh ruling over the densely forested region of Kannauj. He was married to *Apsara* Ghritachi, who bore him 100 daughters (*kanya*, in the local dialect). Lord Vayu proposed to marry them but the daughters refused to marry against their father's wish. Enraged by the insult, the Lord cursed them with a hunchback (*kubja*, in the local dialect). Thus, the region was named Kanyakubja.

Dargah Hazi Sharif

Kannauj ruler Jaichandra's daughter was a devoted follower of Saint Hazi Sharif. She brought him food in gold and silver

utensils every day but he would throw it in the Ganga every time, as a tribute to the sacred river. When Jaichandra found out that this was diminishing the treasury, he asked the saint to refrain from doing so. The saint exclaimed that he would not stop till the river passed from near him. Hence, he is said to have coerced the river to shift 3 *kos* away, assuming its present-day course.

Prithviraj-Sanyogita

King Jaichandra's daughter Sanyogita's Swayamvar took place in his capital at Kannauj. She was, however, carried off by Rajput king, Prithviraj III. This tale is immortalised in Prithviraj Raso, attributed to Chand Bardai, the court poet of Prithviraj.

Folklore of Alha-Udal

Alah Udal is a heroic saga of two brothers who are said to have taken refuge in the kingdom of Kannauj after being evicted from Mahoba in Bundelkhand. The Alha Khand narrates this story that is set against the historical background of the rivalries between Prithviraj Chauhan of Delhi, Chandel King Parmardev of Mahoba and King Jaichand Rathor of Kannauj. Jaichandra is said to have hosted the two brothers in the city of Rizgir or Rajgirh which was seen as an affront to King Prithviraj Chauhan (said to be Jaichand's cousin brother).

Itradaan Being Carved off Wood

Mohd Mustaqeem, The Last Kuppi Maker

ART *at the* HEART

City *of* Perfumes: Attar *of* Kannauj

Kannauj Perfume or *Ittar/attar* has been protected under the Geographical Indication (GI) of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. It can be made from flowers, musk, camphor, saffron and other aromatic substances. Plants like Vetiver (*khus*), are used for summer varieties while soil is used for monsoon variety, which is known as *Mitti Ittar,* that gives out the typical scent of first raindrops on dry earth. *Heena Ittar* and Musk *Ittar* are winter varieties. Following the seasons of the flowers, traditional *ittar*-makers, with their *degs* (traditional copper vessels) source flowers from across India to make fresh *ittars*. There are more than 500 units manufacturing traditional *ittar* in Kannauj.

The ancient, slow hydro-distillation process to make *ittar* is called

deg-bhapka. When a fresh supply of material comes in, the petals are put into each *deg*, covered with water, a lid or *sarpos* sealed with a mixture of clay and cotton. A wood or cow-dung fire is lit underneath, the receiver (condenser/ *bhapka*) is filled with sandalwood oil—which serves as a base for the scents—and sunk into water. The *deg* and *bhapka* are connected with a hollow bamboo pipe (*chonga*) that carries the fragrant vapours from the simmering pot into their sandalwood oil base. Not only is the process green, even the by-product is recycled. For example, the used rose or sandalwood petals and the burnt wood are consumed by the incense sticks industry. Even the water that is drained after *attar* is made is so clean that local workers often take a bath in it.

Extracted from dry soil and distilled using ancient techniques, *Mitti Attar*—the earth's perfume is still made during the monsoon. The technique has been in practice here for more than a hundred years. The *mitti attar*, the only attar that doesn't come from a plant, has to be kept and sealed in a *kuppi,* a special leather bottle, otherwise it would be not release its true scent. For the *mitti attar*, half-baked clay is distilled. The clay is first collected in neighbouring villages, where little clay cakes are made, dried, baked and placed in the *deg*. The fragrance is a sweet mixture where the woody and oriental note of sandalwood is complemented by an earthly smell.

People who Fascinate

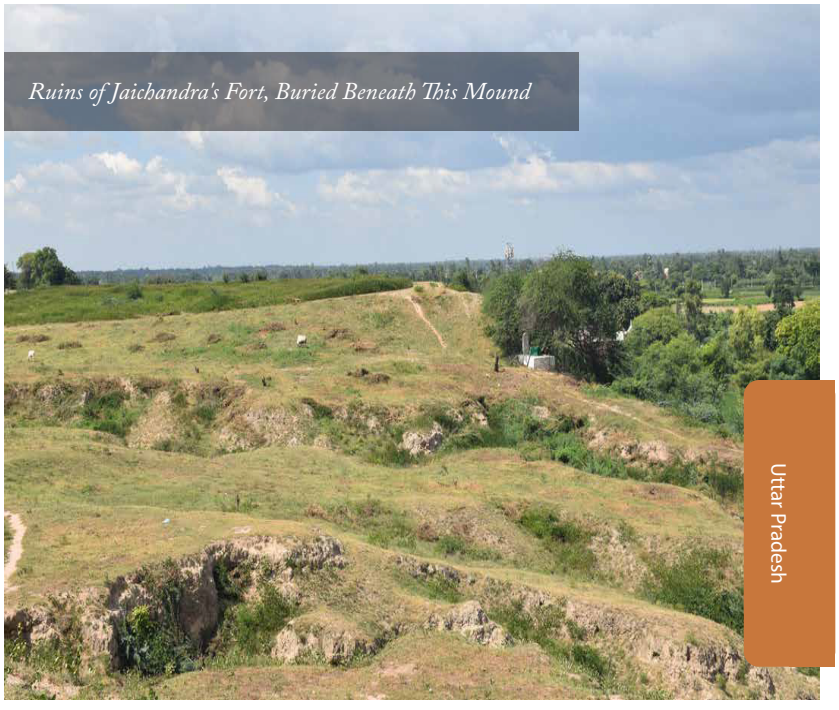
Hakim Mehdi

Nawab Meerza Mehdi Ali Khan, alias Hakim Mehdi has been rightly described by the British as the stormy petrel of Oudh politics. William Crooke of the Indian Civil Service wrote in 1917 that Hakim Mehdi had been the right hand man of the Nawab Sa'adat Ali, and on the accession of his son Ghazi-ud-din Haidar in 1814, he was dismissed on the ground that he had incited the King to protest against interference in Oudh affairs by the Resident, Colonel Baillie. The King, at the last moment, frightened at the prospect of an open rupture with the Resident, deprived Nawab Hakim Mehndi of all his public offices, much of his property, and imprisoned him. On his release he retired into British territory and lived at Fatehgarh. He built a suspension bridge over River Kali to join the road from Gursahaiganj.

Rose Perfume in the Making

Kalavati Gatta, A Famous Delicacy

Makhdum Jahaniya's Tomb



Ruins of Jaichandra's Fort, Buried Beneath This Mound

Malini Awasthi

Malini Awasthi, born in Kannauj in 1967, is a *Ganda Bandh* student of the legendary Hindustani Classical singer, Vidhushi Girija Devi of Banaras. The ceremony of *Ganda Samaroh* or tying a red thread is a known practice for the entrance of a new disciple into any specific tradition, lineage or *Gharana*, to attain knowledge in that specific field. She is popular for her renditions of the *Thumri, Thaare Raho Baanke Shyam,* and other forms of semi-classical music.

Monuments *that* Matter

Jaichandra's Fort

12th century Kannauj ruler Jaichandra built a large fort in the city, from which the settlement expanded northward and westward. The residential clusters were planned along the northern extent of the settlement. Along the way, *dargahs* dedicated to renowned saints of his kingdom were built. Along the east-west axis of the settlement was the Bara Bazar which was the hub of trade and commerce.

Dargahs *of* Kannauj

Dargah Hazi Shareef was built for the saint who was the mentor of the Chishti *pirs* of Ajmer Sharif. Another ancient *dargah* is built in the north-west of Kannauj which lies near an ancient mound associated with Lord Buddha. The 8th century CE *dargah* of Tatkale Shareef in Southern Kannauj district is renowned in the region after the saint who witnessed the moon split in half (as per legend). These structures are mostly square in plan, with the grave in the centre. Habibullah Shah Mazar in Kannauj City belongs to a *zamindar* who settled here during Aurangzeb's reign. It is an extravagant tomb built adjacent to a mosque which was constructed by the *zamindar*.

Sarai Miran

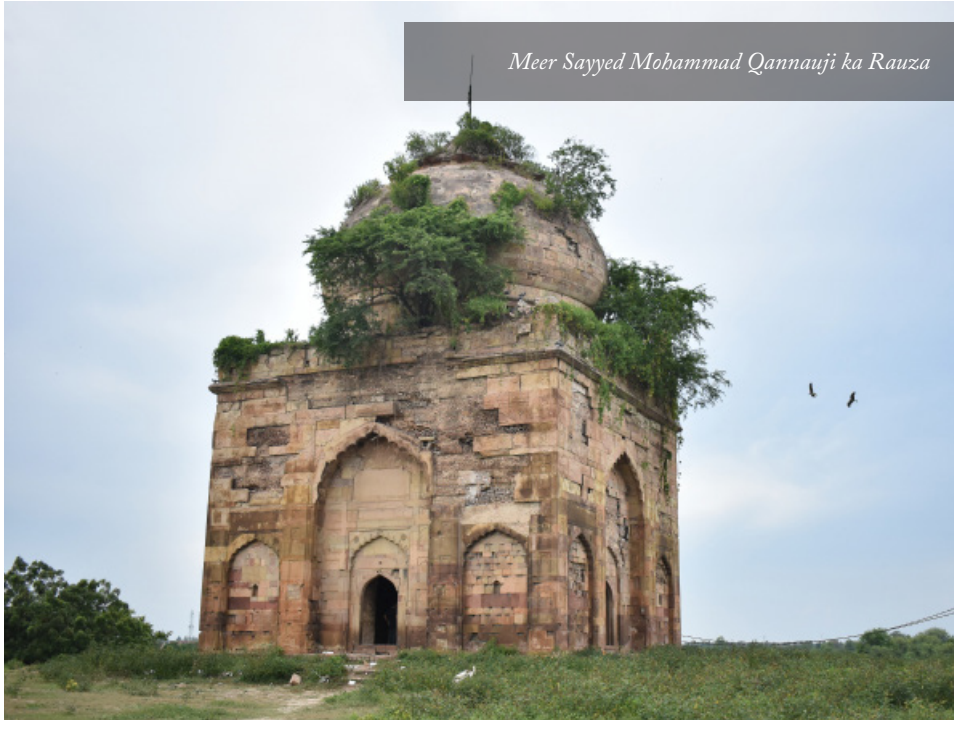
Sarai Miran (presently Sarai Mohalla) in the south-eastern outskirts of Kannauj was established by a Sufi

Scholar, Sayyid Muhammad Qanauji during Shah Jahan's rule. While traveling along GT road, he built the *sarai* complex as it earlier lay near the Ganga. Qanauji also built the Rang Mahal, a leisure garden, located on the west of Jaichandra fort. Eventually, the tomb of Sayyid Muhammad Qanauji was built near Rang Mahal.

Tomb of Makhdum Jahaniya

Makhdum Jahaniya was a famous Sufi Saint of 13th century CE and this complex was discovered in late 15th century CE, during the reign of the Sultans of Jaunpur. It was built on a high mound, a part of which was occupied by a weaver community. Excavations revealed the tomb dedicated to Makhdum Jahaniya, to actually comprise the grave of his son, Jalal. A pedestal with an inscription dating 1136 CE was found on the steps leading to the mound. The tomb of a female descendant of Makhdum Jahaniya lies in the Janana Masjid, across the gateway of the tomb. The structure is built with Lakhori bricks, clad with red and yellow sandstone. Bawan Khamba is believed to have been built by Humayun who left it incomplete after he was defeated by Sher Shah Suri in 1540. As the name suggests, this arcaded hall comprises of 52 stone columns. The north and south interior façade of the structure has pointed arched niches with inscriptions written on it.

The tomb of a female descendant of Makhdum Jahaniya lies in the Janana Masjid, across the gateway of the tomb. The structure is built with Lakhori bricks, clad with red and yellow sandstone



Meer Sayyed Mohammad Qannauji ka Rauza

Kilns

Kilns are either octagonal or square in plan brick structures. They taper in steps towards the top. The kilns were also used to make bricks for construction purposes. Some kilns have decorative features like a moulded band with *paan patti* ornamentation, topped by a stepped *chajja*.

Jami Masjid

The 15th century Jami Masjid complex is rectangular in plan built on a high plinth. The gateway has a pointed arched opening for entrance with carvings on its façade and has a *bangladhar* roof with domes. The entrance leads to a corridor having two raised platforms on its left and right side. The corridor leads to a courtyard which is divided into two parts by a boundary wall. The mosque is supported by 60 stone columns.

Ajaypal Temple Complex

It is built in the memory of Ajaypal, the Guru of King Jaichandra. The idol is made of red stone and shows him holding a trident. There are also idols of Lord Hanuman and Goddess Durga. The entrance gate is built within a multifoil arch along with blind bell arches on either side. The structure also has a moulded cornice running around it with three onion-shaped ribbed domes built having inverted lotus on top. Several old stone sculptures dating to 8th-9th century CE have been found within the complex.

Annapurna Devi Temple *(Tirwa)*

The temple, about 18 kms away from Kannauj, has large dimensions with fine architectural work. The adjacent tank contains five small temples known as Panchvati. To the west of the temple lies a pond known as Rani-ka-Talab.

Maa Phoolmati Devi Temple

Phoolmati Devi is said to be the daughter of King Ben. The temple has the idols of Rani and Raja Ben. A fair is held here every Guru Purnima.

Bawan Khamba, Makhdum Jahaniya's Tomb

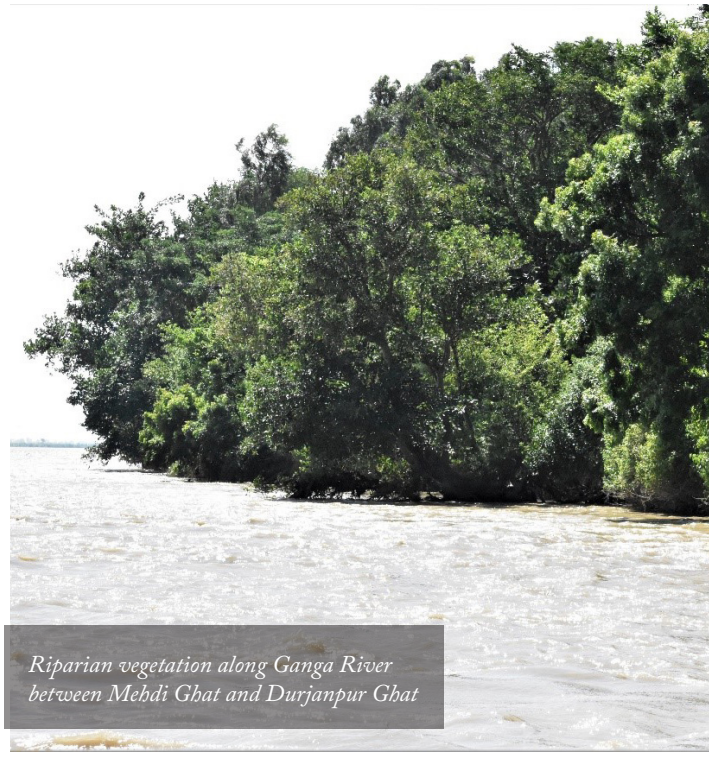
The 15th century Jami Masjid complex is rectangular in plan, built on a high plinth

Bala Pir Shrine

During the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Kannauj was administered by Nawab Dalel Khan who was tutored by Sheikh Kabir, commonly known as *Bala Pir*. *Bala Pir* died in 1644. A tomb was built in his honour. Two identical tombs are built on a high platform. The western tomb belonging to *Bala Pir*, is larger than the eastern one which belongs to his son Sheikh Mehdi. Each tomb is square in plan, built in sandstone. The entrance ceiling comprises floral paintings. The squinches are heavily decorated with floral bands and *muqarna*-like paintings. There are five inscriptions on the door of the tomb of *Bala Pir,* all dating to the mid-17th century recording details of the construction of the tombs.

Nature's Abundance

Kannauj has four soil types: loamy *dumat*, sandy *bhur*, stiff clayey *matiyar* and alluvium *kachoha*. It receives plenty of rainfall besides being sufficiently irrigated by Ganga and its tributaries. Hence, Kannauj exhib-



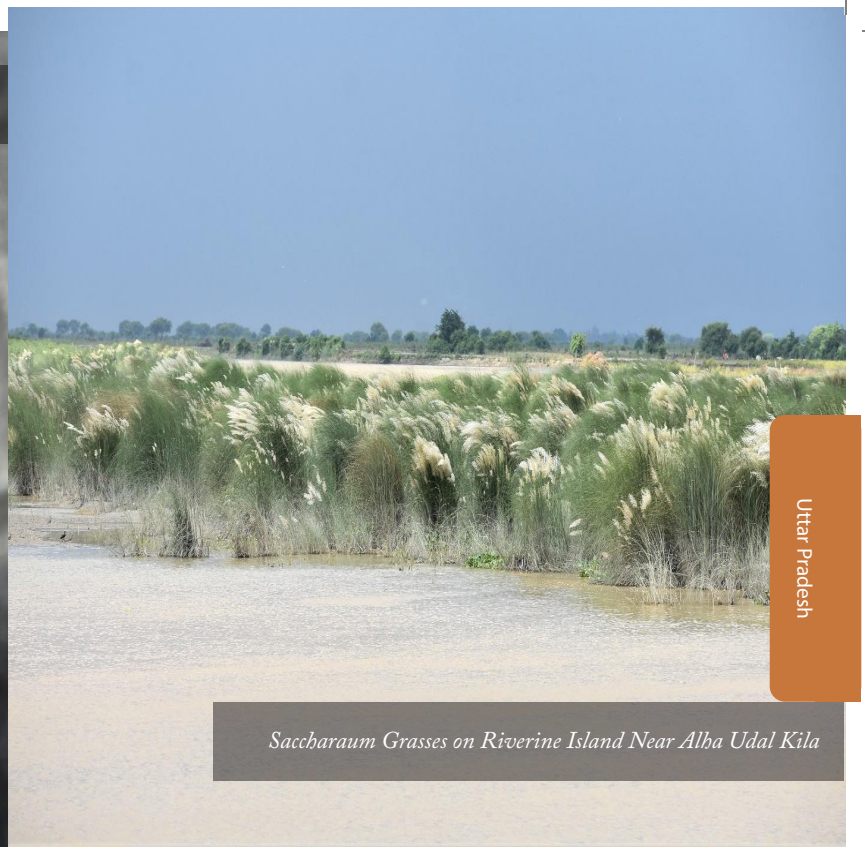
Riparian vegetation along Ganga River between Mehdi Ghat and Durjanpur Ghat

Old And Sacred Peepal Tree At Durjanpur Ghat

its rich biodiversity. *Babool, Dhak, Mahua, Semal,* Mango are some of the common trees found here. The wild animals commonly found include the Jackal, Nilgai and Mongoose, etc. 300 bird species like snipes, ducks and geese. Kannauj district is home to one of the largest bird sanctuaries in India - Lakh Bahosi Sanctuary, established in 1989, covering an area of 80 sq. km. The stretch between Kannauj to Kanpur is known to be the habitat of Indian Soft Shell Turtle, Narrow Head Soft Shell Turtle, Three Stripped Roofed Turtle, Red Crowned Roof Turtle and Indian Peacock Soft Shell Turtle. These are generally found in middle and lower stretches of Ganga. Occasionally, crocodiles may come across in the wetlands surrounding river Ganga. *Munj/Moonj* is the principal grass growing in the floodplain of Ganga River in Kannauj and is useful in checking soil erosion.

The course of the Ganga shifts frequently. Until 11th century CE, studies suggest the river to have passed from the north-eastern periphery of Kannauj City. Over the years, its course shifted further eastward, which continued for several centuries. In early 20th century, the river flowed nearer to the old high bank along Kannauj City. About 592 different wetlands are reported from Kannauj which include lakes, ponds, oxbow lakes, cut off meanders, riverine wetlands, waterlogged, rivers, streams, reservoirs, barrages, tanks, and ponds.

Plastic Cord Fishing Net Used For Catching Fish



Saccharaum Grasses on Riverine Island Near Alha Udal Kila

The Vulnerable Sarus Crane

Dragnet Based Fishing Near Dariapurpatt

CHAPTER 18

UNNAO

From Lav-Kush to Shravan Kumar

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Unnao

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Unnao in central Uttar Pradesh is divided into six *tehsils* - Unnao, Hasanganj, Safipur, Purwa, Bighapur and Bangarmau covering an area of about 4558 sq km. It was created as a district upon the annexation of Awadh in 1856 CE by the British who called it Purwa. It is bounded by Hardoi on the north, Lucknow on the east and Raebareli on the south. Ganga forms the western boundary of this district separating it from Kanpur and Fatehpur. Ganga flows for a distance of 130 km along the district boundary. It enters Unnao from the north-west, via Sirdharpur Ahatmali; and exits from Katari Bhalepur village in the south-east.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Around the 6th century BCE when India had 16 powerful kingdom-states or the *Mahajanapadas* - Unnao came under Kosala. It was visited by Lord Buddha as per ancient Buddhist scriptures and travelogues. During his sermons, 500 demons listened to his teachings, and are believed to have converted to *devtas*. Unnao then came under the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas of Magadha and the Kushanas, Mitras and Guptas. Under the Guptas,

Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien visited Safipur *Tehsil* of Unnao where he travelled along the old course, coming from Kannauj. He found *stupas* in the outskirts of Newal village which marked the places visited by Lord Buddha. The area was under the influence of the Gurjara-Pratiharas in the post-Gupta period but around the 12th century CE, a Chauhan Rajput, Godo Singh, founded the town of Sawai Godo which is the current Unnao city. However, the Gahadavala King of Kannauj banished him from his own kingdom, and stationed Khande Singh as the governor. Singh was killed by his lieutenant Unwant Singh, who named the town after himself and hence, many Rajput clans settled here, including the Bhar Rajputs.

In the 13th century CE when Nasiruddin Mahmud of the Delhi was in power, he sent a force to fight with Gautam Rajput of Argal, the ruler of Unnao. When Rajput won, he visited the holy Ganga banks in Baksar Village but the Subedar of Lucknow sent his force to capture the queen at this moment. It was then that Rajput was aided by two Bai Rajput brothers Abhai Chand and Nirbhai Chand who rescued the queen. While Nirbhai Chand succumbed to his injuries in battle, Abhai Chand assisted the queen to reach Argal safely. The ecstatic king gave his daughter's hand in marriage and granted him the land to the north of Ganga, covering most of the region of Unnao District. Abhai Chand fought the Bhar Chiefs of the region. He established a settlement on the battleground, and named it *Sangrampur* (meaning, city of battles). It was later renamed Daundia Khera. This became the capital of the Bais Rajput Clan, which rapidly expanded under the descendants of the king.

Ferries and Religious Activity at the ghats of Unnao

The Ain-i-Akbari mentions that Unnao had a brick fort in Unnao owned by the Saiyids with a garrison consisting of 50 horses and 4,000-foot soldiers

In the 14th century CE, Malik Sarwar Khwaja-i-Jahan, the Governor of Awadh, defeated the weakening Tughlaq rulers and established independent control across the region. He founded the Sharqi Dynasty. The region came under the rule of the Mughals in the 15th century CE. Under the Mughals, Unnao was a part of the sirkar of Lucknow during Akbar's reign. The Ain-i-Akbari mentions that Unnao had a brick fort in Unnao owned by the Saiyids with a garrison consisting of 50 horses and 4,000-foot soldiers. But there were multiple conflicts between the Rajputs after Aurangzeb's death but Unnao came under the Nawab of

Balkhandeshwar Temple Complex

Awadh Sadat Khan, Safdar Jung and Shuja-ud-Daulah. Shuja-ud-Daulah was defeated by the British East India Company in 1764 in the Battle of Buxar and in 1856 CE, Awadh came under the British East India Company.

The 1857 Revolt was mainly fought along Ganga in Kanpur. During the Sati Chauraha Ghat massacre in Kanpur, many Englishmen crossed the Ganga into Unnao with the aim to escape to Lucknow. Here, Ram Rao Bux Singh fought gallantly against the British but was hung to death on a banyan tree on the site of a temple where the English took refuge. Post the war, the control of the East India Company was transferred to the British Crown.

Mythological Links

The Curse *at* Nawal Village

Chinese travellers Fa-Hien and Hieun Tsang visited Navadevakula which stood on the eastern bank of Ganga. The city was about 5 km in circumference and had about it a magnificent Deva Temple, several Buddhist Monasteries and *Stupas*. This place, which is about 3 kms north-west of Bangarmau in Tehsil Safipur, has been identified by some scholars with Nawal, believed to represent the site of an important ancient city upturned in the 13th century by the curse of a saint, and still called *Aundha Khera* or *Lauta Shahr* both meaning an upturned city. The *dargah* of the Muslim saint, whose curse is said to have befallen the city, is not only the oldest Muslim monument at Bangarmau but perhaps, in the entire district.

Legend *of* Shravan Kumar

Sarwan is believed to be the *samadhi* of Shravan Kumar who was accidentally killed by King Dashrath of Ayodhya when he was taking his blind parents on pilgrimage and was trying to quench his thirst. At the time of his death, Shravan Kumar is said to have turned into a stone statue and legends suggest that the navel of this statue, no matter how much water is poured into it, absorbs all of it since he died while trying to quench his thirst.

The Legend *of* Luv-Kush

Sita is believed to have resided in the *ashram* of Sage Valmiki at Maharanya, on the outskirts of Pariyar, Safipur. It is here that Lord Rama's sons, Luv and Kush, spotted the white horse with black ears which was a part of the *Ashwamedha Yagna* being conducted by Lord Rama. They captured the horse, thus challenging Rama, and fought a long battle with the army accompanying the horse, oblivious to the fact that

It is here that Lord Rama's two sons, Luv and Kush, spotted the white horse with black ears which was a part of the Ashwamedha Yagna being conducted by Lord Rama

Chandrika Devi Temple

Cultivation Of Vegetables On Ganga River Bank In Shuklaganj

the horse and the army belonged to their own father. Prior to the war, Luv and Kush established a Shiva *lingam* in this town in present-day Balkhandeshwar Temple. It is said that any warrior who worshipped here would lose the will to fight. Thus, the temple was named *Bal-khand-eshwar* (*Bal* means strength, and *khand* means destroy). Later, Rama gifted his son, Kush, the throne of Ayodhya, which included present-day Unnao. Excavations at Pariyar have yielded Copper Arrowheads, Ochre Coloured Pottery, Black Slipped Ware, Black and Red Ware, Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware.

The Legend *of* Ashwathama

After destroying many camp followers of Pandavas, Ashwathama was struck by grief but was let off by Lord Krishna with a mark on his head (Lord Krishna did not kill him since killing a Brahmin was a sin). Carrying the mark of shame, Ashwathama went on a spiritual journey and eventually arrived at Asoha in the Purwa *Tehsil* of Unnao. He went to the local Shiva Temple on the banks of the Ganga, known as Kheresur and it is here that he eventually disappeared while meditating. Though he disappeared, it is believed that he did not die and kept visiting and worshipping at the temple even after his disappearance. Numerous kings who visited this temple claimed that before they could perform any rituals, they felt a presence has already visited the temple and placed fresh flowers and water in front of the deity. The people of Asoha revere him and have named the village after him. He is worshipped there even today.

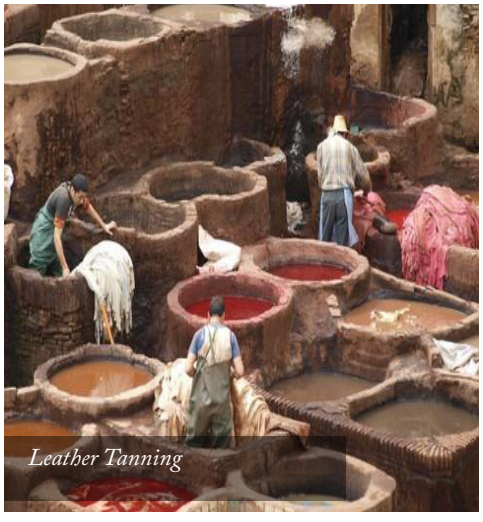
Baksar

It is believed that Lord Krishna killed demon Bakasur in the forests of Unnao, hence giving Baksar its name. People also say that the region is named after either the Bais Rajput Clan or freedom fighter Raja Ram Rao Bux Singh. As per the Markandeya Purana and Durga Saptsati, Maa Chandrika Devi Temple near Baksar Ghat along the Ganga is a *Shaktipeeth*. It was here that Medha Rishi imparted knowledge on Goddess Durga to King Surath and Samadhi Vaishya.

Events *of* Interest

Fairs *at* Balkhandeshwar

Grand fairs take place at the


Leather Tanning

Balkhandeshwar Temple on Navratri and Kartik Poornima.

Takia-Ka-Mela *at* Patan

The fair is held on the first Thursday of the month of *Paus* in honour of Niamat Shah who was said to be a disciple of Muhabbat Shah.

Art *at the* Heart

Folk Songs

In the various villages of the district, village specific folk songs are sung during festive seasons; folk songs like the *Kaharwa* during Diwali, *Phag* during Holi, the *Alha, Kajari* and *Barahmasi* during the rainy season, and lastly, the *Birha* during winter nights. Many verses are also sung for the celebration of heroes of the region. This includes a song specifically dedicated to the brave Bais Rajput of Pachimgaon of Pargana Mauranwan, known as Chet Rai. The song recounts his bravery against Awadh Nawab Sadat Khan who wished to extract more revenue from this region but Chet Rai stood his ground that resulted in slashing of the revenue. Unnao also has some famous folk dances including the Kaharwa, Dhobiya, and Mela. The musical instruments that accompany these folk dances consist of the *Thali*, the Harmonium, *Manjira, Hurka*, and the *Dholak*.

Leather Tanning Industry

Besides its *Zari* Embroidery, Unnao is famous for its leather tanning industry and leather goods. The process of leather tanning involves turning hide into leather and its process includes soaking, liming, de-liming, bating, pickling, and then finally, tanning.

People who Fascinate

Ram Bux Singh

He was a leader in the Mutiny of 1857 and a close associate of Nana Saheb. He was hung to death by the British. Interestingly, Raja Rao Ram Baksh Singh's fort in Daundiya Khera, Purwa tehsil, was once excavated in an attempt to dig up 1,000 tonnes of gold.

Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi

This great freedom fighter from Bangarmau was a brilliant scholar and a close associate of Subhash Chandra Bose.

Chandrashekhar Azad

This famous Indian revolutionary's forefathers belonged to a village in the district of Unnao called Bidarka. He played a prominent role in the freedom struggle of India, getting involved in the Non-cooperation Movement at a very young age. He was the one who reorganised the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) under its new name of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA).

Bhagwati Charan Verma

Born in Safipur, Unnao, this famous writer has been honoured with numerous awards like the Sahitya Academy Award in 1961, the Sahitya Vachaspati Upadhi in 1969, and the Padma

Eminent Hindi poet Suryakant Tripathi Nirala was born in West Bengal, but later shifted to Godhakola in Unnao District since his father belonged to this region

The Ganga, after entering Unnao, flows mostly south-eastwards for about 96 km

Bhushan in 1971. Some of his great works include Bhule Bisre Chitra, Chitralekha, Chanakya, Prashan aur Marichika, and Seedhi Sachchi Batein.

Ram Vilas Sharma

Sahitya Akademi Fellow, eminent critic, writer, and poet Dr. Ram Vilas Sharma was born in Unnao. His poems were included in his collections Roop Tarang, Sadiyon Ke Soye Jaag Uthe, and Pratinidhi Kavitayen. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1970, Shalaka Samman from Hindi Academy, Delhi, Vyas Samman from K.K. Birla Foundation in 1991, Bharat Bharti Samman from Uttar Pradesh Government among others.

Shiv Mangal Singh Suman

Esteemed playwright and poet Shiv Mangal Singh Suman was born in Unnao. Some of his famous poetry collections include Hillol (1939), Yug Ka Mol (1945), Mitti Ki Baarat (1972) and Vani Ki Vyatha (1980). He was awarded the Padma Shri (1974), Padma Bhushan (1999), the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1974) and Deva Puruskar (1958).

Ruins of the fort of Raja Harbans at Bardaka Harbans

Suryakant Tripathi

Eminent Hindi poet Suryakant Tripathi Nirala was born in West Bengal, but later shifted to Godhakola in Unnao District since his father belonged to this region. His body of work is very diverse and includes poems like Ram ki Shakti Puja, Geetika, Dhwani, Tulsidas, Janmbhumi, Bhikshuk, Bela and Adima. Some of his novels include Apsara, Alka, Chameli, Kale Karname, Choti Ki Pakad, Nirupama, and Prabhavati.

Monuments *that* Matter

A majority of the built heritage of Unnao District comprises religious buildings including many Shiva temples due to the association between Shiva and Ganga. The river has changed its course several times in the district. Some of the historic towns which earlier existed along the banks of Ganga, such as Purana Baksar and Pariyar, are presently 2-3 km away from the river.

Bardaka Harbansh

Badarka Harbansh near Achalganj is the birthplace of Chandrashekhar Azad's father Pandit Sitaram Tiwari and mother Jagrani Devi. Raja Harbans, who was an official at Shah Jahan's court, founded this place in the year 1643 CE.

Mausoleum *of* Maqdoom Shah Safi

This mosque in Safipur is dedicated to Maqdoom Shah Safi, a religious mendicant after whom the settlement is also named.

Gauri Shankar Mandir

This temple has Balkhandeshwar Mandir to the west, Ram Janki Mandir to the east, and residences to the north and south. The temple comprises only a *garbha griha*. It is square in plan, built on a low-height square plinth. The north-eastern side comprises a wooden door opening within a pointed arch. The entablature is adorned with leaf moulding. The *garbha griha* has a Shiva *lingam* in the centre.

Ganga Mandir & Dharamshala

Situated in Bighapur, Baksar, it was built for the pilgrims visiting the area to take a dip in the Ganga. It is entered through a central arcaded gateway with an arcaded veranda on either side, leading to multiple rooms. The gateway has a semi-circular arch with floral droppings along its profile. The temple is built in the centre of the courtyard. It has a square *garbha griha*, entered through a rectangular opening with niches on either side.

Nature's Abundance

The topography of Unnao district is divided into two divisions - the *tarai* or lowlands defined by the banks of river Ganga (covered by alluvial soil), and the uplands which are the eastern extents of the region from the river. 23% of the district is occupied by the lowlands, and 77% is occupied by the uplands. The two regions are clearly distinguished by the high banks. The Ganga, Kalyani and Sai are the chief rivers of the district and the other tributaries of the Ganga are Kalyani, Tanai, Loni and Morahi most of which dry up during summer season but hold water during monsoons and are utilized for irrigation in this region. The Ganga, after entering Unnao, flows mostly south-eastwards for about 96 km. Throughout its course in this region, the river is braided due to the presence of several riverine islands and sandbars. Among the significant islands a roughly spear-head shaped island can be observed between Bithoor (Kanpur) and Katri Pariyar in Unnao (about 260 ha), an irregularly shaped island near Keola Khera and another group of small irregularly shaped sandbars near Nanamau Ghat.

Kans, Moonj, Doob are the chief grasses in the riparian zones. Among the fauna, one can occasionally sight Gangetic Dolphins, Turtles, Nilgais and Wild Boars. The common bird species here include White Throated Kingfisher, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Bank Myna, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove and White Wagtail. Besides, among the recorded avian species Black-headed Ibis, Asian Woolyneck, Painted Stork and River Lapwing come under near-threatened category of IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species whereas River Tern and Sarus Crane have vulnerable status.

Golden Jackal

A Tributary River Channel

CHAPTER 19

KANPUR NAGAR

Manchester of the East

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Kanpur Nagar

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Kanpur Nagar district is located in Central Uttar Pradesh, named after its administrative headquarters, Kanpur City. In 1981, Kanpur District was sub-divided into Kanpur Nagar (urban) and Kanpur Dehat (rural countryside) Districts. Kanpur Nagar is bounded by Kannauj to the north, Unnao to the east across river Ganga, Fatehpur to the south and Hamirpur and Kanpur Dehat towards the west. It is the industrial capital of the state. The Ganga River course has gradually shifted over the years. During earlier years, the width of the river measured 640 m, along Kanpur, due to which the British harboured their cargo ships along the riverbank. The river was also a barrier between Kanpur and the Northern Awadh Region which was under the Lucknow Nawabs. However, over the years it has shifted northwards, creating vast stretches of sandy land. Kanpur Nagar occupies an area of 3155 sq km and is divided into four *tehsils* - Bilhaur, Kanpur Sadar, Narwal and Ghatampur. Bilhaur and Kanpur Sadar *Tehsils* in Kanpur Nagar District have been documented as they lie within the 5 km study area of river Ganga. Bilhaur *Tehsil*, in western Kanpur, is located on the banks of the Isan River. It is traversed by the Grand Trunk Road which runs parallel to the Ganga. The Khereshwar Temple here is believed to be the birthplace of Ashwathama. Kanpur Sadar, in eastern Kanpur, comprises five small villages

Ganga as Observed Near Panka

from Jajmau towards the east to Bithoor in the west.

Re-living *the* Past

Shards of Northern Black Polished Ware, Grey Ware and Red Slip Ware have been found in an ancient mound in Jajmau with excavations revealing an entire civilization with traces of town planning techniques adopted 3000 years ago. Architectural remains, pedestals of Jain images and medieval terracotta artefacts have also been found in Makanpur in Bilhaur tehsil. Bronze arrows and spearheads belonging to copper and bronze periods have been found in Ramel Village, in the southern outskirts of Bithoor city.

In the 7th century BCE, Kanpur was a part of the Panchala kingdom, a *Mahajanapada*. Araul town in Bilhaur is believed to be the ancient city of Alambikapuri, where Lord Buddha resided for four months. The kingdom of Jajmau gained importance during the time period. It comprised an ancient palace, which presently lies in ruins. But a significant find is the trace of an empire from the Kushana period in the first few centuries of the common era. A circular terracotta seal with Brahmi writings suggests the rule of the Magh Dynasty of Kaushambi for a brief period. He was defeated by Samudragupta in the 4th century CE, which ultimately led to the rule of the Gupta Empire across Kanpur. Post the Gupta Empire, Kanpur was under Harshavardhan of Kannauj and was visited by the famous Chinese pilgrim, Hieun Tsang during mid-7th century CE who calls it Ayuto.

During 8th century CE, the Ayudh Kings of Kannauj Kingdom ruled over Kanpur District until 815 CE after which the region came under the Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Chandels. But once the Delhi Sultanate came to power the region came under their influence, only briefly being under the Sharqi Dynasty of

Patthar Ghat. Bithoor

Jaunpur in between. The area then came under the Mughals (briefly also being under Sher Shah Suri whose Grand Trunk Road passes through Bilhaur).

By 1730 CE, Muhammad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad undertook the administration of the region and at this time, the Chandel Rajas of Shivrajpur and Sachendi (to the south of Kanpur city), were independent rulers. In the following years, Bangash fought against the Maratha forces which penetrated into southern Kanpur. But, post 1739 CE, Kanpur came under Safdar Jung, the Nawab Wazir of Awadh. After much political shift, in 1765 CE, the British defeated the Awadh-Maratha alliance in Kora since and in 1778, they stationed the local Awadh forces throughout the district to ensure a strong dominion. They soon shifted their military headquarters from Hardoi to Kanpur and in 1801, Kanpur was ceded to the British. It was included in the Awadhi territory, governed by Shuja-ud-daula.

In 1802 CE, it was declared a district called Cawnpore and in 1818 CE, Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II was granted Bithoor by the British where he built a fort and a palace. His son Nana Saheb went on to play a pivotal role in the Revolt of 1857. In April 1857, a part of the 19th Native Infantry of Bengal marched through Kanpur, rebelling against the use of pig and cow fat as grease for the Enfield cartridges that the army was expected to use and in May, Hillersdon (collector and magistrate of Kanpur district), called for Nana Saheb to guard the treasury in Nawabganj. He came well-armed, to Kanpur with Tantiya Tope. On 5th June, 1857, the Indian Cavalry and the 1st Native Infantry attacked the British. They were commanded by Nana Saheb who soon ascended the throne in Bithoor. However, though the rebels gave a good account of themselves, the mutiny was crushed by the British who went on to develop Kanpur as a major industrial centre given its strategic location along the Ganga.

The **Inversion** *of* **Jajmau**

Jajmau is an ancient civilization earlier known as Siddhapuri under the Kingdom of Yayati, who was an ancestor of the Pandavas in Mahabharata. It is said that this city was inverted by a curse of Sufi Saint Hazrat Makhdoom Shah Baba. His tomb was built in 14th century CE by Firoz Shah Tughlaq, which still exists on the Jajmau Mound.

Birbal Janmabhoomi

The people of Dahilar, about 50 kms south of Kanpur, believe that Birbal was born there. According to folklore, Birbal's mother, Anabha, was married to a native of Kalpi, Ganga Das, close to Kanpur. Soon after they got married, a terrible drought hit Kalpi, forcing a pregnant Anabha to return to her father's home in Dahilar where Birbal was born. A popular anecdote recounts how a cobra protected Birbal from the blazing sun while his mother worked in the fields. Once, when Akbar was getting a fort built at Chaparghata near Kanpur, he came to know about a witty teenager named Birbal, and took him to his court.

Brick Temple *of* Bhitargaon

An ancient temple at Bhitargaon, one of the oldest surviving brick temples, is said to have a treasure guarded by spirits. It is also said that whoever has gone to the temple complex after sunset has not returned alive. Due to this, the complex has been locked at 7 pm for over 100 years. Residents share that in 1905, a group of Banjaras came to the village and encamped near the temple complex and began digging once they came to know of the treasure. But before they could finish, they died a painful death. The British then began locking it at dusk. It is no longer visited by villagers.

Mythological Links

Origin *of the* Name

Kanpur is believed to have been named after Kunti's eldest son, Karna, once known as Karnapur. People also say that Kanpur city was founded by the Chandel King of Sachendi, Hindu Singh, in 1750 CE. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna and named this place Kanhaiyapur which became Kanhpur and finally Kanpur. It is also said that Raja Kanh Deo of the Kanhpuria clan established the village of Kanhpur in 1207 CE.

The Legends *of* Dhruva, Lord Brahma *&* Valmiki *at* Bithoor

Local residents share that Bithoor was once a forested region called Utpalaranya under King Uttanpada. His son Dhruva, an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, meditated on one foot to please the deity in the northern extreme of Bithoor city. Impressed by him, Vishnu granted him the boon of an eternal life as a shining star in the sky, thus making him the pole star or the *Dhruv Taara*. A mound called Dhruva Teela still exists here. Bithoor is also home to the Brahmavarta Ghat where Lord Brahma is believed to have performed the Ashwamedha Yajna after creating the world. A horse shoe nail embedded here is believed to be of Lord Brahma's horse and is worshipped daily. Lord Brahma also founded the Shiva *lingam* at the Brahmeshwar Mahadev Mandir at Brahmavarta Ghat. Bithoor finds mention in the Ramayana too for Valmiki Ashram, where Valmiki composed the Ramayana and Sita stayed after returning from Ravana's captivity. Luv and Kush are also believed to be born here. The *ashram* comprises structures named Sita Rasoi and Sita Kund. A temple dedicated to Valmiki, called Van Dev Kuti, also stands here.

Events *of* Interest

Ganga Mela

The history of the Ganga Mela can be traced to 1942. The British had imposed a curb on native festivities like Holi. Hence, during the Holi of 1942, freedom fighters namely Ghulab Chand Seth, Hamid Khan, Shyam Lal Gupta, Amrik Singh, Raghubar Dayal Bhatt, Bal Kishan Sharma, and Pitambar Lal made a formal

Bithoor is also home to the Brahmavarta Ghat where Lord Brahma is believed to have performed the Ashwamedha Yajna after creating the world

Ganga Snan during Mahalaya Amavasya

announcement of India's freedom and were arrested. The arrests were met with strong uproar and protests, following which the British released them. This day coincided with *Anuradha Nakshatra* of the Hindu calendar. Post their release, the people of Kanpur celebrated Holi. By evening, they set up and organized the historic Ganga Mela. The tradition of organizing the Ganga Mela on the *Anuradha Nakshatra* has continued ever since. Generally, this *nakshatra* falls seven days after Holi and hence, Holi celebrations in Kanpur are usually week long. It is celebrated at the same historical place where the freedom fighters had hoisted the Tricolour in 1942, now known as Rajjan Babu Park of Hatia. A procession tours the entire city which ends on the banks of Sarsaiyya Ghat. Another feature is the *Matki Phod*, a competition where various teams participate to break a pot fixed at a height.

Ganga Dussehra

Ganga Dussehra is celebrated particularly on a grand scale at the Parmat and Sarsaiyya Ghats in *Jyeshtha* month (June) to commemorate *Gangavataran*, the descent or birth of the river on earth. In 2014, devotees offered a 51,000-meter-long cloth to the Ganga to celebrate this festival. Starting from Bramhavrat Ghat, it extended till Jajmau.

Paryushana Parva

The Jain Festival of Paryushana Parva is celebrated with fervour at the Jain Glass temple. Special discourse sessions on Kalpa Sutra are also held. A procession of Kalpa Sutra is also carried out through the lanes of Kanpur.

Urs Shah Madar

The fair honours Sufi saint Syed Badi-ud-din, who founded the Madaris Sect and founded Makanpur in Bilhaur. His tomb was built by Ibrahim Sharqi in early 15th century CE.

Gastronomic Delights

Awadhi cuisine

It is said that the chefs of Awadh region invented the *dum* style of cooking, which is essentially a method of slow cooking. Awadhi cuisine is known for its kebabs namely Kakori, Galawati, Shami, Boti and Seekh, which are some of the popular ones in the region. Awadhi kebabs are distinct from kebabs from other regions as they are grilled on a *chulha* or sometimes on a skillet. Curry preparations include *kormas*, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian ones, made using chicken, lamb, or fish. Rice preparations include Pulao, Biryani and Tehri - all of which are rice-based dishes flavoured with spices and layered with either vegetarian or non-vegetarian curries. Biryani, in particular, is cooked along with meat in ghee, along with aromatic spices.

Awadhi cuisine is known for its kebabs namely Kakori, Galawati, Shami, Boti and Seekh, which are some of the popular ones in the region

Thagoo Ladoos & Badnaam Kulfi

One of the most popular food items here is Badnaam Kulfi and Thaggu ke Ladoo which have become brands. It is said that once, Gandhiji referred

to sugar as white poison in a public meeting. His words put one of his followers in dilemma, who was a sweet maker. He named his product Thaggu ke Laddu, implying that he was a cheat because he was using sugar in his laddus. Former Prime Minister Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was an ardent admirer of these Ladoos.

Malai Makhan

Cow's milk is boiled and left under the sky in winter nights - the dew laden milk is churned into a delicate, fluffy substance which is then garnished with saffron along with powdered cardamom, almond flakes and pistachio. It is hugely popular in the region.

People who Fascinate

Tripathi Siblings

Siblings Chintamani Tripathi, Matiram Tripathi, Bhushan Tripathi and Nilkanth Tripathi from Tikampur were patronized as poets in courts of many kings like Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, Shiv Raj of Sitara, Chhatrasal of Panna.

Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi & Bal Krishna Naveen

Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi was an independence movement activist and journalist who played a vital role in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Bal Krishna Sharma Naveen, mentored by Vidyarthi, was also an eminent freedom fighter and edited a newspaper, Pratap.

Shyam Lal Gupta

Shyamlal Gupta, popularly known by his pen name Parshad was an Indian poet and lyricist. A song written by him which featured in the 1948 Hindi film, *Azadi Ki Raah Par,* sung by Sarojini Naidu, is called the flag song of India and is sung every year during the flag hoisting ceremony during Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations. He was the recipient of the fourth highest civilian award, the Padma Shri, in 1969. In 1997, the Government of India issued a postage stamp in his honour.

Sucheta Kriplani

Freedom fighter Sucheta Kriplani, the first woman Chief Minister of an Indian state, (head of Uttar Pradesh Government from 1963-1967) was elected from the Kanpur constituency. She was part of the subcommittee that drafted the Indian Constitution.

John Forbes Royle

British botanist John Forbes Royle was born in Kanpur in 1798 CE and was in charge of the Botanical Garden at Saharanpur. The plant genus Roylea and Royle's pika (*Ochotona roylei*) are named after him. Royle's list of publications includes 'On the

Malai Makhan - A Popular Dessert

Antiquity of Hindu Medicine' (1837), 'Illustrations of the Botany and other Branches of Natural History of the Himalayan Mountains and of the Flora of Cashmere' (1939), 'An Essay on the Productive Resources of India' (1840), 'On the Culture and Commerce of Cotton in India and Elsewhere' (1851), 'Descriptive Catalogue of the Woods Commonly Employed in this Country for the Mechanical and Ornamental Arts' (1852) and 'The Fibrous Plants of India fitted for Cordage, Clothing, and Paper' (1855).

Peter De Noronha

Chevalier Peter Bertram Cypriano Castellino de Noronha, KSG, CE, was a well-known businessman and civil servant of Kanpur who was knighted by Pope Paul VI in 1965 for his work for the Christian community in India. During the great Kanpur floods in 1950, he saved many lives for which he was awarded by the then District Magistrate.

Frank Bellew

Frank Henry Temple Bellew was an American artist, illustrator, and cartoonist born in Kanpur. He drew for notable publications of his time, including Frank Leslie's Illustrated, Harper's Monthly, Harper's Weekly, Harper's Bazaar, St. Nicholas, and humour magazines such as The Lantern, The New York Picayune, Vanity Fair, The Funniest of Phun, Wild Oats, Puck, Judge, and the Comic Life.

Monuments *that* Matter

Kanpur City

Kanpur, up to late 18th century, had scattered clusters of villages with mud houses of peasants. There were four main villages - Old Kanpur, Sisamau, Kursaun, and Patkapur. The area was, till then, under the varying administration of the rulers of Kannauj, Kora and Kalpi but under the

St. Patrick's Church, Kanpur Cantonment

British Rule, a military cantonment was set up along the entire river side strip between Old Kanpur and Jajmau. Kanpur also became an industrial hub and the major trade *ghats* were Magazine Ghat, *Aspatal* (hospital) Ghat, *Parmat* (permit) Ghat, Sarsaiya Ghat, Gola Ghat and Satichauraha (Massacre) Ghat. The Lower Ganga Canal was also built to supplement the trading channels. With the coming of the railways and setting up of several mills, the city now comprised of *mohallas* of brick houses for the residents, including community housing sections known as *Hathas*. These are usually narrow houses of two floors, built adjoining each other, forming a U-shaped plan around an open court. Each *Hatha* has its own gateway and some public buildings like school, dispensary or a temple.

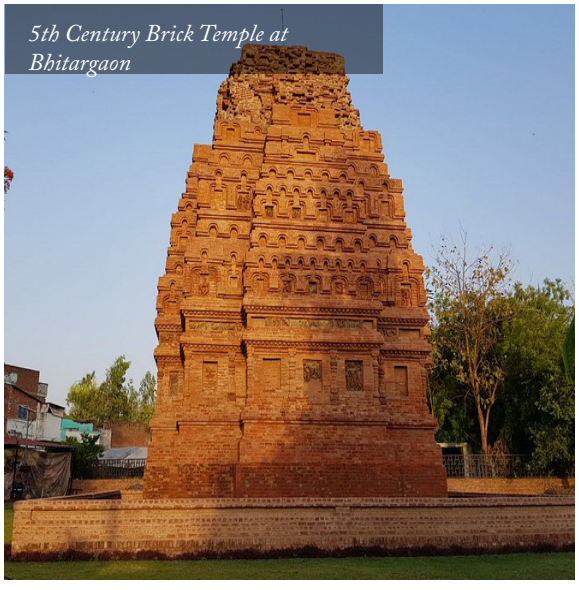
Bithoor

Bithoor was granted by the British to Peshwa Baji Rao II who built a palace here. A portion of Bithoor's land was sold to descendants of Peshwa family, known as Subhedar Sahib, in 1895 CE. Later Raja Tikait Rao, minister from Awadh, built a *baradari* at Baradari Ghat in Indo-Saracenic style. Bithoor was referred to as *Baavan Ghaton ki Nagri* or City of 52 Ghats, of which only 29 are still left. These include the Patthar Ghat and Kalvari Ghat. The Patthar Ghat comprises a Tudor arch at the lower end of the wall. Octagonal pavilions are built on either end of this wall, with a *chattri* above. A Shiva temple, called Mahakaleshwar Temple, made of sandstone stands in the centre. At Kalvari Ghat, a temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha built by the Peshwas still exists.

Brick Temple *at* Bhitargaon

The Bhitargaon Temple, the oldest surviving terracotta/brick temples of the country dating to the Gupta period (5th century CE), is a terraced brick building fronted with a terracotta panel. The walls are decorated with terracotta panels depicting Shiva and Vishnu alongside mythcal aquatic creatures, amongst others. When Archaeological Survey of India, Director-General Alexander Cunningham first visited the site, the remains of the porch and of the *ardha-mandapa* were still visible, which later collapsed.

The temple at Bhitargaon is rightly called a splendour in bricks and has one of the earliest known voussoir or true arches in India. The Bhitargaon temple is *tri ratha* in plan with the central projection called the *bhadra*; the projections on the two sides of the *bhadra* called the *prati-bhadra* or *prati-ratha*. This style of temple architecture was defined by the number of vertical offset projections on the outer surface of the temple which were called *pagas* or *rathakas*. The *tri ratha* temple has one *paga* or *rathaka* and two *kanika pagas* or *rathakas*. These projections were used to give the temple a distinct aesthetic look which was further enhanced by the use of moulded bricks and terracotta panels of varied carvings and composition. As per Brihat Samhita "the height of a temple should be double its width



5th Century Brick Temple at Bhitargaon

and the flight of steps (over which the edifice is built) equal to a third of this height. The panels depict a variety of themes from Hindu religious and mythological texts. On one of the terracotta panels taken from the temple site and now housed in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, is depicted Lord Vishnu reclining on Sheshanaga. This depiction is known as the Seshashayi or the Sayanamurti of Vishnu and was a recurrent iconographic theme during the Gupta Era.

Buddha Devi Temple

As per local belief, the land where the temple is built, was earlier used for growing green vegetables. Thus, people offer green vegetables to the deities here. It is square in plan, raised on a high plinth and is topped by a parapet wall with *paan patti* ornamentation.

Bithoor was referred to as Baavan Ghaton ki Nagri or City of 52 Ghats, of which only 29 are still left. These include the Patthar Ghat and Kalvari Ghat

Baleshwar Shiv Mandir

As per mythology, the ear-piercing ceremony of Luv and Kush, sons of Lord Rama and Sita, took place at this spot. It is a Shiva temple built on a *panchratha* plan with moulded bands on the periphery. The *garbha griha* comprises the Shiva *lingam* in the centre, with semi-circular niches along the inner walls. The ceiling and squinches are intricately painted.

Shuklaganj Bridge

To improve connectivity for trade post-1857, the British took down the pontoon bridge and replaced it with a railway-cum-foot over bridge in the Cantonment area. The bridge is built with brick masonary and is approximately 720 m in length. It connects the Kanpur District with Unnao District.

Jama Masjid & Madarsa Jame-ul-Uloom

The Jama Masjid has a *madrasa* in the same precinct. The entrance of the mosque has a multifoil arch opening leading to the steps. The steps lead to a central *sahn* (central courtyard) with ablution space for *wuzu* surrounded by multifoil arch arcade or *riwaq* on all four sides. The Mosque is adorned with three domes and two minarets.

Badi Karbala

According to the local traditions, the mosque was built by a Muslim Faquir Nahar Shah. The complex is divided in two parts, one is the graveyard, second is the mosque. The graveyard is the oldest amongst all the structures.

Chaitanya Dham Ram Darbar

Once called the Govind Pant Baradari, it was named after Govind Pant Bundela, the commander-in-chief of Peshwa Baji Rao II of the Maratha Empire who settled here at Bithoor. The building is built on Chappar Ghat, to the south of Ganga Kuti. The double – storey baradari is rectangular in plan comprising a wide arcaded veranda with rooms above, aligned along the length of the river.

Wheeler's Entrenchment & Barracks

With the outbreak of the 1857 mutiny in Meerut, Sir Hugh Wheeler built a mud boundary wall and temporary brick barracks here to safeguard the English families. However, many of them were killed by the firing and attacks of the rebels during the revolt. Later a memorial dedicated to the British who lost their lives here, was erected here by Col. Sir Henry Yule and Baron Carlo Marochetti. It is surrounded by All Soul's Cathedral to the west. The memorial wall is curved at the eastern end of the site. It faces a large garden, with the sculpture of an angel against a cross-sign. The wall screen is built in stone with octagonal pilasters at regular intervals.

Kanpur Central Jail

Spread over 12 acres on the banks of the Ganga, it was built by the British in mid-19th century CE to punish the nationalists who revolted during the 1857 revolt. The names of the martyrs are engraved on a memorial pillar here. The precinct is rectangular in plan. It comprises multiple buildings within a tall encircling boundary wall. It is topped by a gabled roof with stepped moulding along its profile.

DAV College

The foundation stone of this College was laid by Sant Mahatma Hansraj, a scholar of Arya Samaj, around 1916-17. The college was an important centre during the Indian independence movement. It is a 2-storey rectangular structure, built on a high plinth. It is topped by a room with ornamental *jharokhas* on the façade. The front two corners of the porch are topped by domed *chattris* with circular columns. The building has Tudor arched verandas on the ground and first floor, adorned with ventilators with floral jail-work. Former Indian Prime Min-

Lal Imli Mills

ister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and former Indian President Ram Nath Kovind are notable alumni of this institution.

Elgin Mills & Staff Quarters

The Elgin Mill was established in 1863 under Cawnpore Cotton Committee. The precinct is set right on the bank of river Ganga. It has several structures built on a low plinth. An octagonal chimney is located in the complex and is built on a high square platform. An arcaded niche band is running around the chimney located at its top. The entire structure is built in graceful and impressive brick masonary. The mill has shut down and the precincts now lie empty and desolate. However, the central location of the mill's land of 75 acres along the river, has great potential as a green lung for the city. Likewise is the position of the Muir Mills.

Lal Imli Mills

Post 1857, J. Condon and other industrialists set up the Cawnpore Woollen Mills, later known as Lal Imli Mills . The complex also has the staff bungalows. The entire structure is built in graceful and impressive brick masonary and offers great potential for green use.

Muir Mills and Victoria Mills are other prominent mills whose vast compounds are now haing a dense urban forest canopy. These mills comprise solid brick masonary structures which offer great potentrial for use as cultural and recreational infrastructure.

Ghats

Massacre Ghat

One of the most well-known ghats of Kanpur is the Massacre Ghat, once known as the Sati Chaura Ghat since a few women committed *Sati* here. It has a single-storey temple. In 1857, Nana Saheb arranged boats for British men and women to escape and instructed his armies not to harm anyone. However, in a state of confusion, a few rebels retaliated, massacring many British at this spot. Those who escaped were later killed at Bibighar. Since then, the ghat is called Massacre Ghat.

Sarsaiya Ghat

It is visited for sacred baths by people on occasions like Ganga Dussehra. It has been restored and maintained under Namami Gange along with cooperation of local authorities. It has five *Shivalayas*.

Akhin Ghat

The word *akhin* comes from Angir Asama or Amod Kanam of the Vidyapathi age. A temple complex has also been found here.

Najabgarh

An ancient Shiva temple is located on the Najabgarh Ganga Ghat.

The important tributaries of Ganga in this district are Isan (flows through Bilhaur), Nun (rises from the swampy tracks of Bilhaur) and Pandu River (rises in Farrukhabad)

Koyla & *other* Ghats

Koyla has many sites dating to the 11th-13th centuries and also has a famous Shivala Siddhanath Temple which is a *peeth* (a pilgrimage spot) of Kanpur. The first *ghat* in Koyla that lies on the banks of river Ganga is Dandi Wala Ghat, derived from the Dandi saints who lived there. Following this is Mouni Ghat, again derived from a saint, Mouni Baba, who lived there. There is Bhagat Sawan Das Ghat named after a person famous for leather work in Kanpur. This is followed by the Bairaj Ghat. From this point, the settlement of old Kanpur begins. The first *ghat* here is the Rameshwar Ghat named after a person whose reference is found in Dargahilal's Book from 1875. The Tiwari Ghat and Mahalwa Ghat are almost next to each other. Raja Khamsyan Singh (Chauhan) had built a palace on Mahalwa Ghat. The last is Baari Ghat and moving slightly upwards there is a Rani Ghat.

Poet Padmakar, who wrote the Ganga Lehari, lived here. Apparently, he had fallen sick and someone recommended that he should worship the Ganga. Padmakar did so and was eventually cured. Then there is a dam after which is the Bahiro Ghat which is also called Visaan Ghat. This is the boundary of old Kanpur village. Kanpur also has Magzeen Ghat, Permit Ghat (it used to be a custom house), Gola Ghat, Falani Ghat and finally the Bhagvatdas Ghat which is close to the Stuart Leather factory. Then there is Baradhari Ghat which is close to another Patthar Ghat. Recently, a plaque was put there that said that both the *ghats* had been made by Tikai Rai, a *diwan* who had gotten a Shiva temple made at the Patthar Ghat. However, the Baradhari Ghat can actually be associated with the Tikku Family of Kashmiri Pandits. After a few small *ghats*, beyond the railway station there is Maharaja Ghat (which has a Shivalaya called Saraswateshwar dedicated to one of the wives of Bajirao called Saraswati). It is most popular along with Ganga Mahal Ghat and these are associated with Maharashtrian families. Then there are the Kamalpur Sanghania Ghat and Haridham Ghat. The Rani Lakshmibai Ghat is another famous landmark named after the queen of Jhansi since she spent her childhood in this region.

Nana Saheb Memorial

It is named after Peshwa Baji Rao II's son Nana Saheb who settled in Bithoor once he was sent to this place by the British. It consists of a museum, a gallery containing historical relics from the colonial period like Royal Orders, coins, stamps and other antiques. It also has statues of Nana Saheb, Rani Laxmi Bai, Tatya Tope and other freedom fighters who intiated the siege of Cawnpore. It is believed that the park has old banyan trees on which the residents of Bithoor were hung when British officials ordered mass hangings after the siege of Cawnpore. According to a legend, before renouncing his titles and going to Nepal, Nana Saheb threw his jewels in a well. The well is now located in Nana Saheb Smarak.

Nature's Abundance

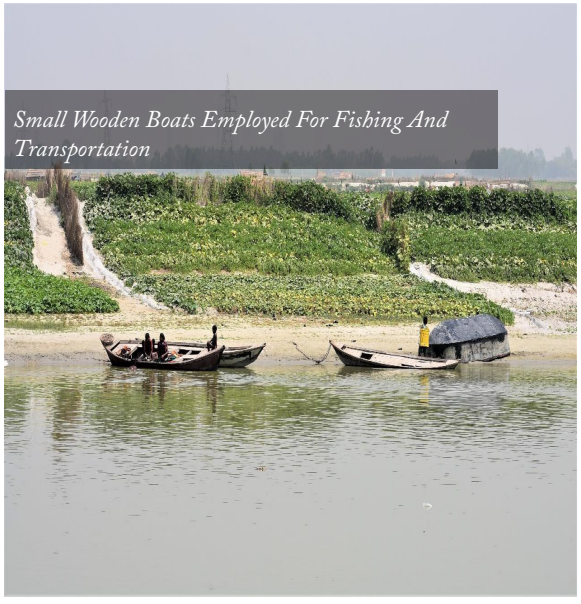
The Ganga has a 67-km course in this district and throughout its course it is braided due to the presence of several riverine islands and sandbars. Among the significant islands of study region are a roughly spearhead shaped island between Bithoor in Kanpur and Katri Pariyar in Unnao, a group of irregularly shaped riverine islands and sandbars near Domanpur Village of Kanpur Nagar and another group of small irregularly shaped sandbars & riverine islands near Atal Ghat and Sarsaiya Ghat. The district has a few erosion-prone sites near Akhin Ghat,

Bithoor, Domanpur, Najabgarh and Saraiyya Ghat.

The important tributaries of Ganga in this district are Isan (flows through Bilhaur), Nun (rises from the swampy tracks of Bilhaur) and Pandu River (rises in Farrukhabad). Kanpur Nagar falls in the Central Plain Zone/ Upper Gangetic Plain Region with the major soils being deep, fine soils moderately saline and sodic; deep, loamy soils and deep, loamy soils associated with sandy soils. It also has 1527 wetlands covering an area of about 14770 ha like Rahanas Jheel (considered as holy as the Ganga), Moti Jheel (developed by the British for drinking purposes) and Jhakar-kati Talab. The floodplain region and riverine islands here have riparian grasses like *Kaans, Moonj* and *Durwa.* The common tree species in study region include *Babool, Neem, Peepal* and Banyan among which *Peepal* and Banyan were also found associated with various religious sites.

One can occasionally sight Gangetic dolphins and turtles in this stretch of the river, while Nilgai and Wild Boars can be found in the floodplains. Amongst the birds, one can spot White Throated Kingfisher, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Bank Myna, Common Babbler, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove and White Wagtail.

Fishing, boat making and production of bricks in kilns are important sources of livelihood for local residents. Boat making activity can be observed at Sarsaiya Ghat. While *Sakhua (Shorea robusta)* is the chief wood choice in these boats, other options such as Babool and Mango are also explored depending upon prices and availability. The average cost of a boat ranges between Rs. 50,000 – Rs. 1 lakh depending upon various factors.



Small Wooden Boats Employed For Fishing And Transportation

Issan Nadi

Fishing Nets Set Up Using Wooden Sticks And Saccharum Grasses

CHAPTER **20**

RAEBAREILLY

Land of Bangles & Acrobats

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Raebareilly
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Raebareli District in Central Uttar Pradesh, created by the British in 1858, is bounded on the north by Lucknow and on the east by Amethi. The southern boundary is formed by the Ganga which separates it from Fatehpur. While on the south-east there is Pratapgarh, Unnao lies on the west. The district, spread over 4043 sq. kms. has been divided into seven *tehsils* - Lalganj, Dalmau, Unchahar, Raebareli, Maharajganj, Tiloi and Salon. Out of these, only Lalganj, Dalmau and Unchahar *tehsils* lie along the banks of river Ganga. Tiloi and Solon *Tehsils* were later removed from Raebareli district and included in Amethi district. Ganga river flows along the southern boundary of Raebareli for approximately 90 kms.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

It is said that Raebareli was a part of the Kosala *Mahajanapada* whose capital was Ayodhya, close to Raebareli. The remains of Buddhist *stupas* under the Fort of Shankerpur also shed light on the region's Buddhist history. The region saw the rule of the Mauryas, Sungas and Guptas, the artefacts of which period have been unearthed from Dalmau. But in the post-Gupta period, the

The Ganga in Raebareli

Pumpkins Harvested In Floodplains

ancient Bhar tribes ruled over this region. In the 12th century CE, they were overthrown by the Rajputs who were subdivided to administer different parts of the district. The Bais Rajputana clan undertook the southern and western parts, the Kanhpurias took over the east and Amethis the north.

In 1390 CE, Raja Bal and Dal Dev came to power in Dalmau. Raja Dal also built a fort along the banks of Ganga, with the river acting as a natural defence but was defeated by the ruler of Jaunpur. The Sheikhs, Sayyids and other Jaunpur allies were rewarded with *zamindari* estates in and around Dalmau. In 1417 CE, Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur restored the Dalmau Fort. He built the eastern part of the fort, comprising a gateway. Under the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar in the 16th century CE, Raebareli was divided into two *subahs* (provinces), and between three *sirkars* - Manikpur in *subah* of Allahabad, and Awadh and Lucknow in the Subah of Awadh. As per Ain-e-Akbari, the fort of Raja Dal was in existence.

In 18th century CE, Raebareli was under the Nawabs of Awadh since it was adjacent Lucknow. Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab Wazir of Awadh built a residence at Dalmau where his son Sadat Ali Khan was born in 1752 CE. The structure no longer exists.

In February, 1856, the district came under the Awadh region annexed by Captain Burrow. With this annexation, Rana Beni Madho Baksh Singh, an officer of Nawab of Awadh Wajid Ali Shah, was forced to surrender his villages, forts and arms to the British under the Summary Settlement of 1856 CE. This turned him against the British and he swore his allegiance to the Nawab's wife Begum Hazrat Mahal and her 12-year-old son Birjis Qadr, the new heir of Lucknow. Madho played a vital role in the Revolt of 1857. With the rebellion successfully unwinding in the region, Bijris Qadr appointed him as the administrator of Jaunpur and Azamgarh. The British briefly lost control of the region. The *taluqdars* became independent rulers. They either extended their territories or attacked the neighbouring estates. The

Kanhpurias of Nain, who also ruled over Arkha also actively participated in the revolt. A note about Rana Beni Madho in the Rai Bareli Gazetteer of 1905 summarizes that the Rana "professed a great zeal for the cause of the deposed king and maintained an obstinate resistance to the last." In 1858, Sir Colin Campbell recaptured Awadh.

Raebareli saw significant activity during the Indian freedom struggle. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya visited the region in 1921 CE. During the 1942 Quit India Movement, there were mass arrests, lathi charges and police firing against the freedom fighters. The police at the Saraini Police Station opened fire against the crowd gathered in protest against the arrest of a local Congress worker, killing a freedom fighter named Audan Singh.

Mythological Links

The Name *of* Raebareli

It is believed that the region is named after the Bhar tribes thus named Bharauli or Barauli that became Bareli. They were the initial rulers of this region. Rai may have come from Rahi, which was a village located 5 kms from Raebareli city or named after the Rai community, from whom the Kayastha community and Manihars emerged.

Dal Dev

Bhar chieftain Dal Dev who ruled over Dalmau sought the hand of the daughter of Baba Haji, a Saiyid under the rule of Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi. A fight ensued as the latter was not happy with the alliance. On the day of Holi, Dal Dev was killed by the Sultan. The Bhars mourned the death of their leader and vowed not to celebrate the festival. Even today, the Bhar descendants inhabiting Dalmau skip the festival in his memory and celebrate it 3 to 5 days later. The cenotaph of Dal Dev was erected around two miles away from Dalmau, in Pakharauli, where the Ahir community offers milk in the month of *Sawan*. The Ahir women of the Bharotia *gotra* gave up wearing nose rings and glass bangles to commemorate this fateful defeat of their leader.

Events *of* Interest

Fair *at the* Tomb *of* Makhdum Badr-ud-din

In the 13th century CE under the rule of Sultan Iltutmish of Mamluk Dynasty, Makhdum Badr-ud-din, an officer of the royal court, ruled over Dalmau which flourished under his stronghold. His tomb was built in the northern outskirts of Dalmau. A grand fair is held at this spot on the last Monday of Baisakhi.

It is believed that the region is named after the Bhar tribes thus named Bharauli or Barauli that became Bareli

Kartik Poornima Fair

Devotees throng the ghats of Dalmau to celebrate Kartik Poornima and a grand fair takes place where they take a dip in the waters of the Ganga.

People who Fascinate

Rana Beni Madho

Rana Beni Madho was an officer of Wajid Ali Shah, the Nawab of Awadh, who remained loyal to the throne fighting valiantly against the British in the Revolt of 1857. Raebareli houses some landmarks and memorials erected in his memory. A tamarind tree in the premises of the magistrate's office in Mustafabad, a village in Raebareli, stood as a mark of the local participation in the Revolt of 1857. About 22 rebels, including Mir Baqar, a close aide of Rana Beni Madho, were hung from this tree for their alleged rebellion and non-cooperation with the British government. Rana Beni Madho Singh's bravery has been immortalised by the local poet Dulare.

Suryakant Tripathi Nirala

Legendary Hindi poet Suryakant Tripathi Nirala spent a significant time in Dalmau studying the works of Tulasidas. Local legends are replete with instances of him spending his time by the *ghat* and on the terrace of the ruined Dalmau Fort. One of his most famous works, Kulli Bhaat is a memoir and an account of his friendship with Kulli Bhaat of Dalmau.

Mulla Da'ud

Mulla Da'ud was a famous Sufi poet who lived in Dalmau. He is credited with composing Chandayan, a Sufi *prem akhyan* (love story) composed in Awadhi in 1379 CE. In one of the verses, he mentions Dalmau located on the banks of the river Ganga as being a "colourful city, with forts on hills, the Ganga flowing below. Good, conscientious people lived there, Sophisticated, connoisseurs of arts, well-reputed."

Monuments *that* Matter

The region has yielded important archaeological finds like Northern Black Polished Ware artefacts at Madan Tusi. A gold statue of Kartikeya (God of War) has also been excavated. The religious and older residential buildings in Rae Bareli are mostly built in Lakhori brick. Substantial built heritage -57% dates back to 19th century CE, 15% of the historic structures were built in 18th century CE and 26% of the total number were built in 20th century CE. Though many sites are historic, the buildings have been re-constructed in recent years.

Historic Town of Dalmau

Dalmau is a historic town of Raebareli district flanked by many sacred and important sites like Bada Matth, Chotta Matth and the two *ghats* - Zenana Ghat of the Mughals and Pakka Ghat. Near Bada Matth is the Dalmau Ganga Bridge connecting Raebareli to the neighbouring Fatehpur. It has the historic Dalmau Fort built by Bhar chieftain Raja Daldev around the 14th century CE. The fort is located on a mound, about 100 feet high. It is said to have been built on the ruins of two Buddhist *stupas* whose remains are visible. In the 15th century CE, the fort went into the hands of the Sultans of Jaunpur. Another structure erected near the banks of Ganga in Dalmau was a masonry well and a garden erected by Jaunpur Sultan Ibrahim Sharqi. The garden had the tomb of his grandson Muhammad Shah known as Maqbara-e-Shah-e-Sharqi. Several other landmarks punctuate Dalmau, including the *baithak* of local heroes Alhaa Udal.

Ghats & Temples *of* Raebareli

The Raebareli district riverfront is mostly covered in forests. Many temples and *chattris* are built along it. Over the years, rulers and *zamindar* chieftans built *ghats* steps for easy access to the river. The river along Raebareli district did not contribute much to the trade of the region. Thus, there is no bridge across Ganga. Ferries continue to ply for tourists and pilgrims. It is interconnected with Baksar Ghat, Daundia Khera, Unnao district. The district has many important *ghats* like the Sankat Mochan Ghat, Pathwari Ghat, Gaura Ghat, Mahabeeran Ghat, Raj Niwas Ghat, Pakka Ghat, Gola Ghat and Maharishi Gokarna Ghat. Rae Bareli also has about 70 Shiva temples dating to the 19th and early 20th century CE, given its location on the banks of the Ganga.

The Raebareli district riverfront is mostly covered in forests. Many temples and chattris are built along it

Musapur Garhi- Lalganj

Lalganj was founded by Lalji Singh of Simarpaha in the early 19th century CE. Due to the presence of river Ganga, Lalganj was described as "a flourishing little market town" that served as the second-most-important *bazaar* in the district, after Raebareli. It hosted markets twice a week and traded hides, cloth, and oilseeds with Kanpur through river Ganga. The

Mahabeeran Ghat, Dalmau

Musapur Garhi is the residence of the descendants of Lalji Singh. The entrance is flanked by two Burj-like structures having an octagonal plan with two ribbed domes on the first floor. The ground floor façade has an arcaded veranda (lying on the left side) framed with a series of three multifoliate arches.

Mahal Khajur Raja-Lalganj

Khajur Village is in *tehsil* Lalganj and this grand palace could be the residence of one of the *zamindars*. It is flanked by two high cenotaphs on either side. It leads to a rectangular courtyard. The public court with the first and second-floor plan recedes inwards with respect to the ground floor footprint.

Qabristan & Imambada-Unchahar

Its entry is marked by a rectangular opening built within a multifoliate arch. The north-facing façade has blind multifoliate arches supported over square columns. It has a vaulted roof resting over a rectangular base. It has inverted lotuses on the top. Over the upper edge of the plinth, it has a band of *pan-patta motifs*.

Arkha Kothi- Unchahar

The town of Arkha formerly belonged to the Kanhpurias of Nain, but it was then held by a prosperous body of Kath Bais Zamindars, the descendants of Gur Bakhsh Singh, who was responsible for the first regular settlement. The Arkha Kothi is a private residence located on the east of Arkha Town. It is accessed through an entrance porch framed with centred arches. An arcaded corridor leads towards the veranda framed with a series of multifoliate arches. It is a double-storied building having three courtyards.

Mahesh Vilas Palace, Shivgarh

The Mahesh Vilas Palace was built in 1942 CE by Raja Bharkandi Mahesh Pratap Singh. The royal Rajput family had relocated to Uttar Pradesh from Bengal. The family at first lived in a mansion on the land granted to them until Raja Mahesh Pratap built this palace on the same

premises. It was designed after the Lalgarh Fort of Bikaner, Rajasthan, with typical Rajputana elements such as the cupola-like *chattris* – domed circular or polygonal balconies with a decorative roof and arched openings – that jut out on the top. It flaunts a decorative façade with 60 marble pillars, made from Carrara marble from Italy, alternating with arched openings. The premises also houses another small palace with elaborate stucco work that served as the royal family's erstwhile residence. The palace complex also has a Shiva temple and a *hammam* adjoining the oldest house. The *hammam* is stone-lined with a square plan and covered with a *chattri*.

Shaheed Smarak Sthal, Munshiganj

This memorial has been erected in the memory of the farmers who lost their lives while participating in the Kisan Andolan Movement protesting against repressive British policies. On 7th January 1921, a mass killing of farmers took place here.

Shankerpur Durga Temple

The Durga temple in Shankerpur is a lesser-known site said to be patronized by Rana Beni Madho Singh, a devout follower of the Goddess Durga. The complex also has a statue of Rana Beni Madho with a plaque bearing the family tree of the Saibasi Rajput clan.

Revtiram Talab

People believe that this artificial lake was made by a Raja Hariprasad from Nasirabad, around the mid-19th century CE. Local legend suggests that the Raja proposed the lake to provide water to the farmers, but the water kept drying up. He got seven wells dug but in vain. He consulted a sage who prophesied that the lake would only bear water if a child is sacrificed on the site. Coincidentally a baby had been born in the household of Lala Revati Ram, a local villager. He agreed to give up his child, after which, the lake was filled with water and did not dry up ever since then.

Nature's Abundance

Raebareli comprises a gently undulating landscape. A drainage channel runs across the region which divides it into 5 distinct topographies - Ganga *Khadar* (low lying alluvial zone between the current and old courses of the Ganga), Southern clay tract (stiff clay, interspersed with broad and shallow swamps having high water table), Ganga uplands (fertile light loamy soil), Northern clay tract and Central tract (along river Sai).

Ganga River enters Raebareli near Sarhapur and Bhagwatganj Village (Lalganj *Tehsil*) after crossing Unnao. A branch of Sharda Canal named Purwa Branch runs parallel to River throughout the district. The major rivers in Rae Bareli are Sai (tributary of Gomti, rising in Hardoi), Bakulahi (originates from interconnected series of *tals* namely - Khair Tal, Barna Tal, Gaurhi Tal, Panhi Tal, Lal Tal and Manjhihar Tal) and Loni (the only tributary of the Ganga here; it originates in Unnao). Besides, 11 minor streams identified within the study area drain into the Ganga. A paleochannel of the river is fading and dried between Baksar, Gahrauli and Gonda. The study area has 122 wetlands like Bara Tal (remnant of the Bakulahi river near Saistabad and Simauri villages; its depth is around 18-20 feet), Barhat Tal (near Kodau Ka Purwa and Pakhrauli villages; it is spread over 12 ha) and Baraila Tal (near Barauli and Jahanganj in Unnao; spread over 59 ha, its depth is around 5-7 feet). But there are 12 lateral erosion sites within the study area in places like near Raebareli-Pratapgarh Border, Kalyani, Gangagarh, Near Kharauli, Near Kharauli, Near Kakora.

The pattern of riparian vegetation in Raebareli is similar to the

Samaspur has six wetlands, of which five are interconnected while one is standalone. More than 75,000 birds flock to this wetland

adjoining districts of Unnao, Fatehpur, Pratapgarh and Kaushambi where *Dhak*, Mango, *Mahua, Neem, Babool*, Banyan or *Bargad, Peepal* and *Jamun* can be found. Out of these, the *Mahua* trees can be found in enormous patches, their average age being 30-40 years. Traditionally, *Mahua* is known to cure headache and skin diseases. But the local communities also collect and dry *Mahua* flowers to prepare *Mahua Daaru* (Wine) which contains 20%-40% alcohol. Riparian vegetation is shrinking in many areas due to several factors like the construction of brick kilns which are concentrated in areas like Chahotar, Santkhera, Habatpur, Bhojpur, Chimnkhera, Gobindpur, Jhakthera, Pure Gopal, Lakhangaon, Ambara Paschim, Bajpeipur, Balbhadrapur, Chamrauli, Dalmau, Salempur, Kandharpur, Isalmpur and Bisnudaspur.

The faunal diversity along Ganga, Loni, Chop and Shahabad Reserve Forest includes Fox, Hare, Indian Porcupine, Golden Jackal, Nilgai, Indian Wild Boar, Indian Mole Rat, Common Mongoose, Rhesus Macaque and Langur. Along the riverine islands and sandbars, one can randomly sight the Brown Roofed Turtle which falls under "Near Threatened" Category and Indian Soft-shell Turtle under "Endangered" by IUCN. The Gangetic Dolphins can be seen in the monsoon and post-monsoon season between the Ganga-Pandu and Ganga-Loni confluences. Nilgais and Wild Boars are also found in this habitat. The bird species are similar to the ones found in the adjoining districts. Fishing is an important livelihood source for the Mallah community. The Mallahs are boatmen who also engage in activities like ferrying local people and fishing, especially in the post-monsoon season when they can catch Rohu, Catla, Tengara and Chinese carp amongst other fishes.

Samaspur Bird Sanctuary

The Samaspur Bird Sanctuary is a perennially wet lowland marsh near Salon. Spread over 780 hectares, it was established and notified in 1987. It is home to about 250 species of resident and migratory birds, some

Flock Of Sarus Crane and Painted Storks In Bada Taal

of which migrate over more than 5000 km from as far away as Siberia. Samaspur has six wetlands, of which five are interconnected while one is isolated. More than 75,000 birds flock to this wetland, fostering endangered bird species like the Egyptian Vulture, Pallas's Fishing Eagle, and more than 1% of the South Asian population of the Common Pochard.

Traditional Fishing Activity At Baraila Tal

CHAPTER 21

FATEHPUR
Doab Country

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Fatehpur
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Fatehpur District has an area of 4,152 sq km. Fatehpur was established as a district in 1826, taking fertile land lying in between River Ganga and River Yamuna also known as *Doab*. The district's name is traced to Fatehmand Khan who is supposed to have founded the town. It is based on a fragmentary inscription found at Denda Sai, in *Tehsil* Khaga, to the effect that Fatehmand Khan, an officer of the Delhi Sultans, obtained a *farman* from him in 1519 CE .

Fatehpur town is the district headquarter for administrative purposes. It is situated between two important cities, Prayagraj and Kanpur. The district is surrounded by Ganga and Yamuna Rivers on the north and south boundaries and is bordered by Unnao, Raebareli and Pratapgarh (for a short length) in the north, Kaushambi District in the east, Chitrakoot, Banda and Hamirpur District in the south and Kanpur Nagar District in the west.

Ganga River enters Fatehpur District near Benikhera Village (Devmai Block) after crossing Kanpur District (right bank) and Unnao District (left bank). Length of Ganga River in Fatehpur District is approximately 75 km, while its width varies between 0.3 Km (Between Garhi and Dalmau) to 2.0 km (near Khargupur Bargala). The active floodplain of Ganga River in Fatehpur District is under cultivation (mainly Rabi and Zaid) except few

Saccharum and *Babool* dominated riparian vegetation. The riverine islands are intact, stabilised by riparian grasses up to 2 metres high.

Re-living *the* Past

Fatehpur has a rich historical past as it has been the native place of many freedom fighters and well-known Urdu and Hindi poets. The population of this place is mixed because it was ruled by both Hindu and Islamic rulers in the past and Indo-Islamic architecture is also reflected in some of its sites of significant heritage value. The languages spoken here in contemporary times are the dialects of Awadhi, Hindi, and Urdu.

The name Fatehpur, according to local tradition is derived from a battle won by Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur over Raja Sita Nand of Athgarhia. It is also to be noted that there is another derivation of the name, traced to Fatehmand Khan who is believed to have founded the town. A large part of the district was ruled by the Rajas of Argai and formed part of the Kannauj Kingdom. During the rule of early Mughal kings, this region was included in the province of Kora and in the 15th century period, it was also part of the short lived kingdom of Jaunpur. During the times of the rule of Akbar, the western half of the present Fatehpur District was part of the *sarkar* of Kora. Later on, during the slow decline of of the Mughal rule, Fatehpur was given to the district of Awadh. This place was also ruled by the Marathas during 1736-1750. Then, it was taken over by the Pathans of Fatehpur. Three years later it was annexed by Safdarjung. Lastly, in 1801 it was ceded to British East India Company in India.

Mahua Plantation

The most significant personalities include Deputy Collector Hiqat Ullah Khan who was deputed in the district during the 1857 Revolt and he was also included in the army of Nana Saheb Peshwa. Hiqat Ullah Khan was later captured by the British and given the death sentence. Other revolutionaries included Dariyaw Singh, martyr of Fatehpur district who was sentenced to death by the Colonial Government, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, a freedom fighter influenced by Gandhian ideology, Thakur Jodha Attaya, a freedom fighter who played a significant role in the 1857 struggle and was hanged from an *Imli* (tamarind) Tree with 51 other rebels. This tree still exists and is known as *Bawani Imli*.

Events *of* Interest

Fairs and festivals in India are celebrated as part of life; so too in Fatehpur. The prominent fairs of this place include Sheetla Devi Fair in Hussainganj held in *Chaitra*,

Mahadeva's Fair in Budwaraman in Shivratri, Ramlila Fair in *Kartik* at Kishunpur, Ramlila Fair in Kwar in Jehanabad, *Ashadh* and *Aghan* Cattle Fair in Shivrajpur on the banks of river Ganga. In addition to this, fairs are also organised wherein people gather to take a holy dip in the river. It is believed that bathing in the holy water of the Ganga absolves people of sins and brings release from the cycle of life and death.

The festivals celebrated at Fatehpur are Diwali, Dusshera, Rakshabandhan, Shivratri, Bhai Dooj, and Bharat Fair, Muharram, Eid, Bakr Id, Eid-Al-Adha, Rabi-Al-Awwal Procession and Chehelom.

Art *at the* Heart

Brass

Fatehpur is well known for its brass handicrafts industry and it is an integral part of its identity. The art and skill of mining, smelting and working of metals was developed thousands of years ago. The art of brass metal work is practised in India since ancient times. Indian metal crafts are well known around the world and are still quite famous. The traditional method behind this craft involves sand casting and lost wax technique. The craftsman transforms and moulds sheets of brass into wonderful objects of art.

Wood

Apart from brass handicrafts, Fatehpur is also known for wooden handicrafts.

Textile & others

Other than these traditional crafts, Fatehpur is also known for the textiles (primarily for bed sheets), leather products, paper and paper products.

Performing Traditions

The performing arts popular in the district of Fatehpur include Kajri, Dadra. Kajri dance is one of the most popular folk dances in Uttar Pradesh. This dance is performed just before the arrival of monsoon to express joy and happiness. Kajri is performed along with the swing songs.

Gastronomic Delights

Food and cuisine in Fatehpur are a combination of Awadhi and Mughal styles of cooking. Awadhi style cuisine reflects finesse, refinement and sophistication associated with the Nawabi way of life. Dum-Pukht style of cooking food is considered the characteristic of Awadhi Cooking. Dum-Pukht style involves cooking in a heavy bottomed vessel with its lid sealed and left over a low fire for several hours. On the other hand, Mughlai cuisine is renowned for delicacies and the rich and aromatic flavour of the food. In Mughal style of cooking, there is extensive use of spices like saffron, cardamom, black pepper, dry fruits and nuts and using cream and butter in preparation of curry bases.

Traditional foods, mainly sweets, are given much importance in Fatehpur. The style of cooking food delicacies in Fatehpur is quite similar to the north Indian style of cooking. Mawa Pedas and Jalebi of this region are well known.

Dum-Pukht style involves cooking in a heavy bottomed vessel with its lid sealed and left over a low fire for several hours

The Bawani Imli Smarak is a symbol of tribute and respect to the sacrifices of the freedom fighters

People who Fascinate

Famous personalities of this place who have promoted the heritage of music and tradition of the region include the famous Saint Riyaz Ahmed Naqshbandi.

Thakur Jodha Singh Attaya

Thakur Jodha Singh Attaya is one of the important and revered persons who participated in the first war of independence. Thakur Jodha Singh Attaya was a rich person from Rasulpur village. He started guerrilla warfare against the British at the call of Nana Saheb. Dariyawa Singh and Shivdayal Singh also helped him in the struggle. Freedom fighter Jodha Singh attacked and captured the government treasury at Fatehpur on 10th June, 1857. He was a mere 20 years old when he joined the struggle. On 9th December, 1857, Jodha Singh along with 51 other revolutionaries surrounded and attacked the Tehsil Office in Jehanabad and imprisoned the *Tehsildar*. The British launched a massive operation to capture Jodha Singh and 51 other revolutionaries. To instil fear amongst the local people, they were all hanged on a tamarind tree on 28th April, 1858. This monument is called *Bawani* (52) *Imli* because 52 people were hanged here. The *Imli* tree still exists; people believe that the growth of the tree stopped after the massacre.

Badshahi Bagh and Pavillion, built by Aurangzeb in Khajuha.

Sohan Lal Diwedi

Sohan Lal Diwedi was born in 1905 in Bindki sub division of this district and was also honoured with the title of Rashtrakavi. He published several compendiums like Bhairavi, Pooja Geet, Prabhati, Yugadhar, Kunal, Chetna and Basuri. Hum Balveer and Andheri Raath are two of his other famous and important works. He was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his ideology.

Monuments *that* Matter

Thakur Dwara Mandir

The temple is located at Shamshai Ghat at Fatehpur and is situated at a distance of a kilometre from the banks of Ganga River. It is said that the foundation stone of this temple was laid under the patronage of Mira Bai, the devotee of Lord Krishna. It is also known as Mira Kumarika Sthal and an idol of Girdhar Gopal (Lord Krishna) placed here has been brought from Chittorgarh, Rajasthan.

Ram Sita Lakshman Temple

This temple is situated at Shamshai Ghat on the banks of river Ganga. At this temple, a gold idol of Ram, Sita and Lakshman was placed by a *Za-*

mindar (Landlord) of Khanpur. This is a very calm place to meditate and worship God to seek blessings.

Bade Shivala Mandir

Bade Shivala Mandir is located at Rewari Buzurg village and is around 4 km from the Ganga Ghat. This ancient temple is believed to be in existence from the past 2000 years.

Baba Brahmshila Mandir

The temple is found near the Adampur Ghat. It is situated at a distance of 100 metres from the banks of river Ganga. This sacred complex was established in 1628 under the patronage of Maharaja Govindrai.

Rani Ka Talab

One of the *kunds*, called Rani ka Talab is found in Haswa, known as Haswa Nagar, and famous for its artistic and unique architecture. Its unique design and workmanship are admirable. This pond was built in 1871 by Rani Gomati Kunwar, daughter of landlord Lala Ram Ghulam. Rani Gomati Kunwar was married to Raja Rai Bahudar Amarnath of Phulpur state in Prayagraj. Their union ended due to Raja Amarnath's demise and the responsibility of Phulpur State was given to Babu Gaya Prasad. It is said that a similar *kund* was constructed by Rani Gomti Kuver at Phulpur state, identical to the one at Haswa. The main purpose of construction of these *kunds* was conservation of water and enabling women to bath discreetly, with a provision of changing rooms.

Ghats *of* Fatehpur

Fatehpur is well known for its *ghats*, among them, Bhitaura and Asani are very famous. Adampur Ghat is also well known among its devotees. There are many ancient temples located in the vicinity of this *ghat*. Om Ghat, Bhitaura, is the block headquarters situated at the banks of the Ganga. This is the place where renowned saint Bhrigu worshipped for a long time.

A school of Vedic education and learning is also present here, named as Bhrigu Ved Vidyalaya. This school conducts a 7 year course in Vedic education. At Om Ghat, Om is chanted day and night.

Shiv Temple, Shivrajpur

Temples Along Asni Ghat

Nature's Abundance

Ganga River bank in Fatehpur district is populated with built-up area (Settlements, Temple Complexes, cremation sites and burial ground), vegetation (plantation and riparian vegetation patches) and agricultural fields. Out of three classes, the vegetation area especially the riparian vegetation area along the River Ganga and streams/Nara is decreasing day by day due to conversion of riparian zone into the agricultural fields and cutting of trees and shrubs for fuel wood and for cremation.

The newly developed agricultural fields can be easily seen along Ganga River near Adampur, Chandpur, Garhi, Ram Nagar and Chak Pure. River bank area, which has recently been converted into agricultural fields, is prone to lateral erosion. Rills and gullies may also develop in such areas. The river bank which is vegetated is stable compared to agriculture and building dominated area.

Rani ka Talab

Baskets Made From Saccharum And Bamboo Plants from the Riverbank

CHAPTER 22

PRATAPGARH
Land of Amla

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Pratapgarh
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Pratapgarh District extends for some 110 kilometres from west to east. It is bounded on the north by the District of Sultanpur, on the south by Allahabad, on the east by Jaunpur, on the west by Fatehpur and north-west by Rae Bareilly. In the south-west the Ganges forms the boundary of the District for about 50 km separating it from Fatehpur and Allahabad and in the extreme north-east the Gomti forms the boundary for about 6 km.

Pratapgarh, one of the oldest Districts of Uttar Pradesh, came into existence in the year 1858. Its headquarters was established at Belha, which came to be known as Belha Pratapgarh, the name Belha presumably being derived from the temple of Belha Bhawani on the bank of River Sai. The district is named after Raja Pratap Bhadur Singh, a local ruler, between 1628–1682, located his capital at Rampur near the old town of Aror. There he built a *garh* (fort) and called it Pratapgarh after himself. Subsequently, the area around the fort became known as Pratapgarh.

Ganga River enters Pratapgarh District near Murassapur Village (Kalakankar Block) after crossing Raebareli District and Fatehpur District. The length of Ganga River in Pratapgarh District is approximately 49 km, while its width varies between 0.3 Km (near Duar-Ganga confluence) to 3.75 km (near Shahpur). The active floodplain of Ganga River in Prat-

Badi Masjid, Malaka Razakpur

apgarh District is under cultivation with stretches of riparian grass (upto 2m high) which has also stabilised the riverine island.

Re-living *the* Past

The name of Bela Pratapgarh has been taken from the temple of Bela Bhowani, located on the banks of River Sai. This river originates at a sprawling pond, named Bhijwan Jheel on the hilltop of a village in Hardoi District.

Pratap Singh (1628-1682), a local *raja*, established his headquarter at Rampur. Raja Pratap Singh built a fort that came to be known as Pratapgarh fort after his own name. The early history of the district dates back to pre-historic age. The archaeological excavations at Sarai Nahar in Tehsil Kunda have found human skeletons along with animal bones and small stone implements probably of Neolithic age that are dated around 8000 BCE; and the ruins of the numerous buildings, monuments makes it evident that this region was thriving since early times.

During the period of Ramayana, District Pratapgarh was also part of prosperous Kosala kingdom. It is believed that Kosala was ruled by kings descended from the sun dynasty, one of these kings was Rama whose capital was Ayodhya. During medieval times, this region of modern day Pratapgarh and neighbouring area was ruled by Manikchand and Kara and then by his elder brother Jayachandra of Gahadavala Dynasty. In 1192, Shihbuddin Ghori (1149-1206), Sultan of Ghurid Empire, invaded this region and established his rule and created the capital at Kara in which Pratapgarh was included. Ala-ud-din Masaud dominated the area of the present district till 1246 when he was succeeded by Nasir-ud-Mahmud (1244-1265). In about 1258, Lakhan Sen, a Sombanshi Rajput from Allahabad, established himself at Parcho Siddh and subsequently occupied the

pargana of Pratapgarh. In 1479, Sultan Bahlul Lodhi ruled this region and he was followed by Sikandar Lodhi who ruled this area till 1517. Manikpur was a place of great importance in the reign of Sher Shah Suri and after his death the district passed under the subjugation of Muhammad Adil Shah. In 1567, Khan Zaman reigned in most of Avadh including Pratapgarh district when Akbar founded Allahabad and made it the headquarters of his province. In this province of Allahabad, the present areas of Manikpur, Rajpur and Bihar were included after some administrative division and changes. In 1580 Akbar appointed Asad Khan Turkman as the in-charge of Manikpur. In 1628 Sombarshi Rajput of Lunar Dynasty, Raja Pratap Singh moved his headquarters to Rampur from Tejgarh (now Pratapgarh) and made a fort in the memory of his late father Raja Tej Singh. Chhatradhari Singh, son of Jai Singh, ruled Pratapgarh independently until 1722 when Sadat Khan Burhar-ul-Mulk was appointed governor of the province of Avadh by Mughal emperor Mohammad Shah. In the year 1759, Pratapgarh state was annexed to the dominions of the Awadh Nawabs.

The modern history of Pratapgarh primarily revolves around a record of continuous fighting between the officials of Avadh government and local Rajput chiefs for more than half a century. In 1856, Wazid-Ali- Shah's (1847-1856) rule was overturned. His territories consisting the area now covered by the present district were annexed to the East India Company. The district of Pratapgarh was then created, with headquarters situated at Bela. In June, 1920, 200 *kisans*, led by Pt. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru, marched to Allahabad to draw the attention of prominent leaders regarding their miserable condition. The Non-Co-operation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 also gained momentum side by side in the district.

Pratapgarh played a crucial role in the Quit India movement of 1942. This movement received wide support and participation of the people of Pratapgarh.

Events *of* Interest

An annual fair is held at Bela Bhawani Mandir to celebrate the festival of Navaratri and worship Maa Bhawani. In addition to this, Buddh Purnima is also celebrated at Kot Buddhist Monastery. Ambedkar Jayanti is also a big event here. Other fairs held at Pratapgarh are at Beejmata Temple and Nag Vasuki Temple during the occasion of Nag Panchami. Magh Mela and Ajgar fair are also celebrated here.

The festivals celebrated at Pratapgarh are Diwali, Dusshera, Rakshabandhan, Shivratri, Bhai Dooj, Bharat Fair and Islamic festivals include Muharram, Eid, Bakr Id, Eid Aladha, Rabi-Al-Awwal procession and Chehelom.

During the period of Ramayana, District Pratapgarh was also part of prosperous Kosala kingdom

Art *at the* Heart

Pottery & Woodwork

The traditional crafts of Pratapgarh include Pottery, Woodwork and Wood Carving. Pottery is one of the most important traditional crafts. This traditional craft is found in the Raniganj area of the Pratapgarh. People here are earning their living through the craft of pottery-making.

Performing Arts

The performing arts include Nautanki, Kajri, Dadra. Nautanki is one of the most popular folk performances of Pratapgarh. Nautanki is the biggest form of entertainment in the villages and towns of Northern India; it typically has a humorous and entertaining story line and has a strong presence in the rural region of Pratapgarh.

The seasonal folk songs are *Hori* or *Phag* in spring, *Malhar* and *Kajri* in the rainy season. Mushairas and Kavi Sammelans, gatherings where Urdu and Hindi poets recite their poems, are also very popular here, especially in urban areas.

Gastronomic Delights

Amla

Pratapgarh cultivates more than 80% of Amla that is exported and also sold across India. Amla and its products are a major part of the district's identity and there are a number of food processing units in Pratapgarh that convert Amla into Amla Burfi and Amla laddu and other products made from Amla, like Amla Churan, Amla Powder, Candy etc.

Amla is a major source of vitamin C and antioxidants, and is quite helpful in increasing immunity and boosting the metabolism of the body. Pushpanjali sweets are very famous in Pratapgarh for taste and authenticity. Pushpanjali Gram Udyog Seva Samiti in Pratapgarh is one of the organisations that also employs mainly women.

In addition to this, Pratapgarh is also quite well-known for Mughlai and Awadhi food, both in vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

Pratapgarh cultivates more than 80% of Amla that is exported and also sold across India

People who Fascinate

Rajkumar Lal Pratap Singh Bisen

Rajkumar Lal Pratap Singh Bisen was a member of the Bisen Rajput dynasty of Kalakankar. He was a prominent leader in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. He was killed during the 1858 battle of Chanda. At the behest of the Begum Hazrat Mahal, Hanumant Singh raised a battalion of 1000 soldiers under the command of his eldest son Lal Pratap Singh. This battalion, called Pratap Jang rose to action in February, 1858 when the British under Sir Colin Campbell, led the capture of Lucknow.

Jumai Khan Azad

Jumai Khan Azad (5 August 1930 – 29 December 2013) was an Indian poet of Awadhi Language from Pratapgarh. He received the Awadhi Academy Award and Lokabandhu Rajnarayan Memorial Award. He was also called the Kabir of Kathari. His numerous works include Patti and Kathari, both of which were very influential works.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan

Harivansh Rai Bachchan's ancestral house was located at Babu Patti in Pratapgarh. He was a representative poet and writer of the *Nayi Kavita* (romantic upsurge) Literary Movement of early 20th century Hindi literature. He was also a poet of the Hindi Kavi Sammelan. He is best known for his early work Madhushala.

Poets of *Khari Boli,* Ram Naresh Tripathi and Ram Narayan Singh are also well known.

Tara Singh

Dr. Tara Singh (born 10th October, 1952) took special interest in dance and music as well as in writing poems since childhood. She has contributed to Hindi Literature. She is the founder president of the Hindi website Swargvibhaand.

Monuments *that* Matter

Shani Dev Temple

Shani Dev Mandir is mainly dedicated to Shani Deva and is situated at a distance of 51 km from Allahabad and 16 km from Pratapgarh. Shani Dev is believed to be the incarnation of Lord Krishna and is considered as the God of *Karma* (deeds), justice and retribution and presents results on one's thoughts, speech and deeds.

Belha Devi Temple

This temple is one of the old Hindu Shakti temples at Bela Pratapgarh situated on the banks of River Sai. In this temple, Goddess Belha Bhawani

Onsite Personalia Museum, Managed by Nirjhar Pratapgarhi

is worshipped as the incarnation of the Devi (Mother Goddess). Raja Pratap Bahudar Singh, a local king of Awadh region constructed the present temple of Shri Maa Belha Bhawani during the period of 1811-1815. Navratri Festival is celebrated here.

Bhakti Dham Mandir

Bhakti Dham shrine is situated in Tehsil Kunda of Pratapgarh District and this shrine was established by Jagadguru Kripalu Maharaj in November, 2005. The responsibility of maintenance of this shrine is in the hands of Kripalu Parishad, non-profit educational and spiritual organisation.

Ghusmeshwar Nath Dham

This sanctorum of Ghusmeshwar Nath Dham is believed to be one of the holiest pilgrimage sites of Pratapgarh district. This sacred complex is located on the banks of Sai River. In this temple, a Shiva *lingam* is worshipped and is popular by the name of Baba Ghuisarnath Dham.

Baba Bhayaharan Nath Dham

Baba Bhayaharan Nath Dham is one of the ancient temples of Lord Shiva situated in the village of Katra Gulab Singh on the banks of Bakulakhi River. A beautiful lake called Shiv Ganga Lake, that mesmerizes pilgrims and travellers, is also situated near the temple.

Ajgara Baba Mandir

Ajgara Baba Mandir is one of the ancient temples which holds much relevance from a religious perspective. Every year an annual fair of three days is held here and traditional rituals are performed. It is believed that Bhima had a conflict with Ajagara here; later Yuddhisthir had a word with him and Ajgara was finally given *moksha* or salvation from all his past wrong doings. From that time onwards, this place is known as Ajgara and has a temple known as Ajgara Dham.

Yaksh Yudhisthir Samvad Sthal is a spot where antiquities of the Mesolithic period were accidentally found during ploughing by villagers in year 2021. It is claimed that the idols, horns and small tools found in the rubble are ten thousand years old. There are two mounds near the pond at the mythical Yaksha-Yudhisthir site in Ajgara. One is Dihwa mound and the other is a small mound. Earlier antiquities have been found at Dihwa Tila. So far, the antiquities of Shunga-Kushan period have been found on this mound.

Archaeological & Folk Art Museum, Pratapgarh

Yaksha Cult and folk culture in Ancient India finds representation in this museum at Ajgara-Yudhishthira Samvad Sthal.

Ghats *of* Pratapgarh

A prominent *ghat* of Pratapgarh is Pakka Ghat located at Manipur Kund in Pratapgarh. This *ghat* is also known as Pratap Manikpur Ganga Ghat. Other significant *ghats* of this region are Kalakankar Ghat and Gai Ghat. Gai Ghat is located at the south bank of River Sai.

Nature's Abundance

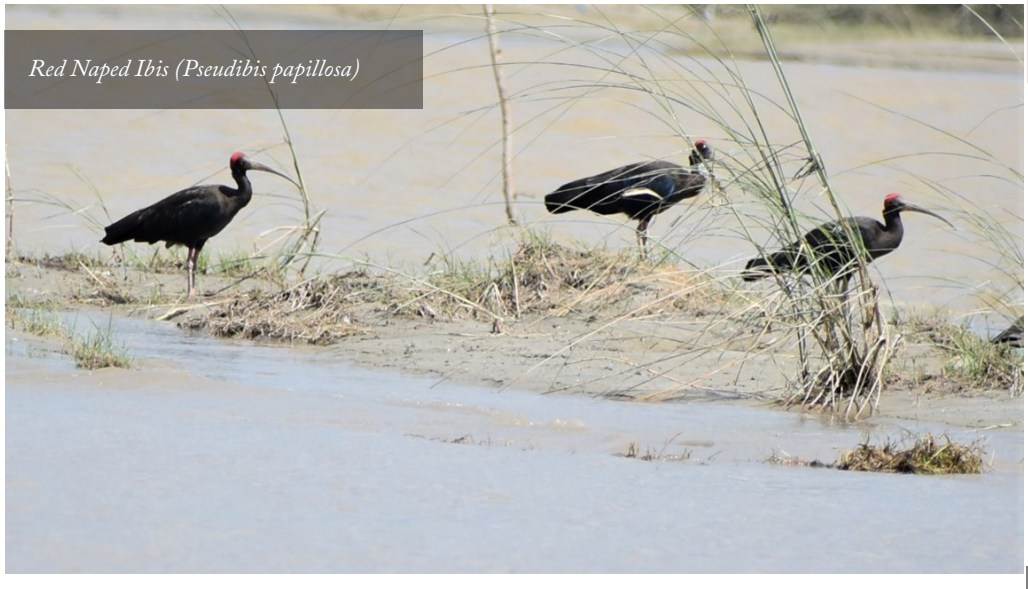
The newly developed agricultural fields are encroaching on the floodplain near Manikpur, Kalakankar, Gutni and Parsipur Village. The river bank area, which has recently con-

verted into agricultural fields, is prone to lateral erosion. Rills and gullies may also develop in such areas. The river bank between Murassapur and Nawabganj is stable.

The river bank and surrounding environ of Parsipur has been considered as sacred due to their association with events related to Lord Krishna and his friend Sudama (commemorated with a Sudama Tal and a jungle named Krishna Van). As per mythology, the area was a dense jungle where Krishna and his friend used to visit to collect fuel wood. Strong local beliefs and rituals act as catalyst for the protection of riparian patches in some areas. Apart from the riparian patches, there are several temple complexes and *ghats* along the river bank which play a vital role in the bank stability as there are several trees found to be associated with these temples.

The Krishna Van

View Of Ganga River From Sami Ghat

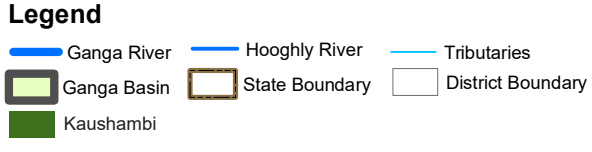


Red Naped Ibis (Pseudibis papillosa)

CHAPTER 23

KAUSHAMBI

Where the Ancient Trade Routes Met



WHERE *on the* GANGA?

District Kaushambi falls under Prayagraj Division, the district has 3 Tehsils namely, Chail, Manjhanpur and Sirathu. Out of eight blocks, four blocks namely – Kara, Sirathu, Chail and Muratganj lies in the study area. The total area of the district is 1903.17 sq km having population of 1,599,556. The district is surrounded by Pratapgarh District on the north, Prayagraj District on the east, Chitrakoot District on the south and Fatehpur District on the west. Ganga and Yamuna are the two major rivers that flow through the district. The physiography of the district is divided into two units, namely the Trans Ganga and the Yamuna Doab.

Ganga River enters Kaushambi near Afzalpur Saton Village after crossing Fatehpur District (right bank) and Rai Bareilly District (left bank). The length of Ganga River in Kaushambi is approximately 62 km, while its width varies between 0.3 Km (near village Badanpur) to 3.75 km (near Deobhita). The active floodplain of Ganga River in Kaushambi is under cultivation (mainly Rabi and Zaid crops).

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

It is believed that Kaushambi derived

Boatmaking by the Ganga

its name from *Kusum/Kosam* tree (*Schleichera Olesoa*) also known as Malay Lac Tree or Ceylon Oak. Buddhaghosha (Buddhist commentator of 5th Century A.D.) records that Kaushambi used to have a large number of *Kusam* trees along the Ganga and Yamuna rivers which got uprooted. Besides having medicinal properties, the lac of the tree is used for stitching gold ornaments since it is yellow in colour. Kaushambi is located in the Purvanchal Region, drained by river Ganga and its tributaries. Thus, it has fertile lands and verdant pastures. The district's history goes back to the mythological era. During Mahabharata, the Pandavas won the kingdom of Hastinapur. However, soon after, the settlement was washed away by Ganga. A successor of the Pandavas, shifted the capital to Kaushambi, along the banks of Ganga. One of the ancient villages to flourish along the river is Kara. It is a famous Hindu pilgrimage centre, visited by several pilgrims. The village was also visited by the Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur Singh. Thus, it also attracts Sikh pilgrims.

Ganga has also contributed to transportation, since ancient times. It connected Kaushambi with the other important trading and religious centres of the Northern Plains. During the prehistoric era, the district was a terminus for river traffic travelling along Ganga. Kaushambi was one of the six most important and prosperous towns of India. It lay at the junction of the north-south and east-west routes. Kaushambi was a main halting station for the armies of the Sultanate and Mughal period. With the introduction of the railways, the river borne trade declined.

Chail and Sirathu *Tehsils* of Kaushambi District exhibit the evolution of the historic settlements along the banks of Ganga. Thus, 17 archaeological structures were identified in Chail *Tehsil* and 80 in Sirathu *Tehsil*. One of the important towns of the *Tehsil* is Charwa, approximately 7 km from the banks of river Ganga. It is associated with Charak Muni who resided here during 1st to 2nd century CE. He composed Charak Samhita, a treatise on medicine. Two important *ghats* are Ujihani Ghat and

Badanpur Ghat. Sirathu *Tehsil* lies in the north-western part of the district. A major portion of Ganga river flows along this *Tehsil* within Kaushambi District.

Events *of* Interest

Mela Sheetla Devi

A large fair is held each year during the months of *Saawan, Chait*, and *Ashadh*. The fair is more commonly referred to as Ashtami. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims attend Ashtami each year. As part of the rituals of the pilgrimage, devotees shave their heads and bathe in the Ganga at various Ghats such as the Kubari Ghat, Kaleshvar Ghat and Hanuman Ghat. Pilgrims are divided into groups and are designated to local hosts who offer them food and shelter during their stay. Several myths about the Maa Sheetla Dham of the town Kara exist. It is believed that the Goddess Durga, here known as Sheetla Devi, arrived at an unnamed town, now known as Kara, and left her palm print on a rock. In the Sanskrit language the word hand translates to *kar* and henceforth the town was named Kara.

Khwaja Kadak Muharram Procession

Khwaja Kadak came to prominence during the reign of Alauddin Khilji. On the death anniversary of the Khwaja each year, the procession passes the porch of Khwaja's residence and proceeds towards the riverbank to fill up water, as part of the ritual. Upon returning from the river, the procession gathers again at the porch where *gaagar* (clay pot) is placed and some sugar is sprinkled onto it. The *gaagar* is then taken to the *dargah* and placed on the shrine and a *fatiha* is read, and sherbet is served to people.

Kuppi Yudh Mela *of* Daranagar

When the entire nation is busy celebrating Dussehra, at Kaushambi a different tradition is celebrated with Kuppi Yudh. The 238 year old traditional and unique Kuppi Yudh or battle is organized during Dussehra festival every year at Daranagar area of Kaushambi District. The ceremonial battle of Lord Rama and Ravana's army is staged where both "armies" fight with one another and sometimes get injured mildly. The Kuppi Mela begins a day before Dussehra. There are 20 "warriors" on both sides and to the accompaniment of music and war cries they hit each other with plastic or leather balls. A large number of residents reach the surrounding area to see the Kuppi War. In the two-day staging of the Kuppi Yudh, the battle is fought in 7 stages. In the first 4 battles, Ravana's army registers victory over Lord Rama's army and in the last 3 battles, Lord Rama's army kills Ravana and registers victory of truth over falsehood. With this victory, the residents celebrate the festival of Vijay Dashami.

Art *at the* Heart

Terracotta

One of the earliest known crafts and the one that has been found in abundance at Kaushambi is the craft of Terracotta. The supply of terracotta was ensured by the skilled potters known as *Kumbhakaras* who were organised into guilds or *srenis*. They mainly catered to the tastes of one particular class - *nagarakas*, a leisure class who consciously cultivated art. The knowledge of *kalas* (art) and *shilpas* (crafts) was a prerequisite qualification for this class. The terracottas were either produced for a seasonal festival or fertility festivals such as Shalabhanjika or Ashokabhanjika, or for sports known as *krida*. The With the progression of urbanisation, scholars have noticed an increased spate of romanticization and secularisation of the original ritual theme.

The Terracottas have been divided into two broad types both of

The Kuppi Mela begins a day before Dussehra. There are 20 fighters on both sides and along with music and chanting war cries they hit each other with light plastic or leather balls

Kokabeli is a speciality that belongs to Kara Dham or Ma Sheetla Mandir and is not found elsewhere; it is a trademark prasad of Kaushambi

which have been found in abundance at Kaushambi: Timeless, that barely register change and the Timebound, that reflect the variations that occur due to changed social conditions. It is important to note that as a flourishing urban centre situated between two historically important power centres of Mathura and Pataliputra, a host of figurines have been uncovered at Kaushambi that belonged to Buxar, Pataliputra, Mathura as well as Terra-cottas of foreign type. The types of ter-racotta unearthed are female figurines, serpents, winged lions, and charging elephants.

Gastronomic Delights

Kokabeli *(Water Lily)* Prasad

The Kokabeli grows in ponds or in water bodies. It is white in colour which is found inside the Lily flower in a granular form. These granules are extracted and after that cleaned

Kokabeli Prasad

and soaked in curd or buttermilk for a while. After a few hours, they are taken out and given to *Bhunjwa* or street hawkers to roast the Kokabeli in sand. Again after it gets roasted, the Kokabeli is cleaned and is mixed with *khoya* (dried milk solids). Once all the ingredients get mixed well, the Kokabeli is cut into the desired shape and size. Kokabeli is a speciality that belongs to Kara Dham or Ma Sheetla Mandir and is not found elsewhere; it is a trademark *prasad* of Kaushambi, it is a special *bhog* or food offering to the Devi.

Pedha

These are made of *Mawa* with carda-mom or saffron. They are decorated with silver foil or dry fruits.

Petha

The white pumpkin is soaked in water for two to three days and then cooked in flavoured sugar syrup. A wide range of flavours are available for this delicacy, like chocolate, *kesar, paan*, amongst others.

Bedmi

Bedmi is the deep fried *maida* puri stuffed with *urad dal* and *masala*. The Bedmi can be enjoyed with chutney or with any curry based dish.

Rewadi

This is a sweet delicacy. It is made out of white sesame seeds. The white *til* or sesame seeds are mixed in cardamom flavoured sugar or jaggery syrup and set to cool down. Then it is chiselled out in different shapes and sizes.

People who Fascinate

Durga Bhabhi

Durgavati Devi is known by the name of Durga Bhabhi. Durga Bhabhi may not have been punished like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru but she kept fighting during the freedom struggle shoulder to shoulder with her compatriots. Durga used to make bombs and help on the path of victory the sons of the country who took on the British.

Baba Maluk Das

Baba Maluk Das, was born on Vikrami of 1631 in the lanes of Bhagat Sthane of Kara. He belonged to a Mehnat family. He was a renowned Hindi poet of his time. A few members of his family migrated from Kara to Sirathu and then later to Allahabad, where they settled in various areas that include Kakkad Nagar, Dariyabad and Kalyani Devi. Baba Das' messages were conveyed through his poetry.

The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb heard of Baba Maluk Das' poetry and his strong belief in God. Impressed by his work, Aurangzeb expressed his desire to meet Baba Das and sent messengers from Delhi to the town of Kara to inform him of the Emperor's wish. However, several of those messengers remained in Kara and did not return to Delhi.

After several visits by Aurangzeb's messengers, Baba Das finally made the journey to Delhi to meet the emperor. Baba Das presented his vast body of work in the field of poetry and literature in the royal court and received acclaim from the emperor. An impressed Aurangzeb compared the works of Baba Das to Kabir Das.

Khwaja Kadakshah Abdul Rehmatullah Alaih

Syed Hasan, of the ruling family of Isfahan, abandoned his throne and began living in Sabzevar under a secret identity. Sometime later, Hasan and some of his close associates decided to relocate. At the beginning of the 12th century, the tribe entered Delhi through the Khyber Pass. A few days later, the group departed Delhi and via Agra reached the town of Bamrauli from where the caravan moved to Kara. Syed Ahmed saw foreign characteristics in Bamrauli and therefore, appointed Maulana Shah Muhammad Ismail Qureshi Rehmatullah Alaih as his caliph and sent him away to Kara. At Bamrauli, however, Hazrat Khwaja Khizr served Syed Ahmed some sherbet, which signified the appointment of Syed Ahmed as Khwaja. The superiors of the caravan became fond of Kara and decided to construct a house and a mosque in the town's bazaar. The house and mosque now go by the name Khwaja Kadak. Kadak is a Hindi word that translates to a loud voice. The

A view of Shiva temple along with a mosque and river Ganga

Khwaja was known to speak in a very loud voice and had a very boisterous personality in general. He was soon named Kadak Shah by the people and therefore came to be popularly known as Khwaja Syed Ahmed aka Khwaja Kadak Shah Abdel.

Khwaja Kadak came to prominence during the reign of King Alauddin Khilji. In 1288, Jalal Uddin Firuz Khilji handed over the treasury of Kara, Manikpur, to his nephew and son-in-law, Alauddin. However, the greed of succeeding to the throne led Alauddin to deceive and murder his uncle. Alauddin then took the throne in Delhi and ruled as king between 1296 and 1315. After becoming the absolute ruler, Alauddin made Ala-ul-Mulk the governor of Kara, Manikpur, who was later succeeded by Nusrat Khan.

Monuments *that* Matter

Kubri Ghat

The Kubri Pucca Ghat is always a lively place with cultural and religious activities happening round the year; which include fairs and festivals along with the performance of sacred rituals. This is a very important *ghat* of Kaushambi District and is the biggest *ghat*. Devotees begin related activities by performing rituals at Kubri Ghat.

Kaleshwar Ghat

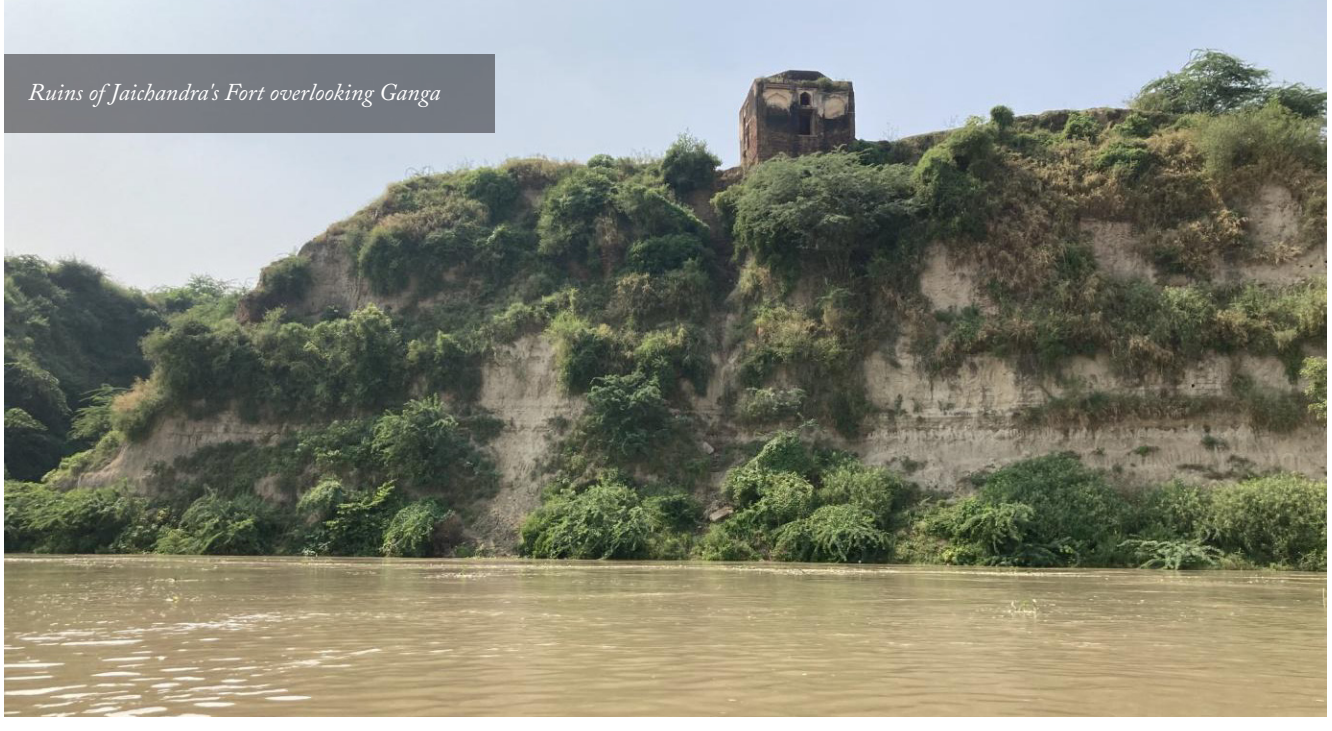
The Kaleshwar Ghat is another non-pucca *ghat* which is very important; the famous Kara Dham or Sheetla Mata Mandir is situated here.

Hanuman Ghat

At Hanuman Ghat, generally, cremations take place. People from several nearby areas and districts come here to perform the last rites, followed by bathing rituals.

Bazaar Ghat

At Bazaar Ghat the fort of King Jaichand is situated, which can be reached



Ruins of Jaichandra's Fort overlooking Ganga

through a track.

Vrindavan Ghat

At Vrindavan Ghat King Jaichand built a Lord Shiva temple. Along with *puja*, sacred bathing rituals take place here.

Akbarpur Ghat

The Akbarpur Ghat is a very old habitation. Here too, sacred bathing rituals take place from time to time.

Sandipan *or* Sandipini Rishi Ghat

The Sandipan or Sandipini Rishi Ghat is one of the most important ghats of Kaushambi. It is believed that Lord Krishna along with his friend Sudama and elder brother Balaram used to study at Sandipan Rishi's Gurukul.

Parana Ghat

Parana Ghat is situated at Mooratganj and attracts huge crowds during festivals.

Kakrabad Ghat

Located at Shahjadpur, the Kakrabad Ghat is a natural *ghat*.

Sheetla Mata Temple

The temple of Maa Sheetla is situated on the banks of the Ganga River. It is known as a major *Shaktipeeth* from amongst the 51 *shaktipeethas* of the Goddess. The idol of Sheetla Devi is sitting on the *gardhabha*. Followers of all the religions worship in this temple. It is said that by the worship of Goddess Sheetla on the Ashtami of *Krishnapaksha* of the month of *Chaitra* one can get rid of evil influences. This place is believed to have been a religious pilgrimage since at least 1000 CE.

Birth Place, Saint Malukdas

Kara is also the birthplace of the famous saint Malukdas (1631 – 1739 CE). The *Ashram* and *Samadhi* of the saint is here. He was also a follower of Goddess Kara. The famous Sikh guru Teg Bahadur had come to Kara to offer discourses on various topics with Saint Malukdas.

Prabhasgiri

Prabhasgiri or Prabhosa is famous as a religious historical place on the banks of the Yamuna River at the Manjhanpur Tehsil about 50km away to the north of Allahabad. It is also said that Shri Krishna, mistaken for a deer, died at this place by the arrow of Jarat Kumar.

Digambar Jain Temple

This is a beautiful Temple of Lord Chandraprabhuji with a height of 95 feet. While digging a canal from the river Ganga, a white idol of Lord Chandra Prabhu Ji, in sitting posture, was found. While transporting the idol by bullock cart, the vehicle got stuck at Mehelaka at the place where there was already a temple of Lord Parshwanathji; this idol was thus established in the same temple. The Annual Fair here is the Annual Rath Mahotsav in the month of April. A cave which is 9 feet long and 7 feet wide is also here. In this cave records are found in the Brahmi Lipi of the second century. This was the place where the sixth *tirthankara* of Jains Bhagwan, Padma Prabhu lived.

Kamasin Devi Temple

Kamasin Devi Temple is situated on the banks of a pond in a village called Gambheera Purb, approximately 10 km to the western side of the town of Mahajanpur, which is the administrative headquarters of Kaushambi District. It houses black stone idols of Goddess Durga and Lord Shiva. It is believed that these idols are from the time of the Buddha.

Bahula Golok Siddh Mandir, Pabhosha

Bahula Golok Siddh Mandir is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna near Pabhosha village. Every year during Makar Sankranti thousands of devotees gather for the circumam-

The famous Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur had come to Kara to offer discourses on various topics with Saint Malukdas

bulation of Yamuna and Giriraj. It is believed that on Makar Sankranti one circumambulation of the Giriraj gives the result/benefit of 33 crore sacrifices. It is believed that Lord Shri Krishna had sacrificed his body in the forests here when the stray arrow of a hunter hit him.

Nature's Abundance

The riparian areas, lying between the aquatic and the terrestrial habitats, serve as functional interfaces within the landscapes, mediating energy and matter between these two ecosystems. With dynamic environmental conditions and ecological processes, these areas tend to harbour rich biodiversity. A major component of this biodiversity are the plant communities growing along the river bank which are interacting with both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The riparian vegetation is significant in the overall ecology and environmental aspects of the region owing to its important roles in soil conservation, harbouring faunal diversity and providing livelihood resources.

42 species of grass and plants from 20 families were recorded, dominated by grasses - Saccharum spontaneum L, Saccharum munja Roxb. and Cynodon dactylon along the river bank

Major riparian sites are found between Afzalpur Saton, Kanthua and Lehdri Village, Girdharpur Garhi, between Akbarpur and Jahangirabad and along Nara in Shahzadpur Village. As many as 42 species of grass and plants from 20 families were recorded, dominated by grasses - *Saccharum spontaneum L, Saccharum munja Roxb.* and *Cynodon dactylon* along the river bank. The most common shrubs and herbs in the study region were *Croton bonplandianus, Parthenium hysterophorus* and *Ipomia sp.* The most common tree species that were present in the study area were *Babool (Acacia nilotica), Neem (Azadirachta indica), Semal (Bombax ceiba), Shisham (Dalbergia sissoo)*, Banyan *(Ficus benghalensis)* and *Peepal (Ficus religiosa)*.

Riparian patches provide habitat to Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), Indian Porcupine (*Hystrix leucura*), Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), Indian Mole Rat (*Bandicota bengalensis*), Common Mongoose *(Herpestes edwardsii)*, Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) and Langur (*Semnopithecus spp.*).

Brown Roofed Turtle (*Pangshura smithi*) and Indian Soft-shell Turtle (*Nilssonia gangetica*) are randomly sighted species in the region. Sparse population of Gangetic Dolphin is present in the stretch. Major sighting area includes Prayagraj-Kaushambi border area and confluences of streams like Manyarwa Nala, Sadhua Nala and Sakra Nala. A total of 77 avian species were sighted in Kaushambi out of which 23 were wetland species and 54 species were of forests and grassland. Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Asian Pied Starling' House Sparrow, Indian Jungle Crow, House Crow, Common Pigeon, Common Myna, Red-wattled Lapwing and Eurasian Collared Dove were the most frequently sighted species.

Ganga as Seen From Jaichandra's Fort

Ramsagar Talab

Common Carp (Cyrpinus Carpio)

Mouth of Sacred Cave Of Mauni Baba [Opens Towards Ganga River]

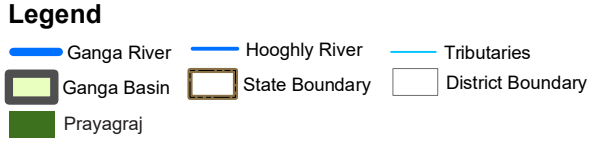
A Villager Making Ropes From Saccharum Spp.

CHAPTER 24

PRAYAGRAJ

Where Streams of Knowledge Meet

Uttar Pradesh



WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Covering an area of 5,482 sq km, Prayagraj District is one of the largest districts of Uttar Pradesh, bounded by Bhadohi District in east, Kaushambi in the west, Pratapgarh in the north and Rewa of Madhya Pradesh in the south. The District is divided into 8 *tehsils* namely – Allahabad, Handia, Phulpur, Soraon, Karchhana, Meja, Koraon and Bara. These 8 *tehsils* are further sub-divided into 20 development blocks.

Prayagraj City is the District headquarters situated at an elevation of 98 m amsl at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna Rivers. This city is one of the historic and mythological cities of India having a glorious past spanning from the Vedic age to the British period. Every corner of the city has its share of history, from Shringverpur, the site where it is believed that Nishadraj helped Lord Rama cross the Ganga, to Anand Bhawan, the centre of India's freedom struggle; Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the three rivers; and the Fort built by Emperor Akbar, which prevented flooding and helped in attracting people to settle in the city. The city is called Kaushambi in the Mahabharata. The present day city was established by Akbar.

The Ganga River flows here in a wide bed in the district with a course having succession of large bends and maintains this characteristic throughout. After entering the district, the river flows in south-easterly direc-

Idol of Nishad Raja at Shringverpur

Idol of Prayagraj at Patalpuri Tempe

tion until it reaches close to Dhoomanganj where it takes a bold sweep to the north-east as far as Phaphamau Bridge. Soon after this, the river bends sharply to the south as far as its confluence with Yamuna River near Allahabad Fort. Thereafter, the river again flows south-eastwards between Jhusi and Handia in north and Naini and Sirsa in south to enter Mirzapur district near Chehara village. The total length of Ganga River in Prayagraj District is approximately 80 km.

Every corner of the city has its share of history, from Shringverpur, the site where it is believed that Nishadraj helped Lord Rama and his retinue to cross the Ganga, to Anand Bhawan, the centre of India's freedom struggle

Re-living *the* Past

Shringverpur

Shringverpur is located 40 km north-west of Allahabad on the banks of Ganga. Excavations carried out in Shringverpur have revealed a temple dedicated to Shringi Rishi. It is widely believed that the city got its name from that sage himself who once had his *ashram* here. Mythologically, the city finds mention in the Ramayana, as the capital of the famous kingdom of *Nishadraj* or the King of Fishermen. It is here that Rama, his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana stayed for a night before going to the forest during exile. According to the story, , Kewat offered to take them across if Rama agreed to let him wash his feet. The place where Kewat washed Rama's feet has been marked by a platform and named Ramchaura. In this manner, Kewat is said to have attained salvation.

Historically, thermolumines-

cence dating assigns this period to the end of the 2nd millennium BCE. Excavations at Shringverpur have recovered Northern Black Ware Pottery (NBWP) and one of the largest water management systems in India with three de-siltation tanks which channelised flood water from the Ganga to its main tank. Three kinds of bricks have been used in the construction of these tanks which has been dated at the end of 1st Century BCE or during the period. The continuity of some traditions over thousands of years is still visible.

Shringverpur was excavated by the noted archaeologist, B. B. Lal and his team under the Ramayana Project. The water tank, its most important discovery, is a remarkable example of hydraulic engineering and Lal mentions these aspects in his report which makes these tanks so significant:

1. The water of the Ganga was fed into the tanks without building any dams on the river;
2. The system included all necessary components such as long feeding channel which brought the water all the way from the river, a de-silting chamber, a preliminary (de-silting) tank, a very long main tank, a circular ritual tank, spill channels and finally an exit channel which drained the excess water back into the river;
3. Wells were also constructed which went deep into the earth. During summer months, when the tank water began to dry up, the same could be supplemented by underground water from the wells.

The city gained importance rapidly soon after that and by the end of Akbar's reign had evolved into a hub of political, military and economic activities

Allahabad

The region which is now the flourishing city of Allahabad/Prayagraj became part of various dynasties-from Kosala Kingdom (600 BCE) to the Palas of Gaurs (9th Century CE) and further onwards-that ruled the Gangetic basin from time to time and over periods of chaos and stability. It was during the reign of the Mughals that Prayag began gaining importance strategically.

Abdul Qadir Badaoni, a historian at the court of Akbar, states that Akbar visited Prayag in 1575 CE and laid the foundation of an imperial city which he called *Illahi vasa* or *Illhabas* (a place where divinity resides). Nizam-ud-din Ahmed, who wrote Tabaqat-i-Akbari mentions that in 1584, Akbar already commanded a city and a fort at Prayag. The city gained importance rapidly soon after that and by the end of Akbar's reign had evolved into a hub of political, military and economic activities. Tavernier (a French merchant and traveller during the 17th Century CE) claimed that the province of Allahabad was so significant that governance was conferred only on a son or an uncle of the Emperor. Akbar converted Allahabad into a *Subah* or a province, whose key industry became boat-building. Large, sea-going vessels were built here and transferred to the coast on the river Ganga.

Shringverpur Tank

During the time of Jahangir and by the end of Shah Jahan's reign (17th Century CE), Allahabad had lost its political importance and became the scene of civil strife. In the following centuries, the city passed from the hands of the Mughals to the Marathas and the Nawab of Awadh (both in the latter half of 18th Century CE) and then on to the East India Company in 1765 which introduced cotton farming in the region around the city due to its favourable climate.

This period also saw the advancement of the Indo-Islamic culture reflected in the architecture, language and literature of the city. Apart from Delhi and Agra, Allahabad was another important city where these thrived. Some of these buildings which are still present are the Allahabad Fort and Khusrau Bagh.

Jhunsi is an old settlement on the other side of the Ganga in Prayagraj. In ancient times, here was situated the city of Pratishthanpur. The name of this city became Jhunsi in the medieval period. About fifty-eight kilometres northwest is the medieval site of Kara with its impressive ruins of Jaychand's Fort. It once belonged to the rulers of Mauryan, Shunga, Kushana, and Gupta period; the ancient Pratisthana has lost its identity to the modernity of Jhunsi.

The Treaty of Allahabad (1765 CE) which was signed between Shah Alam II and the East India Company in the Allahabad Fort. In 1801, the city was ceded to the EIC by the Nawab of Awadh.

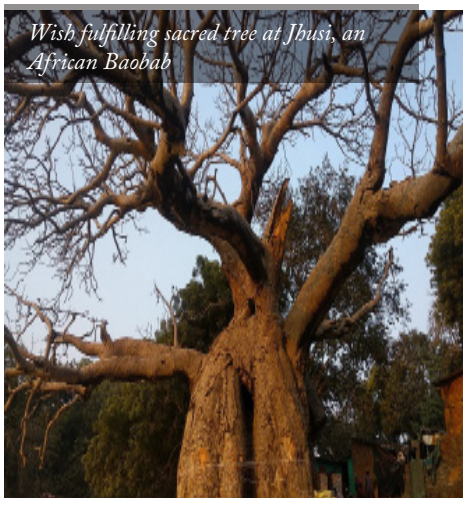
After the British subdued the revolt of 1857 in which Allahabad played an active role, the British converted Allahabad into an administrative capital (1877) of the newly formed United Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh). Many pro-independence groups including the Indian National Congress and Muslim League held their meetings in the city making it an important centre for the rise of nationalism in India.

The colonial rulers expanded the cultural vibrancy of the city and left a remarkable footprint that can be felt even today. The first significant impact is the change of name from Illahabad to Allahabad, an anglicised version of the city name for the ease of pronunciation by the British.

The colonial clutch over the city came about in the year 1764 with the victory in the battle of Buxar which took place between Shah Alam II, the Nawabs of Awadh and Bengal and the British East India Company. This led to the Treaty of Allahabad (1765) which gave Diwani rights (revenue collection) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa marking a significant turn in the history of India. This was the first stint of direct administration by the British on Indian soil. Finally, the entire city was ceded to the British Empire in 1801, resulting in an inflow of British values, culture and political influences over the city.

In 1806 when the government decided to tax the pilgrims who came for the Kumbh Mela there was outrage due to the high value of the tax that was set as one Rupee, an amount that could have lasted a month for a family during that time. Furthermore,

Vijaynagaram Hall, Allahabad University


Wish fulfilling sacred tree at Jhusi, an African Baobab

the British continued interfering with the festival bringing more constraints on the Mela. In 1815, for instance, they clamped a new system of policing the fair which led to a high resentment by the communities especially the priestly class.

Over 1500 Prayagwal families took part in the struggle of 1857 and valiantly attacked the British rule and its institutions. One of the leaders was Maulvi Liaquat Ali who took Khusrau Bagh under his own wing and declared it as the headquarter of a liberated Allahabad.

In the years post the revolt, the city became a prime centre for the struggle for independence. Swaraj Bhavan acted as the centre of all activities and meetings of the Indian National Congress and was also a witness to one of the biggest combined efforts during the Satyagrah Movement led by Purshottam Das Tandon, Bishambhar Nath Pande and Narayan Dutt Tiwari. The freedom struggle saw a pivotal point with the martyrdom of freedom fighter, Chandra Shekhar Azad in Allahabad's Alfred Park in 1931. Another revolutionary who was quite active in the Non-Co-operation Movement was Shaheed Roshan Singh. Allahabad also saw huge participation in the Quit India Movement which was led by student leader, Padamadhar Singh. In spite of these events, the city saw an amalgamation of the new culture brought by the Britishers into the pre-existing Indo-Islamic one.

The city became an Anglo-Indian settlement with a diverse cultural forum. The high number of British in the city could be credited to the North Central Railways which employed the highest number of Anglo Indians and also to the establishment of three cantonments around the city including the one in the fort. Other reasons for emigration of the English population were the status of Allahabad as a capital of the new United Province and the growing economic standards due to the introduction of cotton farming in the region. It was believed that the United Provinces was the best place for a safe and stable lifestyle.

Mythological Links

In ancient times, this region which was not a city of prominence yet, was simply known as Prayag or a place where two or more rivers meet. However, its importance as a supremely sacred site has its origin in various ancient Hindu texts, some of which mentions the place by the name Prayag and others as Triveni Sangam or the confluence of three rivers. The sacredness of the confluence site can be gauged from the following mentions in Rigveda and the Padma Purana.

Rigveda: *"….those who bathe at the place where the two rivers, white and dark, flow together, rise up to heaven."*

Padma Purana: *"…one who bathes and drinks there where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati join, enjoys liberation."*

In a story from Padma Purana, Brahma wondered which was the holiest place on earth and after intense meditation, chose Prayag which is, hence, also known as *Tirthraj* (king of all pilgrimages). Immediately on hearing this, Vishnu who wanted to experience the holiest place arrived in Prayag in the form of *Veni Madhava* (who is also considered the ruling deity of Triveni). Consequently, Brahma performed ten sacrifices or *Ashvamedha Yajnas* in Prayag giving it its name—*Pra* or superlative and *yag* from *yajna* or sacrifice; or the sacrificial grounds of Brahma. Shiva then arrived from Kashi to have a *darshan* of Vishnu and set himself up at the Shultankeshwara Mandir, a vantage place from where he could have constant *darshana* of Vishnu.

According to a story in Matsya Purana, when Yudhisthira was grief-stricken after killing so many kin and kings, the sage Markandeya asked him to take a pilgrimage to Prayag as bathing or just seeing Ganga at Prayag

or even thinking of Prayag from a distance would melt away his sins.

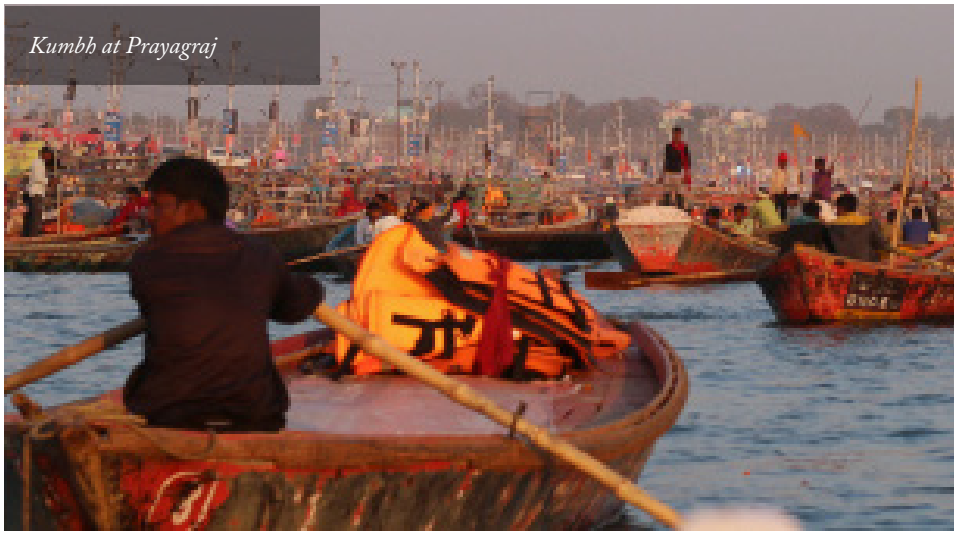
Events *of* Interest

Kumbha Mela

The Kumbha Mela is a grand festival that lasts for close to fifty-five days during the *Magh* months (January to February) with an influx of up to seventy million people. The celebration involves yogic performances, discourses on religious texts, sacred rituals, theatre and other cultural activities. This fair dates back to the Gupta period (4th-6th CE), as per the Narsimha Purana, which fair was described for the first time by the Chinese traveller and monk Hiuen Tsang in 643 CE. The first modern Kumbh Mela was held in 1870. Today, this festival is a grand affair where a megacity is created using pavilions with decorative gateways for the pilgrims. The streets remain ornamented and flooded with road-side vendors, who are seen selling sacred goods.

Every person who comes to the fair is engulfed in the spiritual pull of the Mela, taking a holy dip in the river, offering flowers, oil lamps to the river goddess, to cleanse the soul and attain peace. The *Shahi Snaan*, royal holy bath, which is attended by 10-20 million people on specific days when the river water is considered to be the purest. The pilgrims are also drawn to the *akharas* which are the congregation spaces for the *sadhus* who were brought together by the 8th century saint, Adi Shankara.

Thousands of superlatives have been used for the Kumbha Mela and



Kumbh at Prayagraj

we are all familiar with them. Prayag is the scene of the Kumbha and Ardha Kumbha.

Shahi Snaan

Snaan does not only refer to taking a bath in the river. It is an auspicious act which is said to remove all the negative *karma* that people have collected over many different lifetimes. During the month of *Magh* (January-February), the planetary conjunctions are such that taking a bath at the confluence during this period is said to cleanse a person of all their sins and has the potential to grant enlightenment to the soul. The *Shahi Snaan* (Royal Bath) is the holy bath that is taken by the *sadhus* of different *akhadas* at the confluence before it is opened to other pilgrims.

Makar Sankranti

This day is marked by the Sun entering the Tropic of Cancer and the days becoming longer and night shorter (Spring Equinox). The belief is that the veils to the doors of heaven open up during this time and by taking a bath at the Sangam, the soul gets liberated easily.

Paush Purnima

It is believed that taking holy dips on the day of Paush Purnima (full moon during December-January) at the banks of River Ganga and Yamuna can

The pilgrims are also drawn to the akharas which are the congregation spaces for the sadhus who were brought together by the 8th century saint, Adi Shankara

purify souls, relieve them from all sins and can help attain *moksha* (salvation) after death. Many devotees firmly believe that all their wishes are also granted on this day.

Mauni Amavasya

Mauni Amavasya is believed to be the day when the universe was created, an auspicious day when the water of the Ganga turns into nectar, and the Gods come to reside here. People usually keep *maun vrat* or vows of silence on this day.

Basant Panchami

Basant Panchami marks the beginning of the spring season and is celebrated on the fifth day of this month. It is also celebrated by worshipping the goddess of knowledge and wisdom, Saraswati. Hundreds of thousands of devout Hindus bathe at the Holy River to pay their respect to her.

Kalpavas is derived from the concept of Kalpa or an immense period of time, reckoned as 4,320 million years, which is considered to be the length of a single cycle of the cosmos, from creation to dissolution

Veni Daan at Sangam

Maghi Purnima

It is believed that taking a holy dip on Maghi Purnima (the full moon in January-February) can cure diseases, solve all problems and relieves a person of their sins.

Mahashivratri

The Kumbh Mela ends on the day of Mahashivratri, which according to mythology is the day Shiva married Parvati. A special ritual known as the Shiv Baraat is performed on the streets of Allahabad on this day to mark the occasion.

Kalpavas

Kalpvas refers to the practice of spending a whole month next to the banks of the river Ganga and engaging in daily rituals that helps them in attaining spiritual peace. Kalpavas is derived from the concept of *Kalpa* or an immense period of time, reckoned as 4,320 million years, which is considered to be the length of a single cycle of the cosmos (or 'a day of Brahma') - from creation to dissolution. From Pousha Shukla Ekadashi to Magha Shukla Purnima, devotees (*Kalpavasis*) spend a whole month at the banks of river Ganga to gain the merits accumulated by Brahma during his full lifetime. The scriptures say that the benefits accrued from doing Kalpavas in Prayaga are never-ending, and *Kalpavisis* should sleep on the ground, fast, bathe thrice a day, renounce worldly pleasures, control their senses, and worship Shri Vishnu during this time. The *Kalpavasis* perform the ritual of tonsuring during the Kumbha Parva with the *bhav* (spiritual emotion) of surrendering the intellect and mind to God.

Ganga Aarti

Nature like rivers, mountains, trees, has been personified into divine entities in Indian mythology. One of the ways to pay respect and homage to these entities is in the form of *Aartis*. During the Kumbh, the Ganga Aarti is held in an elaborate manner with massive arrangements on the banks of the river. The priests line up and perform the *Aarti* in the morning and evening reciting chants and hymns with great piety and emotion. The Ganga Aarti at the Kumbh Mela attracts a record number of people. One can smell the fragrant flowers and incense and hear the echoing songs and prayers. The *Aarti* is not just an empty ritual, it is a display of complete devotion to River Ganga.

Magh Mela

The Magh Mela bath begins with Paush Purnima and ends on the day of Magh Purnima, a period of one month in January. During this month, the banks of River Ganga and Yamuna are transformed into a small metropolis which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. Arrangements of special tents/pandals for the pilgrims, *sadhus* and *kalpvasis* are made to accommodate diverse cultural sects to spend a month near Ganga. This annual *mela* brings together myriad communities from different parts of the world, with the aim to take part in various events like sacred and spiritual discourses, and enhance social cohesion.

The Magh mela is supposed to enhance the existing order of life and then transcend it instead of traversing the existing social order. This is a celebration of the structure of life itself with all its hierarchies, disparities and distinctions, which are allowed to coexist on the same level.

Yamuna River As Viewed From New Yamuna Bridge

Nag Panchami

Nag Panchami is celebrated with fervour in this city, with devotees thronging the *ghats* and numerous Shiva Temples, especially the Nagvasuki Temple to offer their prayers. The festival celebrates *Nag* or the King Cobra, where devotees make snakes out of cow-dung or paint on walls and offer it milk, Snake effigies are taken from house to house and donations are accepted.

Gudiya Festival

Interesting and unique, the Gudiya festival is held during the celebrations of Nag Panchami in Allahabad. During the festival, women gather and make dolls out of clothes. Many tales related to women are told, post which the dolls are beaten with sticks by children. However, this tradition has recently seen transformation due to the involvement of the civil society who feared these tales and aspects of beating can inculcate violence in children and also promote gender injustice. The dolls are now placed on a swing and people play with the same. Women gather around and sing songs.

Sawan & Kanwad Mela

Sawan (fifth month of the Hindu *Tithi* calendar corresponding to the months of July and August) is one of the important months that brings with it a new source of energy and is also considered the month of Shiva. It is believed that praying to Ganga (in the form of river) and Shiva during this month is auspicious. Devotees, known

as *Kanwariayas*, undertake the annual pilgrimage or Kanwad Yatra, along the banks of Ganga paying homage to the river and Shiva on the way. Some of the important places or cities that are a part of this pilgrimage route are the Gangotri (source of Ganga), Haridwar, Prayag, Garhmukteshwar and Varanasi.

Gehrebazi: Traditional Horse Show

The Gehrebazi reflects the *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb*. On this occasion people from both the communities, Hindu and Muslim, participate in the event. Before every race a horse has to be massaged for several hours which is not an easy task. Accordingly, horses present different styles of walking. *Dulki* for instance is the style in which the police horses walk. It may also be compared to the style in which the horses of India Cavalry walk during Republic Day Parade. A soft-padded step-by-step move by horses is called the *Sindhi Chaal*. The *Madari Chaal* is a style seen in horses used during weddings and festivals. Though such horses are disqualified, they earn huge rounds of applause by acquiring the *Alaf* position (standing on rear feet) and beating their trinkets laden front feet.

Clay Idol Making at Johnstonganj

ART *at the* HEART

Cane, Bamboo & Moonj

The *Moonj* basketry of Allahabad is produced on a large scale in a small village called Naini and is also called Balla by the local people. *Moonj* is a type of wild grass that grows near river banks. The outer layer of *Sarpat* Grass is peeled and knotted to create *Moonj* Work. The eco-friendly products created from this coiled grass are ideal for daily use, storing food, as decorations items and as containers. Apart from the traditional items, innovative and experimental products like earrings, bookmarks, bags and purses are being created to cater to a wider market.

Idol Making

Idols are an integral part of a city that celebrates faith and religion. Clay from Ganga is used and is considered auspicious. The sculptors come from Kolkata to make these idols. The items required to make these sculptures are *Baans* (Bamboo), *Khila, Sutli, Dhaan ka Bhuusa* and three types of mud/clay. For the finishing, they require water colours and other small decorative trinkets that they bring from Kolkata.

Painting

Allahabad, being a historically important city, has been depicted in paintings by many European travellers and Indian artists. The likes of William Hodges, Thomas Daniell, Robert Montgomery Martin to Indian painters like Sita Ram have depicted Allahabad Fort and nearby areas in many a painting.

Pattharchatti Ramleela Committee

One of the well-known performing art events of the city is the Pattarchatti Ramlila. Goswami Tulsidas mentions two spiritual places in Ramcharitmanas, Varanasi and Prayag. Tulsidas organized the first *Ramlila* in Kashi and it is believed that he then came to Prayag, where he organised the Lila near Kamauri Nath Mahadev Mandir, marking the beginning of Ramlila here in Allahabad. It was organised during the reign of Akbar, who was also visiting Prayag at the same time and hence witnessed the episode of *Ramlila* in which Sita was bid adieu after her wedding ceremony. Akbar got emotional during the scene and it is believed that he was so impressed by Ramayana that he got the text translated into Persian. Pattharchatti Ramlila Committee has completed its 182 years of existence.

Khusro Bagh

According to Sudipta Sen's 'Ganga - The Many Pasts of a River', Akbar's attachment to Prayag was hardly surprising - " - his birth and extension to the throne of Delhi had been foretold. - devout Hindus of Prayag confided that Akbar in his previous birth was an ascetic known as Mukund Brahmachari." Seeing his coming death, he wrote down the date of his death in the form of a Sanskrit verse on a copper tablet. His chief disciple, Biran, also killed himself to be with his teacher in the next life. They were reincarnated as Akbar and Birbal respectively. It is said that Akbar could recite lines from the original Sanskrit verse and Birbal, on hearing these for the first time, could complete the *shloka*.

Prayag Sangeet Samiti

Established in the year 1926 by Deshraj Major (Dr.) Ranjit Singh, late Baijnath Sahai and late Satyanand Joshi, the Prayag Sangit Samiti remains the premier institution for the practice and propagation of music in India. All through its span of nine decades of existence, the Samiti has been playing the role of torch-bearer in the world of classical music and it can legitimately pride itself in having achieved a consistently high reputation for upholding the highest and richest traditions of this sublime art.

Clay from Ganga is used and is considered auspicious. The sculptors come from Kolkata to make these idols

Literature & Languages

One of the most prominent languages of the city is the embellished language of Urdu, a prime example of the *teh-*

Rare Idol of Rama, Lakshman and Sita as ascetics in Patalpuri Temple

zeeb that lives on in the subcontinent. Urdu, in its own identity, has been formed by picking up the etiquettes from various languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Braj, etc. A key factor in the success of Urdu as a language of the city can be attributed to the University of Allahabad which set up the first department of Urdu in India in the year 1924. Many prominent writers like Firaq Gorakhpuri and Harivansh Rai Bachchan served as professors at the University. Allahabad boasts of many renowned poets and *shayars* like Akbar Allahabadi and Firaq Gorakhpuri.

Monuments *that* Matter

Patalpuri Mandir

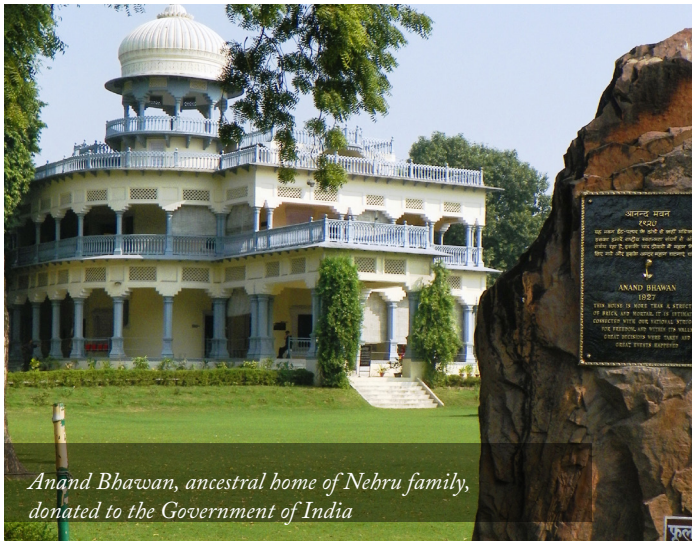
In Markandeya and Shiv Puran, there are references to Patalpuri temple and Akshay Vat tree. In Treta Yug, when Lord Rama was exiled, he stayed here for three days and rested beneath this Akshay Vat tree, performed holy rituals here and embarking on his journey to Chitrakoot after completing the exile. Lord Rama came here again and performed his father's (Dashratha) *Pinda Daana*. At that time Ganga ji used to flow near to the Akshay Vat.

Akshay Vat

The Allahabad Fort has a Banyan Tree which is revered by Hindu devotees and is believed to be very old. The indestructible Banyan Tree (Akshay Vat) is found within the Patalpuri Temple Complex in Allahabad. There are many legends and stories surrounding this sacred fig tree. According to one legend, the sage Markandeya asked Lord Narayana to demonstrate his divine power. Narayana flooded the entire world for a moment, during which only the Akshay Vat could be seen above the water level.

Mankameshwar Mandir

The Mankameshwar Temple of Lord Shiva situated on the banks of Yamuna is of mythological importance. According to the Skanda Purana and Prayag Mahatamya, the shrine of Lord Kameshwara on the banks of the Yamuna near the Pisachmochan Temple, west of the Akshaya Vat, is considered synonymous with Shiva. Where Shiva is there, Kameshwari means Parvati also resides. That is why, here Bhairav, Yaksha, Kinnar are also consecrated. This place is also important from the point of view of the tantric practice of *Srividya*, since the pilgrimage of Kameshwar and Kameshwari.



Anand Bhawan, ancestral home of Nehru family, donated to the Government of India

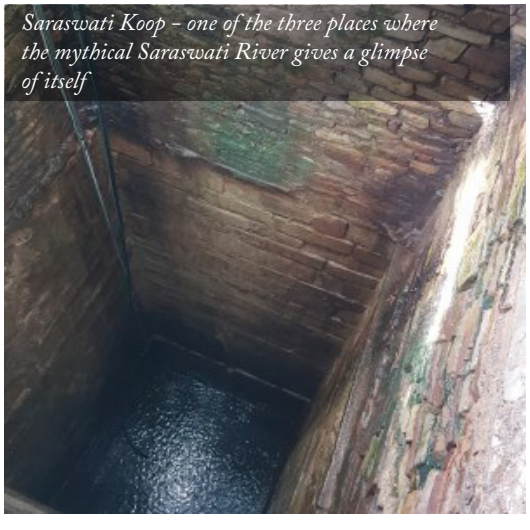
Todar Mal ka Quila

Durvasa Rishi Ashram

Towards the east of Prayag on the bank of the Ganga at Kakra Kotwa and 5 km south of Hanuman Bazaar, this ancient *ashram* is located. It has a grand statue of Sage Durvasa and a fair is held in the month of *Saavan*.

Indian Coffee House

The first Indian Coffee House was established in India in 1935, to have a cup of coffee and snacks and converse about anything under the imperial sun. The first outlet was opened in 1936 in Churchgate, Bombay and since then other outlets have sprung up all over India. However, after independence the Coffee Board fell on hard times and it was at the verge of being shut-down when A.K. Gopalan, a Communist Party leader from Kerala met Nehru to avoid the retrenchment of about 850 workers. Thus, a Coffee Worker's Cooperative Society was born, which took over business from the board. Over the decades, the Coffee House at Allahabad has been the bedrock on which any vibrant political, literary, artistic, progressive and liberal society stands. Over the decades Indian Coffee House has attracted important public figures, artists, literary minds, journalists, workers and students. It has provided an environment where free debates and discussions about various aspects of socio-political life have flourished throughout the years.



Saraswati Koop – one of the three places where the mythical Saraswati River gives a glimpse of itself

St. Joseph's Cathedral

Quila Ghat /Sangam Ghat

The Quila/Sangam Ghat is near to the confluence of three rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. The devotees and pilgrims take a boat to reach at Sangam to take holy bath and perform rituals at confluence point. The confluence of these rivers is believed to be sacred as per Hindu mythology.

Saraswati Ghat

This is located at the bank of river Yamuna and in the Army Cantonment. Here, Allahabad Boat Club offers a range of water sports. There are pedal boats, kayaks, speed boats available for hire.

Nature's Abundance

Doab is the tract of land between two converging or confluent rivers and the Ganga-Jamuna *Doab*, of which Allahabad is a part on the western Indus-Gangetic Plain region. The *Doab* and Yamuna-*paar* region are mainly responsible for the unique biodiversity, especially along the banks of the Ganga. Even though the bed of Ganga is shallow here but the Yamuna is quite deep (around 40 ft). Wild animals are found especially along the banks of Ganga and in Yamuna-*paar*

A total of 42 species of birds are sighted out of which 10 were wetland avian species and the remaining 32 were species of the grassland and forest community

area. The Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), Indian Porcupine (*Hystrix leucura*) and Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*) are found throughout the district.

Gangetic River Dolphin

Presence of Dolphins can be confirmed almost throughout the Ganga River stretch in Prayagraj District though the frequency of sightings has reduced in the last two-three decades.

Crocodile

There are two crocodilian species - Mugger crocodile and the Gharial which abound in Ganga and its tributaries Yamuna and Tamasa. Interaction with riparian community suggests that the sighting of crocodiles have reduced drastically in last 10 -15 years.

Avian Diversity

A total of 42 species of birds are sighted out of which 10 were wetland avian species and the remaining 32 were species of the grassland and forest community. Water birds viz., Common teal (*Anas crecca*), Cotton pygmy goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), Indian Spot Billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Black headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), River Lapwing (*Vanellus duvaucelii*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*), Eurasian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), and White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), were sighted during field visits.

The channels of River Ganga form wetlands near Phaphamau Bridge which are annually visited by migratory water birds. The Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*) were reported in good numbers during field visits. The Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) is a riverine bird belonging to the family Laridae is listed as vulnerable in the IUCN Red list. The first nesting site was identified near Phaphamau Bridge upstream of Ganga River in Prayagraj. Migratory Black-headed gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) present a mesmerizing view at the Triveni Sangam throughout the winter season. These birds travel to a number of other wetlands which includes the Triveni Sangam, Bhirpur, Narayanpurkalan, Dehraon, and Sirsa. The maximum number of nesting colonies of the gulls is encountered between Allahabad and Varanasi.

Wetlands

The study area had a total of 766 water bodies. Of these, Upardaha and Chendi Tal are significant, being of 176 ha and 90 ha respectively. These need to be conserved scientifically and have the potential to be Ramsar sites.

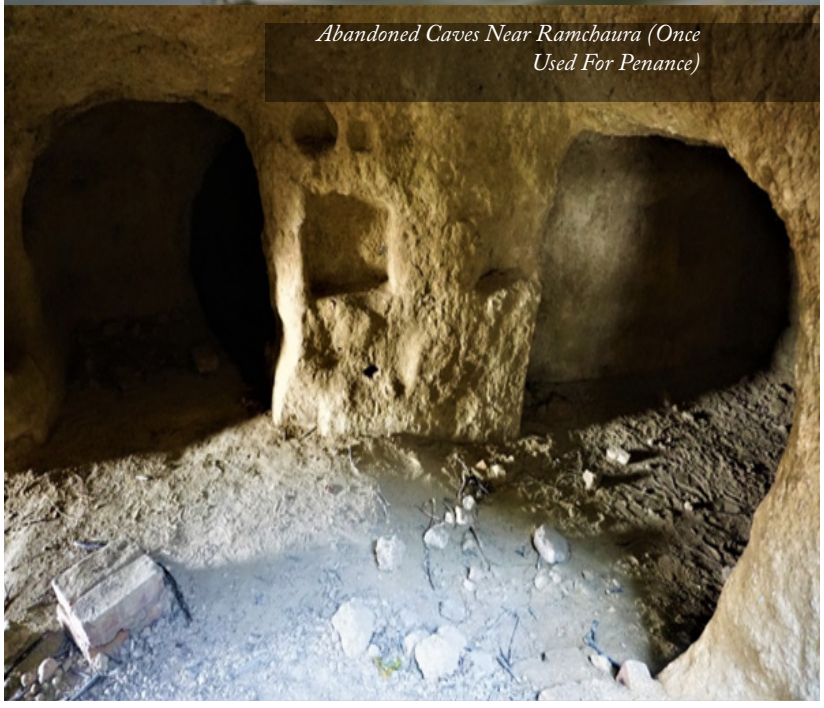
Within the city, uimportant lakes are Macpherson Lake (16.7 ha) and Subedarganj Talab (9.96 ha). There is also a large oxbow lake near Mubareakpur village of 19 ha.

A large riverine island of 30 sq km exists 8 km downstream of the fort. The island is being cultivated but its upstream and downstream ends are wooded, providing habitat to varied wildlife.

Black Headed Gull (Chroicocephalus ridibundus) – Adult Summer Plumage

Erosion Prone Bank In Kusamha Village

Bansputta (Ailia coila) Fish



Abandoned Caves Near Ramchaura (Once Used For Penance)

The Old River Port at The Hathi Gate Of The Fort

CHAPTER 25

BHADOHI

Carpet Kingdom

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Bhadohi

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Bhadohi District earlier known as Sant Ravi Das Nagar is well known for its carpet industry. The district is situated in south-eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. The district falls in the Middle Gangetic Plains, bordered by Jaunpur District in the north, Varanasi District in the east, Mirzapur District in the south and Prayagraj District in the west. The geographical area of the District is 1015 sq km having a population of 1,578,213. The district has 3 *tehsils*, 6 blocks and 3 assembly constituencies having Gyanpur as the District's headquarters. Out of 6 blocks, Deegh Block and Aurai Block are on the Ganga.

The district got its name from Bhar Raj Kingdom, where Bhadohi was the capital. The District has an elevation of 85m above sea level. Loam, sand and clay are the major soil types. The district has a total forest area of just 1.75 sq kms.

The District's geo-morphological characters have been divided into two categories, namely, the uplands and the low land plains. The upland comprises the major part of the district. The lowland is comprised of silty loam deposits and has frequent flood events in the monsoon. River Ganga forms the southern boundary of the District. From the south-central boundary, the river turns towards the Mirzapur District and returns again to form the extreme south-eastern boundary of the district before flowing

down again to Mirzapur District.

In the 16th century during the Mughal Emperor Akbar's regime Bhadohi's carpet industry gained its popularity. Famous for its Persian designs, it is believed that the industry was set up by the Persian weavers during their visit to India when they stopped at the village called Madhosingh, near Khamaria where they set up their looms. The Mirzapur-Bhadohi region is responsible for the employment of 3.2 million people in the carpet industry making the region the largest handmade carpet-weaving cluster.

Bhadohi District is located on the left bank of the river Ganga which enters Bhadohi near Karaundhia Village. The length of Ganga River in Bhadohi District is approximately 64.5 km, while its width varies between 0.5 km to 2.2 km. The Ganga River stretch of 30 km of Bhadohi-Mirzapur-Prayagraj is designated as a Turtle Sanctuary. In Bhadohi, a stretch of 15 km between Arai Karaundhia and Sitamarhi-Baripur is under the Turtle Sanctuary. The active floodplain of Ganga River is mainly under cultivation excluding a few patches of scrubland, plantation and settlements.

At the point where Ganga enters the district, it meanders and makes a turn south towards left bank (at Chhachhua Village). The concave turn of the river is named as Dakshinvahini Ganga by the locals. Moving downstream, the river further meanders and turns between Chhachhua village and Naragda Village. This turn of the river is called Uttarvahini Ganga. The river meanders again towards right bank upto Danipatti Village. In each turn, the river creates huge sand bars which are a suitable habitat for turtles. After Biraspur Village, the river moves straighter and enters Mirzapur. Here, the river

Throughout its journey, the river covers a distance of approximately 64.5 km in Bhadohi District

Baghel Bhavan, Bhadohi

Ganga River At Chaturbhuj Ghat

forms a huge riverine island (covered with dense vegetation) named as Majhara/Manjhara which offers a habitat for species like wild boar (*Sus scrofa*). The river again touches Bhadohi on its left bank near Itwa Village and flows upto Dwarkapur (stretch of 2.3 Km) and finally enters Mirzapur near village Agiabir.

Re-living *the* Past

According to the epic of Mahabharata, the Pandavas escaped from Lakshyagrah through a tunnel and took shelter here at a place called Semradhnath. Sant Ravi Das, known as Raidas as well, was one of the twelve pupils of Saint Ramanand. A devotee of Nirgun Brahma, Raidas never discriminated between people on any basis. He established the Raidasi Sampradaya. The region is linked with Sant Ravidas, after whom the district was given the name Sant Ravidas Nagar.

The region covered by the present district of Bhadohi once formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kashi, one of the sixteen *Mahajanpadas* of *Bharatvarsha*. As the district is situated between Kashi and Prayag, the two grand *Tirthas* (holy places), many legends are linked with it. Sitamarhi is the place where Ramayana was said to have been written by Maharshi Valmiki. It is said that Mata Sita, wife of lord Rama, lived here in the *ashram* of Maharshi Valmiki when she was abandoned by Lord Rama. Here, Lav and Kush, the sons of Lord Rama and Mata Sita were born and later Mata Sita plunged herself in the lap of Mother Earth. It is said that besides the first poet Maharishi Valmiki, the saint Goswami Tulsidas also stayed at Sitamarhi for a few days. Many historians claim Anand Van to be the ancient name of Sant Ravi Das Nagar (Bhadohi). It is also known by the name of Saghan Van or Kanchan Van at some places while it has been referred to as Sundar Van in the Maunas history.

The Bhars ruled Bhadohi for nearly 200 years from 1193 to 1394

Bhadohi gets its name from Bhar Raj of the region which had Bhadohi as its capital, whose traces can be found in the names of ruined mounds and old tanks named after the Bhar rulers, vassals of the Kannauj kingdom, which in the early medieval period was included in the kingdom of Jaunpur. They constructed their own forts, the remains of which are still found in the villages of Rohi, Bankat, Beribeesa, Bharduwar, Sarai Kot (Sair) etc. Suriyawan was the capital of the Bhar's Kingdom. The Bhars ruled Bhadoi for nearly 200 years from 1193 to 1394. After 1394 Maunas Rajputs overthrew the Bhars from this region and it was named Bhardrohi, which, with the passage of time, transformed into Bhadohi.

During the rule of Akbar, Bhadohi was made a *dastur* and included in the *sarkar* of Allahabad. By the fifteenth century the Bhar were overpowered by Maunas Rajputs with Sagar Rai as the first head of the clan, and his grandson, Jodh Rai, received it as a *zamindari sanad* (deed) from Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. However, around 1750 CE due to non-payment of land revenue arrears, Raja Pratap Singh of Pratapgarh, in lieu of his paying the arrears, gave the entire *pargana* to Balwant Singh of Benaras, who, subsequently received it directly under a *sanad* from Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh under British influence in 1770. Thus, the Banaras kingdom came into power and ruled the region from 1748 to 1948.

During the revolt of 1857, the region between Banaras and Mirzapur, namely Bhadohi and Gopiganj, were the areas of stiff popular resistance led by Udvant Singh (later hanged), Jhoori Singh and Sarnam Singh. Udvant Singh, chief of Maunas Clan of Rajputs who ruled the area before Banaras Raj, tried to capture G.T. Road. He was arrested and hanged in a mockery of justice. His wife held W.M. Moore joint magistrate Mirzapur and Darshan Lal Karinda of Banaras Raj, responsible for the murder of her husband and appealed to the people of her clan to avenge it. The Indigo Factory at Pali was attacked and plundered by the locals who were led by Jhoori Singh and Dhanwan Singh. Moore, and the factory owner Jones, were inside the factory. They were attacked by the armed mob and killed. Moore was beheaded and the head was sent to the widow of the clan chief who gave 300

rupees as reward for this act. Jhoori Singh emerged as the hero of popular resistance of the area and attacked the supporters of British Rule in Suriyawan (19th August) and Bisauli (21st August). A reward of one thousand rupees was announced for the arrest of Jhoorin Singh and 3 of his main supporters.

Bhadohi in 1911 came under the first Maharaja of the newly created princely state of Benares ruled by Maharaja Prabhu Narayan Singh. After independence, the princely state of Banaras merged with the Union of India.

Events *of* Interest

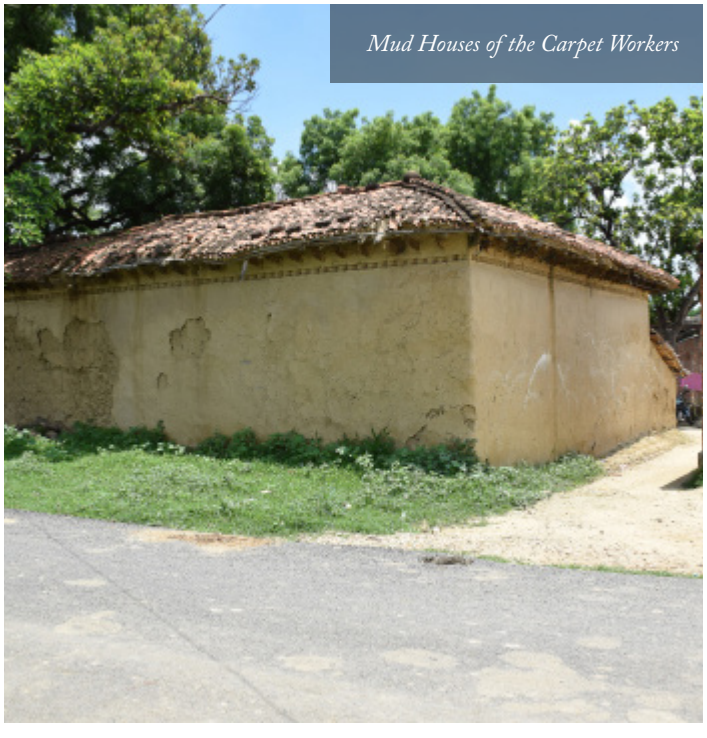
Jitiya

Jivitputrika (also called Jitiya) is a three-day-long festival which is celebrated from the seventh to ninth lunar day of *Krishna-Paksha* in *Ashwin* month. It is celebrated mainly in Maithili, Magadhi and Bhojpuri speaking regions of Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. In this festival mothers observe fast (without water) for the wellbeing of their children.

There is a *puja* in each village and, in a beautiful tradition, sons carry home cooked items, fruit, *prasad*, and toys to offer to Goddess Jitiya. All the women gather together and worship the goddess and narrate stories. The tradition of storytelling is an important aspect of the festival.

Kajri

The festival of Kajali (Kajri) is celebrated with pomp in the district. Newly married girls keep fast without water, and sing songs of the *Kajri* genre. They also make a *jarai* which is made up of soil in a conical shape on which they sow paddy seeds. When these sprout, they immerse the *jarai* in the pond on the day of the festival and carry back the grown seedlings. When they come back to their homes, they



Mud Houses of the Carpet Workers

Dharamshala at Rampur Ghat

Finishing Touches

Carpet Weavers at traditional loom. On an average it takes an entire day to create just one square inch portion!

put the sheafs of paddy on the ears of their brothers and father. It is believed that after being immersed in a water-body on this day, placing the sheaves on the ears of male relatives gives more years to their lives. Fairs and *Kajri* singing are organised at various places in the district, including the Kajri Mela Ground located at Bhori Mah-juda. People still feel strongly about the importance of *Kajri* folk songs, and keep the tradition alive.

Ghazi Miyan Fair

The historic fair of Sayyid Salar Masood Ghazi Rahmatullah Alaih (Ghazi Miyan) is a popular four-day fair. The pilgrims seek blessings by offering flowers and garlands to Ghazi Miyan. The historic Roz-e-Pak of Ghazi Miyan is located in Naryadpatti area of the city. The fair held here is an example of *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*. Along with Muslims, a large number of Hindus participate in the fair. Apart from Bhadohi, numerous people from adjoining districts also come to the fair.

It has been a tradition to make Ghazi Miyan's tomb *ghusl* (full ablution, or ritual bath) every year in the evening. In the evening, on behalf of Bhishti Akhadadars, the *Mazar* is made *ghusl*, that is bathed. Along with it, ballads are read in the glory of Baba Murshid Ali, Nafees Ansari, Sagir Ahmed, Nabiullah Ansari, Jameel Neta, Ishtiaq Ahmed, Muslim Ansari, Mohammed Chhedi, Shaheen Ansari, Guddu Ansari, Sarfaraz, Mahmood Alam, amongst others.

Bhadohi Mahotsav

The Bhadohi Mahotsav endeavours to make the youth, especially those living outside the region, more aware of the different facets of life and culture in the country and specifically in the region. It organizes various cultural activities, sports events, medical camps etc. The Mahotsav organises enthralling traditional Indian dance performances, and authentic Indian delicacies brimming with flavours.

Art *at the* Heart

Carpets

India, since ancient times, had a prominent name for producing wonderful artistic and colourful handicrafts. This prestigious position was attained long before the invention of machines introduced after the industrial revolution in the 18th century. Carpet (popularly known as *Kaleen*) weaving by hand is an old craft industry of India. It reflects not only the country's traditional heritage but also has a significant imprint on its culture. Bhadohi is known as the Carpet City for being the biggest carpet producer in the India. Since the medieval period, this region is the known for its fine handmade carpets. The industry employs more than 22 lakh rural artisans. These carpets are not only sold in the large market in India, but are also a popular export item to the rest of the world.

Carpet weaving in the region dates back to the 16th century during the reign of Akbar. The tradition of carpet manufacturing in Mirzapur-Bhadohi belt is at least 400 years old. Abul Fazal in Ain-i-Akbari (1600 CE) mentions weaving of carpets here. Now, it produces both traditional as well as contemporary designs. The traditional patterns are in the old Persian style.

The amazing thing about the production of Bhadohi carpets is that the raw wool for this industry is not a local pfoduce. Only the availability of skilled labour is its biggest asset, on the strength of which Bhadohi has made its mark in the world market.

Moonj & Sarpat Grass

Bhadohi, Allahabad, Gorakhpur, and Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh are the areas where baskets are made out of *Moonj* (a riparian grass harvested in winters). Once completely dried out, the process of basket weaving begins. As the grass becomes lighter in colour, it makes the coating of other colours easy. Using basic hand techniques and elementary tools, stunningly beautiful *Moonj* Crafts are created, mostly by the womenfolk. Tradition calls for the mother to pass this skill and associated techniques to her daughter.

Sarpat Grass Baskets of Bhadohi are also beautifully woven artistic works, with colourful and attractive designs.

Gastronomic Delights

During the festival of Makar Sankranti, a special ritual is observed in Bhadohi where brothers prepare Khichadi, and along with *Gur* (jaggery) and sugarcane, and take it along to visit their sisters. The Khichadi is prepared with the first crop of the season. A special sweet, locally called Ledua, is prepared with *Besan,* or chick-pea flour, during Makar Sankranti. After taking bath in the wee hours, the devotee prepares breakfast comprising of *Choora* (beaten rice) and *Dahi* (Curd). The women while preparing traditional *Choora,* sing folksongs.

People who Fascinate

Sant Ravidas

Ravidas, a 14th century saint, was the founder of the *Bhakti* Movement in North India. He was also known as Guru Raidas. Though the details of Guru Ravidas's life are not well known, scholars state that he was born in 1450 CE and died in 1520 CE. He was born in the village of Seer Goverdhanpur, near Varanasi. His birthplace is now known as Shri Guru Ravidas Janamsthan, where lakhs of people converge to celebrate

Bhadohi is known as the Carpet City for being the biggest carpet producer in the India

his birth anniversary every year.

Ravidas's devotional verses are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Panch Vani text of the *Dadupanthi* Tradition within Hinduism also includes numerous poems of Guru Ravidas. He propagated removal of social divisions of caste and gender, and promoted unity in the pursuit of personal spiritual freedom.

Maharishi Shiv Brat Lal

Shiv Brat Lal Varman, popularly known as *Data Dayal* (Merciful) and *Maharishi* (Great Sage), was born in Bhadohi District of Uttar Pradesh state in India in 1860. It is believed that he wrote as many as 3,000 books on various social, historical, religious and spiritual topics. Being a famous writer, he was called the modern Maharishi Ved Vyas and hence became famous with the name *Maharishi ji*. His books include Light of Anand Yoga, Dayal Yoga and Shabd Yoga became very famous. Other writings include Radhaswami, Adbhut Upasana, Anmol Vichar, Kabir Yog, Kabir Bijak, Karam Rahashya, Panth Sandesh, etc. To spread the Radha Soami spiritual movement, Lal began a long journey from Lahore to Calcutta on 2nd August 1911. He then left Calcutta, proceeding towards Rangoon by sea. He travelled through Penang, Hong Kong, Singapore and Java. After that he went to Japan and later to San Francisco in America, where he delivered two lectures. In 1912, Lal founded his *ashram* in Gopi Ganj in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. His discourses attracted seekers of the Radha Soami Movement from all over India and abroad. He left for the Radha Swami Dham on 23rd February 1939 at the age of seventy-nine. His holy *Samadhi* stands at the Radha Swami Dham near Gopi Ganj.

Handmade Carpet of Bhadohi

Jhoori Singh

Amar Shaheed Jhoori Singh, a great warrior of the revolt of 1857, was born on 21st October, 1816 in Paraupur Village of Suriyawan area of the present day Bhadohi District. After meeting the revolutionary Babu Kunwar, resident of Jagdishpur (Bihar), he blew the trumpet of revolution from Duddhi to Rohtas (Bihar), and shook the British rule. He was later hanged in Ojla Nala of Mirzapur.

Monuments *that* Matter

Ganga Ghats

There are several famous *ghats* on the banks of the Ganga in Bhadohi. Among the famous Ganga Ghats are Rampur Ganga Ghat, Semradhanath Ghat, Sitamarhi Ghat, Gulauri Ghat Bihrojpur, and Bhogaon Ganga Ghat, Jahangirabad. People from far and wide also come to take a dip of faith in the Ganga.

Sita Samahit Sthal Temple

The most famous temple of Bhadohi is Sita Samahit Sthal, famously known as Sitamarhi. The temple is located on the banks of the Ganga. It is 11

Idol of Jhoori Singh

km from Jangiganj Bazar, between Prayagraj and Varanasi. It is believed that this is the place where Mother Sita offered herself to the earth after having to go through the trial by fire. There is also a 110 feet high statue of Lord Hanuman near the temple, which is one of the most prominent statues of Hanuman.

Baba Hariharanath Mandir

Baba Hariharanath Mandir is a famous temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in Gyanpur of Bhadohi. The temple is located between Bhadohi and Gopiganj. This temple of Shiva is located about 14 kilometres from Bhadohi Station and about 10 kilometres from Gyanpur Station. There is also a beautiful pond in front of the Baba Hariharnath Temple.

Semradhnath Bhole Shankar Mandir

Situated on the banks of the Ganga between Kashi and Prayagraj, this Shiva temple, named after Lord Semradhnath, is situated inside a pit. It is believed that the Shiva *lingam* originated from the light emanating from the collision of Lord Krishna's *chakra* and Shiva's trident. According to mythology, once, when Lord Krishna flung the *Sudarshana Chakra* to kill the demon Pundarik, after the death of the demon king, entire Kashi also started burning with its force. In such a situation, the life of the residents of Kashi was in danger. Deities proposed that Lord Shiva would raise his trident to counter the *Sudarshan Chakra*. In the collision of these two weapons, a supernatural light was generated which got absorbed into the earth, resulting in a Shiva *lingam* originating at the spot. Later, a temple was built at the spot by a passing merchant, as Lord Shiva had appeared in a dream and told him to do so. Though devotees visit the temple throughout the year, it is in especially large numbers in the month of *Shravan*.

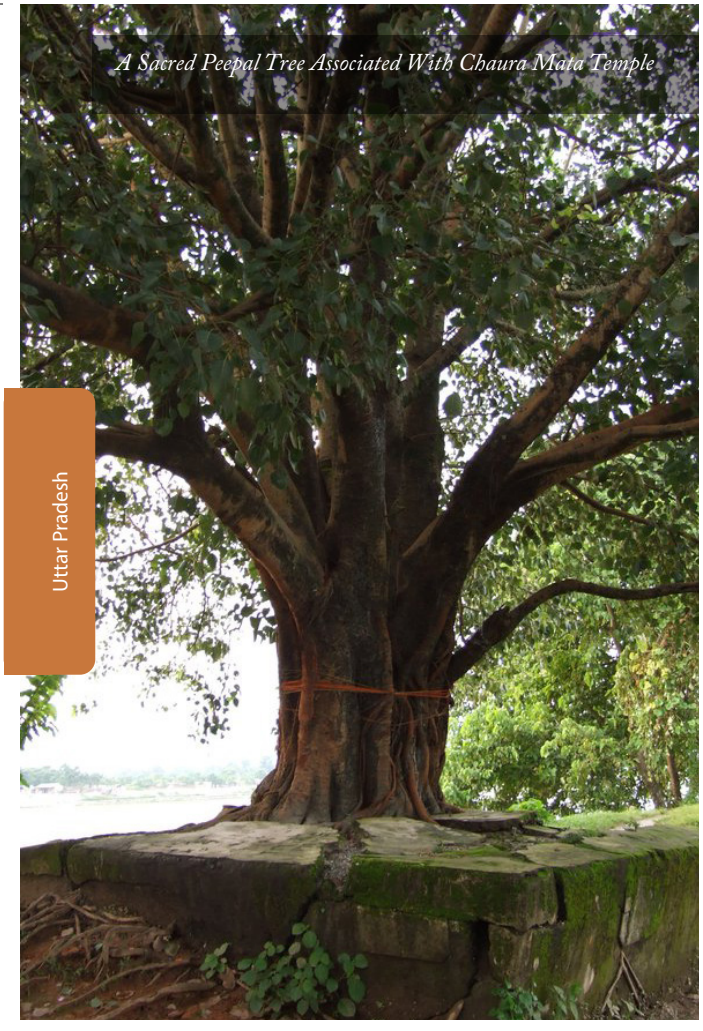
Chakva Mahavir Temple

This is another famous temple in Bhadohi district. Located at Gyanpur, this temple is dedicated to Lord Mahavir Hanuman. Every year on the last Tuesday (*Budhwa Mangal*) of the *Shravan* month, a huge fair is organised here. People from nearby districts come in large numbers to get the blessings of Lord Mahavir. The Mahavir talab/pond is also located near the temple.

Nature's Abundance

Very little area of the district is under forests. Flora and fauna are similar to other nearby districts and rather sparse. However, fishing, boatmaking and ferry services are significant occupations along with sand mining and brick manufacture.River bank erosion due to agricultural occupation of the floodplains is a severe problem in the entire district.

Ravidas's devotional verses are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Panch Vani text of the Dadupanthi Tradition within Hinduism also includes numerous poems of Guru Ravidas



A Sacred Peepal Tree Associated With Chaura Mata Temple

Samdha Tal

A Family of Nilgai

Abandoned Cave Near Chaturmukh Ghat (Once Used For Penance)

CHAPTER 26

MIRZAPUR

Land of Kajri & Inland Trade

Legend

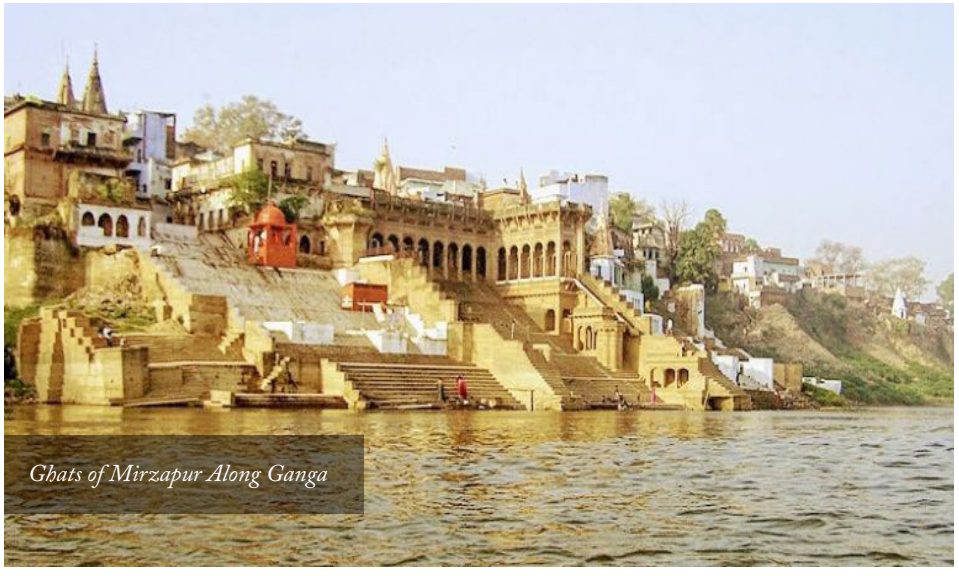
Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Mirzapur

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Mirzapur District is bounded by Bhadohi and Varanasi Districts in the north, Chandauli District in the east, Sonbhadhra District in the south and Allahabad in the north-west. With Mirzapur town as its head-quarters, the district covers an area of approximately 4522 sq km. Ganga River covers a total distance of about 45 kms in Mirzapur District.

The District is administratively divided into four *tehsils* namely Chunar, Marihan, Lalganj and Mirzapur Sadar. The district is popular for the renowned Vindhyavashini Devi Temple (dedicated to Goddess Vindhyavashini) situated at about 8 kms from Mirzapur town. This place is one of the most revered *Shaktipeeths* of the presiding deity and every year lakhs of devotees from different corners of the country come here especially during Navratri. The physiography of Mirzapur District is broadly characterized with hard rock as well as alluvial formations and table land topographic features. Hard rock area comprising Marihan, Rajgarh and Halia blocks reflects the uneven plains dotted with hillocks. Geomorphologically, the district can be divided into two distinct units: the residual hills/ table lands and the marginal alluvial plain.

The topography of the district is influenced or modified by the presence of rivers and streams including River Ganga, which is the main river



Ghats of Mirzapur Along Ganga

of this district along with several tributary streams and *nallas*. The general slope of tract in this region is North to South and the elevation of the area varies from 100–300 m amsl. The climate of the District is sub-humid characterized by hot summer, pleasant monsoon and cold winters and the average annual rainfall in the District is 1085 mm).

River Ganga enters Mirzapur District near Chehara village from Allahabad District and almost immediately forms a remarkable loop enclosing a tract of land which is approximately 6 kms wide. Thereafter, it pursues a somewhat sinuous but generally easterly course past Vindhyanchal towards Mirzapur. Furthermore, towards the northern part of Mirzapur, the river flows northwards and shows a tendency to curve back, but after a short distance, it regains its easterly direction continuing towards Chunar. After Chunar, the trend of Ganga becomes north-easterly and it finally exits the district 4 km short of Varanasi city.

Re-living *the* Past

In early days, Mirzapur was known as the land of Karushas. The first historical record of the Karushas is a minor rock edict of Emperor Ashoka in a rock shelter on what is now known as Chandan Sahid's Hill. Emperor Ashoka had established a stone quarry workshop at Chunar. The district contains more remnants of a tribal population than any other in Uttar Pradesh. It is said that Bhars had large settlements along with Cheros, Seoris, Kols and Kherwars. Present day Mirzapur was known as Kantitpuri during ancient times.

During the Buddhist Era around 600 BCE, most of North India was subdivided into 16 Republics, described as *Solahsa Mahajanapadas*. These Republics were also known as *Ganarajyas*. During this period, Mirzapur fell under the *Mahajanapada* of Vatsa, with its capital at Kaushambi.

The history of the Revolt of 1857 in Mirzapur is short but engaging. During 1857, George Tucker was the Administrator and Treasurer. The news of rebellion by the sepoys in Delhi and Meerut spread to Varanasi and Jaunpur in succession. On 16th May, 1857, George Tucker came to know about the revolt and deployed soldiers of 37th Sikh Regiment from Firozepur to guard the government treasury containing an amount of two lakh rupees; but the troops could not hold against an uncontrolled and charged mob. An amount of sixty thousand rupees was transferred to nearby areas of Allahabad and the rest of it via Ganga on steamers amid

The first historical record of the Karushas is a minor rock edict of Emperor Ashoka in a rock shelter on what is now known as Chandan Sahid's Hill

tight security. Under the leadership of Adwant Singh the Rajput community on the other side of Ganga rebelled and disrupted the traffic on G.T. Road. Adwant Singh was captured by the British Government and publicly executed. On 4th July, 1857, General Moorie ordered the arrest of scores of protesters and held them in an Indigo factory.

On 11th August, 1857, a 5000-strong group of Indian rebel soldiers arrived in Mirzapur. To suppress the rebels, a brigade of British troops marched to Mirzapur. Major fighting occurred at Company Ghat (or Burrier Ghat) and Morcha Ghar. The rebel soldiers couldn't hold their positions for long and were defeated. They were captured and executed at a spot marked by a huge tree near Morcha Ghar.

Mirzapur is proud of its history and contribution to the freedom struggle. The Morcha Ghar in Mirzapur played a crucial role in the Revolt of 1857. It also became symbolic of British repression. Here, next to Morcha Ghar is a huge tree where hundreds of freedom fighters were said to have been executed by the British. In 1921, the Civil Disobedience Movement, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, found widespread resonance in Mirzapur among all sections of the society. Barrister Yusuf Imam, Dr. Updendra Banerji, Ajit Nath Bhattacharya, Hanuman Prasad Pandey, Chandrika Prasad Vidhyarthi, Maulvi Hameed and several other local prominent figures were arrested by the then government. Later, in 1930 during the Salt March and Satyagraha, the resistance was led by J. N. Wilson in Mirzapur.

When Gandhi ji broke the Salt Law imposed by the colonial regime, his defiance of the British resonated across the Mirzapur and Bhadohi areas. In the premises of Ghanta Ghar, a large gathering of around ten thousand people led by freedom fighters John N. Wilson, Mahadev Prasad Seth Matwala, Sankata Prasad and Prof. Vishram Singh broke the Salt Law.

Morcha Ghar - The Centre of the 1857 Events

Trade *through* Ganga

Mirzapur's position as an active trading point was further strengthened during the colonial regime and to protect the goods of merchant class the British government established the Ganga Insurance Company in 1791. The importance of Mirzapur as an entrepot of inland trade is now a thing of the past. The zenith of its prosperity was attained by 1840, when, from its position at the head of the steam navigation of the Ganges, the city attracted a very large share of the cotton trade from the south of Vindhyas. In 1847, the annual value of the transit trade in this article alone was stated at nearly a million and a quarter pound sterling.

The boats that in those days plied over the Jumna returned to Rajpur, Kalpi, Agra and other marts in Upper India, freighted with sugar, rice and cloth in exchange for the cotton and gram which they had brought.

The development of the railway system has entirely revolutionized the carrying trade of the country. The steamer traffic on the river has entirely ceased. Except for transport of quarried stone by native boats and some short distance passenger ferrying, there is little river borne traffic left.

During 1911 there were twenty-five ferries over the Ganges and eight on the Son River, thirteen being managed by the district board, seven, all on the Ganges, by the Maharaja of Benaras, and the remainder being private and worked by the local *zamindars*.

The monopolisation of inland trade by the servants of the East India Company after the Battle of Plassey and later the annexation of Agra by the British in 1803, dealt a heavy blow to the fortunes of the commercial classes in Northern India. Bombay and Calcutta became the new centres of trade and commerce and the inland commercial centres along the banks of the Ganga and the Jamuna lost their former importance.

Bharat Milaap at Chaubetola, Mirzapur

Events *of* Interest

Panchami *ka* Bharat Milaap

The Bharat Milap Panchami of Purani Dashmi Ramlila Panchayati is a 650-years old performing tradition in Mirzapur. This *Ramlila* starts on the fourteenth day of the *Kartik* month (October-November), the same day when Bhagwan Shri Ram performed his father's *Pinda Daan* at Gaya and returned to Mirzapur. The specialty of this Ramlila is that it is staged daily and performed by the local performers with one episode a day. On the day of *Vijay Dashami* or the tenth day, after the battle with Ravana, the effigies of Ravana and his main commanders are burnt. Finally after worshiping the Gods and an elaborate enactment of *Bharat Milaap* (meeting of Rama with Bharat) at Purani Dashami at Chaubetola, the event concludes.

Idol of Ma Vindhyavasini, Vindhyavasini Temple, Mirzapur

Navratri Mela

Durga Navratri is the main festival of Vindhyachal region as Goddess Vindhyavasini is prayed to and honoured by each family of Vindhyachal. It is believed that during this period the Devi's energy and divine power flows through all devotees. During Navratri, a large number of pilgrims also come from different part of the country and nine goddesses are worshiped, one each day, as per their names described in the Devi Kavacha of the Chandipatha scripture also known as the Devi Bhagvatpurana or Devi Mahatmya.

Sharad Poornima Festival

According to belief Sharad Poornima has a significance related to the churning of the ocean by *Devas* (Gods) and *Asuras* (Demons). The fourteen elements were said to have been regurgitated from this churning of the ocean. One of these elements was the moon, which later took its place in the universe. It is also considered as a symbol of beauty due to its pacifying effect. Sharad Poornima has special significance as the day signifies that *Raas Lila* was initiated on this auspicious occasion by Lord Krishna in Vrindavan.

Kartik Snaan & Rituals

During the month of *Kartik*, lighting lamps in the temples of Shiv, Chandi, Surya and other deities is considered auspicious. The God Vishnu is greeted with flowers.

The zenith of prosperity was reached in Mrizapur by about 1840, when, from its position at the head of the steam navigation of the Ganges, the city attracted a very large share of the cotton trade from the south of Vindhyas

Ojhala-*ka*-Mela

The Ojhala-ka-Pul is a distinctive and well-known architectural attraction within Mirzapur. It has been a popular location for holding of a traditional fair or Mela and Kajri Festival on Bhadrapada Shukla Dwadashi (September-October). Near Ojhala is a lake named after Bali, in which rowing competitions are held and by the lakeside a Kajri singing competition or Kajali Dangal is organised. A fair on the day of Nag Panchami in the month of Saavan (July, August) is also held here.

Kajri Mela

According to a belief, Kajri song was written to please mother goddess Vindhyavasini by a Muslim poet. After listening to the song the Goddess granted the poet his wish and said

whosoever would sing this song would get instant blessings from her. Since then, before the start of a Kajli Dangal in Mirzapur area, the poets have to write their first creation dedicated to mother Goddess Vindhyavasini.

ART *at the* HEART

The main occupation and business activity in Mirzapur concerns carpet making. Most of the carpets made in the area are sold internationally as India has a limited market for carpets. It is believed that Akbar introduced carpet making in India. This also finds mention in Abul Fazal's Ain-ae-Akbari. Carpet making first developed in Kashmir, followed by Agra and then spread to Jaipur under the patronage of Akbar.

The story of carpet making in the Mirzapur belt is very interesting. The ruler of Bihar Sharif had requested Akbar to send royal weavers to Bihar, which was approved and a group of weavers were sent. Near Gopiganj, the weavers were attacked by robbers and many of them were killed. Those who survived fled to Madho Singh and Ghosiya Villages nearby to take refuge and thus started the story of carpet weaving in Mirzapur. Initially, they faced difficulties, especially as they could not procure wool and had to use Jute instead. Later with financial assistance provided by the Maharaja of Benaras, the industry flourished. During the regime of the East India Company,

Brassware Industry of Mirzapur

Jail Carpet

the carpets of Mirzapur received international recognition and in this pursuit Edgar Hill established E. Hills Company at Mirzapur in 1896 followed by Tellary and Oakley, Bowden and Taylor or Obeetee in 1936.

Mirzapur is again witnessing a surge in overseas demand, especially from the U.S. The main raw material, wool, is procured from Bikaner (Rajasthan) and New Zealand. Carpet making was not a vast business earlier and was confined more to clusters. There was a time when Mirzapur was famous for *durrie* - (flat woven rug), even a small grocery shop would have these *durries*. Every shopkeeper would buy *durries* from small vendors who would come to Mirzapur on their bicycles.

Jail Carpets

The world-renowned Mughal Jail carpets, possibly the most expensive carpets in the world at present, originated under the reign of Emperor Akbar, who was a great patron of the arts and cul-

ture. When it was brought to his notice that the prisoners created a ruckus in the jails, he decided to reform them. Between 1520-30 CE he brought some of the finest weavers of carpets from the most well-known carpet workshops of Persia to teach the prisoners the art of weaving carpets. These prisoners took immense pride in their work and they eventually outshone their masters. These carpets were made for palaces in India and some were also sent abroad in the form of gifts. Since there was no shortage of money, labour or time, it could take a few hundred weavers up to 15 years to make a single carpet. They used the finest wool, velvets, silks, Alpaca wool and sometimes even Pashmina (Cashmere), one of the most exotic fibres used for weaving shawls, for making these carpets. The dyes were all natural dyes/vegetable dyes extracted from plants, rocks, minerals, insects, etc. The designs were rare and quite different from the traditional Persian, Turkish and Central Asian carpets and many of these designs were based on original Indian patterns prior to the Mughal influence. The jails most renowned for carpets were the jails of Agra, Lahore, Amritsar, Jaipur, Gwalior and Bikaner.

Brassware

The brassware tradition has been prevalent in Mirzapur for the last 500 years, and currently involves around 50,000 workers. There has been little development in entrepreneurship in this handicraft industry and traditional ways and processes still dominate. The process of brassware making is complex

Chunar Pottery

and time consuming. It involves various stages such as Moulding, Para Casting, Darza Casting, Sheet work, Beating, Pressing, Spinning Lathe, Soldering and scraping, Engraving and Polishing. Two materials, copper and zinc are mixed in a ratio of 60:40 to make brass metal which is an alloy. Brassware is locally in demand mostly during the marriage season.

Chunar Pottery

The traditional red clay pottery in Chunar has dwindled from 400 to about 10 to 15 families that are still involved in this occupation. This industry has been impacted adversely due to a smaller number of train routes through the area and electricity shortage. The artisans have not received any recognition. This pottery made from two special clays called *viakti* and *khasi*, and when unglazed the products are of a dark-brown colour, this tinge being produced by mixing up a powdered red stone with the clay paste. Both vitreous and metallic glazes are applied, but red metallic glaze is peculiar to the potters of Chunar and Faizabad.

Lac & Shellac Work

When we recall Lac or Shellac, the mind immediately travels back to the epic Mahabharta in which Duryodhana had clandestinely got a palace of lac called Lakshagrah built to kill the Pandavas. The spot where the mythical palace was said to have been built

is near Jangiganj which is known as Lakshagrah or Lakshagrih. Even today devotees offer their prayers at this spot. Commercial use of lac started when the East India Company arrived in India and lac saw a surge in demand, especially during World War I and II as it was used in ships and explosives. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Mirzapur became well-known for its shellac industry.

Kajri

Folksongs as a tradition are orally transmitted from generation to generation in the community. Mirzapur is known mainly for its Kajri. Birha and Laavani are also important folk song traditions here. Laavani tradition of singing was performed at the Pukka Ghat, Ghantaghar and the Sankirtan Bhawan of Mirzapur. This form of singing is closely associated with literature and is sung accompanied by an instrument called Chang. Some of the well-known singers of Laavani were Hadiya Baba, Banarasidas Hazari, Harisahay Giri and Devi Singh.

Birha singing was specific to the Ahirs, who were traditionally cattle herders. The Birha songs of today are sung mostly in villages and can be in the form of Bhakri Gyaan, Vairagya Geet, Vikasgeet, Rashtriya Geet and Shringaar Geet. The instruments used to perform Birha include Harmonium, Kartaal, Dhol, and Jhanjh. Propagated further by Jahangir, Kajri is a legacy of Mirzapur. It is said that Kajri was redefined by Munni Lal Sharma, Bairagi Chaibiram, Akkhat and Sri Pandit Sridas who were folk singers. Interestingly, Goddess Vindhyavasini is also known as identified as Kajra Devi. Kajri is sung primarily during the months of Shravan and Bhaado. Dhunmuniya Kajri is sung during the month of Vasant.

It is believed, that the word Kajri is derived from the Hindi word kajra, which means kajal (kohl or black). References to the Kajli Festival being celebrated in the month of August (in the month of Bhadon). Instead of Gharanas of Indian classical music, this folk tradition has multiple Akhadas. Shivdas Akhada, Imaman Akhada, Jahangir Akhada, Bhairo Akhada, Baffat Akhada, Muurat Thela Akhada and Akkhad Akhada are some of the well-known

Ajita Srivastava Performing Kajri

Kajri Singers at Ghat of Mirzapur

Akhadas of Kajri in Mirzapur.

It is also believed that the origin of Kajri comes from the story of a woman called Kajli whose husband was in a distant land. Upon the arrival of monsoon their separation became unbearable and she started to cry at the feet of the Kajmal Goddess or Kajli-Mata. Separation is the main theme of the origin of the popular Kajri songs. There are two forms of Kajri singing in UP—one which is performed on stage for an audience and the other which is primarily for enjoyment and celebration at home and is sung by women during monsoon evenings, while dancing in a semicircle (this is known as the Dhunmuniya Kajri).

Lorikayan

Lorikayan is a very popular folklore in the Vindhyanchal region and is usually sung in Bhojpuri language. It is an oral tradition still prevalent among the tribal and non-tribal populace primarily of Ahir community besides Gond, Dusadh, Teli, Kalavar, Kumahar, Mallah, Naai, Dhobi and Kherwar communities. It is sung with great love and great emotions. Many different versions of Lorikayan are available.

It is believed, that the word Kajri is derived from the Hindi word kajra, which means kajal (kohl or black)

19th Century Stone Pillar with Engraved Boat Tariffs for Different Destinations

Lorik's place of birth is disputed. Some say it was Gaura Village in Mirzapur district while others insist that he was born in Hardi in Ballia District (both in Uttar Pradesh). In Bhojpuri, Lorikayan is sung as a love story of Lorik-Chanda. It is based on the heroic deeds and sacrifices of Lorik. The folklore also narrates the relation between Lorik and his love, Manjari.

Wrestling

Traditional wrestling is an integral part of the culture of Mirzapur and is still prevalent in its original form. Here, on the occasion of Nag Panchami and Govardhan Puja, traditional wrestling matches are held. The Dukhi Ram Akhada near Ojhala ka Pul still follows the traditional form of wrestling. The other prominent Akhadas of Mirzapur are Shripati Singh Akhada (Manai Village), Dukkhi Ka Akhada at Pokhari, and Vishwanath Agrahari Akhada.

Mural & Rock Paintings *of* Mirzapur

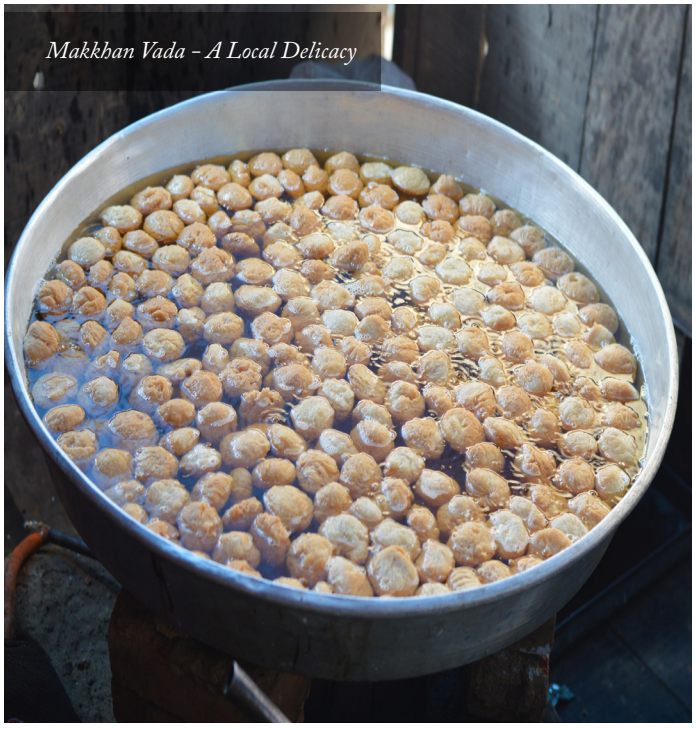
Mirzapur was not only a trading city in earlier times but also a hub of art and creativity. The influence of Awadh Mural Paintings and Rajasthani Paintings was immense; the sole extant samples on the verge of extinction are the mural paintings at Naar Ghat. Indigenously

made with Bhusi, Mitti, Lime and Gond, these paintings and art form depicted mythologies and are now on the verge of extinction.

The total number of hitherto known painted rock-shelters is 240 which make district Mirzapur the second largest rock-art centre in India. The rock paintings depict various aspects of the life of the communities to which the painters belonged and provide a very useful source-material for the study of the associated communities and their cultures.

Gastronomic Delights

One of the most famous traditional sweets of Mirzapur is the Badi Tikiya which is found only in Mirzapur. Other popular local sweets are: Makkhan Vada, Mewa ka Laddoo, Thekua, Gondh Laddoo, Balushahi and Bundi ka laddoo. All these are made using pure desi ghee. Makkhan Vada is usually prepared on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan and Diwali. The ingredients used are maida, ghee, water and curd; process involves mixing all the ingredients together to make dough, which is then made into small balls and cooked over low flame, and after 2-3 days it is put in a sugar syrup or Chashni. This sweet is known to have a shelf life of about a week.



Makkhan Vada - A Local Delicacy

The other traditional sweet of Mirzapur is Pethua which is made with Moong Daal, Ghee, Sugar, where the grinded Moong Daal is fried with Ghee on low flame, then it is rested for 2 days, after that it is beaten, sugar added and Pethua is ready.

Baati Chokha is made during the rainy season when people go out for picnics and family gatherings. Rice and lentils are cooked in clay pots and Baati is baked. People from other regions come here to eat Baati Chokha, especially during the rainy season.

People who Fascinate

Lalita Shastri

Lalita Shastri (11 January, 1910 – 13 April, 1993) was the wife of former Prime Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri. Lalita Devi was from Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh. Lal Bahadur Shastri spent nine years of his life in jail. During these spells, Lalita looked after the children and household.

Naheed Abidi

Naheed Abidi is an Indian scholar of Sanskrit and writer. She was honoured by the Government of India, in 2014, by bestowing on her the Padmashri, the fourth highest civilian award, for her contributions in the field of literature.

Amar Goswami

Amar Goswami (28 November, 1945 – 26 June, 2012) was a senior journalist and one of the prominent fiction writers of Hindi literature. His work includes satire, short stories, poems, novels, novelettes and translations from Bengali to Hindi. He was asso-

ciated with Kathantar, Vikalp, Aagamikal, Sampa, Manorama, Ganga, Sunday Observer (Hindi), Bharti Features, Uxhur Bharat, Bharatiya Jnanpith, Remadhav Publications. His stories have been aired on All India Radio and short films have been made on his stories.

Lakshmi Raj Sharma

Lakshmi Raj Sharma (born 1954) is an Indian author, novelist, and academician. He used to teach English Literature and Literary Theory. He was Professor at the Department of English and Modern European Languages at the University of Allahabad. Recently, his novel, The Tailor's Needle was published.

Monuments *that* Matter

Ojhala Ka Pul

Mahant Purushottam Das was an affluent cotton trader based in Mirzapur. It is widely believed that the Ojhla Bridge was made by Purushottam Giri with a day's earnings. The bridge represents a microcosm of British architecture and heritage. It is supported by four towers on both sides which evenly distributes the weight of the structure. The dungeons and other rooms that are a part of the tower were not for any practical purposes. The bridge is an architectural marvel. Its arches are also structurally important as they support the weight of the upper part of the bridge.

Ojhala ka Pul

> ***82°30'E, which is the Standard Time Meridian of India, passes through Mirzapur. The time of this meridian is taken as the standard time for the entire country***

Pakki Sarai

There is a beautiful old structure of a Sarai or rest house, with intricate stone-work, situated in the heart of the city. Built of sandstone, the well in the complex is an excellent example of Gothic architecture. It was built in year 1851 on the orders of a rich local merchant, Pandit Sheetala Prasad Upadhyaya, the grandfather of renowned Hindi writer, Pandit Badri Narayan Chaudhary Premghan.

Chunar Fort

The fort is about 35 km from Mirzapur on the road to Ram Nagar. It finds detailed mention in the fictional work of Devkinandan Khatri's famous novel—Chandrakanta. The fort is believed to have been built by King

The Gothic Style Well at Pakki Sarai

Vikramaditya for his brother Bhartrihari. A Samadhi of Bhartrihari is located in the premises of the fort. During Mauryan and Ashokan reign this fort was a hub of several activities. It was at this fort that the slabs used for Dhamma of Ashoka were built.

The recorded history of Mirzapur starts with Chunar Fort which had become a strategic point by the sixteenth century. This Mughal stronghold was seized by Sher Shah Suri around 1530 CE after defeating Humayun. Following, this Chunar had many changes of rulers which included Mughals again, the Nawab of Oudh, minor Oudh Chieftains, the Raja of Benaras and finally the British by 1781 CE.

The Chunar Fort also houses an accurate Sun Dial. The watch is positioned such a way that it tells the exact time over stone dials of the famous watch. After Warren Hastings left the place in 1791, his bungalow was used for the rest and recreation of European forces.

Vindhyavasini Shrine

Ancient Goddess, Vindhyavasini, was considered to be an independent deity and force for a long time before she came to be associated with Krishna's story. According to other mythologies, Vindhyavasini was the Great Goddess or the single *Adishakti* or primal energy of the universe. She has been referred to as *Mahadevi* or the Great Goddess in many ancient hymns that are found in Mahabharata, where she is said to be residing in the Vindhyas. She also had a powerful association with nature, and was believed to dwell in the mountains.

The temple is one of the most revered *Shaktipeeths* of India. Vindhyavasini Devi is also popularly known as Kajala Devi and attracts most pilgrims during the month of April (*Chaitra*) and September-October (*Sharad*). People usually chant Shatchandi Verses as an offering to the Goddess, especially during the two Navratris. Animal sacrifices has also been part of the daily ritual of the temple.

Asht-Bhuja Temple

According to mythology, Ashtbhuja Saraswati was the Goddess born to Yashoda and Nanda as the divine girl-child who took her eight-armed form to announce to Krishna's evil uncle Kamsa that his slayer had been born. She then returned to the hills of the Vindhyas where she continues to reside. Ashtbhuja is one of the three feminine *shaktis* residing in Vindhyanchal and popularly known as Yogmaya.

It is widely believed that the Ojhla Bridge was made by Purushottam Giri with a day's earnings

Kali Koh

Kali Koh Temple is dedicated to Kali Ma and is in the form of a cave. Goddess Kali is believed to have been incarnated to kill the demon Rakta Beej (Demon) who had a boon that every droplet of his blood would give birth to another Raktabeej right away. This made killing the demon extremely difficult. It is believed that Ma Kali stretched her tongue across the ground, licked all the blood and swallowed all his duplicates.

Sita Kund

Sita Kund is located on the west side of the Ashtabhuja temple. It is believed that after construction of the *kund*, Sita ji established a *Shivalaya* near the pond and this place came to

be known as Siteshwar. On the west side of Sita Kund, is the Ram Kund.

Motia & Gerua Talab

The two ponds of Motia and Gerua Talab fall on the route from Kali Koh and Ashtabhuja. The Shiva lingam of Mukteshwar Nath is established on the northern bank of Motia Sarovar. It is believed that devotees attain salvation by bathing in ponds, worshipping in the nearby temples after meditation. There is a belief that by bathing here after a dog bite, one can be healed immediately.

Budhenath Mandir

The temple of Baba Budhenath situated on Satti Road in Rajapur area is very old and based on Bundeli architectural style. Notably, the temple has been patronized by the kings of Jammu and Kashmir and Nepal. Even today the *Ashtadhatu*-made bells provided by the kings adorn the temple. According to the temple priest, Dr. Yogananda Giri, this place is considered the resting place of Goddess Parvati and Lord Shankar. It is believed that every day Lord Shankar comes here from Kashi Vishwanath.

It is believed that Kashi was established by Vishwakarma's craftsmen in the *agra-bhaag* (foremost-part) of Mahadev's trident on his orders. And on the insistence of Mata Parvati while going to Kashi from Mount Kailash, Bholenath asked Vishwakarma to build a place called Girijapur on the back of the Trishul. This place is considered to be Mirzapur. Mata Parvati rests in the Baba Budhenath Temple located here. Lord Bholenath comes with Nandi every day to meet Maa Parvati and fulfils all the wishes of the devotees visiting the temple. Raja Amar Singh, father of Maharaja Hari Singh, the last ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, provided a huge bell of *Ashtadhatu* on behalf of his ancestors, as did the King of Nepal, King Birendra. Even today both the historic bells adorn the temple. Along with Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Baba Budhenath Temple was also renovated by Queen Ahilyabai Holkar. The maintenance and service work of the temple has also been done by the kings of Rewa, Dumraon and Kashi princely states.

Colonial Godown Along the River, now Abandoned

Kantit Sharif Dargah

Close to Vindhyanchal is the village of Kantit where the famous Dargah of Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti's nephew, Sufi Ismail Chisti is situated. According to Rajab (Hijri/Islamic Calendar) during 5th, 6th and 7th of every month, the Urs is celebrated here. Thousands of devotees from every sect and religion pay their obeisance and offer Shirni (sweets), Tasbih (rosary) and Chadarein (cloth sheets).

The dargah is situated on a sand mound and is a testimony to communal harmony. As an example of harmony, the first chadar is always mounted by the descendants of Jawahar Kasera, a resident of Makri Khoh.

Exquisite carving, Ghats, Mirzapur

The story behind the arrival of Khwaja Ismail Shah Chishti states that he accompanied Moinuddin Chisti when he came to India. Later he was given the usury and Khilafat of Mirzapur. There is a saying that when Ismail Chishti came to Mirzapur, the then ruler forbade him to draw water from the river, in return Hazrat diverted the river stream and demolished the fort with his influence and power.

Baman Mandir

The Baman Temple is near Ojhala-Ganga river confluence and in close proximity to Ojhala ka Pul.

Ghats *of* Mirzapur

There were 27 Ghats in Mirzapur. However, majority of them have either been damaged or fallen into disuse. The names of them are: Fataha Ghat (built in 1857), Ghode Shaeed Ghat, Kacheri Ghat, Tarkeshwar Ghat (swept away), Bariya Ghat comprising separate Zanana and Mardana Ghats, Teleniya Ghat, Koniya Ghat, Sundar Ghat, Narayan Ghat, Badli Ghat (built in 1779), Baba Ghat, Gangaram Ghat, Trilochan Ghat, Heera Lal Ghat, Gau Ghat, Dau ji Ghat, Pakka Ghat (Built in 1885), Sankata Ghat, Naar Ghat (Pracheen Ghat), Rukhadd Ghat, Steamer Ghat, Chaube Ghat (Shamshan Ghat), Lalla Ghat, Bawan Ghat (near Ojhala-Ganga confluence).

Zanana *or* Pakka Ghat

Zanana Ghat remains the most active

ghat of the town, being located in the central and the oldest part of the dense, active river front. This is one of the most elaborate ghats in Mirzapur. The steps leading down to the river are paved with buff coloured sandstone quarried at Chunar. Of the same material are built the two partitions running north-south from the river to the street. The central portion was used by women for bathing. The Ghat was built in the late eighteenth century by a local rich trader, Sri Bhagwandas Umar, for his wife's exclusive use.

Naar Ghat

At one time when Mirzapur was known as an important trading centre, Ganga Ghat had a major role to play. Goods were loaded onto large boats at this ghat and sent to Varanasi, Calcutta, Patna and other cities. Even today, inscriptions and prices written in English, Persian, and Hindi can be seen on old stone pillar here.

Mata Parvati rests in the Baba Budhenath Temple located here. Lord Bholenath comes with Nandi every day to meet Maa Parvati and fulfils all the wishes

Mural Painting at Naar Ghat

Nature's Abundance

Since Mirzapur lies in the Vindhyas, the physiography is broadly characterized with hard rock as well as alluvial formations and table land topographic features. Hard rock area comprising Marihan, Rajgarh and Halia Blocks reflects the uneven plains and dotted with hillocks.

Only medium dense and open forests are to be found here. These forests are classified as Tropical Dry Deciduous Type. Three reserve forest areas, namely – Vindhyachal Reserve Forest, Mahuwari Reserve Forest and Bhiskuri Reserve Forest are present. The Vindhyachal Reserve forest mainly covers the Vindhyachal Range where holy places such as Ashtabhujha Temple, Motiya Talab and Gerua Talab are located. The slope of these mountains have medium to low density dry deciduous forests while the upper sections of the mountains are covered by open scrub and degraded forests with sparse tree cover. The Bhiskuri Reserve Forest also comprises of low altitude hilly tracts covered with open degraded forests having very low density of vegetation. In interactions with local residents, it was found that till about 20-25 years ago, these areas had higher density of flora which provided habitat for several faunal species

Hard rock area comprising Marihan, Rajgarh and Halia Blocks reflects the uneven plains and is dotted with hillocks

such as Leopards and Sloth Bears. However, due to increasing fragmentation of habitat and over-exploitation of forest resources, these populations have diminished to a state of near local extinction.

The riparian areas, lying between the aquatic and the terrestrial habitats, serve as functional interfaces within the landscapes, mediating energy and matter between these two ecosystems. With dynamic environmental conditions and ecological processes, these areas tend to harbour rich biodiversity. A major component of this biodiversity is the plant communities growing along the river bank which are interacting with both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The riparian vegetation is significant in the overall ecology and environmental aspects of the region owing to its important roles in soil conservation, harbouring faunal diversity and providing livelihood resources.

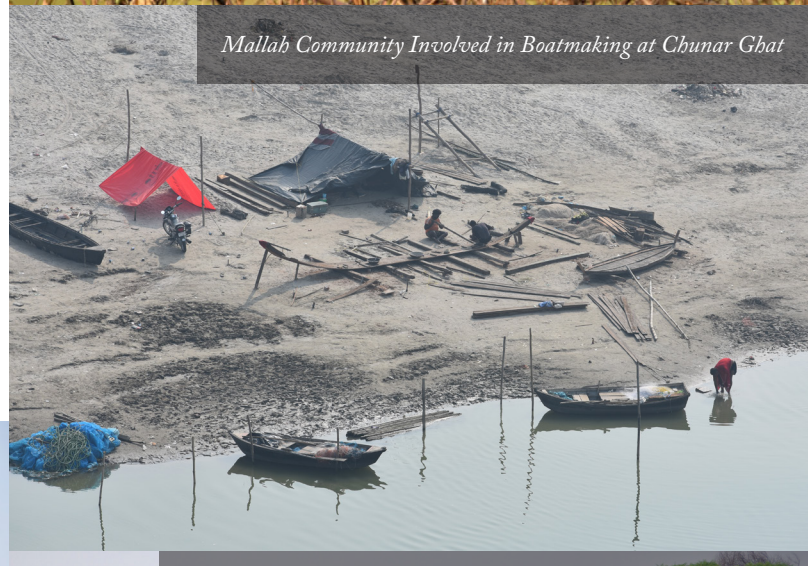
The grass species *Saccharum spontaneum L.* (commonly known as *Kaans*) was the most widespread grass in the floodplain region of Mirzapur District. This species is a tall and perennial grass growing naturally in the alluvial plains, swamps and riparian areas of north India. Fishing is a major occupation.

Wyndham Water Falls Near BHU Campus Mirzapur

The large 0.75 sq km riverine island 'Kewatabir ka Reta' is a sand bar which is stabilising with wild vegetation on its upstream end providing biodiversity habitat, while also being used for cultivation.

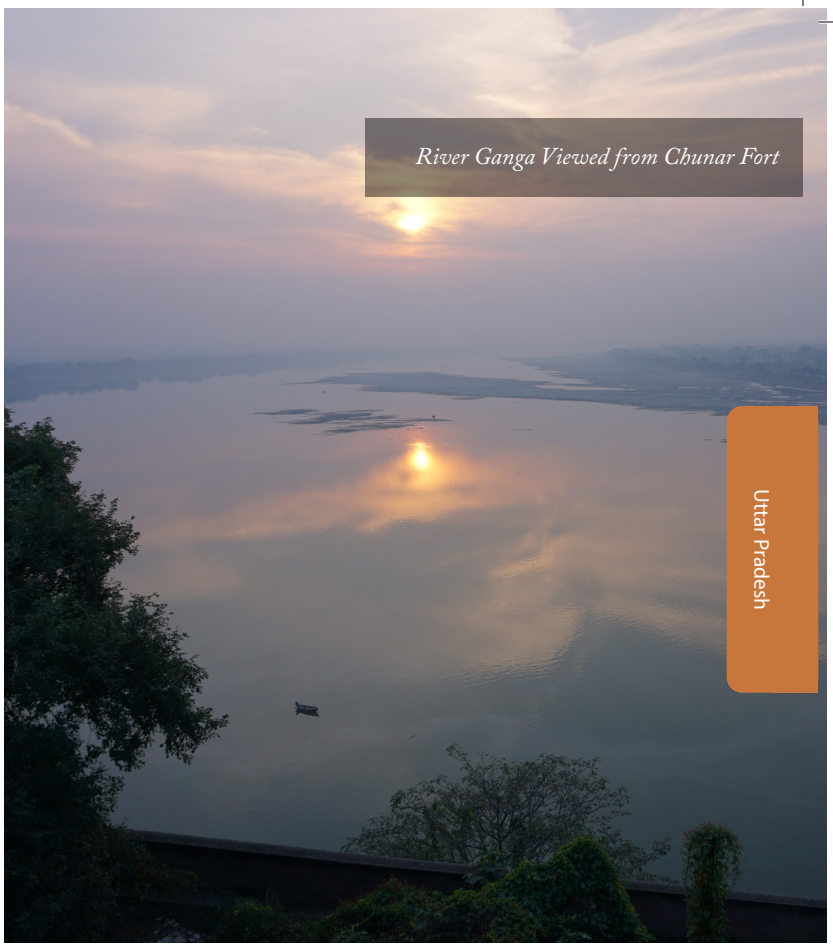
Motiya Talab Along With Mukteshwar Mahadev Mandir

Brahminy Starling (Sturnus pagodarum)



Mallah Community Involved in Boatmaking at Chunar Ghat

Karnawati Nala Near Akrohi Village – A Small Tributary



River Ganga Viewed from Chunar Fort

Uttar Pradesh

Ancient Naag Kund

CHAPTER 27

VARANASI

Where Shiva Resides

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Varanasi
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Varanasi city is the headquarters of Varanasi District. Located on the western bank of Ganga its proximity to the river has been the major factor for making it habitable since as early as the 800 BCE and thus being the staging ground of all cultural, religious, political, and economic activities in the region. Due to its serene location and religious associations, this city has been visited by pilgrims from all over the country, who want to live and who want to die here as well. This large visiting population to the city has resulted in cross-cultural influences, which in turn has helped in evolution of the city as a religious mega city that is one of a kind. The intermingling of cultures and practices of people with highly varied religious, economic, and geographical backgrounds has shaped Varanasi into the most important and assimilative religious centre of the country and the ghats of Ganga have surely contributed to making it into what it is today.

Varanasi has grown along the flow of the river Ganga. All the religious and historic sites are primarily located on the western bank of the river. The different historic precincts and their locations also help to understand the organic pattern of growth of a settlement along the flow of Ganga and the city's evolution with it. The city stretches along the ghats of the holy river for about 15 km and the settlement pattern and architecturally

rich riverfront demonstrates the importance of Ganga in its structure and morphology.

Varanasi District is located in the southern portion of the state of Uttar Pradesh with Sant Ravidas Nagar District in the west, Mirzapur District in the south, Jaunpur and Ghazipur Districts in the north and Chandauli District in the east. It comprises of Gangetic plains throughout the district and geologically comprises the alluvial plains.

The district comprises of two major geographical components - the upland plains known as the *uparwar* and the moist lowlands known as the *tari*. The slope and levels of the land vary tremendously in the entire district despite a common geological setting and dependent up on the course of flow of the rivers and streams in the area.

The region is rich in ecological diversity with various rivers and

The Sharp Curve of the River Signifies the Crescent Moon on Shiva's Head (Google Earth Image)

streams, bountiful aquifers and waterbodies like lakes, ponds, and kunds. The Ganga here has tributaries like Varuna, Asi, Nand and Gomti apart from that water bodies like Pushkar Talab, Durga Kund, Moti Jheel and many more. The undulating topography within the district with highlands and depressions also result in zones of varying fertility. There are several soil types like clay, sandy loam, kankar present in the region due to the presence and flow and deposition by many streams. There are no forest areas in the district and major vegetation includes scrubs and areas of light vegetation.

Ganga is as integral to Varanasi as are the temples and other religious structures in the district. In fact, in fact trying to analyse all the components of the religiosity of Varanasi, the river Ganga is at the apex. Since ancient times, water sources have been sacred to human civilizations as they nurture life and hence, they are worshipped as different manifestations of deities. And thus, Ganga emerged as the holiest of all rivers in the country. Varanasi is believed to be the holiest of all places Ganga travels through, as it is the land of Lord Shiva, who is associated with Ganga as her lord, who brought her to earth. Lord Shiva is believed to have supported life on a drought prone earth, saving humanity by holding Ganga in his dreadlocks. Therefore, Shiva and Ganga are integral to Varanasi and permeate every aspect of life in the district.

> ***"Varanasi is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, And looks twice as old as all of them put together"***
>
> ***- Mark Twain on his visit in 1897***

Re-living *the* Past

The area of Varanasi along the flow of or in proximity of the river Ganga is of highest significance in the district and well beyond. The mythological associations and the archaeological finds provide evidence of a flourishing human settlement since prehistoric times and the religious significance it has held for humans for centuries, adds to the different layers of the multi-dimensional cultural richness of Varanasi.

Varanasi has been known by the names of Varanasi, Banaras, Benaras, Kashi, Kasi, Avimukta, Anandvana, Rudravasa, Mahashamshana and more over centuries. Kashi, the oldest name of the settlement and region, dating back to the 15th century BCE, is mentioned in the Atharva Veda. The meaning of the word Kashi is cosmic light and *Moksha* as per the texts. According to the Mahabharata, it is described as the sacred city Kashi, with similar boundaries as of the *Panch Kosi Yatra* of today. According to the Mahabharata, the mythological epic, it is believed that the seven *Rishis* or saints who wrote and compiled the Vedas, approached Lord Vishnu, and requested to be shown the road to salvation or *Moksha*. The Lord created a *lingam* or stone idol which shone brightly for a radius of 5 *Kos* or ten miles. This area was called Kashi, the centre and the spot first created on earth. This was later placed in the centre and earth was created to accommodate the large number of *rishis* or saints, who could not stay in the initial radius.

The Subah-e-Banaras Aarti

Another etymology of the word suggests that the name came from the word, *Kasha* meaning the King as it was a capital city. Another one suggests, it is derived from the name of *Kasha* flower, which is a tall silver coloured flower that grows in this region. This name was used before 8th century BCE as per ancient texts. However, it has been commonly used by the pilgrims and visitors through the centuries. Varanasi (Kashi) is still Shiva's abode, and he is called *Kashinaresh*, meaning the King of Kashi.

Varanasi is a name believed to have been derived by the two rivers or streams which defined the territorial limits of the kingdom in ancient and historic times, the Varuna or Varna River on the north and Asi River on the south. It is also a mythological belief that the two rivers were created by Gods to protect this holy land of Shiva from any evil. Another belief is that the rivers are created by the left and right legs of Lord Vishnu, who is lying down with his head at Prayag or Allahabad for protection of Shiva's land. The river Varuna on the north was named so as it meant averter and the river Asi on the south meant the sword. This name had been used since as early as the 6th century BCE to 12th century CE. Later, the district and city were named Banaras and renamed Varanasi only in the late 20th century.

The name Banarasi or Banaras

was mentioned in Buddhist literature, particularly in the Pali version of the texts during 16th century. The name gained prominence during this time only and was later manipulated into Benaras during the British rule for the ease of pronunciation. Besides these other names like Avimukta, Anandvana, Rudhravasa and Mahashamshana are all mythological names associated with Lord Shiva which have never been used officially.

The archaeological evidence present in the Varanasi region provides details of the human life and civilization in the area. Archaeological excavations in the areas of Rajghat, Sarnath, Bairat, Aktha, and Baigar in the district have proven to be informative about the anthropological details of the settlements in the area. It would not be wrong to attribute this presence of life to the major water source Ganga, as most of these archaeological findings are in areas of close proximity to the river. The archaeological findings have suggested the occupation of area since 800 BCE, but recent research and explorations have driven the date further back to the 11th and 12th century BCE. The excavations at Aktha, around 1.5 km south-west of Sarnath archaeological site suggest human habitation in this area in around 12th century BCE. The remains found include terracotta pottery, iron implements, artefacts, and seals along with remains of Black Slip Ware. The archaeological remains suggest humans lived a pastoral life with farming and animal domestication. The houses were made of mud along with wood and surrounded by mud rampart walls during this time. There were some remains like microlith tools and Red Ware found in the Kamauli Region dating from 5th to 3rd century BCE .

The religious practices during this period focused on natural entities like sun and yaksha, as suggested by the Bira images, solar discs and shrines found here. Besides, the Jain images excavated in the Varanasi region, dating from 11th to 9th century BCE and some dating to 5th century BCE also suggest the practice of Jainism in this region. Buddhism and Jainism, in fact, were both practiced along with Ajivika (heterodox sector of Indian philosophy) by people in this region during this time. The areas of Varanasi district are associated with a some Tirthankars (prominent preachers) of the Jain religion and with Buddha. The birthplaces of 8th and 23rd Tirthankars of Jainism are believed to be Chandravati and Bhelupura respectively and the last Tirthankar, Mahavir, is also said to have visited Varanasi in the latter part of his life. In fact, one Jain Temple near Dhamekha Stupa in Buddhist site Sarnath is also speculated to have been built to commemorate the birth of 11th Tirthankar, Shreyamshanatha. Buddha is also believed to have visited Varanasi in the Sarnath area, referred to as Isipatana Migadaya. In fact the deer park in Sarnath is one of the most important sites of Buddhism as it is where he is believed to have met his first five disciples. Gosala, the founder and preacher of the Ajivika sect is also believed to have lived in Varanasi region.

The name Banarasi or Banaras was mentioned in Buddhist literature, particularly in the Pali version of the texts during 16th century

Pali texts, Anguttaranikaya and Dighanikaya and Jataka tales also provide descriptions of Varanasi or Banarasi. It describes the city with six gates and markets, a moat along the main rampart wall and rest houses for pilgrims and visitors. This also has established the fact that Varanasi must have been a flourishing religious town with large number of visitors and pilgrims arriving here. In fact, it has also been revealed by the texts that Varanasi was involved in commercial activities of production and sale of perfume, wood, and ivory carvings during the time of Mahavira and Buddha.

During the period of 8th to 6th century BCE, Varanasi region was one of the 16 Mahajanpadas or states or political divisions of the country. It was known by the name of Kasi with Kasi city as its capital. Later, during the 6th to 4th century BCE, Varanasi was the capital of the kingdom of Kasi under the umbrella of

Kautilya had mentioned Varanasi to be involved in production of cotton fabric and woollen cloth production and trade

Magadh Empire. During this period the region of Varanasi was involved in commercial activities as mentioned in texts written by the scholar Panini, and economist and philosopher Kautilya, who mentioned Varanasi to be involved in production of cotton fabric and woollen cloth production and trade.

Varanasi region was under the rule of Nanda Dynasty for about 50 years of the 4th century BCE. Later, till 2nd century BCE, it was under Mauryan rule. The area must have been flourishing with prosperity as it was on both important trade and travel routes of that period; the Uttarapatha (meaning the northern route) and Dakshinpatha (meaning the route southern route), connected Kasi to the whole world. Emperor Ashoka also visited Sarnath due to his affinity towards Buddhism and had made considerable grants and funded townships with monasteries, stupas and shrines as reflected by the Ashokan Pillar found in the region. The excavations at Rajghat and nearby archaeological sites within Varanasi District provide details of the architecture of the region. The settlement and houses were planned with sensitivity towards climate. Houses were built with rooms around a large courtyard. The settlements were planned with proper sanitation and drainage arrangements using drains joined to lined vertical pits with terracotta rings. The materials of construction included bricks (both baked and unbaked), which were used for the first time in 3rd century BCE in walls, wells, and drains. Besides this, terracotta tiles and iron nails have also been found. The typology of buildings found were primarily residential and no religious structures were found.

During the 2nd century, Varanasi came under the rule of the Sunga Dynasty, with Varanasi being the capital of Kasi Kingdom. In the first three centures of Christian Era, Varanasi came under the Kushana Dynasty. In this period too, Varanasi remained a region with religious affinity towards Buddhist and Jain practices along with Hindu traditions of worship of Yaksha. In fact, Shaivism is believed to have received recognition in this era only. Terracotta remains and seals have also been found for this period suggesting prosperous conditions. Not many details of local political history of the period between 4th to 6th century for Varanasi region are available, except for the fact that it remained under the rule of Gupta Dynasty from 330 to 550 CE. Excavations have also yielded rich artistic findings belonging to the time period upto 550 CE, like images of Bodhisattva (Buddhist scenery), Yakshas (Hindu demigods) and Nagas (Hindu demigods or mythological tribes). Buddhist structures like Stupas, Viharas and votive shrines are present in the Sarnath area in abundance, providing evidence of Buddhist culture in this region during this time. However, for the area in Varanasi City, architectural structures were not found for this time. Only remains available of this period are wall panels, door jambs, columns and capping of the superstructure, found in and around the city, especially on the Panchkoshi Road.

During the Gupta period, Varanasi region also went through religious transformations. The tradition of Shiva worship, which began during the Kushana Period, gained prominence in this period. Worship of Lord Krishna, began during this period. An inscription of Buddhagupta of 478 CE found on a stone pillar in archaeological excavation in Rajghat mentions a Krishna Temple and other religious structures being built in and around the city. The tradition of worship of folk deities like village guardian deities, Skanda and Surya, also gained ground during this period. The clay seals of this period provide ample evidence of flourishing trade in the area.

After this, Varanasi came under the rule of Pusyabhuti Dynasty from 550 to 700 CE. On the local level, however, it was governed by the Maukhari Dynasty of Kannauj. It is also believed that Gaharwar Rajputs might have also held Varanasi for some time.

Leaning Ratneshwar Temple at Manikarnika Ghat

Varanasi was recognized as a sacred land during this period and the worship of Shiva along with Ganga and related rituals were established during this time. The economic prosperity of the kingdom remained intact with large number of pilgrims, traders and tourists visiting Varanasi.

During the period of 8th to late 12th century CE, Varanasi witnessed several changes in ruling dynasties and hence in overall social, political, economic, and cultural situation.

During 700 to 750 CE, Varanasi came under the jurisdiction of Varman Dynasty, which was a major power ruling in northern part of country with Kannauj (known as Kanyakubja at that time) as their capital. At the local level it was governed by the Maukhari Dynasty of Kannauj. The little information available of the period suggests clearance of forests and expansion of built settlement to south of present day Dahsashvamedha Road. Many religious structures including ashrams and similar monastic developments took place during this period for the Hindu sages and pilgrims and migrants arriving and settling in the well-established religious centre of Varanasi.

After the Varmans, Gurjar-Pratihar Dynasty took control of Varanasi and ruled till 950 CE. The city is believed to have expanded in the southern direction in this period along the banks of Ganga. Varanasi was one of the stops of the religious tours of Adi Shankaracharya. He is said to have completed his literary composition of Brahmasutra here. He established his seat here at the Jangambhari Math, the headquarters of Vira Shaivism. He is also believed to have established the Chandramaulishvara, the idol or Shiva *lingam* here in the *math*.

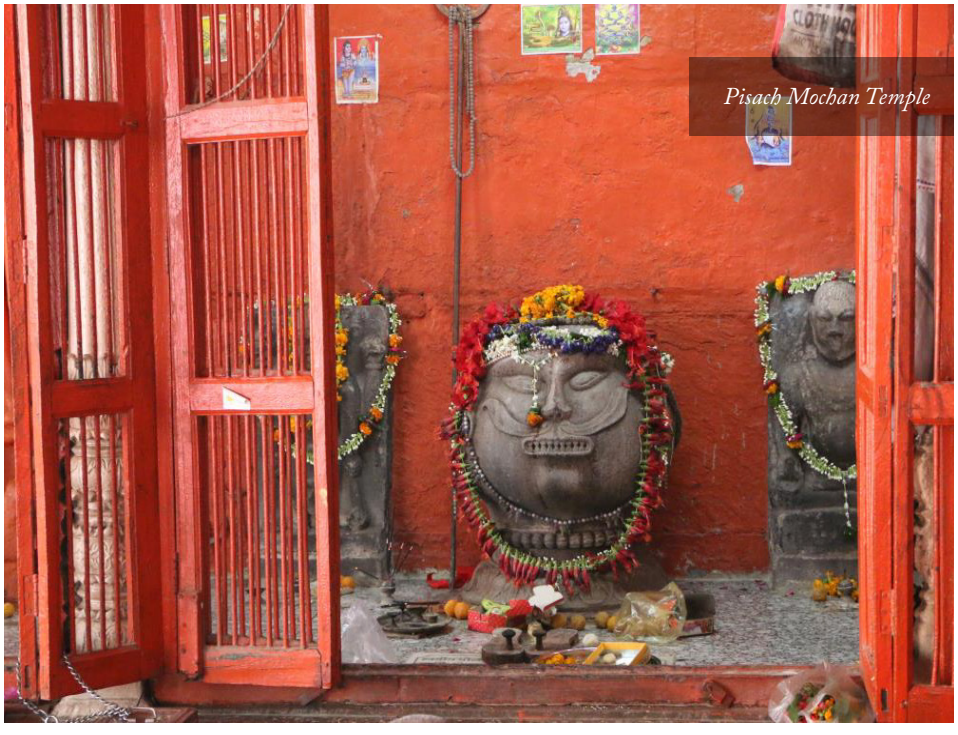
The Chandellas took control of the area for a short period of 77 years from 950 to 1027 CE. Later, from 1045 to 1064 CE, Varanasi was ruled by Gangadeya from the Kalachuri Dynasty. The Kalachuris also had their administrative capital at Kannauj, but Varanasi was their capital and in fact was given more importance than Kannauj sometimes. A ruler, Karna from the same dynasty is also said to have erected a Shiva temple, Karnameru and a ghat nearby. The area Kharnaghanta in present day Varanasi is believed to be the site of the temple and the ghat by the same name still exists on the banks of Ganga in Varanasi.

After the Kalachuris, the Gahadalava Dynasty ruled over the region of Varanasi. There seem to be contradictions in the exact period of their rule in Varanasi, but they certainly ruled here till 1170 CE for a period of about 106 years. This is said to be the golden era of Varanasi. The rulers of this period were proactively involved in supporting institutions, a practise that began during Shankaracharya's time including the development of Tirthas, established during his period. They also made substantial donations and patronised large number of religious structures. There are about 90 Gahadavala inscriptions found in Varanasi mentioning donations

to Brahmans by Gahadavala kings and merchants. Another 83 copper inscriptions and 1 stone inscription are found mentioning the prosperity and firmness of the Gahadavala rule. This was the first time in a century when Varanasi gained political prominence. It was also during this time that the contest of ideologies of Hinduism and Buddhism in Varanasi emerged. A sect of Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism, based upon Tantric rituals, beliefs and practices had been practiced in Varanasi till now.

In 1197, the Gahadavalas were finally overthrown by the Muslim rulers. The Delhi Sultanate took control of the entire Varanasi region and later it came under the rule of the Mughals. This period of about six centuries was of immense turmoil for the city and district of Varanasi. Due to the iconoclastic attitude of the Sultanate rulers, important Shiva temples like Vishwanath Temple, Krttivasheshvara, Avimukteshvara, Kala Bhairava, Adi Mahadeva, Siddheshvara, Kumbhishvara, Balishvara, Kapaleshvara were desecrated. It is generally believed that the architectural fragments from the demolition were used to build Islamic structures. Mosques like Dhai Kangura, Chaubis Khamba, Bhadaon and Ganje Shahida are attributed to this period.

The Sharqis of Jaunpur also took control of the district during the end of the 14th and entire 15th century till 1495, but the Sultanate's rule was restored from this time till 1526. When the Delhi Sultanate regained power in Varanasi, Sikandar Lodi took control, and he is believed to have destroyed a massive part of the settlement at Varanasi.



Pisach Mochan Temple

The political and cultural atmosphere normalized with the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar in the middle of the 16th century. Before his arrival here, simultaneous destruction and construction of temples continued and the most important temple of the city, the Vishveshavara or rather commonly known as the Kashi Vishwanath Temple was destroyed and rebuilt thrice, and despite being destroyed and rebuilt multiple times, it remained the landmark of the city. Multiple ghats like Manikarnika were also built during this period.

This period saw the propagation of new schools of thought by saints and poets, Ramanand, Kabir, Ravidas, who challenged the rigid Brahmanical ways and practices and established the thought of Bhakti or devotion rather than idol worship and ritualistic ceremonies. Guru Nanak Dev also visited the city of Varanasi and dialogued with these saints and philosophers.

The period of Mughal rule, 1526 to 1707, socio-political and cultural scenario of Varanasi remained quite turbulent, which worsened the situation for the religious and cultural harmony of Varanasi. The conflict between Akbar and Ali Quli Khan, is one of such situations. When Akbar took control of Varanasi, people enjoyed religious freedom. He even made contribution towards

the repair of ghats and temples destroyed or damaged by the earlier rulers. Ali Quli Khan's revolt against Akbar, however, drew him away from Varanasi. Similar political contest between Jahangir's and Khurram's period, and Aurangzeb, Dara Shikoh and Shuja's period also wreaked havoc on the city. Aurangzeb, in particular, destroyed many temples of Varanasi and only one temple, the Kardameshwar Temple in Kadwa is believed to have escaped his wrath. On the contrary, he is also believed to have commissioned the construction of a temple, a Shiva Temple in Jangambari. The imposing mosque built by Aurangzeb is the most important construction of that period which has left a permanent mark of his rule on Varanasi's skyline. The Gyanvapi mosque stands out tall at the Panchganga Ghat, being the only structure with minarets amongst the various temple spires. He is also said to have renamed Varanasi to Muhammadabad. The name, however, never gained popularity. A few other notable structures of the Mughal rule are the Idgah at Bakaria Kund, Dhai Kangur mosque, the Alamgir Mosque at Panchganga and a few more structures at the Rajghat area.

When Mughal power declined in the district, the Marathas took control of Varanasi from 1707 to 1738. No major political event is recorded for this period. The Maratha rulers, however, made considerable contributions to the religious constructions of the city, including temples and ghats. In fact, the present temple of Vishveshvara or Kashi Vishvanath was completed with the patronage of Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar. The major political power, which rose and took control of Varanasi post Mughals was Raja Balwant Singh. He founded the Benaras dynasty of Kashiraj. He is attributed to have ruled Varanasi during a phase when it grew at its fastest. Balwant Singh shifted the capital from Gangapur to Ramnagar across the river on its eastern side, and built the Ramnagar fort there.

Varanasi became the commercial capital of North India during 1750 to 1790 CE as it lay on the trade route connecting Bengal to the Maratha states through the river route of Ganga and additional road routes, along with availability of large tracts of fertile lands along Ganga, suitable for cultivation. The trades of brass, copper, metal ware, carpets, and lacquerware, silk and ivory carvings happened through Varanasi. This was the period of complete transformation of social and cultural composition of Varanasi along with economic growth. Many merchants from different parts of India migrated to Varanasi and settled here. The Bengali Tola with major Bengali population living along western side of Kedar Ghat at the present is a testimony to this influx. Many communities living in the area also formed stronger associations and eventually ended up being the largest landowners in the city. Around 500 *maths* or monasteries were established during this period in the areas of Chaukhamba and Dashashvamedh Ghat.

The Benaras royal house lost administrative jurisdiction of Varanasi at both regional and local levels after the death of Balwant Singh. For a brief period of 10 years, from 1766 to 1776, the district of Varanasi came under the rule of the Kingdom of Oudh (Awadh). At local level, however, the political and economic functioning of the area were handled by the British. Later, with annexation of the Kingdom of Oudh (Awadh), the entire region came under British control in 1782.

British officials went to great lengths to establish control over this prosperous area. Records of conflicts between British administrator, Warren Hastings and Raja Chet Singh provide evidence of the same. However, despite all the clashes at the administrative level, the social order and religious harmony was maintained during British rule in Varanasi. In fact, Warren Hastings is also believed to have made a contribution to religious structures here. He built the gateway of the Vishveswara Temple or Kashi Vishwanath, known as the Naubatkhana.

The political and cultural atmosphere calmed down with the rule of Mughal Emperor Akbar in the middle of the 16th century

Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya spearheaded the formation of Banaras Hindu University, whose foundation stone was laid in December, 1916 on 1300 acres of land donated by the Kashi Naresh, Dr. Vibhuti Narain Singh, and with the financial support of the Maharaja of Darbhanga and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The trustees of the Central Hindu College, including Dr. Annie Besant, agreed to handover that institution to be made as the nucleus of the proposed university.

The district's history after independence is peaceful in terms of social and political context. The major developments in the district in this period include increase in number of institutional areas. Also, the major factor governing the district's, and the city's growth, has been the steady growth of pilgrimage and tourism. In 1949, the present district of Banaras received its current form and had been known by this name till 1956, when the historic name of Varanasi was brought back into use by the Government of Uttar Pradesh.

Today, what strikes one about Banaras, apart from the always busy river front, are the narrow and boisterous by lanes. As the city came under attack from invaders, the Banarsis continued to make their lanes tight, ensuring that not many soldiers, especially those on horseback, could enter together. Entering narrow, dark lanes, difficult to map and navigate, also instilled fear in the minds of invaders. Many households enveloped their shrines within the four walls of their homes. These by lanes have now become a way of life.

Mythological Links

According to myths, when Kashi or Varanasi was created by the Gods, Lord Shiva was the first lord of the city. Lord Brahma tricked Shiva, and gave his favourite devotee Divodas, the command of Kashi, during Shiva's absence. Lord Shiva soon regained control and ruled Kashi. Since, he is a dweller of all realms, and a wandering yogi, he made Abhimukteshar the commander in charge of his city. During the periods of Hindu epics Ramayan and Mahabharata, Varanasi region was referred to as Kashi. Another belief suggests that the city of Varanasi might have been completely burned down to ashes by Lord Shri Krishna's discus, the Sudarshan Chakra. Kashi is a divine land steeped in mythology.

Events *of* Interest

Ramnagar Ramlila & others

The festival of Dussehra is celebrated all over India with the staging of the *Ramlila*, the story of Lord Ram, based on the Ramcharitmanas written by Tulsidas. No other *Ramlila* is steeped in so much history and grandeur as the *Ramlila* of Ramnagar in Varanasi. The episodes of Rama's life are staged at many other places in India, but the flavour and religiosity of the Lila at Ramnagar is unmatched. The performance lasts for over a month and the preparations take almost a year.

Sitting across Asi Ghat and on the opposite bank of the river, the small town of Ramnagar boasts of one of its kind *Ramlila*. The most essential and unique characteristic of this performance lies in its performance spaces and spectatorship. The audience moves along with the characters from one place to the other over time. The performance is sponsored by the Maharaja of Ramnagar and the performances never start without his presence. The most important scenes from Ram's life are enacted by young performers of a certain age group, who are chosen to play the deities after careful selection and they are made to follow strict rules and regulations for the period they are enacting the divine roles. As the evening falls over the Ganga, the spotlights take over the *Ramlila* grounds and thousands of viewers from nearby villages gather to watch the *Lila*.

Some of the locations of the Ramnagar Ramlila are specially constructed, such as the Panchavati, some are the town's landmark areas like the Durga Mandir, Rambagh and others have simply been found appropriate and used. The timings and locations are circulated among the crowd for the staging of each scene of the *Lila*. Toys and trinkets are sold by local vendors and food stalls are set up around the grounds. A special kind of pattern is painted on the forehead by local artists who carry little baskets of *sindoor,* sandalwood paste and other colours. Young and old alike are seen sporting these designs on their foreheads during the *mela*. Children

are introduced to the stories and epics through fairs like the *Ramlila*.

Apart from the Ramnagar Lila, the other famous *Lilas* include the episode of *Bharat Milap* at Nati Imli, near the Sanskrit University in Varanasi. This reunion of Ram with his brother, Bharat, is said to host the largest crowd among any of Varanasi's fairs and is emotionally stirring for the crowd. People jam the streets to watch this reunion which is a simple yet moving scene for many. For the devotees, it is a mere glimpse of the deities that brings them to these performances. This *darshan* along with the recitation of the lines of Ramacharitmanas brings them closer to God, they feel. During all the scenes the *pothis* are always kept close for ready reference. If there is any record for the procedure of the performance, then it must be these *pothis* or books that contain the text of the *samvada* or the dialogues.

The Nakkataiya at Chetgunj is another popular episode of the Lila, where Lakshman chops off the nose of the demonic Surpanakha. The procession begins at the Ramlila Ground near Pisach Mochan and ends at Chetgunj where the act of chopping the nose is enacted and the festivities are ended.

The *Dhanush Yajna* performed at Asi crossing is another famous scene from the Lila enacted in the city, which brings a lot of viewers together to watch the marriage of Ram with Sita. The drama is set with the *dhanush* (bow) kept in the centre of the stage.

One of the lesser-known performances that have been taking place for a while now, is the Ramlila enactment at the Manikarnika Ghat. This raw yet devotional performance is organized by a committee that funds this performance and encourages the young and old actors to perform in the Lila. Like the Ramnagar Lila, the scenes and its locations are shared via fliers, posters and by word of mouth. The verses from the epic are sung and instruments like the *manjeera* and *dhol* are used to add musicality to them. The environment is congenial, and the performance style is very informal. The *vyas* or *sutradhar* reads out the dialogues to the characters. This Lila, in comparison may seem comical and casual, but the essence of reliving the life of Lord Ram on the banks of Ganga, learning from it and sharing the episodes of this epic with hundreds of viewers and devotees, is the essence of not only this but all the Lilas performed at any location in India.

Nag-Nathaiya & Krishna Lila

On similar lines of the Ramlila is the Krishna Lila, the dramatization of the story of Lord Krishna. Both these elaborate theatrical performances differ from each other in terms of the costumes, characters, themes, and contexts.

The Krishnalila, a mythological tradition involving depiction of famous episodes in the life of Lord Krishna is held annually in the month of Kartik. The famous Nag Nathaiya Festival of Varanasi is a part of this performance that takes place at the Tulsi Ghat. The Nag Nathaiya Festival celebrates Krishna's conquest of the serpent Kaliya and people from in and around Varanasi

Characters from the Ramlila of Manikarnika Ghat

gather at the Tulsi Ghat to witness this spectacle. The other days of the Lila are quieter, and a limited audience attends. The low-key performance of the other days of the Lila is without elaborate lights and amplified sound, with the *sutradhaar* reading dialogues from the text for the characters to repeat. Like the Ram Lilas, the characters are carefully chosen, and a committee takes the responsibility to stage this performance. The start of the Krishna Lila is marked by the Mukut Puja that takes place in the temple on Tulsi Ghat near the Swaminath Akhada. The crowns worn by the main characters are kept in the *puja* and the blessings to begin the Lila are taken from Lord Krishna's idol at the temple.

Krishna Lila is an exclusive 20-day oral tradition-based performing art associated with Tulsi Ghat since the 16th century when Tulsidas began the tradition of performing this Lila which brings alive the tales from Lord Krishna's life – ranging from Krishna's birth to Ugrasena, Kansa's father, being crowned as the king of the Yadavas. The play begins on the *Kartik Krishna Paksh Dwadashi* with the last episode performed on the 20th day falling on *Krishna Paksha Marg Sheesh*. The duration of each day's performance ranges from 2 to 4 hours and is a form of theatre involving episodes of songs, dance, and storytelling (the Chandra Prastav Lila involves storytelling). The dance performance happens only on one day when *Raas Lila* is enacted showing Krishna playing Dandiya with the Gopis and Radha. Apart from the actors who essay the roles of characters ranging from Krishna, Balaram, Maa Yashoda, Baba Nand, Radha, Gopis and Gwaal, there is a choir, singing in Ramayan Vaani, a peculiar style of singing, from a book called Braj Vilas written by Brajvasi Das. A copy of the book is held by Vyas ji, who plays multiple roles ranging from performing the *Ganesh Vandana* (prayer) daily before the start of the play to speaking the dialogue of each character into their ears in a hushed manner, the same dialogue is then reproduced by the character/actor on stage. The book with him is in the form of dialogues called S*amvad ki Pothi* which uses pure Braj language. The language, at times becomes a mixture of Hindi, Awadhi, Khadi Boli and Bhojpuri spoken/sung in the form of *chaupai* (a quatrain verse that uses a meter of four syllables), *doha* (rhyming couplet with long syllabic lines) and *chhand*. The training of the boys selected to play the lead roles begins almost a month in advance. There are also experienced people who have been associated with the Lila for years and do not require much training or practice. People like Vyas ji or the *shringariya* are motivated by sheer passion and willingness to be a part of the celebration every year. Almost everyone is involved in their daily grind, but they devote time to fulfil their duty as a part of a team to ensure that the tradition lives on. They get dakshina in return for the effort and time invested by them. All roles are played by men and not a single female is a part of planning, organization, or implementation.

This reunion of Ram with his brother, Bharat, is said to host the largest crowd among any of Varanasi's fairs and is emotionally stirring for the crowd

On the first day of Krishnlila, a puja is performed of the mukut (crown) of Krishna, Balaram and Radha to imbue them with divine power, and when people bow down to pray and touch the actor's feet, it is not the boy, but his *mukut* which is believed to retain the true spirit of the lord. The *mukut* transforms a young lad into an object of high religious and cultural value – Krishna *Swarup*, meaning he becomes Krishna himself and not just the actor. The lead characters of Krishna, Balaram and Sita must be played by young boys who have not stepped into adolescence as they are considered pious. *Mukhauta* or masks are also a part of the play, used in certain scenes of the Lila. Bakasur, Kagasur, Ek-Chonch Wala Mukhauta (one-beaked mask) etc. are some of the masks used.

Nag Nathaiya, the most famous Lila is performed on the *Kartik Shukla Paksha Chaturthi* and begins at 3 or 4 pm, unlike the rest of the days when the performance begins only around 6 to 7 pm. The

Lila depicts the day when Krishna was playing with his friends (*gwals* or the cowherd boys) and his ball fell into the Kalia Lake, inhabited by the fearsome Kalia Nag (serpent). Krishna climbed the Kadamba Tree and dove deep into the waters to retrieve the ball. An enraged Kalia transformed into his multi-hooded avatar and tried to crush Krishna by coiling around him. Krishna started dancing on Kalia's numerous heads and the powerful Kalia began to diminish under the weight of Krishna's feet. Seeing their husband die, Kalia's wives prayed to Krishna to forgive him and begged for mercy. The soft-hearted lord desisted from his terrific dance on the condition that Kalia would leave the lake and return to his original home in the island of Ramanaka. The entire episode is enacted, and massive preparations are made in terms of installing a tree in the Ganga, creating platforms in the river to host the *aarti*, arrangement of police security to handle emergency situations as the crowd swells up to watch the play on this day.

There are two Krishnas for this day, one who enacts the play every day and the other who is trained to climb the tree installed in the river and then jump into the water. The act of Krishna jumping into the river becomes a popular performance, attracting crowds and being a source of much jubilation. People shout praises of Lord Krishna while watching the godly dominance over evil forces. The main objective behind the play is to create social awareness on keeping the Ganga clean and pure, like the removal of Kalia Nag from the Yamuna would cleanse the river.

The Maharaja of Varanasi also attends the grand performance of Nag Nathaiya. It is said that the Raja of Ramnagar had tried to initiate a tradition of his own Nag Nathaiya but when the Krishna statue was thrown into the river, it vanished and could not be found despite continuous efforts. It is believed that whoever has tried to replicate the performance of this day's Lila has failed miserably and hence the Nag Nathaiya remains indisputably one of the most exclusive, world-famous oral traditions of Varanasi.

A Scene From Nag Nathaiya

Bhand Mandali & *the* Uluk Mahotsav

Jesters or comedians were a popular class of people in the old city of Banaras. They were called *Bhands* and used amusing stories full of gestures, postures, songs, and clowning techniques to provoke laughter from the audience and entertain them. Such performances were organized for the public mostly during weddings and festivals like Holi. The origin of the first *Bhand Mandali* is credited to a well-known artist known by the stage name Ajuba. Consequently, his students and others formed more *Bhand Mandalis*. Even though these performances are not to be seen today, various *hasya kavis* (comic poets) gather and organize the Uluk Mahotsav to exchange poems and spread laughter and joy.

Ghats *as a* Performance Stage

Ganga Lahiri, dedicated to Ganga river is a poem composed by Jagannath, a poet at the court of Shah Jahan during the 17th century. The Brahman poet fell in love with a muslim woman and they were ostracized and fled to Varanasi. The couple sat atop the 52 steps of the Panchganga ghat where Jagannath

Magahi Paan

composed the 52 verses of Ganga Lahiri, extolling the river as mother and the last refuge. Legend has it that the Ganga river ascended step by step as each verse was composed. When 52 verses were completed, Mother Ganga embraced the poet and his beloved and carried them away.

The *ghats* provide ample space for performances ranging from dance recitals, music concerts, poetry festivals, *Nukkad Nataks* and more. Recently, an evening programme was initiated at the Rewa Ghat called the Ghat-Sandhya. Through this programme, the youth of Varanasi are given a chance to showcase their talents and perform for the public. The Subah-e-Banaras programme to celebrate the sunrise of Varanasi also promotes a cultural programme after the morning aarti and the Vedic chanting performed at the Asi Ghat. Many street plays are also performed at the *ghats* as these are always milling with people. Since the open space and calm atmosphere of the *ghats* serves as a perfect space for creative thinking and practice, several amateur artists flock to the *ghats* to practice their art, sit for hours, do their *riyaz* and meet friends over a cup of tea. Certain spots like the Rewa Kothi on the Rewa Ghat are always occupied by young enthusiastic musicians who are engrossed in jamming sessions and collaborations. The Rewa Kothi is also known to host music students of Banaras Hindu University and strains of music can always be heard if one crosses that area during their *riyaz*. Various Art and Music Festivals like the Sankatmochan Festival and the Mahindra Kabira Festival use the *ghats* as a stage.

Fairs & Festivals

Varanasi finds mention in all the great Indian epics and ancient Hindu and Buddhist literature. It is said to be preferred by the gods, demi-gods, sages, kings, and common men alike, who worshipped Shiva. That is the reason behind the city having more than 3,000 Shiva lingams. With the belief in multiple gods, arise multiple celebrations in the form of festivals. Each festival and ritual is conducted on specially calculated days from the calendar (*panchang*). In the lunar calendar, there are 12 months like *Phalguna* (January-February), *Chaitra* (March-April), *Ashwin* (September-October), *Kartik* (October-November), etc. Each month is divided into 2 *Pakshas*: 15 days from the new moon day/ *Amavasya* to the full moon day/ *Purnima* is called the *Shukla Paksha* or the bright period and the other half of the month's 15 days when the moon is waning is known as the *Krishna Paksha* or the dark half of the lunar month.

Most of the important rituals, rites and ceremonies are conducted during the *Shukla Paksh* as it is held very auspicious by Hindu astrologers. Each day in the 30-day lunar month, which is of 27-29 days, unlike the solar month which extends to 30-31 days, is called a *tithi*. The first *tithi* or day is the new moon day and the 30th *tithi* is Amavasya or the absence of moon. The new moon day in common usage is the first *tithi* of the *Shukla Paksh* and *Purnima* thus becomes its 15th day. The next day or the 16th day of the lunar month is called the first *tithi* of *Krishna Paksh* which goes on till the 15th day of *Krishna Paksh*, referred to as *Amavasya*. The *tithis* are *prathama, dwitiya, tritiya, chaturthi, panchami* and so on till the 15th day. The *tithis* play a very significant role as they have an auspicious significance during months.

A popular saying goes in Varanasi, "*Saat Vaar, Nau Tyohar*" (The city celebrates nine festivals in a week). Here are some significant ones:

Makar Sankranti/ Uttarayan/ Pongal

The festival of Makar Sankranti is celebrated when the Sun enters the *Makar* (Capricorn sign of the zodiac). This is considered the most auspicious position for the Sun to be in, and it is celebrated every year on 14th January. In Varanasi, the celebration begins with people gathering along the *ghats* as early as 2:30 am in the morning to perform worship rituals and bathe in the Ganga. Just like *Kartik Snaan*, it is believed that bathing in the Ganga on this propitious day results in multiple blessings. Devotees believe that by simply bathing in the holy river, one is freed from one's past sins and thus eligible for liberation from the cycle of birth and death. In Varanasi, this festival is also called *Khichadi*, named after the food preparation, made from the new harvest of rice, pulses and vegetables that is distributed on this day to the needy and even consumed in homes. It is believed that on the day of Makar Sankranti, taking bath in the river and giving alms is considered significant and highly auspicious.

When Bhishma Pitamah was lying on the bed of arrows, the Sun was in the *Dakshinayan*, and he waited till the time it entered the *Uttarayan* to breathe his last. Hence those who die during this time are more likely to attain salvation because of the auspiciousness of this time. *Til* (which is said to have emerged from the sweat of the gods) is donated, it is eaten, *til ka tel* (sesame oil) is massaged on the body before taking a bath in the Ganga. Jaggery, *chiwda, khichadi* and curd are consumed on this day. People bathe in the holy river Ganga, commemorate their forefathers and offer *tarpana* to them which in turn brings *punya* to them, and destroys bad karma. Then, people go home, worship the Sun God, and offer Gudh-Chawal (Pongal) to Him. The element of kite flying for fun and competitions is a manifestation of the Banarasi-*Andaaz* or style.

Milk is boiled in a *kansa* (an alloy of 85% copper and 15% brass) utensil, to which jaggery and rice is added. This is cooked for at least 35-45 minutes until it is ready to be served. First, the Pongal is offered to the Sun God and then it is consumed and distributed as *prasad*. Sh. Brahmanand Tiwari, a *Tirtha Purohit* who works at the Dashashvamedh Ghat and performs *Karma Kand, puja* and marriage-related rituals for the people, says that from this day the period of *Uttarayan* begins, which will continue for six months, and all the days will belong to the gods, while the nights will belong to demons (*asuras*). It is believed that donations in terms of clothes, food items, *khichadi* and fruit made on this day guarantee the attainment of *Akshay Phal* (maximum rewards).

Holi

Holi, the colourful and joyous festival of springtime is celebrated in the month of *Phalguna*. Brightly coloured powders and other Holi merchandise like the *Pichkari* (water guns) are available for sale in the neighbourhood *bazaars* weeks ahead of the festival. Since Kashi is the land of lord Shiva, the *bhang* which is consumed during this festival becomes a common yet key ingredient of the celebrations, mostly offered in the form of milk-based drinks known as Thandai. This festival is not complete without the sweet preparation of Gujiya, which are often made at home. The roads, lanes, and even the ghats are layered in bright colours.

On the eve of Holi, the Holika fires spring up in different neighbourhoods, where people gather to perform religious rituals and pray to eradicate their internal evil. The celebration of playing with colours takes place on the next morning with people smearing each other with wet or dry colours and playing with pichkaris and water balloons.

Banaras also celebrates a unique festival called *Masane ki Holi* or the Holi of the cremation ghats. The Dom Raja, the leader of the Doms who controls the cremation *ghats*, arrives here and sometimes picks up the ashes from bodies being

Nag Nathaiya remains indisputably one of the most exclusive, world-famous oral traditions of Banaras

cremated, and smears people around him with it, in a form of smearing the Holi colour. He may also play Holi with the corpses lying around awaiting a cremation, removing their shrouds. Banaras is truly a land full of the surreal and the divine.

A popular saying goes in Varanasi, "Saat Vaar, Nau Tyohar" (The city celebrates nine festivals in a week)

Budhwa Mangal

Budhwa Mangal, a unique festival of Varanasi used to be celebrated a week after Holi in the month of *Phalguna* (March). In days gone by, musicians would perform in decorated flatboats or barges on the river Ganga along the *ghats*. The term *budhwa* meaning old, is used to refer to the year gone by; *mangal* refers to Tuesday, and also to good times, when the celebrations begin. During the period 1730-38, when Varanasi came under Awadh domination, Mir Rustam Ali was appointed as the administrator of the city. It is said that he was an *aish-pasand* or a lover of luxury, who began a festival which gave the royalty and aristocratic gentry of the city an outlet for their cultural spirit. The *rajas* and other nobleman would compete to decorate their boats with flags, carpets, flowers, even chandeliers and take their large boats—*Bajras*, out on the river Ganga. These would be converted into a stage where musicians and dancers performed for the noblemen and royalty.

Those who were not invited aboard these large, decorated boats could watch the celebrations from the *ghats*. The Ganga from Asi to Panchganga, became the setting for a floating music festival. Hundreds of smaller boats selling flowers, betel leaves, sweets and toys are plied between the large boats.

A symbol of the spirit of *Mauj-Masti* (fun and frolic) that is characteristic of Varanasi, this river festival saw many ups and downs over the years. A perfect blend of festivity, boating, music, and dance, it seems to have lost its grandeur and gaiety with the disappearance of royal patronage. Since the 1920s the Burhwa Mangal, an emblem of great days of princely culture, has disappeared.

Mahashivratri

The month of *Phalguna* brings with it the holy festival of Mahashivratri. This great night of Shiva turns into a grand spectacle of sorts and is celebrated annually. The fourteenth day of every waning fortnight is observed as Shivratri but Mahashivratri is considered one of the most important festivals in Varanasi. On Shivratri, a *darshan* of Lord Shiva in his symbolic form, the *lingam*, is essential. The numerous *lingams* found all over the city are worshipped and tastefully decorated on this day. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple attracts the most crowds, followed by other Shiva temples like Kedareshwara, Tilbhandeshwara, Bhrameshvar, and Mrityunjaya among others. Water, Milk, *Dhatura, Bel* Leaves, *Bhang, Akwan* flowers are offered to Shiva's idol or *Shivalinga* by the worshippers. Unmarried girls and women pray for an ideal husband just like Lord Shiva. The wedding anniversary of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati is celebrated on this day and the devotees take out a special procession called *Bhole ki Baraat* in the evening. This is a spectacular sight as the devotees decked up like demons, animals, other gods, and mythological characters along with saints, *sadhus*, residents, and visitors alike can be seen marching towards the temple to celebrate the wedding anniversary. This procession starts from the Mahamrityunjay Temple and ends at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple.

Ganga Dussehra

According to scriptures, it is said that Rishi Bhagirath took many years meditating to convince the Goddess Ganga to descend upon earth. Ganga Dussehra, a 10-day celebration takes place to commemorate Ganga's descent, known as *Gangavataran*. It is celebrated in the month of *Jyeshtha* (May-June).

The river is worshipped, with a belief that Goddess Ganga can wash away all sins of mankind. The term Dussehra comes from *das* which

means ten and *hara* which connotes defeat. Thus, it is believed that bathing and praying on all ten days leading up to Ganga Dussehra, can destroy sins of ten lifetimes. It is celebrated at major *ghats*, and amidst hundreds and thousands of pilgrims, the priests perform *aarti* o the goddess. Devotees first take a bath in the river and string a garland of flowers across it to show their love for the river. This could be done by swimming, or taking a boat, while trailing the garland. Lastly, the devotees worship the shrine of Mother Ganga near the Dashashvamedh Ghat.

Ramzan

Varanasi, as a hub of different cultures and religions, celebrates festivals of different communities. One such festival is Ramzan, celebrated in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar as the holiest month, a month of fasting (*sawm*). According to Islamic belief, the fasting is done to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad. This annual observance is regarded as one of the Five Pillars of Islam. A pre-fasting meal called *Suhur* is consumed before fasting begins from dawn until sunset. After sunset, *Iftar*, the food to break the fast which usually comprises of dates and traditional sweets, is relished. Madanpura, the area inhabited by the silk weaver community, is agog with stalls and shops of sweets and *Iftar* food laid out during Ramzan. Located somewhere between Gowdoliya Chowk and Asi, this area comes alive as the sun sets, and the streets bustle with residents and visitors at various sweet shops and food stalls to break their fast.

Decorated Flatboats or Barges are Converted into Performance Spaces

The element of kite flying for fun and competitions is a manifestation of the Banarasi-Andaaz or style

Saawan *ka* Mela

Adjacent to the Durga Kund a yearly fair, the Saawan ka Mela at Durgaji, is staged to mark the arrival of the monsoon. This is one of the largest fairs in Varanasi. Since the fair is located between Durga Kund and Sankat Mochan Temple, it is believed to attract the largest crowds on Tuesdays which is considered the most auspicious day to worship Durga and Hanuman. The open area behind the Durga Kund gets transformed into a fairground consisting of stalls and kiosks selling knick-knacks. From toy shops to ornament stalls, magic shows to rides like the giant Ferris wheel and merry-go rounds, the fair offers fun for everyone.

The crowd is a healthy mix of rich and poor from all communities, enjoying the change of season and celebrating the onset of the monsoon. This season brings with it festivals like Teej that becomes an occassion for women and girls to dress up. Little shops selling colourful bangles, *sindoor*, artificial jewellery and henna cones can be spotted at this *mela*. All along the road, stalls are set up

which sell sweetmeats and snacks like Samosas, Chowmein, Kachoris, Gol Gappas, Jalebis and more. As the sun sets, the crowd doubles and the ground is lit with colourful neon lights, with sounds of the yelling shop keepers merging with the blaring music from the loudspeakers and the buzz of the crowd.

Teej

Teej is a generic name for several monsoon festivals like Haryali Teej, Kajari Teej and Hartalika Teej that celebrates nature, greenery, arrival of the rains with various social activities and practices. Goddess Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, who is sometimes referred to as Teej Mata, is worshipped during this festival.

Kajri

Derived from the word *kajli* meaning black, Kajri is another form of Teej (Bhadon ki Teej) that falls in the *Krishna Paksh*, which celebrates the monsoon season. With the arrival of dark clouds and the monsoon winds, the celebratory mood of men and women, rejoicing the season change. It leads to singing of special folk songs called Kajri with distinct and peculiar tunes. This festival is celebrated two days after Rakshabandhan as a night long celebration in the form of *Ratjagga*, and the third day of *Bhadon* being Kajri. The rituals would be celebrated in the city as well as the villages, but now are a rare sight in the city, and sporadic in the village areas.

Nag Panchami

The year's most important celebration of the ancient serpent deities is observed in the waxing fortnight of the month of *Shravana*, as Nag Panchami. This festival involves various rituals that are unique to the city of Varanasi. Snakes are both loved and feared, and on this day are worshipped and offered milk, sweets, flowers, and lamps. The doorways or walls outside the house are painted with pictures of snakes and other auspicious *mantras* are also written on them as a sign of good omen for the family.

It is rare to find people continuing the tradition of hand painting these sacred symbols. The people earlier had no access to digital pictures and were compelled to draw these images by hand. The stickers that are available everywhere during such festivals have taken the place of the traditional hand paintings. Snake charmers would come and show their *Nag Devtas* to every household and the people brought out milk and other offerings for the serpent gods. The *Nag Devtas* would be worshiped on this day and different types of festive cuisine would be prepared like Kheer, Bakheer, Dal ki Poori. Such traditions are almost fading and are not so prevalent, especially in the city.

In Varanasi, another aspect of Nag Panchami celebrations includes decorating and cleaning of the *akhadas*, which hold annual wrestling matches. The crowds pour into these compact spaces and cheer for their favourite participant. Dangal/ Kushti competitions are organized at many important akhadas. One such competition is at the Swaminath Akhada situated at Tulsi Ghat. The akhadas are cleaned and a puja done before the competition. The young participants are encouraged and the constantly cheering spectators expect the older, more experienced boys to pull complicated and difficult moves on each other during the fight. Special guests are called in to judge the matches. The akhada gets transformed into a lively space with loud cheers of encouragement.

Kavad Yatra

Devotees of Lord Shiva perform an annual pilgrimage called the Kavad Yatra. These devotees, who call themselves *Kanvariyas*, collect the sacred water from the Ganga in small containers and carry it across hundreds of miles to offer it at the Shiva temples and shrines in their respective homes and neighbourhoods. Dressed in finery, they walk miles carrying the water and around the time of their *yatra*, they come in thousands to Varanasi to take the blessings of Lord Shiva.

Raksha Bandhan

The festival that celebrates and strengthens the bond between brothers and sisters is observed as Raksha Bandhan in India. Brightly coloured threads called *rakhis* are tied around the wrist of the brothers by the sisters, praying for their long life and good health. The brothers in return vow to protect them. Apart from the busy marketplaces like Godowliya and

Chowk, the road connecting Asi to Banaras Hindu University is full of street shops and stalls that start selling these *rakhis* a week before the festival. Apart from this, the *samagri* used for the *puja* is also packed and sold.

Nishadraj Jayanti

The boatmen and fishermen community who live along the river are popularly known as Nishad, Kevat or Mallah. They worship Nishadraj, who has a temple dedicated to him in Varanasi. The story of Nishadraj comes from the epic Ramayana. He was the chief of the fisher folk who lived on the banks of Sarayu, a mythical river. It is said that when Ram, Sita and Lakshman were exiled to the forest, Nishadraj welcomed them, and the fishermen community built a boat for them to cross the river. This community celebrates Nishadraj Jayanti around April, when they visit the Nishadraj Temple and worship the deity, observing certain rituals. There is a rule set among the community that no boat is plied and no fisherman or boatman is allowed to take out his boat during this festival. Celebrations and merry making carry on till the evening.

Janmashtami

Among the many deities that are worshipped, Lord Krishna's birthday is celebrated in India on the eighth day of the waning fortnight in the month of *Bhadrapada*, the last month of the rainy season (August/September). The celebrations at the Krishna Gopala Mandir in Varanasi on this day are full of enthusiasm. The markets are flooded with decorated costumes, swings, and jewellery for the idols of Lord Krishna. Devotional songs are sung, and the birth of Krishna is celebrated by praying to the idol and occasionally swinging the *jhula* where *Gopala* is placed.

The ISKCON temple and Shree Dharmasangh Shikshamandal near Durgakund are among the many places where *jhankis* (tableaus) are set and elaborate celebrations are organized for this festival. At the Shikshamandal or school for young boys enrolled for studies in Sanskrit, Vedas and *dharmashastras*, the preparations for the celebration are elaborate. At midnight, they ring in the birthday of lord Krishna by decorating his idol and offering him *bhog*, before the *prasad* can be distributed. A *puja* is organized with an *aarti* for Lord Krishna. The idol is placed in a *paalna* (baby cot) and episodes of Krishna's life are performed as Raaslila in the area. Since the ISKCON society promotes Krishna consciousness, this festival is one of the most awaited festivals for them. The devotees, who are mostly volunteers or members of this society, gather in large numbers for the celebrations. Offerings are brought for the lord and Krishna bhajans are sung with utmost devotion. The *pandits* religiously perform the rituals and the devotees celebrate by singing and dancing. The *prasad* is distributed and the event becomes a festive veneration full of energy and positivity.

Varanasi, as a hub of different cultures and religions, celebrates festivals of different communities

Lolarka Shashti

The Sun Festival called the Lolarka Shashti is celebrated on the sixth day of the waxing fortnight of *Bhadrapada*. This annual *mela* held at the Lolarka Kund near the Tulsi Ghat, attracts millions of devotees and followers, mainly young couples and married women who come from far and wide to wish for a child. It is believed that a dip in this *kund* guarantees the birth of a child.

Sorahiya Mela

Lakshmi Kund hosts a sixteen-day fair on the eighth day of the waxing fortnight of *Bhadrapada*, the Sorahiya Mela. This fair is celebrated to honour the goddess of wealth Lakshmi or Mahalakshmi. A *vrat* (fasting) is observed to honour her during these sixteen days and those who observe this *vrat* are supposed to bathe in the *kund*, hear the stories of the *vrat*, worship the goddess and offer her sixteen kinds of grain and flowers. The devotees, mostly women, set up Lakshmi idols at home and pray to them. The last day of this mela is

known as Jivitputrika, that brings the celebrations to a close.

Jivitiya Vrat

The last day of the fasting done during the Sorahiya Mela, often called the Jivitputrika or Jutiya is a festival in which *nirjala* (without water) fasting is done by mothers for the wellbeing and the long life of their children. This three-day-long festival is celebrated from seventh to ninth lunar day of *Krishna Paksha* in *Ashwin* month. It is celebrated in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

Govardhan Puja/Annakut

The Krishna idol is bathed with milk, curd and *Panchamrit*, followed by a snaan with Ganga Jal. People take rounds around a replica of Govardhan Mountain made out of cow dung with a belief that this *parikrama* is as pious and sacred as the one done around the original Mt. Giri in Braj. Upon completion of this ritual, cow dung is put into a field or under a tree on the next day.

In Varanasi, another aspect of Nag Panchami celebrations includes decorating and cleaning of the akhadas, which hold annual wrestling matches

Bhai Dooj

The festival is celebrated by women and girls on the second lunar day on the bright fortnight of the month of *Kartik*, to pray for longevity and good health of their brothers. Dooj comes every year on the fifth and last day of Diwali, which falls on a new moon night. The term *dooj* denotes the second day after the new moon, the day of the festival. Sisters wake up in the morning and observe a fast until the rituals are performed. The Govardhan prepared on the previous day is again worshipped on this day but with different resources, *puja*, and beliefs. Idols and images of Ganga, snakes and scorpions are made using cow dung because there are myths and stories that involve these animals, which are read out in the form of songs, chants and *katha*. Women gather and perform the rituals at the Govardhan which makes it more of a social event than being celebrated individually at home. Every girl who has a brother performs the rituals of Bhai Dooj. *Bhadhehar,* (a small earthen pot) is used for *puja* on Bhai Dooj. A garland is made of stringlike cotton stacked over five times if you have one brother, and ten times for two brothers and so on. Turmeric paste (considered auspicious) is applied without uttering a word.

A big *Musar* is mounted on a brick, hand-held in the middle of the Govardhan and worshipped as the deity. Vermillion, turmeric paste is applied, and milk is poured over the *Musar* during the *puja*.

Women sing songs in which they curse their brothers but to punish themselves, they later prick their tongues 5-7 times with the thorn of Regani plant known as *Bhoom Bhatkaiyya*. There are songs related to this day which are recited by the women after ensuring that there are no men around, as these tales are not to be heard by men. *Chana* (chickpea) and *supari* (areca nut) are placed under the *Musar* and cracked into pieces by its force, which is collected by all the females to be used as *prasad* while applying *tilak* on the brother's forehead, followed by feeding him sweet from the earthen pot. Four to five rounds (*parikrama*) are taken around the *Musar*.

Chhath

The festival of Chhath celebrated mostly by the community from the east, witnesses women performing rituals associated with this it at the *ghats* of Varanasi. This festival celebrates the god of energy known as *Dala Chhath* or Surya Shasht. It is believed that proximity to Bihar is a reason for the popularity of the festival in recent times.

Aakashdeep

People in Varanasi celebrate the Akashdeep Festival in remembrance of their ancestors by lighting earthen lamps on the banks of the holy river Ganga. Hundreds of these sky lamps are hung on tall bamboo poles and

lit up every evening. This practice is observed in the auspicious month of Kartik and is believed to light the path for the gods and for the departed souls to return to the world of their ancestors.

Dev Deepawali

Dev Deepawali is celebrated every year at Varanasi, exactly 15 days after Diwali, on the auspicious day of *Kartik Purnima* when the moon is at its fullest. According to Hindu belief, Gods descend to earth to celebrate this grand occasion, along the banks of river Ganga in Varanasi and other such sacred sites. Varanasi also celebrates a four-day cultural fiesta, the Ganga Mahotsav, currently, where many reputed artists and performers gather to perform and celebrate the occasion. While illuminated *diyas* dot the stairs of various *ghats*, many of these tiny earthen lamps are seen floating serenely on the Ganga. The sight of the bright *ghats* and the full moon shining in all its glory in the background is truly magical. The mesmerizing sound of *mantras* and the special Ganga Aarti add to the enchantment. Large crowds gather at the *ghats* to watch and be a part of this spectacle. The Ganga Aarti and the programmes following the *aarti* take place at many ghats simultaneously.

ART *at the* *that* HEART

Boat Making

A major tourist attraction in the city is a boat ride on the Ganga, which is one of the finest ways to experience and feel the ambience of Varanasi. Most of the boatmen are believed to be from the Mallah community, whose occupation is said to revolve around boating and fishing. They also identify themselves as Nishad, Kewat, Malso or Mallahi. It is said that the boatman who had his own boat, would be known as *Majhi* and the driver of the boat was known as *Sahani* in their community. Each *ghat* has approximately 2-3 boat owners who employ other boatmen who cannot afford to buy boats to work for them based on sharing half their earnings from each boat ride with these owners. The boats are more than just a means of livelihood for the boatmen. They have a personal connection with the river and their boats. They also help the pilgrims conduct various important rituals like the *Aar paar ki mala* and the post-death rituals of immersion of ashes, among other significant practices.

Akhada

There are *akhadas* of music, poetry, sword fighting, religious teaching and exercise in Banaras. As a place that provides opportunities for leisure and recreation, an *akhada* (a gymnasium) enables one to nurture their body and mind in a structured manner, which in turn brings overall well-being and discipline. Every *akhada* has at least one shrine dedicated to Lord Hanuman, and the beginning of Nag Panchami celebration at the Swaminath Akhada is marked by a Hanuman *puja*. Banaras has preserved the concept of arenas for exercising and wrestling, and the concept of open *akhadas* with mud pits for wrestling, with *Neem* or Mango trees planted to provide shade and keep the premises cool, and shrines of Lord Hanuman and other gods. The city today has also accommodated modern gyms with wrestling mats, air-conditioned rooms, and modern equipment.

Yoga

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word *yog*, which means unity or to join. Varanasi has a great tradition of yoga learning and practice through centres like *ashrams* and *maths*. Yoga is also taught in colleges, private centres and by home tutors, following a specified curriculum. The Banaras Hindu University and Sampurnanand Sanskrit University have separate faculties and departments for Yoga and Meditation. The Bhring Sanhita Kendra at Bhadaini, the Pragya Yoga Institute at Jagat Ganj, Jnana Pravah, the Kashi Yoga Sangh at Sankat Mochan, are some of the institutions where Yoga is taught.

A Musar Being Worshipped as Part of Bhai Dooj Rituals

Painting

Varanasi has been the inspiration for many artists and a rich tradition of painting style has evolved over the years. During the Mughal era, many court painters brought the Mughal style of painting to the city. It is said that one such, Lalji Musawwar, settled in Varanasi, after coming here with the self-exiled Jawanbakht Jahandar Shah towards the end of the 18th century. A local artist, Ustad Sikkhi learned the style from Ustad Lalji and founded the Banaras sub-school of later Mughal paintings. This style of water colour or oil painting was distinctive and featured portraits from life. Ivory paintings and their traditional representations of *dhyana*, especially as cult objects, also became popular.

Two distinct styles emerged: the Indian School of Painting and the Company (European) Style, which was mainly an Indian version of the European style of painting. This school of painting is said to have originated in the city and used various aspects of Indian life as its subject and inspiration. Apart from these, the localized art of wall painting was widespread in the city. The local ruling class and western artists made substantial contributions to the field of paintings. The kings were the main patrons of paintings and often commissioned works. For example, Maharaja Udit Narain commissioned a wall painting in the Kali Temple at Ramnagar Fort. An important illustrated manuscript of this time was Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, which is now scattered in various collections and dates to the late 17th or early 18th century, and shows a different style, more linear but vibrant with crowded and colourful scenes. Bharat Kala Bhavan and Ramnagar Fort collections still preserve some of these old works of art.

Maharaja Ishwari Narain Singh was another connoisseur and patron of the arts who loved music and poetry and was dedicated to the learning of arts and crafts. During his time the study of European paintings became popular and their influence expanded. Some artists who flourished then include Hatkerlal, Gopal Chand, Balai Chand, Suraj and Shivaram. Artists proficient in wall paintings were Kamalapati, Chunnilal, Munnilal, Biharilal, Mahesh Prasad, Ganesh Prasad and Misrilal.

Among the European visitors to this holy city, there were many

Aakashdeep - Lamps hung on Bamboo Poles

British, both male and female, who were enthusiastic amateur artists like William Hodges R.A., James Forbes, Thomas Daniell, William Daniell, Edward Lear, and James Prinsep. The Daniells were criticized by some scholars and artists for their vision. Edward Lear, a professional artist of England, who visited Varanasi in 1873 and painted scenes of the city, remarks in his diary, "How well I remember the views of Benaras by Daniell R.A.: pallid, grey, sad, solemn. I had always supposed this place a melancholy, or at least a staid and soberly-coloured spot, a grey record of bygone days. Instead, I find it one of the most abundantly buoyant, and startlingly radiant of places, full of bustle and movement. Constantinople or Naples are simply dull and quiet by comparison".

Another European visitor, Fanny Parks, draws attention to the inadequacies of the painters to represent the beauty of Varanasi through their artworks. She said, "In the midst of hundreds and hundreds of temples and *ghats*, piled one above another on the high cliff or rising out of the Ganges, the mind is perfectly bewildered; it turns from beauty to beauty, anxious to preserve the memory of such, and the amateur throws down the pencil in despair."

James Prinsep, the most well-known among the creators of artworks of Varanasi, has left several illustrations and lithographs of the city. He came to work in the city's mint but gradually started identifying himself with the city. He was a great draughtsman, numismatist, epigraphist, town planner, cartographer, architect, and artist among other things. His illustrations were collected and published as Benaras Illustrated in 1830.

Stupa at Sarnath

Sculpture

Looking back at the history of sculpture, rulers in various parts of the country in different eras got sculptures made for decorative and religious purposes near forts, temples, palaces, and other public spaces. These sculptures have played a very important role in decoding India's history. Varanasi, being one of the world's oldest living cities, has a wide array of architectural and sculptural evidences that are still preserved. Bharat Kala Bhavan and Sarnath Museum house several sculptures that were excavated and recovered at various spots in the city, Sarnath and neighbouring areas of Varanasi. Early specimens of stone sculptures not only give us a peek into the lives of our ancestors but display the skills or techniques involved in creating those pieces of art. It is believed that Varanasi, as *Shivanagri*, is home to thousands of Shiva *lingams*.

In terms of continuity, most sculptors assert that nobody is interested in this work as it is very tiring and requires a lot of hard work. Since the material is expensive and the raw materials have always been a cause of worry, the cost of raw material should be reduced for people to even get interested in investing in the craft, they suggest.

Puppetry

Abhinav Kala Samiti led by Sh. Rajiv Kumar Srivastava, specializes in *Putul Rod*/ American puppets and glove puppets, and presents *Ramlila* and other such stories through these puppets. They believe that even the illiterate can be educated using this means as the stories can reach out to them. Glove puppets are famous in the northern region of India as *Gulabo-Sitabo* and are made of Papier-mâché. The puppet tradition comes from Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh and not from Varanasi. It served as entertainment for the *nawabs* and their *ranis*.

Scenes from Tulsi Akhada at Tulsi Ghat

Toy Making

The city celebrates multiple festivals throughout the year. With every festival, small items including toys related to that specific festival are made and sold. The materials vary from mud, wood, Papier-mâché, copper, and other metals. This is a specialty in Varanasi. These small items have educational importance attached to them as they teach the user about the various cultural traditions and the mythology of the city. Toys like *tava, chulha, belan, chakla, sabzi*, fruits, *gai, bael, tota, ghoda, unth*, along with idols and gods like Hanuman, Radha-Krishna, Laxmi, Ganpati, Ram-Laxman, Sita and others are sold during various festivals and fairs. During the *Chaitra* month, Ramnavami is celebrated, and idols of Ram, Sita, Laxman, Hanuman, and toys made of clay are sold in the markets. During the Jagannath Yatra, idols of Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balram are seen; during Nag Panchami, near the *melas* at Nagkuan, idols and toys of Nag Devta and during Laxmi Kund Mela, masks of Goddess Lakshmi are available. During the *Bhadra* season, Tulsidas's Ramlila enactments can be seen in Ramnagar. The characters of the Lila wear special masks made from Papier-mâché. Replicas of the same are sold in the marketplace. Some copper masks can also be found in certain places in the city. During Diwali, fairs are organized at various places in the city which sell Lakshmi, Ganesh and other small idols and masks. Apart from these, various earthen lamps of 5, 7 or 11 *diyas* made in different styles can be found in Varanasi. Idols of gods and goddesses made of wood with bright coloured paint are a Banaras speciality.

Among the different materials used to make these toys, wood is important. Among the mass-produced wooden artifacts, the *Sinduras, Bartans, Charki,* have always been in demand. These wooden articles are mostly coloured with lacquer. Certain areas of the city like Kashmiri Gunj, which fall in the Khojwa Bazar area are exclusively dedicated to woodwork. As one enters this area, small homes with verandas and courtyards doubling up as workshop areas for the artists who live and work there can be spotted. Most houses in this locality have a *kharad*/turning machine and woodwork happens in most houses in this location.

Metal Work

The Thatheras are a community engaged in the production of metal household utensils among other objects and reside mainly in Northern India. Varanasi boasts of a Thatheri Bazaar, located near the Chowk area. Making of the city's brass and copper vessels and *Naqqashi* work (carving on metal) used to be a major industry of Varanasi. The market and its lanes still exist but the energy and fervour of the earlier work is missing.

Ashtadhatu work has been another specialty of the city. As the name suggests, this work is created with an amalgamation of eight metals. The basic metals in the *Ashtadhatu* work include copper, zinc, tin, lead, iron, antimony, gold and silver. Sculptures or artefacts are specially prepared using age old techniques. Sand casting and lost wax technique are used to create the objects. Lost wax is the oldest known technique.

Metal Repoussé

Repoussé work is a traditional technique of working with metals in which part of the designs are raised in relief from the back by hammering on the reverse side. The name repoussé is derived from the French word *pousser,* which means to push forward. The opposite of repoussé is chasing (or engraving) where the metal is pushed down or worked upon from the front, to refine the design. Both these techniques are often worked together to create a final finished piece and utilize the plasticity of metal to form the desired shapes. The process is relatively slow where a sheet of metal is worked upon, without the loss of metal in the process and maintaining the same thickness throughout. The process is also called embossing and debossing.

Lila Costumes

Ramlila and other festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm and zeal in the holy city of Varanasi. The elaborate costumes and masks are found at several costume shops laid out at various areas of Chowk and Thatheri Bazaar in Varanasi. These shops provide costumes, crowns, beards, clubs, swords, jewellery and much more. The business thrives on the festival seasons. Since Varanasi can be considered as a city that celebrates multiple festivals, the demand for costumes and props is always high.

Weaves *of* Varanasi

A globally renowned centre of hand-made textiles, Banaras is well known for its brocades, *zaris* and sarees since ages. The closely woven exquisite Banarasi brocades are worked out on silk fabrics with gold or silver *zari*. The quality of gold and silver used earlier was said to be so pure that the lustre and colour remained for hundreds of years.

Mrs Colin Mackenzie, a traveller to Banaras in 1847, furnishes a very interesting account of the shops which dealt in the *Zari* brocade, "... this was the house of the richest manufacturers at Banaras. Half of the room was raised one step. Here we sat while bales of the most magnificent gold and silver stuffs, called Kinkob were unrolled before us. I do not suppose any European brocades equals them. They are used by the natives for trousers...some of the muslins spotted with gold, and muslin shawls and scarves with gold and silver borders for about thirty rupees were beautiful…".

The Rig Veda mentions a certain kind of cloth called the *Hiranya*, where the gods and other figures are created in gold. This kind of textile is the earlier equivalent of the present-day Zari work and the *Kimkhab*. In Pali Literature, Banaras is referred to as a reputed centre of textile manufacture, famous for its Kasikuttama and Kasiya. Divyavadana, a Buddhist Sanskrit text of the Gupta period (ca 350 to 500 CE) makes references to fabrics called *Kashika-Vastra, Kashi Kashikamsu* and so on.

An important illustrated manuscript of this time was Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, which is now scattered in various collections and dates to the late 17th or early 18th century

The Lalita Vistara, another Buddhist text also refers to garments made of Kashika fabrics.

The exquisite Banarasi sarees and brocades boast of intricate and exclusive techniques and designs like the *Shikargah, Nakshabandha, Ganga Jamuni* and *Kimkhab*, worked on the handloom by master craftsmen. It is believed that earlier, two localities of Banaras, Madanpura and Alaipura, controlled the manufacture of the Zari and Brocades respectively. However, presently both the centres (along with a few new areas) manufacture both varieties. The exclusive handloom-based brocade designs like the *Shikargah, Nakshabandas,* and *Kimkhab* etc. are still produced on special demand.

Wooden Toys of Banaras

Zari Embroidery

The gold and silver threads woven into Banarasi sarees or used for elaborate embroidery are very famous in Banaras. The Shivala neighbourhood has many workshop-homes of *zari* embroiderers. A long needle hooked at the end manipulates the thread. Most *zari* artists begin learning from a young age and have flexible working hours as they work mostly at their workshop-homes.

Putul Rod of Abhinav Kala Samiti

Gulabi Meenakari

Enamelling may be described as the art of colouring and ornamenting the surface of metal by fusing to it various mineral substances. The mention of enamelling in the Ain-i-Akbari makes it clear that the art was well established in India around Akbar's time. Jaipur, Alwar, Delhi and Banaras were the principal places where enamelling was practiced. The nature of Banaras pink is like that of the Jaipur red. It is equally elusive, applied last and requires the least firing. Only a master enameller can bring out the silken lustre and pleasing shade of rose pink. It is said that the *hathi ke munh ka kada* (elephant-trunk bracelet) was introduced by a Banarasi master goldsmith and these have knobs enamelled with white and covered all over with minute floral scrolls in pink which are considered the most attractive forms of knobs available in Indian bracelets. The shading and

delicacy of the Banarasi Meena is very distinctive and the Meena workers of Varanasi have mastered the art of creating the perfect pink of the rose. The work is done with a fine brush and when the brush is used repeatedly, the work becomes finer. The artists of Banaras can give you anything but will not part with their brushes as they have reached a level of perfection with those brushes.

Music

Varanasi has been the home of musicians and artists for ages. The spiritual atmosphere of the city gave the musicians a creative space to nurture and extend their music tradition. The royal patronage over the years and of the Muslim rulers specifically, played a vital role in the growth of the Banaras Gharana of music. Varanasi emerged as a centre of Hindustani Classical Music. *Dhrupad, Khayal, Dhamar, Tarana, Ghazal, Tappa, Bhajan, Thumri, Dadra, Kajri, Chaiti,* and *Hori* sung in Banaras, became prominent in North India. Similarly, for musical instruments, it became known for the *Veena, Shehnai, Tabla* and *Sarangi*, as well as *Sitar, Sarod* and *Pakhawaj.*

Folk instruments like Turi, Bheri, Tikara, Damama and Jharjhari were popular in earlier times. Varanasi occupies a high place in the Thumri culture of north India. It does not feature Tanakari; the emphasis is on emotions. Generally based on romantic texts and songs about the beloved, the *thumris* are composed in simple *taals* from lighter *ragas*. The credit for Banarasi Thumri goes to the *Kathak* of Varanasi and to Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh. It is believed that while Lucknow Thumri was growing, the Banarasi Thumri developed a certain character as the courtesans and singers here made it more soulful and expressive. While the musicians developed the Thumri style in melodious forms of classical music, the courtesans beautified it with their soulful rendering. Famous *thumri* singers remembered today are Maujuddin Khan, Bade Siyaji, Chote Siyaji, Bade Ram Das, and Chote Ram Das among others.

Varanasi has also been known for the rich tradition of the *tappa*. Shori Mian's chief disciple, Mian Gammu and his son and disciple, Shadey Khan, belonged to the *darbar* of Raja Udit Narain. He trained two *tawaifs,* Chitra Bai and Imambandi, in *tappa*, and they went on to become great exponents of this style.

Banarasi singers are also known for the *Khayal.* The word loosely translates to imagination as the form demands improvisational flexibility and creativity, which become the most important ingredients for this style of music. *Khayal* compositions draw freely from sacred texts. One of the chief centres for *Dadra*, Varanasi excelled in the finest styles rendered by the *tawaifs* of the city. The local folk tradition of the *Kajri* was also refined and enhanced with artistic touches by the *tawaifs.* This Banarasi Kajri became a special contribution to music, like the *Chaiti* of

The basic metals in the Ashtadhatu work include copper, zinc, tin, lead, iron, antimony, gold and silver

Metal Repoussé work

Mirzapur or the *Hori* of Vindhyachal and for a long time, it was customary for local women including professional dancers to sing during the large fairs of the season.

In and around Varanasi, two distinctive sects of traditional professional musicians rose to fame, the Gandharvas and the Kathaks, who were devoted to learning, teaching, and performing the arts. It was not just a profession and a means of livelihood for them, but a form of devotion and *Bhakt*i. A large group of Kathaks settled in the Kabir Chaura and surrounding areas of the city. The Kathaks, it is said, came to be known as Misra in Varanasi, and later changed their titles to Maharaj, Sahay, Prasad and like. Another area that came to be predominantly occupied by musicians and artists is the Ramapura area of Varanasi.

The shading and delicacy of the Banarasi Meena is very distinctive and the Meena workers of Varanasi have mastered the art of creating the perfect pink of the rose

Tabla

Banaras evolved its own style of Tabla playing and this *gharana* was called Banaras Baaj. This tradition that is said to have been developed by the legendary Pandit Ram Sahay is around 200 years old. The oral tradition was passed down from generation to generation and retains its richness and purity till date. In the Banaras Baaj, the art of playing the *tabla* as a soloist is respected and promoted. The technical aspects of this tradition include the cyclic melody or *Lahara*, the *Laggi Ladi* (melodies repeatedly strung in a beautiful and aesthetic form to generate a pleasing performance) that is considered a specialty of the Banaras Gharana and the multiple unique compositions that have been passed on from the beginning of the *Tabla* tradition in the city. Pandit Samta Prasad and Pandit Kishan Maharaj have been the *tabla* legends associated with Banaras.

Shehnai

The *Shehnai* tradition also finds its place in the city of Varanasi as some of the most distinguished *Shehnai* players have come from this city. One of the best-known exponents of the *Shehnai* was Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan. His house in Sarai Harha is maintained by his grandson, Sh. Nasir Abbas. The living room where Ustad used to sit and practice for hours, is adorned by many photographs and awards that the late maestro received. Ustad had a special affection for the

Shikarbandh Motif

Ganga and would often play on the *ghats* and temples by the river, and also at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple.

Sarangi

Sarangi was part of the music culture of Varanasi from 19th century onwards and Pandit Buddhu Mishra was said to be a pioneer in the Sarangi Gharana of the city. A short-necked string instrument, the *sarangi* is an integral part of the Hindustani classical music and is said to resemble the human vocal cords most aptly. The belly (*pet* or *pasli*) of the instrument is hollowed out in the front, the neck (*chhati*) and the head (*magaz*) are hollowed out at the back.

Kathak

Kathak dancing grew to become a specialty and a unique feature of Banaras along with two other major centres in North India, Jaipur, and Lucknow. Since dance is said to originate from Lord Shiva, and

Banarasi Handloom

Banaras is the city where he is believed to reside and even perform the *Tandava*, the Kathak style of Banaras is dedicated to and imbibes elements and characteristics of Lord Shiva. The Banaras Gharana footwork is very strong. It is said that the female dancers in this *gharana* also aim to look *mardana* and incorporate masculinity in their dance style. Pandit Birju Maharaj and several other stalwarts represented this *gharana*.

Gastronomic Delights

Varanasi is said to rest on the trident of Lord Shiva and his omnipresence is evident in the lifestyle, language, and food cultures of the city. Banarasis exude a special kind of love towards food, with an exceptionally large appetite for sweets. It is said that no one should fear going away hungry from Varanasi because Maa Annapurna, the goddess of food, is a permanent resident of the city. One can find an interesting and wide array of foods here. The people of Varanasi take pride in sharing their indulgence for food, which becomes apparent from the queues witnessed at the *chaat* or *mithai* shops. University students are seen immersed in discussions while sipping hot tea from their misty, fragrant *kulhads*.

While there are certain foods typically prepared during a particular season or festival, there are others which are available in abundance throughout the year. There are some food preparations specifically tied to the festivals like the Kashi Vishwanath's Annakut ka Shringar, Annakut Darshan, and the Chhapan (56) Bhog of Gopal Mandir. The *Langda Aam* (a variety of mango), is relished by the people of Varanasi, and in mango season (which begins from June), the markets are overflowing with it.

During the month of Ramzan, areas like Madanpura come alive when groups of people mostly men and children, gather in the markets and streets in the evening to purchase traditional sweets and other food items. The lanes of Dalmandi are agog with stores and restaurants offering Kebabs, Biryani and Nihari. The ramshackle shops do brisk business churning out Bade ke Kebab, Gurda Kebab, Shami and Galouti on their tandoors and tawas. Walking further into the lanes of Dalmandi, a populated area situated in the middle of the city, one passes through numerous small sweet shops offering a variety of colourful sweets.

Lassi

Fruit and dry fruit-flavoured Lassi can be found at stores like the Blue Lassi Shop, near Manikarnika Ghat. Plain curd and Malai Lassi are quite popular. Old patrons still prefer shops in the Chowk or Pakka Mahal area

Gulabi Meenakari

The lanes of Dalmandi are agog with stores and restaurants offering Kebabs, Biryani and Nihari

where the intertwined vine-like lanes present many lassi options. This cool refreshing drink is mostly enjoyed in the *kulhad*, the eco-friendly earthen cup, with a layer of *Malai* or yoghurt cream on top.

Chaat

The Kashi Chaat Bhandar and Deena Chaat Bhandar near Godowliya begin operations around 3 pm and serve delicious varieties of *Chaat Papdi, Tamatar Chaat, Palak Pakodi, Dahi Papdi, Falooda* and *Gol Gappa* to the customers who queue up at these stores. At the market streets of Godowliya, including the ones that lead to Chowk, and the lanes that lead to the Dashashvamedh Ghat, one can find multiple food options like Poori, Samosa and Sandwiches. The stretch from Asi Chauraha to Godowliya (approximately 3 kms) is full of outlets, make-shift tents, cart vendors, and restaurants where one can find numerous foods being sold. There is egg roll, and omelette in the tea shops, vegan bakeries, Indian cuisine (ranging from Mughlai to Idli Sambhar), *Paan, Bhang, Chaat*, Chicken, Noodles, Momos and several sweet shops like the Ksheer Sagar – a truly exhaustive list of options for someone who would want to sample the fabled street food of Varanasi.

Puri Jalebi

Ram Bhandar in Chaukhambha Gali attracts morning *Poori-Jalebi* breakfast lovers. All food items here are prepared in *desi ghee*, like the popular Kachori-Sabzi. There is also the delicious Gol Kachori and Badi Kachori served with Aloo Rasa. Roasted *Chana*, Peanut, *murmure* prepared with chopped onions, chillies, and spices, and *bhutta* (corn) become quick snacks savoured by the people while strolling at the *ghats* and marketplaces. Lemon tea is prepared within 20 seconds by pouring hot water from a big aluminium kettle over freshly squeezed juice, with *masala* (powdered spices) added to it. This is served in earthen *kulhads* and can be found at the *ghats*.

Makai Ka Murmura

A quick local snack prepared within minutes, comprises of roasted Makai ka Murmura (corn), Hara Makai ka Murmura, Matar (pea), Chips, Pingal (local name for a long rice-like item), chana, peanut, and Chiwda (rice-based food item). All of these are dry roasted in salt, mixed with some powdered spices and chillies, and eaten with a chutney which is a thick blend of onion, coriander, mint and chillies.

Suhaal

The Suhaal are crispy, savoury pastries that are crushed and mixed with cooked *chhole* (chickpeas), onion, salt, pepper, and special *chutney* (made using coriander, chillies, tamarind, cumin powder and lemon juice) to make the Suhaal ki Chaat, which is best enjoyed hot.

Banarasi Aaloo Papad is another speciality of the city. Locals make these *papads* at home. The thinly cut potato is mixed with spices and is left to dry on the rooftops/open areas. Once dried, they are fried and the transparent crunchy potato *papads* are relished.

At the Chowk area, there are a variety of local *murabbas* and pickles to be found. The Banarasi stuffed fat red chili pickle is the most well-known among the pickles sold in the market.

Varanasi is also known for its vegetarian dishes. Some restaurants serve *Sattvik Thaalis*. The Banarasi Dum Aaloo is considered a delicacy here. Matar ka Nimona, another unique vegetable dish made of green peas is consumed with boiled rice and the special stuffed red chilli pickle.

Thandai

A cooling drink made with milk, *malai*, dry fruit (almonds and pistachios), and cardamom, the Thandai stands true to its name, providing relief from the searing heat. While serving Thandai, the shopkeeper will ask if you want *bhang* (Cannabis) in it, and prepare your Thandai accordingly, finishing

with a rigorous shaking of all the ingredients achieved by cupping two glasses together. *Bhang* is available openly throughout Varanasi. There are government *bhang* shops from where one can purchase *bhang* powder, or the green-coloured, thickened paste like form of *Bhang*. Backed by the faith that it is *Bhole ka Prasad* or *Baba ka Prasad*, *bhang* enjoys its own special spot in people's lives here. There are multiple Thandai shops at Godowliya offering Kesariya Badam, Banarasi Thandai, Pista Badam, Gulab Sharbat, Nimbu Masaledaar, Soda Masaledaar and Lassi.

Sweets

Khoya Gali is the wholesale market for milk products, and the makers of sweets buy their raw materials from here. *Khoya* is a key ingredient in the sweet-making traditions of Varanasi. It is churned out of milk and used for various sweets, ranging from barfi to milk cake. While some of the old sweet shops like Madhur Jalpan in Chowk, Shree Rajbandhu in Kachori Gali (famous for *pedas* and *namkeens*), and Madhu Bahar at Asi, continue to thrive, the relatively newer outlets like Ksheer Sagar (which fuses the Banarasi and Bengali traditions) have created a distinct niche for themselves in the sweet market.

Jaleba, a bigger form of Jalebi is a special preparation seen in the markets of Varanasi during Kajri festival. On the night of *Ratjagga*, some sweet shops remain open till late in the night, celebrating the Kajri season by preparing Jalebas.

Laung Lata is an exquisite, light caramel coloured, deep fried sweet stuffed with flavoured *khoya* (milk solids) and soaked in sugar syrup. It derives its unique name from the use of clove in its preparation. Once the sweet is ready, a piece of clove is inserted into it as the final garnish.

Mallaiyo, a sweet delicacy, is available only during the winter season. Milk is churned the whole night to attain a feather-like level of fluffiness, which is then flavoured with saffron and garnished with pistachios and chunks of *Rabri*. It is served in *kulhads* and has the appearance of a delicate fluffy milk cloud. Chaukumbha Gali is known to have good Mallaiyo during the winter season. It can be seen in the market only after the month of October and savoured during the winter season.

Paan

There are a countless number of *Paan* shops in Varanasi. While the Banarasis say their shops are categorized based on preference of different varieties of *Paan*, people can be seen sourcing their entire day's *Paan* supply from a single shop and carrying it with them. These *Paan* (which are not instantly eaten) are kept folded with the help of a little stick which holds the ingredients inside the leaf intact. Before eating the *Paan*, the stick is removed, and as they say in Banaras, "*paan jamaya jaata hai*." Most Banarasis eat the *Desi Paan,* which uses the *desi patta* or *Mahua* leaf that comes from Lucknow. The *Magahi* is special for visitors and tourists as it melts in the mouth immediately.

People who Fascinate

Fa Hien

(337–422)

After having walked the Silk-Route, passing by Gandhar, Taxila, Utchh, Mathura, Varanasi and Gaya, Fa Hien stayed in Pataliputra for three years collecting, copying, and studying Buddhist texts. About his short trip to Varanasi Fa Hien writes, "From Pataliputra I walked 22 *Yojans* (280 Km) west to reach Varanasi. Only 10 *Litarah* (12 Km) north-east is located the legendary Sarnath, where I witnessed many Buddhist *Viharas* and the famed deer-park of the saintly sages."

Hiuen Tsang

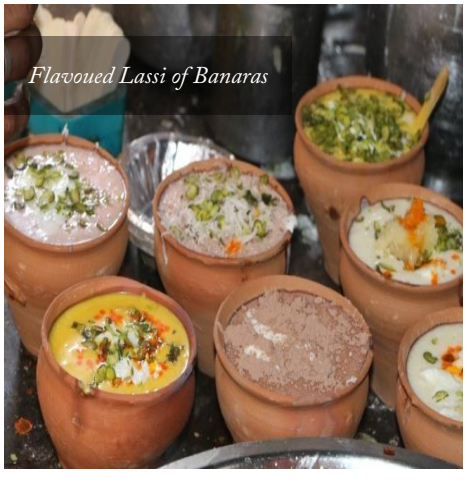
(602–664)

Hiuen Tsang left China and reached Kashi via Afghanistan. About Varanasi's grandeur he said, "Varanasi has 20 grand temples with huge spires and structures made of carved stone and painted wood. A copper statue of Shiva is no less than 100 feet tall and seems alive…in the north-east of the capital flows the river Varuna. Westwards from here is a *stupa* built by Ashoka which must be 500 feet high. In front of this is a stone pillar which glimmers like a mirror. Its ice-like surface appears to reflect Buddha's image before which one can pay obeisance." This stone pillar, in fragmented form, can be seen in Sarnath. Even today, it has a mirror-like sheen.

Al-Biruni

(973–1048)

Travelling to India in 1017 with Mahmud Ghazni, Al-Biruni was enamoured by India's philosophy, religion, and ways of life. Mathematics, Physics, Nature-Science, History, Linguistics, Anthropology, and Astronomy are only a few subjects which he excelled at. In his book, 'The Book of India', he wrote extensively about the society, cities, villages, lives of the people. His take on Banaras strikes one as very insightful, "The sages and mendicants gravitate to Banaras and then refuse to leave, much like the people attached to Kaaba who refuse to leave Mecca. They stay there till death in the hope that afterwards they may achieve salvation and stay here forever. It is believed that if you have committed a crime such as murder, your punishment will be commensurate to your sin. But only if the sinner comes to Banaras can he be absolved of sin."



Flavoued Lassi of Banaras

Dara Shikoh

(1615–1659)

Dara Shikoh was the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan and his queen Mumtaz Mahal, who commanded an infantry troop of sixty thousand men and a cavalry of fifty thousand. He was also appointed the governor of important states like Allahabad, Gujarat, Multan and Kabul at different points of time. In Banaras, under the tutelage of Bairagi Baba Laldas, and with the assistance of 150 Vedic Pundits, Dara Shikoh embarked on the task of understanding and translating no less than 50 Upanishads into Persian. This was published under the title of Sirr-e-Akbar. Following this, he wrote a tome *Majma-ul-Baharien*, Meeting of Oceans, where he tried to fuse the teachings of Sufism and the Vedant. To commemorate the Mughal crown-prince's residency in Banaras, a still-flourishing borough, Daraganj, was established.

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier

(1605–1689)

Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveller, jeweller, and gem-merchant, started his voyages from Antwerp and Paris. In India, he travelled from Surat to Agra, Puri, and Golconda, and of course to Kashi. Because of his ingenuity, the Mughals called him *Hunarmand*. In his iconic travelogue, Travels in India, published in 1676, he describes Banaras, "Benaras is a large and very well-built town. Most of the houses being of brick and cut stone, and loftier than those of other towns of India; but it is very inconvenient that the streets are so narrow. It has several caravan *serais*, and among others, one very large and well-built. In the middle of the court there are two galleries where they sell cotton, silken stuff, and other kinds of merchandise. The majority of those who vend the goods are the workers who have made the pieces, and in this manner, foreigners obtain them at first hand."

Francois Bernier

(1620–1688)

Landing at the port of Surat in Gujarat, this French physician left France at the age of 36. He was soon appointed as the personal physician to Dara Shikoh. He was retained as the designated doctor to the Mughal Durbar by Aurangzeb even after Dara's death. He travelled with the royal entourage and later with his fellow Frenchman, Tavernier. These travels gave him an experience of India which he later wrote in his book Travels in the Mughal Empires. About Banaras, he writes, "The town of Benaras, seated on the Ganges, in a beautiful situation, and in the midst of extremely fine and rich country, may be considered a general school of gentiles. It is the Athens of India, where Brahmins and other devotees reside; they are the only persons who apply their mind to study."

Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib *(1797–1869)*

Mirza Ghalib, one of the greatest Urdu poets, passed through Banaras in 1827, on his way to Calcutta. Banaras's charm tempted him to stay, which he did, for one whole month. To immerse himself in the spirit of the city, he hired a *haveli* in Naurangabad. He wrote a lengthy ode to Banaras comprising of 108 couplets. In this poem *Charag-e-Dair*, The Lamp of the Temple, he referred to Kashi as The Kaaba of the East, "I will go to Kaaba and there blow aloud a conch-shell! In Banaras, along with temples, I'll build a Pyramid as well! Wah! What can one say about Banaras? One can't find another city like that anywhere. I chanced to be here in the twilight of my life. Had I been young, I would have stayed put here and never left. O Allah! Please protect this utopia from the evil eye, for it is far superior to any paradisiacal heaven: Kind Allah, do save Banaras from any bad omen! This paradise, this bliss, this dreamland, this heaven!"

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore *(1861–1941)*

Kashi was visited several times by Rabindranath Tagore. The triumvirate of Annie Besant, Mahamana Malaviya and Gurudev got along very well. He would stay at the Malaviya home on the campus of Banaras Hindu University, where he was the chairperson of the Bhartiya Kala Bhawan. In one of his presidential addresses, he talked about Banaras, "The best place to preserve and protect ancient Indian manuscripts and culture is Kashi. The marked difference between other pilgrim spots and Kashi is that this is not only a confluence of rivers of faith, but also of all rivulets of Indian knowledge systems. If the regional languages and cultures of India want to extend their reach beyond the boundaries of their respective regions, then Banaras could become the centre of this endeavour, because Banaras does not belong to a region, but all the regions reside within this conurbation. In the history of Hindu India, whatever streams of knowledge sprang-up, all came and converged here in Kashi at one time or another."

Rani Bhawani

(1716–1795)

After the untimely demise of her husband, the king of Nator State in Bengal, Rani Bhawani took over the reins of the kingdom and established her credentials as an able administrator and a benevolent patron of religion, philosophy, and theology. During her long sojourn at Banaras, the Rani built many temples dedicated to the feminine divine, thus giving a deeper dimension to Shiva-obsessed Kashi. Tara, Durga, Kali, Vishalakshi, are a few mother goddesses that she revered by building their abodes, along with several shrines dedicated to Shiva and Krishna. The striking red stone structure of Durga Temple and tank, standing tall in the southern part of the city, as well as many of the rest

Jaleba is Prepared and Sold During Kajri Festival

houses, watering-holes, perennial tanks and shady trees that dot the perilous path of the *Panchkroshi Parikrama*, were a gift of the very capable Rani to the city. In all she constructed 60 ponds, 18 stepwells, 15 temples, more than 500 dwellings and four major *ghats* in Banaras.

Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar

(1725–1795)

This courageous queen of Malwa, instead of renouncing the world and relinquishing power after the demise of her father-in-law, husband, and son, chose to personally lead her army to repel the challengers to her authority. She went on to make temples, shrines, tanks, monasteries, and rest houses in no less than 91 places, many beyond the boundaries of her own princely state. Infrastructure built by Maharani Ahilyabai can

Laung Lata

be found in far-flung pilgrim spots like Gaya, Somnath, Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Kanchi, Avanti, Dwarika, Badrinath, Jagannath Puri, Rameshwaram and, of course, Kashi. Here, the old Vishwanath temple had been pulled down and a mosque built at the very spot. Resourceful Rani Ahilyabai procured a piece of land adjoining the old Gyanvapi plot and constructed a temple resembling the original. When the *pundits* of Banaras refused to consecrate the new temple, she got holy men from Maheshwar to sanctify the new Kashi Vishwanath temple. In popular lore it is said that the leaning temple of Kashi-Karvat is bowing down in homage to this caring and compassionate queen.

Annie Besant

(1847–1933)

Annie Besant, born in London, was a freethinker revolutionary who led many agitations to secure rights for women in Victorian England. After participating in the World Religions' Parliament in Chicago in 1993, she was drawn to India, and eventually made it her home and country. The Kashi Naresh, Maharaja Prabhu Narain Singh, gifted her a plot of land where she established the Central Hindu College, dedicated to preparing young, thinking minds in sync with the idea of an emerging India. With the support and encouragement of Doctor Bhagwandas and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, she also undertook a fresh new translation of Shrimadbhagwat Gita. In 1913, joining forces with Pandit Malaviya, she offered up her Central Hindu College campus so that the vision of starting the Banaras Hindu University could be realized quickly. BHU held its initial classes here, till its own site was inaugurated. In 1916, with Lokmanya Tilak, she established the Home Rule League and was arrested by the British in reaction. Soon she was elevated to the position of President of the Indian National Congress. In 1921 she was honoured by the BHU with its first D.Litt. degree. Upon her demise in Madras, in accordance with her wish, her ashes were brought to Varanasi to be immersed in the Ganga. Millions came to bid farewell to their beloved Basanti Devi. The woman with a European body but Indian soul was thus united with India forever.

Adi Shankaracharya

(788–820)

Born at Kalladi in Kerala, Shankara left home for Kashi at the behest of his Guru, Govind Bhagwatpad. After an arduous journey of more than 2500 kilometres, he reached Kashi and headed straightaway for a dip in the Ganga and then to the temple of Ma Annapurna. Shankara asked not for food but to be blessed with the qualities of knowledge, renunciation and attainment. Once, as he headed to the Ganga, a lady sat in the middle of the road with the dead body of her husband. When Shankar requested her to move it away, she asked him to directly tell the corpse to move. "How can a body, which has lost its *shakti*, move?" asked an amazed Shankara. The woman shot back, "You recognize only the Absolute Brahman. But see how without *shakti* or the female power even an omnipotent male Shiva turns into a lifeless cadaver." Shankar saluted her and henceforth acknowledged the power of the divine feminine as well.

On another occasion, an

outcast with four dogs blocked Shankara's path. When Shankara's disciples asked the man to move, he asked, "Whom do you want to move? The body that is me, or the soul that is me?" When one of them cursed him angrily, he said, "There is the same soul in all men, damned or blessed. The sun, whether reflected in the holy Ganga or in a sinful cup of wine, remains unchanged." Shankara immediately understood his divinity and fell at his feet, whereupon the man transformed into Lord Shankar himself. And since that day they say, "Where Shankar and Shankara come face to face, Kashi is a blessed place!"

James Prinsep

(1799–1840)

In 1820, young James Prinsep was sent from Calcutta by the Company to be the Assay Master at the Banaras Mint. The moment he saw Banaras, Prinsep was so captivated by the city that he dedicated the next 10 years to the betterment of the place, by streamlining its administration, writing extensively about it, and making dozens of drawings and sketches of its localities.

Prinsep was responsible for making the first correct map of Banaras, preparing blueprints of important temples and mansions, calculating the position of the stars over its sky, laying an underground sewage system, finding ways to tackle flood waters of the Ganga, correcting the measure and weight of minted coins, establishing The Benaras Literary Society, deciphering the Brahmi-Kharoshti script to decode Ashokan edicts, undertaking an accurate census, recording boroughs, houses, ponds and shrines, listing essential commodities, and laying a bridge on the river Karamnasa. Also well-known are his sketches of Banaras; so vibrant that the city seems to almost move before one's eyes. Prinsep's yeoman service to his revered holy beloved city puts it forever in his debt. Prinsep's obsession with Banaras was so well known that his British colleagues gave him the nickname *Gora Banarasi*. In 1833 he published Benaras Illustrated from Calcutta, which included several dozen of his lithographs of the *ghats*, temples, fairs, bazaars, and life in the city, as well as word portraits. James Prinsep accomplished so much in India and England in his relatively short life that a variety of a flower found here was named Prinsepia after him. Today, wherever a Prinsepia blossoms, people think of the Banarasi Englishman.

Sir Alexander Cunningham

(1814–1893)

19-year-old Alexander Cunningham came to India from England as a rookie engineer with the Bengal Engineer Group. In a happy coincidence, the moment he landed in Calcutta in 1833, he met James Prinsep, and the rest is history – or rather Archaeology! From here on, apart from serving the Company as an engineer and in many other positions, History and Archaeology became his passion. Cunningham went to Banaras and, with F.C. Macy, set up the archaeological dig of the *stupas* of Sarnath to unravel their mysteries.

Banaras does not belong to a region, but all the regions reside within this conurbation. In the history of Hindu India, whatever streams of knowledge sprang-up, all came and converged here in Kashi at one time or another

During his time with the army and as ADC to the Governor General, Cunningham travelled all over India and he used every opportunity to understand the history and the archaeology of the place. After Banaras he worked closely on several sites from Sanchi to Taxila. His research and excavation activities were underwritten with his personal funds. But he realized the need for a formal institutionalized approach to manage the archaeological treasures of a vast country like India. In 1871, his untiring effort led to the setting up of the Archaeological Survey of India by Governor General Canning, with Cunningham as its head. He

authored many volumes on his interpretation of history based on archaeological findings. His journey from novice engineer Cunningham to becoming Sir Alexander began in Banaras and it would not be wrong to say that the man known as Father of Indian Archaeology was a son of Banaras.

Where Shankar and Shankara come face to face, Kashi is a blessed place!

Rani Laxmi Bai

(1828-1858)

Born on 19th November, 1828 in Varanasi, Lakshmibai, later became the Rani of Jhansi, the queen of the princely state of Jhansi in North India. She was one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and became a symbol of resistance against the British Raj for Indian nationalists. She was born in a Marathi Brahmin family who gave her the name Manikarnika Tambe, which was later shortened to Manu. Today, her birthplace is marked in Varanasi near Asi as the Rani Laxmibai Janmasthali, an open museum space.

Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya

(1861–1946)

When the notable personalities of Banaras are counted, a name that shines bright is that of Bharat Ratna Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya. Proficient in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, and Persian, he also composed poetry under the *nom de plume* Makrand. In 1886, Malviya's address to the second convention of the Indian National Congress greatly impressed its incumbent President, Dadabhai Naoroji, and thus began his political life. As time went by, it was Banaras, and not Allahabad, that started drawing him in. Malviyaji decided to dedicate his life fully to the national cause, spirituality, education, literature, and social work.

He was amongst the first persons in India who led a movement against British attempts to build a canal over the Ganga at Haridwar. He insisted that Ganga should not be disturbed, obstructed or diverted in any manner.

In 1911, with Annie Besant, he dreamt of establishing a grand university where students could study not only cutting-edge science and technology, but learn the most ancient Indian traditions, cultural and religious practices, and Sanskrit. After getting the King of Kashi to promise a suitable piece of land for this endeavour, he traversed the country, raising funds from rich royals and commoners alike. In 1916, his wish was fulfilled and thus was born the largest residential university of Asia. Present at the inaugural was Mahatma Gandhi who gave him the new sobriquet of Mahamana, the great hearted. In 2015, the country conferred the highest civilian award of Bharat Ratna on Mahamana.

Chinnaswami Subramaniya Bharati

(1882–1921)

Subbaiah was born in Tirunelveli of Tamil Nadu. Seeing the young boy's grasp of music, language and poetry, people started calling him Bharati - the son of Saraswati. At age 16, life took an unforeseen turn, when his father died, and he had to move in with his father's sister, who lived in Banaras. Banaras proved lucky for young Bharati. Here he mastered Sanskrit, studied the Vedas and Upanishads, apart from learning 32 Indian and foreign languages. Banaras gave him the opportunity to explore a spiritual dimension and to connect with the national political scene.

Back in Madras, Subramaniya Bharati concentrated on writing in Tamil and bringing out Tamil and English journals. In between, back in Banaras, he met Sister Nivedita, who had been close to Swami Vivekanand. She inspired Bharati to write extensively on women's issues. Recognizing the revolutionary nature of his poetry, the British arrested him. It was Annie Besant who bailed him out. In 1919, after meeting Mahatma Gandhi, Bharathi shifted his focus to the concept of *Swadesi* in a new magazine called Swadesi Mitran. Bharati, arguably the greatest Tamil poet of the 20th century, wrote on

every conceivable subject on earth. In his last public address, delivered from the steps of Erode Library, he spoke about the Immortality of Man. There is no doubt that this man, shaped in his adolescence by Kashi-Varanasi, is an immortal Indian.

Lal Bahadur Shastri

(1904–1966)

Born in Ramnagar of Banaras, Lal Bahadur Shastri lost his father in childhood. Forced to live with his maternal grandfather in Mughal Sarai, he started his education by learning Urdu and Persian. Once when his uncle killed a pigeon, young Lal Bahadur went on a hunger strike. This was his first brush with *Satyagraha* or non-violent peaceful protest. At the age of 13, when floods in the Ganga made it difficult to attend school in Banaras, he jumped into the river with books tied to his head and swam across to attend classes. But his bright career as a student was under threat because of lack of money for school fees. In this situation, one of his schoolteachers hired him to teach his own children, so that Lal Bahadur could continue his studies.

At the age of 17, after attending a public meeting in Banaras addressed by both the Mahatma and Mahamana, he decided to dedicate his life to the cause of Indian independence. He was arrested but released on account of being a juvenile. Prodded by Acharya Kripalani, Lal Bahadur did complete his course and got a degree of Shastri from Kashi Vidya Peeth, but his heart and soul remained with the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. He spent 9 years in various prison terms.

In 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri took oath as the second prime minister of India. At this critical juncture when the nation faced many challenges like shortage of food grain, language riots, and military threats from neighbouring countries, Shastri ji gave the clarion call of *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*, inspiring a green revolution in the country and imparting a befitting strategic defeat to the adventurous neighbour.

Much after his death, this son of Varanasi remains highly regarded for his honesty, courage and sagacity in leading the nation.

Munshi Premchand

(1880–1936)

Dhanpat Rai was born in Lamahi Village of Banaras. After the demise of his mother, if he could get solace anywhere from the cruelty of his stepmother, it was in the world of books, fictional stories, and his own imagination. Having learnt Urdu and Farsi at a *madarsa*, and English at the Queen's College, Banaras, he started writing under the penname, Babu Nawab Rai Banarasi. But his first collection of short stories *Soz-e-Watan* or Burning for the Nation was banned, and five hundred copies found at the writer's home were burnt. Now the only way for Dhanpat Rai to save his job was to take another name, and he started a new innings as a writer under the *nom de plume* of Premchand.

Munshi Premchand completed his graduation and joined the education department in Gorakhpur as Deputy Inspector of Schools. But in 1921, after attending a meeting addressed by Mahatma Gandhi, he vowed to join the Non-Cooperation Movement. He resigned from his government job and shifted to Banaras with a pledge to serve the nation through literature. In Banaras, despite financial constraints, he started Saraswati Press and began publishing the journal Hans, apart from regularly penning novels and dozens of short stories. In 1934, dire financial difficulties led him to Bombay to write the film 'Mazdoor'. But the British government banned the film, deeming it a provocative work that would instigate workers against the establishment. Premchand returned to Banaras and immersed himself in writing powerful novels like Godan and stories like Qafan.

In 1936 he chaired the first session of Progressive Writers' Association, but soon breathed his last due to lifelong struggles with poverty and ill health. He left behind a rich legacy of fifteen novels, over two hundred and fifty short stories, six plays and scores of essays, articles, and translations. Munshi Premchand is perhaps rightly referred to as the Emperor of the Novel in India.

Jaishankar Prasad

(1890–1937)

A great scholar of Sanskrit, Urdu, Farsi, and English, Jaishankar Prasad is counted amongst the founders of

Romanticism in Hindi literature. His initial poems were in *Braj-Bhasha*, a dialect of Hindi, but soon he shifted to a new, standardized Hindi which became the medium for his poems, essays, stories, novels, and plays. Apart from composing poems of varying length, Prasad wrote poetic verse novellas and thirteen plays. Regarded as the father of modern playwriting in India, he staged many of these. His historical dramas like Skandgupt, Chandragupt and Dhruvaswamini are considered timeless classics. With seventy-three stories and three novels to add to his repertoire, Prasad is firmly placed in the pantheon of immortal Indian writers. His poetic verse novella Kamayani is termed the Tajmahal of Hindi literature.

Ustad Bismillah Khan

(1916 – 2006)

Ustad Bismillah Khan was a Shehnai Maestro who epitomised the spirit of Banaras. He would sit and do his *riyaz* on the *ghats* of Banaras, or in a tiny room near the entrance of his house in Kabir Chaura. The power of his music was such that people who walked in to sit for 10 minutes, eventually left after hours, listening to, and appreciating his music. Ustad ji's daily routine involved waking up at 4 am for *namaz,* resting a little, then practicing from 9-11 am. After *namaz* and lunch, he would rest some more before beginning his *riyaz* again. He played at the Balaji Temple for three and a half years. Like any other artist, Ustad Bismillah Khan was very attached to his Shehnai and would never let anybody else play his personal instrument. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna for his services to music.

Pandits Rajan-Sajan Mishra

Renowned singers, Pandit Rajan and Sajan Mishra carried forward a 300-year-old lineage of *Khayal* singing of the Banaras Gharana. Having performed at numerous national and international concerts, the Mishra brothers received their initial musical training from their grandfather's brother, Bade Ram Das Ji Mishra, their father, Pandit Hanuman Prasad Mishra, and from their uncle, Pandit Gopal Prasad Mishra, who were renowned artists of Banaras, along with their grandfather Pandit Sursahai Mishra. Both Rajan-Sajan Mishra, were *ganda-bandh* students of Gayanacharya Swargiya Pandit Bade Ramdas ji. Pandit Sajan Mishra considers himself fortunate that the duo was born in Kashi in a family in proximity to Kabir Chaura where the Kabir Math is situated. This area is well known for the master artists of Banaras music and dance, who lived here. They were awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2007.

Pandit Chhannu Lal Mishra

Padma Bhushan Dr. Chhannu Lal Mishra, an artist par excellence, was born on 15th August 1936, in Azamgarh but finds himself to be bound by a "relation of blood with Varanasi". A firm believer of the *Guru Shishya Parampara,* he is a fount of knowledge as he has with him the compositions and techniques passed down to him from generations. He mentions a famous *Thumri* singer from Lucknow, Maujuddin Khan, who came all the way to Varanasi just to learn from his great grandfather Pandit Jagdim Maharaj. He asserts that it is in his *parampara* to not take the name of a *gharana* and instead call it a style of singing; his great grandfather's and father's style of singing, which he is simply carrying forward. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2020.

Monuments *that* Matter

The architecture of Varanasi is a physical manifestation of all the socio-political, cultural and economic changes that the district has experienced. The historic buildings observed in the present scenarios, hence, primarily reflect the architectural amalgamation of Mughal, Colonial and traditional local architecture.

Architecture of Varanasi reflects the socio-political transformations it has been through. Varanasi's architectural marvels showcase all the political and the architectural changes the city has witnessed. Besides the temples and *ghats*, the amalgamation of local traditional architecture with the Islamic architecture gifted Varanasi with some magnificent architectural specimens like the Alamgir Mosque on the Panchganga Ghat. Such

Lolarak Kund
Credits - Angshuman Chatterjee

precincts and buildings showcasing layers of history reflect the unique architectural value of the place.

The arrival of different rulers and patrons reflected on the evolution of architecture in the city. The rulers and dynasties brought along with them their architectural influences which reflect on the historic buildings of Varanasi. However, the architectural style of the city is primarily a combination of Mughal, Colonial and local traditional architecture. Besides these, the elements from traditional local architecture, adopted by different rulers and merchants from within the country, who either settled in Varanasi or made donations for construction of buildings in Varanasi is also visible in the historic buildings here. The architectural vocabulary, primarily traditional, Mughal and colonial lends a unique character to Varanasi. For example, even though the Scindias of Maratha Empire came and built *ghats* and temples in Varanasi dedicated to their community gods, the architectural vocabulary was borrowed from Mughal elements only. Similarly, the other structures also patronised by different rulers and merchants from different parts of the country had common architectural features with minor differences.

One of the seven holy cities for Hindus, Varanasi is a sight to behold. It is an exhausting, liberating, and uninhibited experience; all at the same time. The colossal temples and *ghats* and the manner in which divine and human interactions constantly happen, lend this space a special character.

Assi Ghat

Located far south, Assi Ghat is where pilgrims pay homage to Lord Shiva by worshipping a huge *lingam* situated under a *Peepal* tree. This *ghat* is a lively space, enveloped in spirituality and chaos and one that vividly captures the ancient-ness of Kashi.

Dashashwamedh Ghat

The main *ghat* in Varanasi on the Ganga River, Dashashwamedh is a flamboyant place known for its spiritual transcendence. Raja Divodas sacrificed ten horses in a *yajna* here, and thus the name Dashashwamedh Ghat. Ganga *aarti* is popularly referred to as *Agni Puja* here. Located close to the Gowdowlia Chowk, it was built by Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao in its present form, even though the *ghat* may have existed since times immemorial.

Manikarnika Ghat

Considered to be an auspicious place to be cremated, Manikarnika Ghat is among the pivotal places of interest in Varanasi. This *ghat* is an exasperating and startling experience in itself as absolutely nothing is considered sacrilegious here. The setting sun and the glowing pyres along with earthen lamp-lit flower bowls floating down the holy river Ganga make Manikarnika Ghat a sight to behold. Located near Rajendra Prasad Ghat, Garawasi, Jugul Tola, it was built in 1730 by Bajirao Peshwa.

Shivala Ghat

Shivala Ghat is one of the places that reflects upon the city's history. The Shiva Temple here was built in the 19th century by the Nepalese Kings. The splendid architecture here is surely something that takes one by surprise and so does the craftsmanship of the temple. It was built in 1600 by Nepal's Maharana Sanjay Vikram Shah.

Ahilyabai Ghat

Known as Kevalgiri Ghat earlier, this place is famous for being the first one of its kind that got named after the person, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore. At any given hour one can see devotees taking a dip with a belief that it will cleanse their sins. This is located off Dashashwamedh Ghat Road, at Bangali Tola, and was built in the present form in 1785.

Rana Mahal Ghat

Built by Raja Rana Jagat Singh at the time when he came to the city as a pilgrim, this *ghat* attracts a lot of tourists day in and out. It is situated right next to a palace which is believed to be the residence of the Maharaja during the period of his pilgrimage. It was built in 1670.

Panchganga Ghat

No doubt Varanasi is full of innumerable *ghats*, but the Panchganga Ghat surely stands out. Believed to be the mythical meeting place of five sacred rivers, this place has images of the five goddesses namely Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Dhutpapa, and Kirana. Situated on Sonarpura Road, at Bangali Tola, the *ghat* was built by the Marathas in the 18th century.

Chousatti Ghat

Famed for being the shelter of the famous Sanskrit scholar Madhusudan Saraswati and for its palace built by King Digbatiya of Champaran, Bihar, this *ghat* is one of its kind. It also houses a temple complex that features images of Goddess Kali. On occasions like Holi and *Chaitra Krishna Paksha Dwadashi*, this place welcomes pilgrims in large numbers.

Kedar Ghat

Counted as one of the oldest *ghats* in the town of Varanasi, Kedar Ghat is considered ideal for a holy dip. The Kedareshwar Temple here is visited by many pilgrims who offer prayers to Lord Shiva.

Manmandir Ghat

Built in the early 17th century by Maharaja Man Singh of Jaipur, this *ghat* is famous for its palace and observatory. The palace was built by the Maharaja and the observatory was built in 1710 by Sawai Jaisingh II. One can marvel at the views of the River Ganga from a stone balcony situated on the northern side of the *ghat*.

Kashi Vishwanath Temple

The list of places to visit in Varanasi would be incomplete without including the famed Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this temple is one of the 12 *Jyotirlingas*, the only one in Uttar Pradesh, and has also been referred to in the holy scriptures. The temple structure, as it stands today consists of a series of smaller shrines located in the Vishwanath Gali. The precinct has been renovated to obtain a clear passage from the Ganga. Located in Lahori Tola, the temple was re-built by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar in 1777.

Tulsi Manas Temple

Among the many holy places in Varanasi is the Tulsi Manas Temple, the place where Tulsidas wrote the Hindu epic Ramayana in an Awadhi dialect of the Hindi language, and is one of the most sacred. The temple was constructed in white marble in 1964. Verses and scenes from Ramcharitmanas are engraved on the temple walls. Located on Sankat Mochan Road and Durgakund Road near Jalan, the temple was funded by the Sureka Family of Howrah.

Durga Temple

Also called the monkey temple, this temple is among the mythical places to see in Varanasi. Built in the 18th century, the temple is painted red and ochre. It is believed that the idol of Goddess Durga in the temple

The Samrajeshwar Temple

was not constructed, it appeared on its own. It was built in the 18th century by Rani Bhabani of Natore.

Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple

Located on the banks of River Assi, this temple is one of the most-visited. This temple is not only known for its spirituality but is also popular across the town for its historicity. Built by the well-known freedom fighter Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya in the 1900s, this temple is visited by devotees of Hanuman as well as Lord Rama. Situated on the banks of Assi River, it was built in the 18th century.

Nepali Temple

This temple is amongst the oldest in the holy town of Varanasi. Dedicated to the powerful Lord Shiva, this temple is one of the best marvels in the city from the 19th century. Founded by the King of Nepal, it resembles Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu. Apart from the religious aspects, it is the architecture of this temple that attracts pilgrims in huge numbers. It is one of the oldest Shiva temples built in 1843 by Nepal rulers Bahadur Shah and Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah Deva.

Chinese Temple

Chinese Temple is a shrine dedicated to Lord Buddha. It is built in the Chinese architectural style and is mainly done in different shades of red and yellow. The exterior is simple but the interior is elaborately and beautifully decorated. The meditation hall is spacious and peaceful, surrounding you with a spiritual vibe. Located in Sarnath, it was built in 1939.

Tibetan Temple

A stunning temple with Tibetan architecture, this temple is at Sarnath, where Lord Buddha taught his disciples the four truths of life. Visit the temple and marvel at the Buddhist paintings that adorn the walls of the temple. The temple has another distinctive feature which is the prayer wheel with chants written on them to be rotated clockwise.

Batuk Bhairav Mandir

This temple is a place of worship for *Aghoris* and *Tantriks*, it is a place of profound energy, good vibes and utmost religious importance. Dedicated to Batuk Bhairav who was an incarnation of Lord Shiva, the temple also has a unique feature that is the lamp which is said to have healing powers. Located in Bhelupur, it was built in the 17th century.

Bharat Mata Mandir

It is a unique shrine that is dedicated to our country, Mother India as the name suggests. This temple is very different from others as it is not dedicated to any specific deity or a lord. The temple features a relief map of India carved in marble. The temple was the brainchild of Babu Shiv Prasad Gupta, a freedom fighter, and was built in 1936.

Ramnagar Fort & Museum

The Ramnagar Fort on the Eastern Bank of Ganga

Located opposite the Tulsi Ghat, the Ramnagar Fort was built in 18th century. However, the crimson sunset as viewed from inside this enclosure is reason enough to give Ramnagar Fort a spot on the list of places to visit in Varanasi. This old rampart is also home to a vintage museum that is famous for its rare collection of Vintage cars, ivory works, medieval costumes, and a huge astronomical clock. It was built in 1750 by Kashi Naresh Raja Balwant Singh.

Sarnath

Located 13 km northeast of Varanasi, Sarnath is among the famous Buddhist pilgrimages in India. After ac hieving enlightenment at Bodhgaya, the Buddha came to Sarnath seeking his former companions and gave his first sermon here. The site was originally set up in 300 BCE by Emperor Ashoka.

Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum

A distinctly classical sound, characteristic of an endless stream of madness rings through Varanasi. But the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum located within the prestigious Banaras Hindu University comes across as an island of peace in this clamour. The museum was set up in 1920 with Rabindranath Tagore as its honorary chairman. The museum showcases miniature paintings, sculptures, and local history. It also has an art gallery dedicated to the Russian artist, Nicholas Roerich.

Man Mandir Observatory

Located on the Man Mandir Ghat, this masonry observatory is established atop the Man Singh Palace. It was built in 1737 by Sawai Jai Singh II, the founder of Jaipur City. The observatory consists of four main astronomical instruments.

Alamgir Mosque

Built in the 17th century, the Alamgir Mosque is among the famous Varanasi tourist places. The mosque, as it stands today, dominates Panchganga Ghat.

St. Mary's Church

This oldest church in the city has existed for over 200 years now. It was built by Reverend George Weatly in 1810. The church used to serve as a place of worship for the European and British community living in Varanasi. It is also South Asia's oldest surviving garrison church.

Banaras Hindu University

The Banaras Hindu University is spread across a 5.3 square kilometre campus, the university is home to 30,000 students who study and reside within. This makes the university the largest residential university in Asia. The university has Indo-Gothic architecture, the sprawling lawns adding to its immense beauty. It was founded in 1916 by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.

Nature's Abundance

The entire Varanasi Distt. forms part of the Gangetic plain, characterized with alluvial formations, flat terrain and little topographic relief. The Rajghat plateau in Varanasi, situated close to the confluence of Varuna and Ganga rivers, is the highest point in the city with elevation of 83 m above sea level. Excavations in this region, coupled with ancient literature, provide evidence that Varanasi was once an inland port. This area, being close to the river confluence, was important in terms of deep-water availability throughout the year, facilitating ease of accessibility and transportation.

River Ganga is the most important natural feature along with tributary rivers such as Varuna, Assi and Gomti. Ganga flows incised into its narrow valley (1-2 km wide) from south to north-east direction with the river making a prominent meander loop. On the opposite side, a wide bar is developed followed by a vertical cliff along the valley margin on which Ramnagar town is located. Here, the Ganga has two tributaries – Assi Nadi on the southern flank and Varuna river on the north-eastern side of the city. Both the rivers are presently incised cutting into older alluvium called *Bangar.*

The River Ganga makes its first curve between Subba Nala in Betwar and Ghurha Nadi in Ramnagar. Downstream of Ramnagar the river makes another curve and bends towards Varanasi City. In doing so, the river makes a semi-circular river course commonly referred as, "a moon over the head of Lord Shiva".

Varuna River, joins the Ganga at Rajghat which is 7.5 km north of Assi Nadi. North of the villages Tantepur and Sehbar, the river forms a large riverine island by forming two channels known as Sota Nadi while the channel in the east is called as Ganga.

Near village Misirpura the River turns sharply west and is joined by the tributary named Gomti. The Gomti-Ganga confluence, popularly called *Sangam* is one of the important pilgrim hotspots in the region Ecologically, the *Sangam* area provides one of the important habitats to the national aquatic animal, the Gangetic Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*).

The Ganga floodplain is an important habitat for the luxuriant growth of *Munj/Sarkanda (Saccharum bengalense)*. It has successfully colonized alluvial sandy banks of Ganga in places not subject to water logging. Owing to its enormous growth potential combined with the binding capacity of its roots, it is very useful in checking soil erosion and stabilizing sandy soils. The local communities use this grass in its dried state extensively for thatching the roofs of their dwellings.

The narrow corridor along Ganga containes about 357 wetlands. The 43 hectare oxbow lake situated near Hatauri village is a potential eco-tourism site. Several sacred ponds are to be found such as the one at Baba Kinaram temple in Ramgarh while "Krim Kund" is located at Bhelupur, both associated with Aghori practises.

Besides crocodiles, water monitor lizard, at least 11 different species of freshwater, mud and estuarine turtles and tortoises inhabit

Ruins at Sarnath

the Ganga system. These include the *Kachuga dhongka*, Bengal Roofed Turtle (*Kachuga kachuga)*, North Indian Roofed Turtle (*Kachuga tecta)*, North Indian Freshwater turtle (*Geoclemys hamiltoni)*, Narrow Headed Soft Shell Turtle (*Chitra indica),* Peacock Marked Soft Shell Turtle (*Trioryx hurum)* Gray, *Trionyx gangetica* ; besides these four other species, are also known to occur in Ganga system viz. Batagur River Terrapin (*Baiagur basak*,) Peninsular soft shelled Turtle (*Trioryxlethi spp.)* and North Indian Flap-shelled Turtle (*Lissemys punctata punctata)*. The Kashi Turtle Wildlife Sanctuary, a 7 km. reach between Ramnagar Fort and Malviya Bridge has now been relocated in Prayagraj.

Local fishermen suggests that sightings of turtles especially hard shells have reduced drastically. Most of them identified Ganges Soft Shell Turtle (locally called '*Katawa*") and said that sometimes the size is very large which destroys the trapping net.

All the major landmarks of Varanasi such as Kardmeshwar Mahadev Temple, Sankat Mochan Temple, Baba Kinaram Ashram in Ramgarh, and others were surrounded by dense forests on all sides. However, with the passage of time, forests have disappeared under the pressure of urbanization to such an extent that today virtually no forest exists in or around Varanasi city.

At Varanasi approximately 82 fish species are said to be recorded by scientists. Fishermen revealed that Ganga once had an abundance of freshwater rays locally called *Batawan*

Man Mandir Observatory Established by Maharaja Jaipur

(big size) and *Sekchi* (smaller ones). *Hilsa*, once abundant in this stretch, has totally disappeared after 1978. *Jhinga* has also declined drastically as have Indian carps (*Catla catla, Labeo rohita*, and *Cirrhinus mrigala*). They strongly believe that change in dynamics of the fisheries is due to the presence of common carp. Fishing methods included dip net, hook and line, gill nets and cast net fishing.

A total of 70 species of birds were sighted during the field visits of which, 16 were wetland avian species and 6 raptor species. The remaining 48 were species of grassland and forest community. In the absence of forests only generalist fauna is present such as Wild Boar, Nilgai, Golden Jackals.

River islands are typically exposed land parts surrounded by river water channels. These islands generally result from changes in the course of a river. One such large river island of 13 sq.km. having villages Mokulpur, Gobrha and Ramchandipur which can be accessed by the Ramchandipur bridge.

The visit to this ancient city is incomplete without experiencing a boat ride along the crescent shaped stretch of Ganga to witness the charm of Benaras especially during early mornings and in evenings. To facilitate this several boatmen ply manual and motor boats of different sizes for the tourists. Most of the boatmen traditionally belong to Mallah or Nishad Caste.

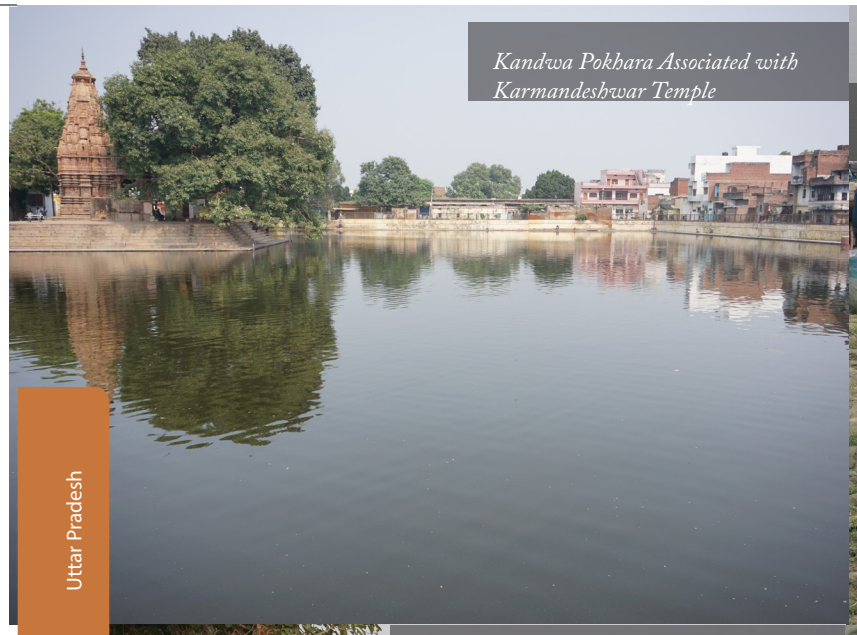
The boat makers revealed the use of *Sekua* or Sal wood (*Shorea robusta*) for construction of the main body of boats while mango

wood or bamboo wood was used for construction of smaller parts. Once the boats are prepared and ready for plying in the river, the boatmen perform a small *puja* for safety and prosperitybefore the boat starts its journey on the water. The newly prepared boat is applied turmeric and *sindoor*, offered flowers and money and the owners pray for its successful venture by lighting incense sticks. After this ritual, the newly prepared boat is launched into the Ganges.

Ganga View from Malviya Bridge

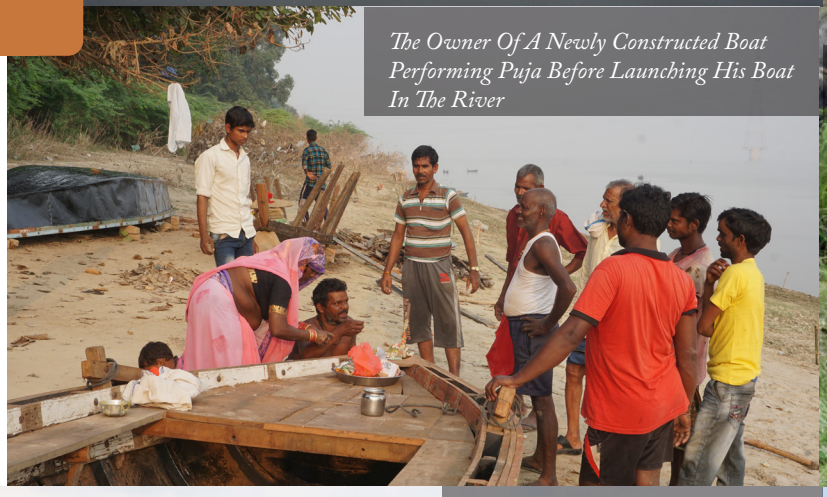
Oxbow Lake Near Hatauri Village

Baan-Ganga - Sacred Water Body Beside Kinaram Temple



Kandwa Pokhara Associated with Karmandeshwar Temple

Dip-Net Fishing



The Owner Of A Newly Constructed Boat Performing Puja Before Launching His Boat In The River

Saccharaum bengaenis Grass Provides Riparian Habitat

Eroded Bank Near Markand Mahadev Temple Ghat

An Old And Sacred Neem Tree Near Ganga River In Amba Village

CHAPTER 28

CHANDAULI

East-West Flow in Vindhyanchal

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Chandauli
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Chandauli District was carved out from Varanasi in 1997 and is located at a distance of about 30 km south-east of Varanasi. The district lies at an elevation of 70 m above msl covering a total geographic area of about 2541 sq km. It is bounded on east by Rohtas District of Bihar State, on the north and north- east by Ghazipur District, on the South by Sonbhadra District, on the South-West by Mirzapur and on the North-West by Varanasi District. River Ganga separates this District from the Districts of Varanasi and Ghazipur. Chandauli Town is the district head-quarters while Mughal Sarai in this District has the busiest railway station on the North-Eastern Railways. The district is divided into 5 *tehsils* - Sadar, Sakaldiha, Chakia, Mughalsarai and Naugarh which are further subdivided into 9 administrative blocks.

On the basis of geology, soils, topology, climate and natural vegetation, Chandauli District is divided into three different regions: Chakia Plateau, Chandauli Plains and Ganga *Khaddar*. The Chakia Plateau region comprises of the southern part of Chakia *tehsil*. The 100 meter contour separates this region from Chandauli Plains which comprise of parts of the Chandauli, Sakaldiha and Chakia *tehsils*. The major part of this region is devoid of streams, i.e., having low drainage density. Geologically this region is composed of alluvium and

dun gravels. The third region of Ganga *Khaddar* is a narrow belt along the Ganga River extending from one end of the district to the other end. The surface in this region is low lying and subject to inundation during floods.

Shortly after crossing Ramnagar, Ganga River enters part of Chandauli District which is intermixed with parts of Varanasi District on the opposite bank of Assi Ghat in Varanasi City. At this point, the river curves north-eastwards for a short distance after which it bifurcates into two branches due to presence of a riverine island. Downstream of the island, the Ganga River continues for 20 km north-eastwards crossing Baluwa Ghat, Taanda Ghat and up to Mustafapur. Thereafter, it sharply turns south-east near the Saidpur bridge on Ganga flowing past Saifpur, Dhanapur and Guraini upto Zamania town where it enters Ghazipur District. The river flows for a distance of about 84 kms adjoining Chandauli District on the right bank throughout its course.

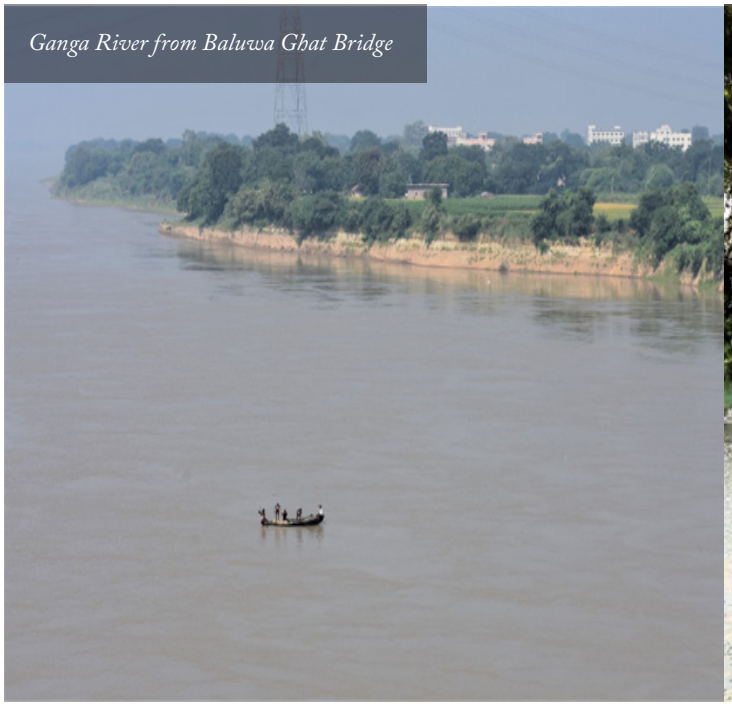
In one of the ancient sites in the Village Hetampur, there is a fort which is known as Fort of Hetam

A stand of sacred Peepal Trees associated with a temple near Bissupur Village

Re-living *the* Past

The history of the district for the most part is unknown. There are some historical sites, tanks and *kunds* seen in *tehsils* of the district and they carry vague legends. One of the ancient sites of the district, Baluwa, is situated on the banks of river Ganga where Ganga flows from east to west. A religious fair takes place every year in the month of *Magha* (January) which is known as Pachchim Vahini Mela. It is said that the Ganga flows in a east to west direction only at two places - first in Prayagraj, and second at Baluwa. Village Ramgarh of *tehsil* Sakaldiha, known as the birthplace of great Aghoreshwari Saint Shri Kinaram Baba is just 6 km away from Chahniya.

In one of the ancient sites in the Village Hetampur of the district, there is a fort which is known as Fort of Hetam (*Hetam Ka Qila*). The ruins of this fort are spread over 22 *bighas*. It is said that this fort was constructed between 14th to 15th centuries by Todar Mal Khatri, who was the construction in-charge in the kingdom of Sher Shah Suri. After Mughal Period, Hetam Khan, Talukedar and Jagirdar captured this fort. There are five famous ruined *Kots*, known as Bhulaini Kot, Bhitari Kot, Bichali



Ganga River from Baluwa Ghat Bridge

Part of Oxbow Lake Associated with Kinaram Baba

Kot, Uttrai Kot and Dakchhani Kot, which attract visitors.

Northern Black Polished (NBP) ware and the associated grey, black-and-red, black-slipped and red wares in the form of common bowls and plates have been excavated. Objects such as beads and bangles made of shell, glass and terracotta and a few microliths comprising parallel sided blades were also found. Observations were recorded of the presence of terracotta ring wells along the river bank. Around thirty-nine proto historic sites from Chakia and Chandauli *tehsil* were brought to light, after partial exploration. Black and red ware and NBP ware was found at several sites in Chakia and Chandauli *tehsil.*

The shards from Janso-ki-Marai were also found to be painted and incised, when discovered in the year 1962-63. A Shiva temple belonging to early medieval period located at Mandara was found in 1979-80. Along with it the presence of medieval and late medieval sculptures was recorded at Adalganj, Chandauli, Gaudiha, Gothani, Kamauji, Karauli, Khevana, Kusumhen, Oinimishra and Orgai. Excavations of great significance, known for their contribution in understanding the origins of Mesolithic period and origin of farming in mid-Gangetic plains, have been carried out at numerous sites in the Vindhyan Range.

Being part of Kashi Kingdom, the history of the Chandauli District is the same as that of Kashi Kingdom and of Varanasi District. After the death of Jaichandra of Gahadwal Dynasty, the independent Hindu Dynasty in Kashi came to an end in 1194-1195 CE and went into the hands of Mohammed Ghori. In 1526, Ibrahim Lodhi was defeated in the battle of Panipat and Humayun, the son of victorious Mughal Emperor Babur, took over the charge of the region. Humayun was, however defeated in the battle of Chausa by Sher Shah. Akbar, the great Mughal Emperor, is said to have reached Varanasi in 1556 CE and conferred the three *sirkars* of Varanasi, Jaunpur and Ghazipur to Munim Khan after taking them away from Ali Quli Khan. The area continued to be administered by various governors appointed by the Mughal emperors.

Ramgarh Village of *tehsil*

Zari Workers of Dulhipur

Sakaldiha, in Chandauli District, is known as the birth place of great Aghoreshwari Baba Kinaram. It is believed that Baba Kinaram is responsible for the revival of the Kashi Aghor lineage in the 16th century. Kashi (Varanasi) is known as the city of Shiva. The Aghoris claim lineage from *avadhuta siddhas* of Varanasi which in turn is said to have emanated from Lord Shiva himself. Baba Kinaram established the Aghor Ashram in Varanasi. It is believed that while travelling across the country, Baba Kinaram witnessed people suffering and engaged himself in alleviating their misery. It is said that, after observing Baba Kinaram's dedication, Goddess Hinglaj blessed him in Girnar and followed him to Varanasi where she is present in the form of a *yantra* in a mystical geometric pattern.

Events *of* Interest

Paschim Vahini Mela

Paschim means west and *Vahini* means flowing, this *mela* is organised to celebrate the flow of river Ganga from east to west. Mauni Amavasya Snan on the *ghats* of river Ganga during Paschim Vahini Mela is significant. The Paschim Vahini Mela is celebrated in the month of January and hence the locals call it Magh Mela. It is set up on the banks of river Ganga in Baluwa *taluka*, district Chandauli. The age old tradition of devotees donating cereals and pulses to the *bhikshus* still continues. It is believed that by taking a holy dip at this place and time of the year can cure mental illnesses and can free a person from their fears, misconceptions and delusions.

It is believed that by taking a holy dip at this place and time of the year can cure mental illnesses and can free a person from their fears, misconceptions, false notions, etc.

Vindhyanchal Festival

Every year during the time of Navaratri devotees from Chandauli, Mirzapur and Sonabhadra district gather to celebrate this festival dedicated to the Vindhyavasini Goddess, residing in the ancient temple at Vindhyachal. The places Sita Kund, Sita Rasoi, Ramagaya Ghat, Rameshwar Temple in the region are testimony

Mughalsarai Railway Junction

to the journey of Lord Rama along with wife Sita and brother Lakshman during his period of exile. In ancient times the main temple of Vindhyachal was surrounded by thousands of small temples and other religious places of Shakti Cult.

Kala Namak Rice Festival

Kalanamak is one of the finest quality scented rice varieties grown and available in India. It is named after its black husk. This variety has been in cultivation since the Buddhist period. It is also called scented black pearl of Uttar Pradesh. It was featured in the book 'Speciality Rices of the World' by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of United Nations. The Kalanamak Rice Festival is an initiative to promote local agricultural produce and was launched recently.

Art *at the* Heart

Zari-Zardozi

Embroidery done with metallic threads is called *kalabattu* and forms the *zari*. The main *zari* production centres are at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. Here, the metal ingots are melted into metal bars called *pasa* from which lengths are got by beating it after treatment. This is then pulled through perforated steel plates to make it into wires, followed by the *tarkashi* process to make it thin with rubber and diamond dies. The last stage is called *badla* where the wire is flattened and twisted with silk or cotton thread to become *kasab* or *kalabattu*. The finished thread has uniform evenness, flexibility, softness, and ductility. *Kasab,* in appearance, can substitute for real silver or gold, as well as for plated silver or gold or for an imitation in which a copper base is given a coat of silver or golden colour to make the product less expensive.

Zari thread is used widely in weaving but more selectively in embroidery. For intricate patterns, *gijai* or a thin, stiff wire is used; *sitara*, a small star-shaped metal piece is used for floral designs. This type of embroidery is called *salma-sitara*. The thicker *kalabattu* is a braided gold thread used for borders while the thinner variety is used at the end of the drawstring of purses or *batwas*, and in tassels, necklaces, and strings. *Tikora* is a gold thread spirally twisted for complicated designs. The dull *zari* thread is called *kora* and the more shiny one is called *chikna*. The equipment that is used for embroidery is a rectangular wooden-frame called *karchob* and a wooden leg called *thapa* used for sewing laces.

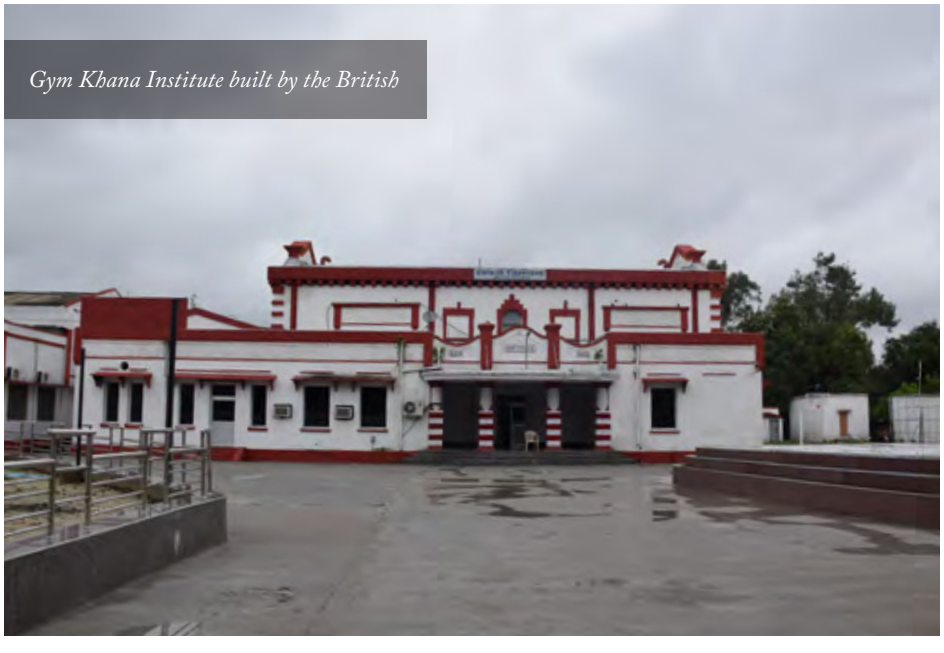
Zardozi, Kamdani, Mina Work, Kataoki Bel, Makaish, Tilla or Marori, Gota and Kinari are some kinds of Zari work.

Monuments *that* Matter

Latif Shah Tomb & Dam

This *mazaar* is associated with a Sufi saint, Hazrat Latif Shah Bir Rahmatullah, and is located at a distance of 3 km from Chakia. Latif-Shah Dam, one of the oldest dams in India, was completed in 1921; it is built on the river Karmanasa. The reservoir created by the dam is used mainly for irrigation and human consumption.

Christ the King's Church



Gym Khana Institute built by the British

Mughalsarai Railway Junction

Famously known as the gateway to east India, this junction was set up as part of a project to connect Delhi–Calcutta route. Mughalsarai marshalling yard is the largest in Asia. It is 12.5 km long and handles around 1,500 wagons daily

Christ the King's Church

The church reflects a Victorian architectural style, built in brick. The typical architectural features comprise of semi-circular arches, topped by circular windows. The flat roofs of the building is adorned with an ornamental pediment in the front. The roofs are also interspersed with cupolas, extending from the columns. The front elevation of the church comprise of intricate tracery carving into the walls.

Nature's Abundance

Kinaram Baba, *& the* Oxbow Lake

An oxbow lake is associated with Baba Kinaram in Ramgarh area of Chandauli District which is spread in an area of about 14.1 Ha. According to locals and religious practitioners, Aghoracharya Baba Kinaram was believed to have been born in the 16th century at Ramgarh Village where his

Dev Dari Waterfall

ashram is situated currently. In the backyard of this temple lies the water body referred to by the locals as Baan Ganga who associate this with the Mahabharata. As this water body is considered sacred, no activities such as bathing, washing, fishing are permitted, making it suitable habitat for the native biodiversity. However, some extended parts of this Oxbow Lake, away from the Ashram boundary, are exploited for their water resource mainly to irrigate the surrounding agricultural fields.

Dev Dari Waterfall

The Rajdari and Dev Dari Waterfalls are located in the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary was established to conserve Asiatic Lions and though their population has dwindled, there are several species of animals and birds found here. Apart from the animals and birds, the sanctuary is home to several other attractions, more notably the Rajdari and Dev Dari Waterfalls. The crystal clear waters, gurgling over the rocks present a breath taking sight.

Riparian Flora

The riparian areas, lying between the aquatic and the terrestrial habitats, with dynamic environmental conditions and ecological processes, harbour rich biodiversity. A major component of this biodiversity is the plant communities growing along the river bank which are interacting with both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

The common tree species here include Mango, *Peepal*, Banyan, *Neem* and *Bel Patra* among which *Peepal* and Banyan are also found associated with various religious sites. *Acacia nilotica* (*Babool* tree) was abundant in the riparian regions along Ganga River. The common shrubs and herbs in the region include *Croton bonplandianus, Parthenium hysterophorus, Polygonum sp.* and *Zizyphus sp.* The floodplain grass – *Saccharum sp.* was a major component of riparian vegetation throughout with its luxuriance dominating the other flora at some sites.

Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary

Chandraprabha is a land covered with dense forests, small hills, prehistoric cave shelters and majestic waterfalls. The forest is named after the Chandraprabha River; meaning the luminescence of moon. The river is a tributary of the Karmanasa River and both flow through the forest to finally meet the Ganga, nourishing a wide variety of flora and fauna on the way. The rare and rich vegetation has been a prime source of Ayurvedic medicine since the era of Kashi Raj Divodas Dhanvantari. The hills and the dense forest have hundreds of caves hidden in a spread of over an area of 78 km^2 that lies along the Naugarh Fort and Vijaigarh Fort on the northern slope of the Kaimur Range. Presently abandoned, these caves had been home to prehistoric humans for a long time.

A major component of this biodiversity is the plant communities growing along the river bank which are interacting with both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems

One can still find evidence of their lives and habitats on these cave walls in the form of primitive rock art.

The forest was developed as a hunting preserve for the rulers of Varanasi, in the second half of the 18th century. A variety of wild animals are found here, which include Blackbuck, Chital, Sambar, Golden Jackal, Nilgai, Wild Boar, Bear, Leopard, Porcupine, Chinkara, Gharial and Python. The park is a bird watcher's paradise, as one can discover around 150 species of birds here. The wildlife sanctuary was established in May, 1957 and is managed by the government to develop and preserve its biodiversity.

Fauna

Gangetic Dolphins were sighted between Taanda Ghat and Ganga-Gomti Sangam. Apart from these, the presence of Dolphins throughout this stretch of Ganga was reiterated by the interlocutors along with scattered sightings at various places.

Turtles form an important component of Ganga riverine biodiversity and play a critical ecological role by controlling aquatic vegetation, serving as scavengers and help maintain river health. During the field survey, interactions with local fishermen revealed a significant decrease (almost 80-90%) in the turtle population during last couple of decades. According to them, turtles would be seen earlier on the sandy river banks and exposed *diaras*. However, especially since last two decades the sightings of turtles have diminished greatly.

The Nilgai antelope – *Boselaphus tragocamelus* is widely distributed throughout the country. However, due to prolonged breeding activity and lack of potential predators, the numbers of Nilgai have increased considerably. In course of time, this species has been successful in adjusting to the human-altered landscapes and in many places have become a serious mence to agricultural crops. The farmers in this region complained about the large-scale damage to agricultural produce caused by Nilgai but despite this they have never retaliated violently towards it. The villagers often enclose their fields with mesh nets or wires or thorny plants to prevent intrusion of Nilgai and drive them away with sticks and stones.

A Stream at Confluence with Ganga near Guraini Ghat

The Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa L.*) has become a regular menace for farmers as it generally causes damage right from planting till the maturity of the crop. The floodplain farmers in villages such as Gauspur, Gahmar, Chitawan Patti, Loharpur, Chochakpur and Kaithi complained about the damage caused by Wild Boars, especially to crops such as potato and onion. They claimed that the boars destroyed entire fields sometimes resulting in huge losses and even attacked small children or local residents who tried to drive them away. Hence, in some cases the local villagers had to resort to killing these boars in order to safeguard themselves and their agriculture produce.

The Golden Jackal (C*anis au-*

Turtles form an important component of Ganga riverine biodiversity and play a critical ecological role by controlling aquatic vegetation, serve as scavengers and help maintain rivers

reus) is a wolf-like canid. Its presence was recorded based on information by local residents along with a direct sighting near Bissupur village amidst agricultural fields along Ganga River.

Avifauna

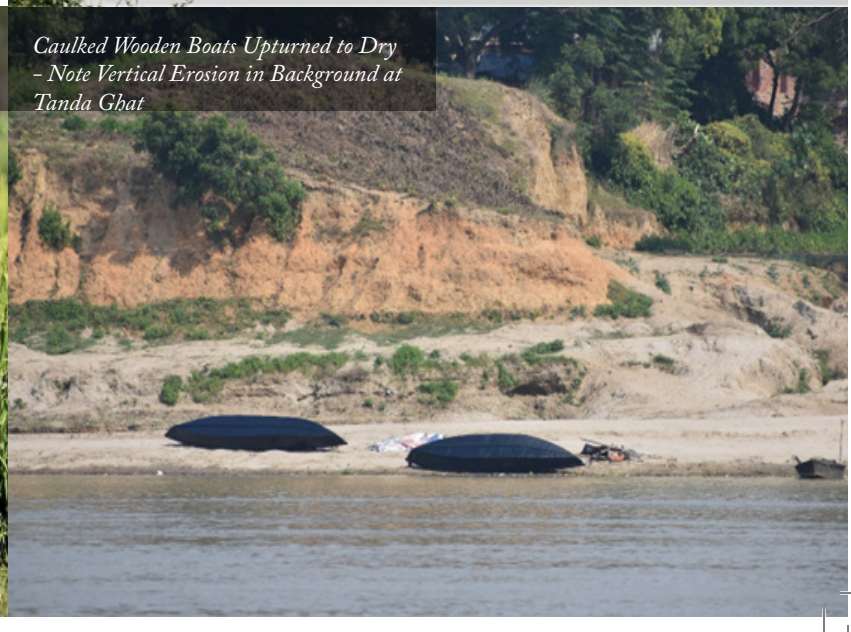
Ganga River, with its mosaic of habitats, supports a rich diversity of avifauna which include both resident and migratory species. Some iconic and globally threatened birds such as the Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*), Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*), Sarus Crane (*Antigone antigone*) and River Lapwing (*Vanellus duvaucelii*) also breed on the islands, sandbars and banks of the Ganga River. In Chandauli District, a total of 60 different bird species were sighted, out of which 20 were wetland bird species River Lapwing was the sighted species which comes under Near Threatened Category, River Tern has Vulnerable status IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Cross River Ferrying between Chandauli and Ghazipur

Turtles can be Found Sun Baskin on Sand Bars in the River

A pair of Golden Jackals spotted near Bissupur Village

Caulked Wooden Boats Upturned to Dry – Note Vertical Erosion in Background at Tanda Ghat



CHAPTER 29

GHAZIPUR

Land of Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb

Uttar Pradesh

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Ghazipur

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Ghazipur District forms the eastern part of Varanasi Division. It encompasses a total geographical area of about 3384 sq km and forms a part of Mid-Gangetic Plain. The district is bounded by Ballia and Bihar State in east, Jaunpur, Varanasi and Azamgarh in west, Mau and Ballia in north and the Chandauli in south. It is divided into 7 *tehsils* which are further sub-divided into 16 blocks. The district is spread mainly on the north of the river but a smaller part is on the south of the river as well.

The topography of Ghazipur District ranges from a flat to gently undulating. Physiographically, the district is divided into two regions, The Ghazipur Plain : this region covers the northern part of the district beyond Ganga River encompassing some areas of Saidpur, Ghazipur and Muhammadabad *tehsils*; and Gomti–Ganga Flood Plain : this region is situated along the Gomti and Ganga Rivers in an east-west direction encompassing entire Zamania Town and parts of Saidpur, Ghazipur and Muhammadabad Tehsils. Major soil types in the district are – clay loam, sandy loam, *diara* soil and black soil.

Soon after its confluence with Gomti, Ganga River enters Ghazipur District near Kaithi and for several kilometres, forms a separating boundary between Ghazipur and Chandauli Districts. Soon after entering the district, Ganga

Old Residences Overlooking the River Ganga

River Ganga from the Zamania Bridge

River changes direction near Aunrihar bending south-eastwards and maintains this course until Diyara Bad where it turns north-eastwards for some distance. Near Nari Pachdewara, the river channel returns towards northern bank and makes a sharp bend south-eastwards flowing past Chochakpur. In the extreme south towards Dharammarpur, the river makes a U-turn bend turning sharply north-westwards to the Zamania Town and then takes a great loop north-westwards via Mainpur and the confluence with the Gangi Nadi. From Mainpur, Ganga River sweeps north-eastwards flowing close under the high *Kankar* Ridge on which stands the city of Ghazipur.

At a short distance downstream of Ghazipur city , the river makes another sharp turn south-eastwards near Gauspur village and flows past Narainpur, Jamalpur, Prithvipur and Birpur villages before exiting the district and entering Ballia district. On the opposite bank of Birpur Ghat, Karamnasa River confluences with Ganga which forms a separating boundary between Ghazipur district and Buxar district (Bihar). The total reach of Ganga River in Ghazipur District is 113 kms. Throughout its course, the river flow meanders from one bank to the other. The river swells during monsoon season resulting in inundation of floodplain areas in some parts whereas during summer the active channel narrows down greatly, exposing parts of the riverbed.

Re-living *the* Past

According to a legend, Ghazipur was earlier known as Garhipur. A mound near the city is thought to

The topography of Ghazipur District ranges from a flat to gently undulating

be the site of an ancient mud fort and is known as the Fort of Raja Garhi. Pahar Khan's Tank, Chahul Satun, the Jami Masjid, and other heritage sites are located across the city.

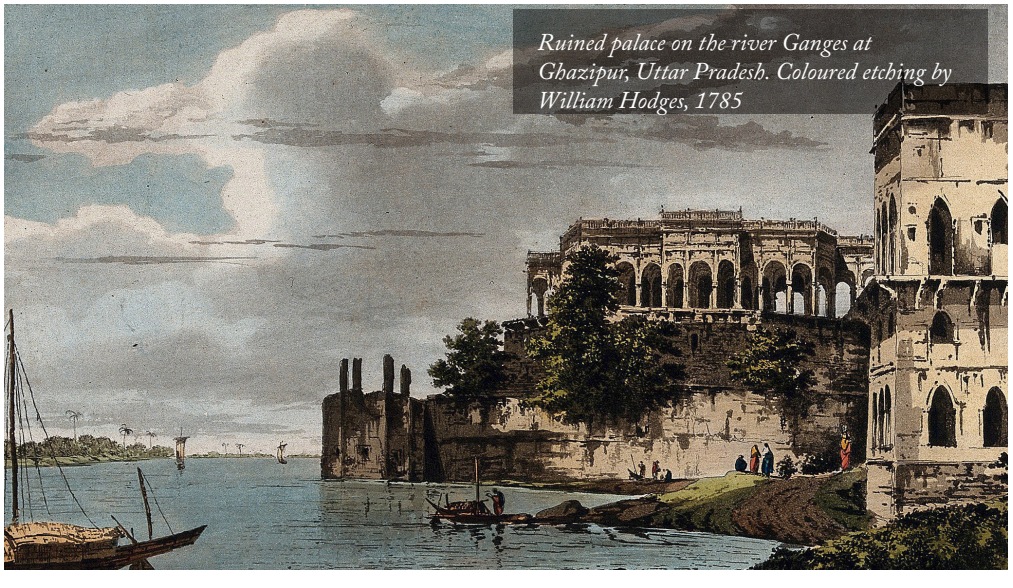
Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General of British India, is buried near the city's western outskirts. Mahadev Ghat, Dadri Ghat, Collector Ghat, Massol Ghat, Chitnath Ghat, and Posta Ghat are some of the most important *ghats* along the Ganga's banks.

It is home to one of the world's oldest opium factories, which was founded in 1820 by the British East India Company and is still the world's largest legal opium factory, producing the drug for the pharmaceutical sector. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan founded the first Scientific Society of India in Ghazipur in 1862 to spread modern understanding of science, technology, and industry. The Society inspired the Technical Education and Research Institute (TERI), which is part of Ghazipur's post-graduate institutions.

Mohammadabad is located along the western boundary of the Ghazipur District. An ancient mound was found on the northern bank of the Ganga yielding black and red and grey wares and Brahmanical sculptures. It was the capital of Tikam Deo, a great Cheru Raja. According to mythology, Zamania was the place where Rishi Jamadagni, father of Lord Parashuram had his *ashram*. During the reign of Akbar, the Afghan, Ali Quli Khan took command of Ghazipur and founded Zamania in 1560. It was named after Ali Quli Khan's title Khan Zaman, who was the Governor of Jaunpur.

Lathiya, in Zamania Tehsil, is an archaeologically noteworthy location where excavations have been conducted. The Lathiya Pillar is a polished sandstone monolith with a diameter of 20.5 inches and a height of 20 feet. It has a bell-shaped capital, similar to the Bhitari Column in Saidpur *tehsil*, with a set of eight outward-facing lions above it. It lacks an inscription, but its likeness to others found at Bhitari and along the Prahladpur-Varanasi route suggests a Gupta origin. Bara, in the Zamania tehsil, is an ancient location with a link to the old town of Birpur, in the Mohammadabad Tehsil. In the settlement, there is a big mound where many ruins have been discovered.

Saidpur is located on the south western edge of the district, bordering Jakhanian *tehsil* on the north and Ghazipur *tehsil* on the east. Bhitari is one of the *tehsil's* archaeologically noteworthy sites. It is possible that the region was in the hands of Buddhists, although it most likely rose to prominence during the Gupta Period. It was, possibly, one of the Gupta Kings' royal homes in the area. Other Gupta sculptures dating from the 6th century CE, as well as an *Eka Mukha Shiva lingam* with *Gokarna* from the same period, have been discovered in this *tehsil*. Mukhari copper plate was excavated in Deokali in Saidpur in 1988-89. Several *havelis* and residences built by *zamindars* in the 19th century, institutional structures from the early 20th century in colonial style and Shiva temples are found here.



Ruined palace on the river Ganges at Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. Coloured etching by William Hodges, 1785

Events *of* Interest

Ghazipur district has a rich cultural heritage and it is also known for the bravery of its people and spiritual glory. Dhobia and Purbi Nautanki are very famous folk dances of the district. Ghazipur is the native land of several renowned musicians. Among the community dances, Phari or Pharia is organized at the time of marriages and other celebratory occasions. Performances like Nataks and Nautanki, Bhajan Kirtan, recitation from Ramayana and other religious stories constitute the vibrant and colourful culture.

Ghazipur is the main centre of the Ganga-Jamuni culture from its past - festivals of all religions are celebrated here. In Ghazipur district, about 32 fairs are held annually. Celebrations of most of the festivals are accompanied by local fairs as well. Of these, the Dhanush Yagya Fair is prominent, held at village Katghara in Saidpur. Ramlila fair is another important fair. Govind Dashami Fair at Jafarpur, Navratri Fair, Trimohini Fair at Jalapur and Goril Baba Fair are also considered prominent. The fair at Jamdagni Rishi Ashram is also very popular. A large number of devotees come here on the occasion of Kartik Purnima and Makar Sankranti every year. Mauni Baba Fair at Chochakpur holds tremendous significance. It is held at the temple of Mauni Baba that is situated on the banks of Ganga River.

Art *at the* Heart

The *Birhaa, Chaiti*, and *Sohar* are famous folk song genres. Ghazipur boasts many singers of repute in *Birhaa*. The Dhobia and Poorbi Nautanki of this area are famous folk dances of the district. When accompanied by enchanting music generated by *Harmonium, Tabla, Dhol, Manjeera, Nagara, Jhanjh* and *Kartal*, a magic spell is cast on the audience. Ghazipur is also the motherland of Pt. Ravi Shankar of Sitar fame and Pt. Udayshankar, a dancer of international repute.

Among the community dances, the Phari or Pharia is organised with the beating of the Nagara at the time of marriages, and is still popular. During the rainy season, the battle songs of Alha are sung by professional singers of the Nat community. Dhobia Dance is common among the washermen community and this district has produced dancers of national repute. Among the rural folk, narrating stories and legends and singing is common. Performances like Nataks and Nautanki, Bhajan Mandalis, recitations from

Wall Hangings of Ghazipur

Wall Hanging Makers of Ghazipur

the Ramayana and the Bhagwat Kathas, Mushairas and Kavi Sammelans are also arranged periodically.

Jute Wall Hangings

For the past several years, the craftsmen of Ghazipur District have been engaged in making jute wall hangings. These wall hangings hold a prominent position in the decentralized handicraft clusters. The wall hangings usually depict landscapes and ships, pointing towards the age when Ganga was the main artery to the heart of India, and large river vessels passed through the region. The river borne trade may have disappeared but the tradition of depicting ships has been kept alive through these wall hangings.

Dhobia Dance is common among the washermen community and this district has produced dancers of national repute

People who Fascinate

Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari

Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari (1880 – 1936) was a nationalist and political leader, and former president of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League during the Indian Independence Movement. One of the founders of the Jamia Millia Islamia University, he remained its Chancellor from 1928 to 1936. He was born in Yusufpur-Mohammadabad town in Ghazipur. He was an outspoken supporter of the Khilafat Movement, and led the Indian medical mission to treat the wounded Turkish soldiers during the Balkan Wars.

Viveki Rai

Viveki Rai was a well-known literary figure of Hindi and Bhojpuri Literature. He belonged to Sonwani Village in Ghazipur. Sonamati is his most popular novel. He was awarded the Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan Award in 2001 and Uttar Pradesh's prestigious Yash Bharati Samman Award in 2006 for his contribution to Hindi Literature.

Sahajanand Saraswati

Sahajanand Saraswati was born on 22-02-1889 in Ghazipur. He was a writer, social reformer, historian, philosopher, ascetic, revolutionary, Marxist, politician and memoir writer.

Nazir Hussain

Nazir Hussain was born in 1922 in Usia Village, Ghazipur. He was a character actor in several popular films, a film director, film producer and screenwriter who was well known for his work in Bollywood.

Kubernath Rai

Kuber Nath Rai was an author born in Matsa Village of Ghazipur District. His collections of essays Gandha Madan, Priya Neelkanti, Ras Aakhetak, Vishad Yog, Nishad Bansuri, Parna Mukut have enormously enriched Hindi essay writing. A scholar of Indian culture and western literature, he was a proud advocate of India's heritage.

Monuments *that* Matter

Opium Factory, Ghazipur

The Opium Factory located in the city was established by the British and continues to be a major source of opium production in India. It is known as the Opium Factory Ghazipur or, more formally, the Government Opium and Alkaloid Works. It is the largest factory of its kind in the country and indeed the world. The factory was initially run by the East India Company and was used by the British during the First and Second Opium Wars with China. The factory as such was found-

Ghazipur Shiv Mandir

Cornwallis Monument - Burial Place of Lord Cornwallis

ed in 1820, though the British had been trading Ghazipur opium before that. The factory's output serves the global pharmaceutical industry.

The factory covers about 43 acres and much of its architecture is in red brick, dating from colonial times. Within the grounds of the factory there is a temple to Baba Shyam and a *mazaar*, both said to pre-date the factory. There is also a solar clock, installed by the British opium agent Hopkins Esq from 1911. Rudyard Kipling, who was familiar with opium, both medicinally and recreationally, visited the Ghazipur Factory in 1888 and published a description of its working. The text, 'In an Opium Factory', is freely available from Adelaide University's ebook library. Amitav Ghosh's novel, 'Sea of Poppies' deals with the British opium trade in India and much of Ghosh's story is based on his research of the Ghazipur factory.

The Ghazipur Opium Factory may have one more claim to fame because of a rather unusual problem. It is infested with monkeys, too narcotic-addicted to be a real problem, and workers drag them out of the way by their tails !

Mahahaar Dham

It is believed that this *dham* was built by King Dasharatha, and that in Mahahar Dham, King Dasharatha's arrow struck Shravan Kumar by mistake. This is the place where the old and blind parents of Shravan Kumar cursed King Dasharatha and he too sacrificed his life here.

Aunrihar

This is one of the oldest and perhaps most important sites in the district, with a group of mounds stretching from Saidpur to Aunrihar. The surface of Aunrihar is strewn with fragments, large carved stones and fine pieces of sculpture which are being utilised as common building material. Every few yards, traces of archaeologically significant masonary walls appear.

Bahadurganj

Bahadurganj Town is situated on the banks of the Saryu River. It is at a dis-

Ancient Coins Found at Virpur (Muhammadabad)

tance of about 35 km from Ghazipur. The place is said to have been founded in 1742 CE by Sheikh Abdullah, the Governor of Ghazipur, who also built a large fort here. A small fair is held here on the occasion of Ram Navami.

Bhitari is archaeologically very important. It is a place of great antiquity and contains many remains of great archaeological value

Bhitari, Saidpur

Bhitari is archaeologically very important. It is a place of great antiquity and contains many remains of great archaeological value. It is probable that Bhitari was at one time dominated by Buddhist presence but it probably attained its importance during the Gupta Era. The most noticeable relic of that period is the famous monolith of red sandstone standing in the fort enclosure on a block of stone. It has a bell shaped capital about a meter high like that of some Ashokan pillars. On it there is an inscription referring to the reign of Skanda Gupta and his succession to Kumar Gupta. The latter name occurs on several large bricks that were excavated at the foot of the pillar in 1885. An ovular silver plate bearing the inscription of Kumar Gupta, was found in the adjacent ruins. Apart from the pillar, the most valuable yields here have been a seal and coins giving the genealogy of nine generations of the Gupta Kings. Bhitari was probably one of the royal residences of the Gupta Kings in the area.

Virpur, Muhammadabad

Virpur is situated on the banks of the Ganga at a distance of about 35 km from Ghazipur. It was the capital of Tikam Deo, a great Cheru Raja. Old coins and pieces of sculpture have been found in the fort that was built by Cheru Raja.

Dildarnagar

Dildarnagar lies on the road from Varanasi and Zamania to Buxar and 20 km from Ghazipur. Between the town and the station there is a mound called Akhandha, said to have been the seat of Raja Nal and the large tank to the west is called Rani Sagar after his famous queen Damayanti. In the centre of the mound are the ruins of two temples.

Gauspur

Gauspur, a large village, is situated 14 km from Ghazipur. The former *zamindars* of the place claimed descent

from those who cured Raja Mandhata of his leprosy and who in consequence received a grant of land. The tank in which the *raja* bathed is still pointed out on the eastern border of the village and it has ever since been the resort of persons similarly afflicted. The Raja's Fort was at Kathot, an adjacent village on the east. Both in Ghauspur and in Kathot, traces of ancient settlements are to be found; large masses of stone and old bricks have been discovered and in the temple are seen several striking pieces of Hindu sculpture.

Ghazipur

According to legend, the ancient name of city was Garhipur. The mound found in the city is said to be the site of an ancient mud fort, that is known as Fort of Raja Garhi. In the south of the city, the Cornwallis monument is present, where Lord Cornwallis, Governor General of India, is buried. It is a heavy structure with a domed roof supported on twelve Doric columns. The floor is some four meters higher than the ground and is of grey marble. In the centre there is a cenotaph of white marble, bearing on the south side a medallion bust of Cornwallis. In the middle of the city there is a tank close to the road known as Pahar Khan's tank. The Chihul Satun or hall of 40 pillars is the place where Abdullah Khan is buried in the garden known as the Nawab-ki-Chardiwari. The gateway of the palace is handsome but the residence itself is dilapidated. Opposite the Chihal Satun, a road leaves the main street on left and runs in a north-easterly direction, past the Jami Masjid. The Math of Pauhari Baba, a great saint of the time, is situated 10 km. from the city. As Ghazipur is situated on the banks of river Ganga, there are some beautiful *ghats*, like Mahadeva Ghat, Dadri Ghat, Collector Ghat, Massol Ghat, Chitnath Ghat and Posta Ghat. Chitnath Ghat is the oldest among them.

Saidpur

In the town there are two *dargahs*, one being a small domed building resting on square pillars. The other is a larger and more remarkable structure with a massive roof of stone. One of the tombs is of Sheikh Samman, who died in 1595, and other is of Makhdoom Shah.

Zamania

The town was founded in 1560 by Ali Quli Khan, the governor of Jaunpur and named after his title, Khan Zaman. According to Hindu tradition, it derived the name of Jamadagnia from Rishi Jamadagni. Three kilometres southeast of the town is the Lathiya Pillar, a circular monolith of polished sandstone 50 cm. diameter and about 6 mt. in height. There is bell-shaped capital and above this is a group of eight lions facing outwards.

Nature's Abundance

Ghazipur district has a rich natural heritage along the banks of the Ganga. The river has changed course and thus has a wide channel as observed through the map series of the last 100 years. Ganga has several perennial tributaries here mostly joining on the left bank. The river corridor alone has over 500 wetlands. An oxbow lake spread in an area of about 40.6 ha is present near Kharona village close

Ganga – Gomti Confluence

to Ganga-Gomti confluence. Pallia talab is the largest wetland here in the easternmost part of Ghazipur district, spread in an area of about 76.9 ha, harbouring extensive biodiversity and wintering migrants from the north. The biggest and most significant riverine island in this reach is roughly semi-circular, spread over 3 sq.km. and located close to Zamania town.

Riparan Vegetation Along Gahmar Village

Verical Erosion Near Gahmar Village

Manbisra Jaal

Purana Pokhara at Taraon Village

CHAPTER 30

BALLIA
Land of Valmiki & Bhrigu

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Ballia

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Ballia district is situated in the extreme north-eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. It is surrounded by Mau on the west, Deoria in the north, Bihar in the north eastern part and Ghazipur in the south western part. The district is separated from Bihar state by two major rivers, Ganga and Ghaghra. The Ganga River forms the southern boundary of Ballia separating it from Bhojpur and Buxar districts of Bihar whereas the Ghaghra River forms eastern boundary of Ballia separating it from Siwan and Saran districts of Bihar. Comprising a total area of 2981 sq. km., the district is divided into six *tehsils*, Ballia (Sadar), Belthra Road, Bansdih, Bairia, Rasra and Sikandarpur which are further sub-divided into 17 different blocks. The headquarters of this district lies in Ballia town which is well connected with major cities nearby such as Varanasi, Ghazipur, Patna, Buxar and Chhapra.

The district forms a part of Middle Ganga Plain with very little variation in elevation. On the basis of geology, soils, climate, topography and natural vegetation, the district is divided into three regions: Ghaghra *Khadar,* Ballia Plain and Ganga *Khadar.*

Ballia is supposed to have derived its name from the name of Valmiki, a great sage who is said to have had his hermitage or dwelt here for some time. It is also associated with Bhrigu, another renowned sage who, according to a local legend, came

Incomplete Boat Bridge, connecting Ballia to Buxar

Ballia Along the Banks of Ganga

and dwelt here because of the sacredness of the place.

Ganga River enters Ballia District near Narainpur which is at a short distance before Korantadih Dak Bungalow built by the British. Here, the river banks of both Ballia and opposite Buxar District are elevated comprising of *Kanker* formation. The river flows here as a single uninterrupted channel crossing through alluvial lands, a little further downstream, which are constantly being eroded and altered. Shortly after crossing the Ballia-Buxar Bridge, Ganga river bends towards Ballia town during which it is bifurcated into two channels by the presence of a group of irregularly shaped riverine islands (*diaras*). The part of river touching Ballia District along these *diaras* usually starts drying post monsoon season up to the summers. To the east of Ballia town, the river makes a large loop southward encompassing few *diaras*. Further eastwards, the river makes another extensive bend northwards causing bank erosion on the outer side of the bend.

Upon moving eastward, the river touches Sitab Diara region soon after which it is joined by Ghaghra River. While Sitab Diara lies in Ballia district, the confluence point of these two rivers situated adjacent to it falls under Saran district of Bihar. The confluence of Ghaghra and Ganga rivers was not at this point some decades ago. The Ghaghra flows with a much higher velocity than Ganga and brings far more coarse sand. When the two rivers confluence, the combined stream flows with a slower current and is unable to transport the heavy sediment, thereby resulting in the formation of sand bars which with emerging vegetation, later stabilize as *diaras*. In the early 1800s, the traditional point of union for these two rivers is believed to be at Suraha Taal. However, it went on shifting south-east and eastward in the next two centuries bringing the confluence to where it lies currently.

Re-living *the* Past

The city of Ballia holds great importance from ancient times. This is evident from ruins and remains found from that period in and around the Ballia district. In the area

of Barhmain and Hanumanganj, the remains of a large mound known as Miradih are found. Dark-coloured broken pieces of brick and pottery were found indicating the presence of an ancient city. Another site, the ruins of Khaira Dih, are believed to be the ancient city named Bhargavapur, the abode of Rishi Jamadagni. The Black and Red Ware found at numerous sites point to the existence of settlements which date back to 1450-1200 BCE.

This is the place of Bhrigu Rishi's penance, who built his *ashram* here. At that time this place was divided into two regions, Dharmaranya (*Dharma* Regions) and Brihadaranya (densely forested). There was a circumambulatory trail of 5 kms known as *Panch Koshi Parikrama*, which continues to be visited today bearing testimony to the sacredness of this place. Dardar Muni, his disciple, continued the legacy forward and because of him the annual festival of Dadri Mela is organised every year. Lakhneshwar Dih is one of the places associated with the period of Lord Rama. During their exile Ram, Sita and Lakshman crossed Lakhneshwar Dih to Buxar. Here, Lakshman consecrated a Shiva *lingam*.

The district is known to have a close connection with many different stages of the Vedic period. Ballia was known as *Bhrigu Baba ki Nagri*. Bhrigu Baba was one of the *Sapta Rishi* or Seven Sages in the Hindu philosophy. He is known for Bhrigu Samhita or the compendium on Astrology. The etymology of the name of the district also points to the link with the sages. It is believed that the name has been taken after the sage Balmik or Valmiki who was a famous Hindu poet. .

Ballia was a part of the Kosala Kingdom which became a *Mahajanapada* in 6th century BCE and flourished under the leadership of King Mahakoshala. He was succeeded by his son Prasenjit, after whose reign the decline of Kosala began. Not much is known about the history of this area after this decline.

There was a brief rule of the Nandas in the 4th century BCE which was succeeded by the Mauryas under Chandragupta. Since Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, was a patron of Buddhism, we find evidence of a ruined *stupa* in Ballia and remains of Buddhist monasteries at various places in the district. The Shunga Dynasty followed the Mauryas, and Pushyamitra Shunga ruled over almost the whole of the district. Subsequently, the district came under the rule of the Kushanas. The rule of Kushanas over this area is supplemented by a large number of coins of this period found at the ruins of Khaira Dih. There is a brief period of silence about the history of this region after the Kushanas. However, it is believed that the region, after being ruled by some minor kings, was annexed into the empire of Samudragupta. One of the most significant mentions of this district comes from the account of the Chinese traveller, Fa Hien, who visited India during the rule of Chandragupta II. He mentions that on his way from Kasi to Pataliputra, he came across a Buddhist Monastery and a Buddhist Temple in Ballia which bore the name, which on translation means, 'The Vast Solitude'.

After the Gupta Dynasty, the next major political change in Ballia was the ascendency of the Maukharis of Kannauj. The Maukharis were succeeded by Harsh Vardhan (606-647 CE) and Ballia continued to be a part of his empire. It was during his reign that we find references to a Buddhist Monastery in the area from the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang (629-644 CE). The repeated reference of the Buddhist monastery in the area confirms its close connection with the history of the Ballia district. However, after the disintegration of Harshvardhan's Empire, there was no stable political authority in this area for around 75 years. The rule of Gurjara-Pratiharas was the next big change but their rise was stopped in its tracks by the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1018 CE.

The Second Battle of Tarain did not bring Ballia directly into the fold of the Delhi Sultans and the tract to the east of the river Saryu was more or less controlled by the Rajputs. Muhammad Ghori also passed

The Ghaghra has a much higher velocity than Ganga and brings far more coarse sand

by the district when he was going to Bihar and he constructed a fort by the Ghagra River in Qutbganj area. There still exists a mound in the Qutabganj area which is believed to be a part of that fort. It was around 1325 CE that the area came under the control of Mohammad Tughlaq.

When in 1528, Babur started his march towards Bengal, the Afghans took up their position on the north bank of Ghagra, close to its confluence with the Ganga while Babur proceeded by the river to Ghazipur. Babur pushed the Afghans across the Ghagra and towards Awadh but soon after Babur's death, the Afghans started to assert their control over the region. Sher Shah, taking advantage of Humayun's absence, regained control of the whole of Bihar and Jaunpur. In 1538 Humayun tried to take back the region but was defeated in the Battle of Chausa on the Ganga, fought very close to the border of this district.

Ballia District remained under the rule of Sher Shah and his successor until Akbar came to power and the whole eastern part was conquered by him in 1559. We find mention of Ballia in Ain-i-Akbari regarding its contribution of revenue by the various *parganas*. There were three *Mahals* (revenue paying units) of the present district of Ballia in the *sirkar* of Jaunpur, namely Sikandarpur, Kharid and Bhadaon.

The area was held by the Rajputs under Balwant Singh from 1758 to 1764 as a feudatory of the Raja of Benaras. The British victory in the Battle of Buxar in 1764 led to the transfer of the Varanasi province, which also included Ballia, to the East India Company.

The East India Company acquired direct control of the district from 1781. Ballia made a significant contribution to the Revolt of 1857. On 1st June 1857, the news of mutiny and disarmament of Benaras Regiment reached Azamgarh and the 17th Native Infantry stationed at Azamgarh went into disorder.

Mangal Pandey was one of the Indian soldiers who played an important role in the outbreak of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. He was a sepoy in the 34th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry of British East India Company. He is regarded as the hero of Indian Mutiny of 1857. He was born in Nagwa, a village of Upper Ballia District, Uttar Pradesh.

Raja Kunwar Singh was an important freedom fighter of the region. During the rebellion, his army had to cross the Ganga River.

One prominent figure who played a crucial role in August Kranti of Ballia was Chittu Pandey. He was described as the 'Tiger of Ballia' by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose because of his exemplary leadership during the Quit India Movement. He was born in Rattuchak, a village in Ballia District.

On the morning of August 19, when a crowd of more than 5000 people reached the district magistrate's compound they were greeted by their leaders Chittu Pandey and J. C. Nigam. Amid slogans and songs of freedom, the Union Jack was lowered and the Tricolour unfurled. Ballia became the first Indian city to declare its independence from British Rule, at least for a few days. A popular government was formed, led by Chittu Pandey. The British unleashed a brutal reprisal. The colonial establishment killed more than a 100 leaders by hanging them from trees. Others were shot or tortured or simply imprisoned in overcrowded jails.

Mythological Links

The other belief behind the etymology of Ballia as Balliyag revolves around the episode of Raja Bali and the Vaman *Avatar* of Lord Vishnu; this was the exact spot where Bali put his head as an offering in front of Lord Vishnu to put his foot on, during his demand for land equivalent to his three steps. Shruti and evidence is available in the context of the temple and the amazing Shiva *lingam* installed in it, according to which the deity was worshiped by the generous Raja Bali. According to mythological texts, Lord Vishnu had to come himself as a Vamana Brahmin in a *yajna* performed by King Bali under the auspices of Shukracharya, the priest of *Daityakul*, son of Maharishi Bhrigu. During this period, a temple was built along with an installation of a Shiv *lingam* by Bali which is believed to exist even today. Perhaps this is the reason that the programme of worship and *havan* goes on at this temple twenty-four hours throughout the year.

Events *of* Interest

Dadri Mela

Dadri Fair holds both religious and cultural significance. It is the second-largest cattle fair in the country, and it is held annually to honour Dardar Muni, the disciple of Maharishi Bhrigu. The fair is usually held around the land of the original Bhrigu *Ashram* which is considered to be a sacred place, as the river Ganga and River Saryu meet there.

There are usually two parts to the fair, one being the sale and purchase of cattle by the traders and the second part is when the cultural programmes are held. This fair is held at the onset of Kartik Purnima which mostly falls in October or November.

Chhath Puja

Chhath is an ancient festival celebrated in states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh and the Madhesh Region of Nepal. The Chhath Puja is dedicated to the solar deity (Surya) in order to thank him for bestowing the bounties of life on earth and to request the granting of certain wishes. This festival is observed mostly by Bihari people and the Nepalese along with their diaspora. The festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm in Ballia district as well.

Art *at the* Heart

Sinhaura

Sinhaura is a popular traditional craft of Ballia. A majority of the craftsmen and their families are concentrated in Hanumanganj area of Ballia. Sinhaura is a wooden container used to store vermilion, given to brides on the wedding night by her in-laws; the *sindoor* in this container is orange in colour and is used during wedding ceremonies, during the ritual of *Sindoordaan*. The groom takes *sindoor*/vermilion from this pot to adorn the bride with sindoor. Various woods have been used for the processing of the Sinhaura. Mango and eucalyptus wood is extensively used to make these. Dark red or colourful ones with fancy cords tied to them are a particular variety of Sinhaura.

Tikuli

The *Bindi* (*Tikuli*) industry is active in Maniyar Block of the district. The *Bindi* is a dot that usually adorns the forehead of married women. Maniyar Bindi has a large manufacturing hub in Ballia. Earlier, the *Bindi* used to be made of glass. This included the glass being smelted out of which the *Bindi* was made. Gold and silver water layers were also applied on it. Around the year 1975, the practice of glass *Bindi* came to an end and new types of *Bindi* started flooding the markets.

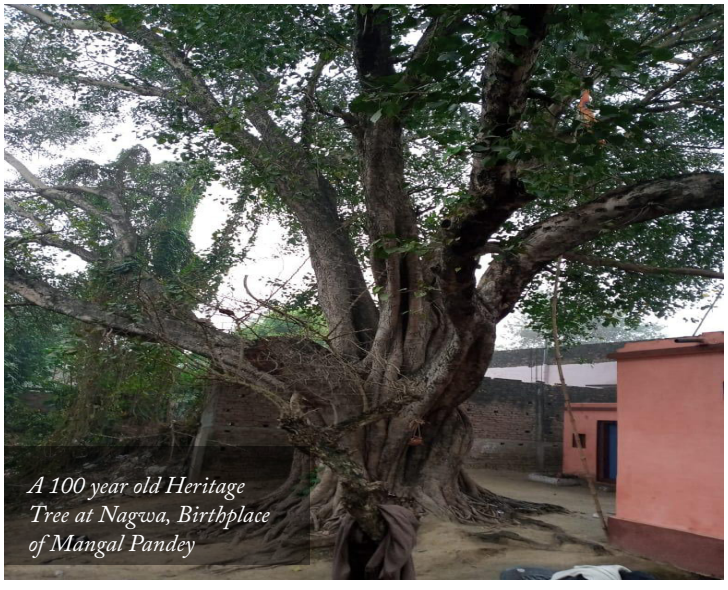
Ballia became the first Indian city to declare its independence from British Rule, at least for a few days

Palki-Doli

With modernity, several new practices and new means of living come into existence. The old ones die. Their memories remain, in songs, in idioms and proverbs. The same has happened to the *Doli,* the medium of transportation for the rich nobles, *zamindars*, brides and grooms. In the past, the palanquins were the main means of transportation. Sikandarpur area was the place where the workers, craftsmen making *Doli* were concentrated.

Lorik

Lorik is remembered as a great ancestor of historical heroes of Ahirs. His story is also described as the Ramayana of the Ahirs. This story is famous in Chhattisgarh under the name Lorik Chanda; it is a love story of Lorik and Chanda. The saga is based on the love affair of a married princess Chanda and married Ahir, Lorik. The saga is very popular and has several versions to it. The prominent one is that Lorik was born at Ballia and there is a place



A 100 year old Heritage Tree at Nagwa, Birthplace of Mangal Pandey

A Sinhaura Craftsman At Work, Hanumanganj

called Lorik Dih here which is testimony of the great saga. Lorik Dih was the place where Lorik worshipped Goddess Durga and also meditated. The saga is sung and performed on various occasions.

Gastronomic Delights

Litti Chokha is the most famous dish of Ballia. Badi Poori or Haathi Kaan Poori is also a special dish of Ballia. Although it is also like normal *poori*, it has the shape and size of an elephant's ear. Chotha is like *chilla*, but it is a sweet tortilla. Some people also call it Meetha Chilla. Girvach is a salty snack made with *Arbi* corm leaves. *Arbi* leaves are wrapped with gram flour and made into rolls. It is then cooked. Currently, the most cherished local food of the people is Baati-Chokha.

Tari and Sendhi are the two fermented liquors largely consumed in the district. Tari was obtained from the *tar* or Palmyra palms while the Sendhi was derived from the *Khajur* or date palm. However, these drinks rarely find mention in current times.

People who Fascinate

Chandra Shekhar Singh Solanki

Popularly known as Chandrashekhar, he was an eminent politician who briefly rose to be the 9th Prime Minister of india in 1991.

Mangal Pandey

A soldier with the East India Company's army serving with the 34th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry, he was the original rebel hailing from Nagwa village of Ballia, who was hanged in Barrackpore. The house of the Pandey family still stands over there.

Doodhnath Singh

Doodhnath Singh (1936 – 2018) was a Hindi language writer, critic and poet. Born in Ballia, Singh's well-known works were Sapaat Chehre Wala Aadmi, Aakhri Kalaam, Nishkaasan, Bhai Ka Shok Geet, Dharmakshetra-Kurukshetra and Surang se Lautate Huye. He was also a literary analyst and critic, poet and playwright.

Kedarnath Singh

Kedarnath Singh (1934 – 2018) was an Indian poet who wrote in Hindi. He was also an eminent critic and essayist. He was awarded the Jnanpith Award (2013), Sahitya Akademi Award (1989) in Hindi for his poetry collection, Akaal Mein Saras (Cranes in Drought).

Hazari Prasad Dwivedi

In the literary tradition of Ballia, if we talk about intellectuals of this area, the most talked about and famous personality is Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi. Dwivedi became such a pioneer of progressive literature that he became an *Acharya* under the guidance of Rabindranath Tagore.

Krishna Bihari Mishra

Dr. Krishna Bihari Mishra, a resident of Balihar Village under Haldi Thana, was awarded the Padma Shri, the country's prestigious civilian honour. He was born on November 5, 1936 in Ballihar Village of Doab region. He wrote the book Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi : Journalism, History and Questions. At the same time, in the Fine Essay collection 'Behaya', there are expressions, thoughts and impulses of rural life.

Lorik is remembered as a great ancestor of historical heroes of Ahirs. His story is also described as the Ramayana of the Ahirs

Monuments *that* Matter

Ujjiyar: *The* Trail *of* Rama's Exile

Ujjiyar and Bharoli are two villages which find mythological references to Lord Rama's exile. Ujjiyar is located between the bank of watercourse of the Ganga and National Highway-19. Local beliefs in Ballia mention that Lord Ram together with Lakshman and Sage Vishwamitra took the route of Bharauli and Ujjiyar Village in the wee hours, to wipe out demoness Tadaka.

Bhrigu Ashram

The temple was constructed to commemorate Saint Bhrigu. To this date, he is a famous and respected saint in Ballia and its surrounding areas. The temple is enshrined with the idols of Bhrigu Baba and his disciple Dardar Muni. Many people believe that thousands of *rishi-munis* have meditated at this location making this place divine.

Mangla Bhawani Mandir

This ancient temple is dedicated to Mangla Bhawani, who is one of the nine *avatars* of Durga. It is said that the officials of East India company threw the idol into the Ganga; which was later re-established.

Maa Brahamani Mandir

The ancient temple of Maa Brahmani Devi situated on the Ballia-Sikandarpur main road, five km north of the district headquarters, remains the centre of faith among the devotees. A thirsty and wounded Raja Surath stopped here and asked the soldiers to bring water. When the soldiers walked some distance, a lake appeared. They fetched water from here and gave it to the king. When the king touched that water, the wound got cured. Astonished by this incident, the king asked the soldiers to take him to the place from where they had brought the water. When he reached there he entered into the *Taal* and all his wounds got healed. Raja Surath met Rishi Medha who suggested he practice penance for three years. Ma Brahmani blessed him and this place. Since then the temple, the Kashthar, or Kathal Naala's religious significance has been established.

Nature's Abundance

Ballia district falls under the Eastern Plain Zone and Vindhyan Zone, with

Deendayal Bhakt Barai Pokhara

Fishermen Placing Nets in Suraha Taal

the major soils being clay loam, loam and sandy loam soils. Agriculture is the chief source of income for majority of the residents of this district and it is benefitted by the fertile alluvium brought by Ganga river and its tributaries like Ghagra, Gandak, Tamsa, Magai and Kathar.

Ghagra, one of the major tributaries of Ganga in the district, swells up during the monsoon season, often leading to floods in the nearby villages. The banks of Ghagra experience lateral erosion due to the sandy facies, low degree of compaction, scouring, fractures, palaeocurrent and mass movement. Tamsa river has immense cultural significance as it is believed that Lord Ram spent the first night on its banks after his exile from Ayodhya

Sitab *diara*, a riverine island, is an important site having historical as well as mythological significance. This confluence region of Ganga and Ghagra is considered to be a sacred site owing to a third river – Sone, which joins Ganga at a short distance just after crossing Chhapra city. During festivities and other religious occasions, people from both UP and Bihar states visit this *sangam* site for offering their prayers and taking holy bath.

The major tree species in this region include *Bili* or *Bel patra (Aegle marmelos), Peepal (Ficus religiosa),* Banyan *(Ficus benghalensis), Babool (Acacia nilotica)* and S*emal (Bombax ceiba)*. Among these, some old *Peepal* and Banyan trees are considered sacred and protected.

Ballia district is home to mammal species like Gangetic Dolphin, Nilgai, Wild Boar and Golden Jackal, along with Turtles seen basking on the river bank and the sand bars. Cormorants, Lapwings, White-throated Kingfisher, Indian Pond Heron, Common Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Little Grebe, Indian Pond Heron, Painted Stork, Common Moorehen and White-breasted Waterhen are the common avifaunal species.

The numerous *diaras* along the Ganga in Ballia district are under extensive agriculture by residents of nearby villages who access these *diaras* by boats. These *diaras* also harbor a luxuriant growth of floodplain grass – *Saccharum spontaneum* which is collected in dried form to make use for roof thatching and setting up temporary huts in floodplain agriculture fields.

Purain ke Patte or Pattal made out of Lotus leaves is also one of the major indigenous traditional livelihood activities

Surhataal

In Surha Lake a number of traditional indigenous fishing techniques are

employed with a variety of gear like gill nets, cast nets and traps. Wood plank built boats are used in fishing. These fishing crafts and gear are locally prepared by the fisher folk. Fishing is the main occupation for those living around the vicinity of the lake.

Purain ke Patte or *Pattal* made out of Lotus leaves is also one of the major indigenous traditional livelihood activities. These environment-friendly plates could be used as an alternative to curb the growing plastic waste.

Surhataal is also a part of the Surhataal Bird Sanctuary spanning over an area of 34.32 sq. km.

Deendayal Bhakt Barai Pokhara

This is a sacred pond located in Chitbaragaon village and is believed to be more than hundred years old. The pond also harbors a rich fish diversity which is protected by the local people and fish catching is banned here. According to a folk tale, this land was visited by many saints, who were angered by the local residents eating fish and other animals. Hence, they put a curse that anybody who indulges in animal killing or eating will suffer from bad consequences. As a result, to this day no local resident buys, sells or eats any kind of non-vegetarian food in Chitbaragaon.

Traditional Fish Net Making

A Diara (Island) Hidden in Mist, Seen From Beyasi-Ballia Bridge – Floodplain in the

GANGA THROUGH

BIHAR

CHAPTER 31

BUXAR

Battlefield since Ages

Bihar

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Buxar

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Buxar is located on the western border of Bihar with Uttar Pradesh. It is bounded on the north by Ballia, on the south by Rohtas, on the west by Ghazipur and Ballia and on the east by Bhojpur. The district is divided into two subdivisions: Buxar and Dumraon. It falls entirely on the right bank of Ganga River, to its south. Ganga flows for a length of 40 km on its northern edge.

The district is part of the lower sub-basin of the Upper Ganga Basin. The physiography of the district reveals an alluvial plain having gentle slope towards north which can be divided into two physiographic sub-divisions.

The low-lying northern plain, extending from the Ganga, the river has built a long natural levee along its

Buxar is famous since ancient times for being the seat of eminent saints, battlefield of gods and demons as per the Puranas, and a battleground between foreign invaders and countrymen in recent history

Part of Buxar Fort, 1830 by George Francis White. (British Library)

course which covers the entire geographical area of the Simri and Chakki blocks along with parts of Buxar and Barhampur blocks.

The other one is the flat region of the south, covering major parts occupying the entire area of Chausa, Rajpur, Kesath, Nawanagar, Itarhian, Dumraon and parts of Buxar and Barhampur blocks. There are mainly three types of soils found, Recent Alluvium Soil (Levee Soil) found along the banks of the river Ganga, Tal Soil (Kewal Soil) found in south of the levee, Old Alluvium Soil, a combination of Kewal Soil and clayey soil which covers the central part.

Re-living *the* Past

Buxar is famous since ancient times for being the seat of eminent saints, battlefield of gods and demons as per the Puranas and a battleground between foreign invasion and countrymen in modern history. The remains from archaeological excavations have established the link of Buxar with ancient civilizations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. This area was also known as Siddhashram, Vedgarbhapuri, Karush, Tapovan, Chaitrath, and Vyaghrasar in ancient history.

The history of Buxar dates back even prior to the period of Ramayana. The name Buxar is said to have been derived from Vyaghrasar. During Mughal period, the historic battle between Humayun and Sher Shah Suri was fought at Chausa in 1539. On 23rd June, 1764, British forces under Sir Hecter Munro defeated the combined forces of Mir Qasim, Shuja-ud-Daulah and Shah Alam-II on the grounds of Katkauli, situated about 6 km from Buxar town.

Buxar played an immensely significant role in Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement. The Mahatma, known for non-violence, laid the foundation of the freedom movement in Shahabad. It can be said that Gandhi's Buxar chapter eventually led to his

transformation into the *Mahatma*. Gandhi visited Buxar five times and his simple thoughts still inspire people there.

Every year, August 16th commemorates the sacrifice of four martyrs, Kapil Muni, Ramdas Sonar, Ramdas Lohar and Bhikhi Lal who played a crucial role during the Quit India Movement of 1942.

Mythological Links

According to mythology, sage Vishwamitra the guru of Lord Rama and eighty thousand saints, established their *ashram* on the banks of holy river Ganges in the district of Buxar. Vishwamitra was disturbed in the *yagna* (sacrificial offerings) by the demons. Therefore, he invited Rama and Lakshmana to help rid the area of demons. The place where *Rakshasi* (demoness) Tadka was annihilated by Lord Rama is said to fall within the present Buxar town area. Earlier, Lord Rama and his younger brother Lakshman took their lessons from Vishwamitra here. It is also said that Ahilya, the wife of Gautam Rishi, was restored to her human body from that of stone and got salvation by a mere touch of the feet of Lord Rama in a place known as Ahirauli situated six kilometres away from the Buxar town. The Kanwaldah Pokhara, also known as Vyaghrasar is a tourist spot.

The love for Dal Puri is never-ending here. The stuffing for the puri is made with boiled and mashed chana dal mixed with salt and spices

Events *of* Interest

Panchkroshi Parikrama

The Panchkroshi Parikrama is a pilgrimage in which people walk through five villages around Buxar in five days. During the pilgrimage, they eat Litti Chokha, and practise purification rituals.

Sita Ram Vivah Mahotsav

The Sita Ram Vivah Mahotsav is a marriage celebration held in November. Thousands of saints and pilgrims from across the country descend upon the Sita Ram Vivah Ashram in the Naya Bazar locality of Buxar to celebrate the occasion.

Art *at the* Heart

According to texts on folklore, Buxar's religion was an agglomeration of Hinduism, animism, animatism and spiritism. The word Bharra seems to hold a lot of importance for the people of this region. Bharra or Bharrara seems to have been the corrupted form of the word *Bhagat* which means a devotee. who has a lot of roles to perform but is primarily a shaman. Bharras were more popular among the tribes of the region.

Gastronomic Delights

Dal Puri

The love for Dal Puri is never-ending here. The stuffing for the *puri* is made with boiled and mashed *chana dal* mixed with salt and spices. This is stuffed inside the dough made for *puris*. It is further fried till golden brown and best served with Kheer, a milk-based dessert. In Buxar, it is especially made on the occasion of Ram Navami and Dussehra.

Litti-Chokha

The filling of Litti is prepared with *Sattu* mixed with chopped onions, garlic, green chilies, mustard oil, salt, and lemon juice. It is further stuffed inside the dough and baked or deep-fried to perfection. It is served with Chokha, which is a mixture of roasted eggplant, tomatoes and boiled potatoes. Litti-Chokha dates back to the era of Lord Ram and Goddess Sita who cooked the recipe to satiate their hunger during the fourteen years of their exile at Charitravan, now a part of Buxar.

Belgrami

Paneer Khurma is a cottage cheese based sweet from Bihar. This sweet is also known as Belgrami. Other sweets such as Tilkut, Anarsa, Malpua, Laai, Sonpapdi, Perukia, Balushahi, Kheer Makhana and Thekua are made on special occasions.

People who Fascinate

Kapil Muni

On 16th August 1942, at four in the evening, hundreds of agitators gathered at Dumraon market under the leadership of Kapil Muni and his associates. The fire of Quit India Movement had spread all over the country. Nationalist leaders had called for hoisting the tri-colour on all government buildings. Police fired indiscriminately on unarmed agitators on the orders of the then Inspector Devnath of Dumraon Police Station. One bullet hit Kapil Muni's chest, and he died while hoisting the tri-colour on the building, and became a martyr.

Vimlanand Saraswati

Vimlanand Saraswati was a Bhojpuri writer, author and spiritualist. He is credited with writing the first short story collection in Bhojpuri. He was born at Mangraon village of Buxar, Bihar. During 1939-40, he was the editor of the weekly Hindi journal Krishak. He went to jail during the independence struggle in 1942. Later he became a saint and changed his name to Dandiswami Vimlanand Saraswati. His first book was the Bhojpuri short story collection, 'Jehal ke Sanadi', which was published in 1948. In the same year his collection of Hindi poems, Makarand, was published. After becoming a monk he started writing an epic on the life of Gautama Buddha, which was published in 1983 as Baudhayan.

Rani Kuan, Buxar

Navlakha Temple

Buxar Central Jail

Monuments *that* Matter

Buxar Fort

It forms one of the biggest landmarks of the city. The fort was built by King Rudra Deo I in 1054. It is a stone masonry fort located on the banks of the river Ganga. Since the fort provided a position of great strategic importance, after the Battle of Buxar, the fort was taken over by the British and the land around the fort was acquired for military purposes in 1770.

Sita-Ram Upadhyaya Museum

This was founded in 1979. It was renamed in 1993 as Sita Ram Upadhyaya Museum in honour of Upadhyaya, a resident of Buxar, himself a collector, who donated many artefacts to the museum. The museum has many stone statues, coins and terracotta figures amongst its exhibits.

Kathkauli Maidan

This is located near the Kathkauli Village in Buxar. On this ground, the Battle of Buxar was fought, and a memorial was established by the British to commemorate their victory.

Ram Rekha Ghat

This place derives its importance from the epic of Ramayana. It is mentioned in the Ramayana that Lord Rama drew a line on the Ganga River with his bow so that demons could not cross into that territory. Folklore also suggests that it was at this spot that Rama, his brother Lakshmana and sage Vishwamitra crossed the Ganga to reach Janakpur for Sita's *Swayamvara*. The *ghat* is thronged by devotees on the festivals of Makar Sankranti and Chhath Puja as taking a dip here in the Ganga is considered very auspicious.

Navlakha Mandir

This temple is one of the most famous in Buxar. The Navlakha Temple is also known as Charitravan Baikunth. Lord Rama completed his studies under sage Vishwamitra in Charitravan, where the temple is located. The architecture of this temple very closely resembles the South Indian style of temple architecture.

Rameshwarnath Mandir

This temple is located close to the Ram Rekha Ghat on the banks of the river Ganga. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is believed that the Shiva *lingam* present in this temple was established by Lord Rama himself. It is believed that during his exile of fourteen years, Rama established this temple to worship Lord Shiva. Hence, it is considered a holy site by many people and devotees often come to visit.

Brahmeshwarnath Mandir

This temple is famous for its grandeur and ancient relevance throughout the country. It is located 40 km away from the main town of Buxar. This temple is also dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is believed that the Shiva *lingam* here was established by Lord Brahma himself. According to local legends, once Nadir Shah tried to destroy the temple and came in with his army. The priests of the temple convinced him to trust in the power of their God. He challenged them that they would have to ask Lord Shiva to turn the face of the temple from the east to the west, then only would he leave the temple unharmed. To everyone's surprise, the face of the temple shifted from the east to west. During the month of *Shravan*, many Shiva devotees walk from Ram Rekha Ghat to Brahmeshwarnath Temple to make offerings.

Central Jail

The Jail was built by the British military, after they took over the administration of the city. It was one of the first and largest of five Central Jails to be built in Bihar state. Over the years, the jail started small scale industries to engage the prisoners in work, even rising to the position of being the largest jail industry in India. The jail runs small scale industries for spinning, weaving, tailoring, carpet, blanket and tent manufacturing in these buildings to engage the prisoners in work.

Sone Canal

The canal was built to channelize the water of the canal into river Ganga. It was built as a part of river development scheme adopted by British after they established their administration in Buxar for trade and communication via waterways. The canal was built to streamline the flow of the river across the district and control it before it converges with river Ganga.

Nature's Abundance

The Gangetic River Dolphin is exclusively aquatic and piscivorous, occasionally found in small groups. Dolphin sightings have been made near Mahadeva Ghat located close to Chausa town and near Nath Baba Ghat in Buxar town. The Blackbuck *(Antelope cervicapra)* and Nilgai are also observed. Turtles are also found along stretches.

The two main floodplain grasses *Saccharum munja Roxb.*, commonly known as *Munj* grass, and *Cynodon dactylon*, commonly known as *Doob* or *Durva* grass. Among these, Munj grass is most dominant and luxuriant along the Ganga River banks and on the *diaras*. This species is a perennial wild grass growing up to 2 m in height and found luxuriantly along river banks in India. It forms

The two main floodplain grasses, Saccharum munja Roxb., commonly known as Munj grass, and Cynodon dactylon, commonly known as Doob or Durva grass are found here

extensive root network that binds the soil/pebbles and forms tall thick clumps with high biomass tufts. The grass is used in construction of temporary huts to monitor agricultural fields. Apart from this, some villagers also make use of this grass in dried form for making ropes, brooms and mats. The abundance of this grass and availability throughout the year makes it an excellent resource for the residents in this region.

Fish resources of Ganga River have been an important source of livelihood and food security for millions of people residing along its banks. Fishing from Ganga River and its tributaries (mainly Karamanasa, Thora and Dharmavati) is an important source of livelihood and food in the study region of Buxar District. Many local residents, especially those belonging to the Mallah community were involved in fishing using small boats throughout the region. The main fishing techniques used by them include fine mesh sized nets spread across the stream which are mostly made of plastic and available from nearby markets and rope-based drag nets, some of which are made locally. The fishermen in the region highlighted that the commonly caught fish in this stretch included Rohu (*Labeo rohita*), Catla (*Labeo catla*), Tengara (*Mystus tengara*), *Buari/Barari (Wallago attu)* and *Sidhari (Puntius sp.)*. These fish, especially Rohu and Catla, are found in plenty during monsoons while Tengara is found more during the summer months.

Female and Male Blackbucks Sighted Near Majharia Village

Bridge Across Karmanasa river

Luxuriant Growth of Munj Grass near Sabdalpur Bank

CHAPTER 32

BHOJPUR
Land of Birha

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Bhojpur
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Bhojpur District is situated in the western part of Bihar with the headquarters being at Arrah town. The present district of Bhojpur comprises of three sub-divisions namely Arrah Sadar, Jagdishpur and Piro comprising of 14 developmental blocks. It is bounded on the north by Saran and Uttar Pradesh, on the south by the Rohtas district, on the west by Buxar and on the east by the districts of Patna and Arwal.

Bhojpur had close linkages with its parent district of Shahabad. It is believed that Arrah derived its name from the Sanskrit word *Aranya*, meaning forest. The name indicates that this area was heavily forested and according to mythological belief, Sage Vishwamitra, Guru of Lord Rama, resided in his *ashram* in this region. The district is located in the central part of Ganga Basin with the Ganga River forming its northern boundary. Sone is the other major river flowing along the eastern boundary. The newly built 1.5 km long Koilwar Bridge over this river, which stands parallel to the 138 year old bridge, is an important connecting link between Arrah and Patna.

Ganga River enters Bhojpur District near Nauranga shortly after Nainijor where it exits Buxar. Shortly after, it turns south-east for a small distance before making a curve north-eastwards. It confluences with the mighty Ghaghra River which flows in from northern direction near Sitab *diara*. Thereafter, it flows eastwards and meets

River Ganga In Bhojpur

Ara house, Now Known as Veer Kunwar Singh Museum

another important tributary, Sone River, which confluences with it from the southern direction near Todarpur. This confluence of Sone-Ganga also forms the point where Ganga River exits Bhojpur and enters Patna District. Between these two confluences, the river channel is highly braided due to presence of irregularly shaped *diaras*. The total length of Ganga River in this district is about 34 kms.

Tributaries of Ganga River here include Sone, Ghagra, Dharmavati and Gangi River.

Re-living *the* Past

Bhojpur district is known to be a place of rich cultural and historical significance. The district is bordered on the North by River Ganga, which has played a significant role in nurturing civilizations from ancient times. This has been proved by the discovery of archaeological findings, dating back to Stone Age, in the Ganga Plains. But, due to limitations in exploration procedures, the history of Bhojpur can be only dated back to Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) phase. The district was initially subjected to the influence of Kushanas, Guptas and Post-Guptas. The strategic location of the region led the Rajputs, Mughals and British, to establish flourishing settlements in Bhojpur district. According to mythological references, Bhojpur district has also been a witness to many events which unfolded during the Ramayana and Mahabharata times.

On 17th April 1529, Babur pitched his camp in Arrah. After securing victory over Afghan rulers, Babur proclaimed his sovereignty over Bihar, from a spot in Arrah. This event was commemorated by naming Arrah as Shahabad, which means City of the Emperor.

Arrah was once a part of the Kingdom of Magadh, during the reign of Ashoka (c. 268-232 BCE). This evidence is further strengthened by the travel accounts of Hieun Tsang, a

Chinese Buddhist pilgrim. An inscription from the Mundeswari Temple indicates that Arrah became a part of the Gupta Kingdom under Udyasena. Another inscription at Deo Barunarak Temple tells us that it was constructed under the patronage of Jivita Gupta, who belonged to the later Gupta Kingdom. Historical evidence begins to taper off after the fall of the Gupta Dynasty (mid-6th century CE). Historians have assumed that from this period onwards, the district came under the control of the aboriginal tribes, led by petty chieftains who divided the region into different territories. The Cheros emerged as the dominant tribe during this period, occupying the largest territory. These tribes were later defeated in the early 11th century by Rajput forces led by Raja Bhoja from Ujjain (in the province of Malwa). It is from Bhoja that scholars derived the later name of the district as Bhojpur. The Cheros were expelled from the region and later established themselves in Palamau, conquering the region after allying with other Rajput families like the Thakurs of Rank and Chainpur.

The Rajputs barely held this region for a century before it was wrested from them in 1193 by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji. Shahabad became a part of the *subah* in Bihar region, and by 1397 it was formally recognized as being a territory of Jaunpur. By the 15th century, the Delhi Sultanate took over, and for his aid in conquering the region, Jamal Khan, the *Subedar* of the Province, granted Hasan Khan (Sher Shah's father) the *pargana* (district) of Sasaram as a *jagir*. Control over this region remained fairly loose under Hasan Khan, as powerful local figures like the *zamindars* continued to act independently. By the time Sher Shah came to power, he whipped the *pargana* into shape through coercive means.

When Humayun was forced into exile, north India, and as a consequence Shahabad, wound up back into the hands of the Afghans under Sher Shah Suri. His crowning victory was in the village of Chausa, near Buxar, where he annihilated Humayun's forces and caused them to retreat, allowing him to establish the short-lived Suri Dynasty in India. The region of Bihar, thus, had a special significance for him, which was why he was buried at Sasaram in a specially designed tomb.

Raja Man Singh, one of Akbar's most trusted generals, included Shahabad in his efforts to reorganize the revenue administration of the empire. Rebellions were a common occurrence during the reign of various emperors.

Two of the main dynasties involved were the Rajas of Jagdishpur and Bhojpur. The Raja of Bhojpur was in constant conflict with both Akbar and Jahangir, which culminated in the execution of his successor Raja Pratap by Shah Jahan, whose widow was forced to marry one of the Muslim nobles from the imperial court.

The last major historical event in the region is its involvement in the Revolt of 1857, when Kunwar Singh convinced the people of Shahabad to join the mutineers in their efforts to oust the British officials. There was a jailbreak at Arrah and all of the convicts were set free, most of them joining the mutineers. The few British officers stationed at Arrah holed themselves up in a tiny fortress with a regiment of around 50 Sikh soldiers as Kunwar Singh and his forces marched to the sub-district. The siege at Arrah lasted eight days, and the relief army, which had arrived too late, were also humiliated by the mutineers and forced to retreat with what little survivors remained.

Mythological Links

Tar is a village situated about 10 kilometres to the north-west of Piro. The village is named after Tadaka, described as a demoness in the Ramayana. According to mythological mentions, Tadaka would constantly harass *rishi-munis*, by disrupting their *yagnas*. Therefore, as a solution, Vishwamitra approached Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya, to help him in this situation. King Dasaratha sent his sons, Ram and Lakshman, to deal with demoness Tadaka. When Lord Rama came face to face with the demoness, he warned her firmly. Dismissing his warning, Tadaka continued to harass the *rishis*. Therefore, with the help of Lakshmana, Lord Rama shot her with arrows and eventually killed her.

The city of Arrah was referred to as Ekachakra or Chakrapura, in Mahabharata. According to legend, it was the home of Bakasura, a demon whose daily food included consumption of a human being. During their *Vanavasa*

period, the five Pandavas were living in the house of a sage, who had to supply a victim for the demon the next day. Instead, Bhima decided to go himself and fight the *asur*. He fought the demon at Bakri and killed him. He dragged the demon's body from Bakri to Chakrapur to show to the people.

The city of Arrah is also associated with another legend of Aranyayi, the goddess of forests. According to legend, this region was once a part of King Mordhwaj's kingdom. After praying to Goddess Durga, the queen and he were blessed with a son. After a few years, the goddess appeared in Raja Mordhwaj's dream and wanted the couple to cut the prince into half, offering his flesh as sacrifice. The couple, devotees of the goddess, placed a saw over their son's shoulder. At that precise moment, Goddess Durga appeared before them and informed about her test of trust, which the couple had successfully passed. The spot where the sacrifice was to have taken place, from that moment, came to be known as *Arrah*, or 'the place of the saw'.

Art *at the* Heart

One of the most important crafts in Bhojpur is embroidery, a skill passed down for generations from one family to the next. Many of these families hold on to a valuable piece of their's and the region's history called *Awalkhana*. *Awalkhanas* contain several hundred motifs which have been created over generations, and aim to preserve these traditions so that they are not forgotten. These are generally passed down to daughters on the day of their wedding.

Awalkhana Embroidery

Of the several areas in Bhojpur, Udawant Nagar is one of the major artisanal sectors. *Tikris* and beads are some of the main accessories attached to textiles. They are attached using an apparatus of a frame of wooden beams, where the fabric is placed and is worked upon using a long needle, threads, *tikris*, and beads. A famous style that Bhojpur embroiderers follow is *Kasida*, which utilizes geometrical patterns. Locally, the style is referred to as Bharua Kasida. This style is created through three different stitches. The first is *Jhinkana*, a chain-stitch where the needle is pulled through the cloth, following a design which ignores the texture of the cloth.

Zari, which utilizes gold and silver threads to create different motifs on textiles, is another style famous in the region. *Sujni* is another form of embroidery, primarily done on old *saris*. The *saris* are stitched jointly with white thread and then quilted. The middle part of the quilt is generally stitched together with coloured threads to create vivid patterns. *Taganua* is a style which is done by counting the thread work. *Khatwa*, which utilizes appliqué patchwork is found on tents and personal garments. *Jaali* (literally, net) is an embroidery pattern where geometric or floral shapes are designed by pulling the warp and weft threads and fixing them with minute buttonhole stitches. This pattern is usually employed for household items like curtains, bedspreads, furniture covers and dress materials.

Gastronomic Delights

The staple diet of the region generally includes Chura Matar, Litti (without onion and garlic for Brahmins), Makhana, *Sattu* (roasted Bengal gram flour), Ghughni and Bihari Kabab. Garlic (both raw and cooked) and mustard are common ingredients one

can find in many variations of Bhojpuri cuisine. Other ingredients which are widely used include asafoetida, cumin seeds and *garam masala*. Another distinctive characteristic of Bhojpuri cuisine is the absence of traditional Indian curry. Their vegetable preparations are mellow gravies which serve as an accompaniment to the main dishes.

Bhojpuri food can be traced back to the agriculturist and pastoralist communities of Bhojpur, who needed high protein food filled with carbohydrates to work long hours in the burning sun. This cuisine is rich with flavours, loaded with spices, and can be connected with some of the food from the Magadh Kingdom, of which Bihar used to be a part. Like every other cuisine, Bhojpuri cuisine did not develop in isolation and many of its ingredients, cooking techniques and variations can be traced back to Mughlai and Awadhi cuisine. Some important dishes include Litti Chokha, Sattu ka Sherbet, Thekua, Roasted Tamatar ki Chutney.

People who Fascinate

Veer Kunwar Singh
(1777-1858)

Veer Kunwar Singh was one of the most prominent individuals to emerge from Bhojpur, who had a significant role to play in the course of the Revolt of 1857 (hence the name *Veer,* meaning brave, added as a prefix to his name in various sources).

Abdul Bari
(b. 1884)

Abdul Bari was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and a well-known participant of the struggle to liberate India from British control.

Pandit Hargovind Mishra

One of the prime leaders during the freedom struggle, he coordinated the movement.

Harnandan Singh

Affectionately referred to as Vakeel Babu, he was another active participant of the freedom struggle. His two prominent roles were to lead the Arrah Assembly in 1937 and working with Gandhi during his Non-Cooperation Movement.

Jagjivan Ram
(1908-1986)

Affectionately referred to as Babuji, he was a freedom fighter who later became a Member of Parliament and a member of the Cabinet under Jawaharlal Nehru. He was one of the first among members of the Dalit community to receive a higher education at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, at Kolkata (1928) and Lahore (1929).

Ram Subhag Singh

Ram Subhag Singh organized some of the mass protests during the freedom movement and was sent to jail in 1943. During his sentence, he was repeatedly assaulted by the prison authorities.

Bashishth Narayan Singh

Bashisth Narayan Singh, noted math-

Aranya Devi Temple

ematician and scholar who became well-known in this field internationally also belonged to the region.

Monuments *that* Matter

Tarari Sun Temple

Located in Dev Gaon in Tarari Block, this site contains a statue of Surya, the Sun God, alongside several other deities. These statues can be traced back to the 14th century and possibly even earlier.

Aranya Devi Temple

Located at Arrah, this temple is dedicated to Aranya, the Forest Goddess, who is said to grant the wishes of her devotees. It is believed that this temple also contained the idol of *Adishakti* at one point in time, who instructed Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava, that he should construct a temple dedicated to Aranya here. Other idols were installed in the temple over time. For instance, by 1953, the idols of Ram, Lakshman, Sita, Bharata, Shatrughan and Hanuman were placed inside the complex.

Shahi Masjid

This is the second five *Gumbad Masjid* in India constructed by Shah Jahan in 1623 CE. The *Masjid* is located near the Aranya Devi Temple.

Maulabagh Karbala

This *Masjid* was constructed sometime around 1817 with the aid of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar Shah II. It is located at Maula Bagh Muhalla at Arrah.

Mahthin Mai Temple

Located in the village of Bihiya, this temple in particular witnesses a larger proportion of female devotees compared to male ones.

Nature's Abundance

Bhojpur falls in the South Bihar Alluvial Plain Zone with the major soils being sandy soil, coarse sandy loam soil, fine sandy loam soil, clayey soil and calcareous soil *(NICRA-ICAR, 2013).* Agriculture is the dominant source of livelihood for residents as the district is almost plain, with fertile soils and river waters for irrigation.

The common tree species in the region included – Mango, *Peepal*, Banyan, *Neem* and *Semal* among which *Peepal* and Banyan were also found associated with various religious sites. Gangetic Dolphins, Blackbuck, Turtles, Nilgai and Wildboar are commonly sighted along with a variety of avifaunal species.

The *diaras* along the river

Gundi Village, Barhara Tehsil

Holy Saviour Churh, Arrah

channel, including the prominent Sheo Diara, are extensively used as agricultural and grazing lands.

Bhagar Oxbow Lake

This is the largest water body of Bhojpur district with an area of about 527 Ha and a length of 16 km. The water from this lake serves as an important source of irrigation for surrounding agricultural fields. Fishing is an important activity in this lake and the major fish caught here are Rohu, *Garai, Buari* and *Tilapia*. According to the interlocutors, these fish resources enter the lake during monsoon through flood waters of Ganga and Dharmawati rivers.

Another major wetland is the lake at Nathmalpur Village while the region has a total of 104 wetlands.

The right bank of Ganga is severely eroded near Baluwa village.

Boats Used for Sand Mining Near Koilwar Bridge

Pokhara at Gundi Village

Red Naped Ibis

Part of Oxbow Lake Near Suhiya Village

CHAPTER 33

SARAN

Land that gave India its First President

Bihar

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Saran

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Saran is one of the thirty-eight districts of Bihar, situated in its western part. It is also known as Chapra district after its headquarters at Chapra town. The district occupies a total geographical area of 2641 sq km. It is divided into 3 sub-divisions: Marhaura, Chapra Sadar and Sonepur which are further sub-divided into 20 community development blocks and 1783 villages. The district is bounded on the south by Ganga River. Gandak River forms the boundary in the east separating it from Vaishali and Muzzafarpur Districts while Ghaghra River bounds this district in the west separating it from Ballia.

Saran is shaped roughly like a triangle with its apex at the junction of the east flowing Ganga with the Gandak flowing in from the north-west. The area has rich and fertile alluvial plains with several depressions and marshes. The district has three broad geomorphic divisions: the alluvial plains along major rivers, the region of uplands away from the river and the diara areas in the beds of rivers Ganga, Gandak and Ghaghra. The district is part of the Lower Ganga Basin with the perennial rivers Ganga, Ghaghra and Gandak governing its drainage system.

Downstream of its confluence with Ghaghra River near Sitab Diara in Ballia District of Uttar Pradesh, Ganga River enters Saran District of Bihar and flows past the town

of Chapra. Thereafter, it flows eastwards for a distance of about 44 km, forming the southern boundary of this district separating it from Bhojpur and Patna Districts. Further ahead, it confluences with another important tributary, Gandak River flowing from northern direction near Sonepur. This confluence of Gandak-Ganga also forms the point where Ganga River exits Saran and enters Vaishali District. Between these two confluences, the river is braided into different channels due to presence of irregularly shaped diaras and sand bars. Ganga along with Gandak and Ghaghra Rivers swell up during monsoons which also serves as an important recharge source for the aquifers in the study region. Ganga River has shifted its course in the district as mentioned in the District Gazetteer and as evident from the spatio-temporal variations mapped over almost a century.

Erosion Prone Bank of Gandak River

Re-living *the* Past

Historical records begin to emerge with the rise of the Mahajanapadas of India, as sources indicate that Saran formed the eastern boundary of Kosala. There are some Buddhist myths about this region at this time which some scholars have dismissed as ridiculous but must be mentioned. The village of Chirand supposedly marks the origin of the ancient city of Vaishali, which Buddha visited frequently; and Siwan is said to have been built completely identical to Kushinagara, the site of Buddha's death.

Accounts of travellers like Hieun Tsang corroborate the evidence that Saran formed a part of the Chenchu Kingdom (Ghazipur) by the 7th century CE. He described various stupas that had been constructed over time in this region, the most significant one being the Saran Stupa or Asylum Stupa (Saran literally means asylum, another possible explanation behind the district's etymology) built by Ashoka to commemorate Buddha's conversion of the cannibalistic tribes (described as demons in the story).

The earliest authentic physical evidence located at Saran is an inscribed copper plate at Dighwa Dubauli (District Gopalgunj). This is a land grant which records the grant of a village called Paniyaka in the Shravasti country by Maharaja Mahendrapala Paldevas, a religious donation to enhance the status of his parents. This artefact can be traced back to 761/762 CE, and Mahendrapala's capital was either at Shravasti or Benares, and his kingdom extended from Benares in the south to Shravasti in the north, from Allahabad in the west to Saran in the east.

Ghiyasuddin Shah Khalji, the governor of Bengal in the early 13th century, began a long-drawn-out war against the Raja of Tirhut, which lasted from 1211 to 1226. Ghiyasuddin emerged victorious and Tirhut was forced to offer an annual tribute to the Sultanate. By the late 13th century, Nasiruddin Bughra Khan, and his son Muizud din Qaiqabad were embroiled in a

Inscriptions from Chirand and different regions state that it was during his reign that the whole of North Bihar was formally annexed and became a part of the Bengal Sultanate

succession dispute, and their armies met on the banks of the Ghagra. Fortunately, no blood was shed on the battlefield as a truce was negotiated between both parties. According to the terms of the treaty, Nasiruddin gave up his claim over the Delhi Sultanate but reserved the right to rule over Bengal as an autonomous kingdom.

By the mid-14th century Saran acknowledged the suzerainty of the first independent Sultan from Bengal, Ilyas Shah, after he invaded and sacked Tirhut, entered several prolonged conflicts with the Delhi Sultanate at the border region and built a fortress at Hajipur to consolidate his conquests.

There was a gap of a century of the Bengal Sultanate's hold over the region as it was taken away from them by the Kings of Jaunpur, until eventually it came back under their control during the reign of Alaudin Husain Shah. Inscriptions from Chirand and different regions state that it was during his reign that the whole of North Bihar was formally annexed and became a part of the Bengal Sultanate. By 1499 he ceded this region to Sikandar Lodi after he vanquished Jaunpur and signed a treaty at Barh which stated that Lodi held control over Bihar, Tirhut, Saran and all adjacent regions provided he did not invade Bengal. At this time, Saran was ruled locally by different Hindu zamindars, and in a bid to break up their power Lodi assigned several jagirdari assignments to his trusted officers. According to the source Wakiat-i-Mushtaki, Mian Hussain Khan Farmuli was appointed as the jagirdar of Saran and Champaran (earlier called Jalkhet, or field of water). Described as a religious fanatic, Hussain Khan confiscated over twenty-thousand villages under the control of zamindars, adding them all to his jagir.

Saran formally became a territory of the Mughal Empire in 1574 after Akbar defeated the Afghans led by the Bengal Sultan Daud Khan and captured Patna. An Afghan chief, Kabul Muhammad of Barharia, was earlier given control over Saran but was later killed. Saran now fell in the hands of Jubraj Sahi, one of the first rulers of the Hathwa Raj Dynasty, who was given the Sipah Pargana as a grant by Akbar. Saran now became one of the six sarkars, forming the subah of Bihar. The formal revenue assessment of this region was conducted by Akbar's Finance Minister, Todar Mal, in 1582.

Saran did not have any other major historical events until the spread of European traders in India, with the Dutch East India Company establishing a depot and a refinery at Chapra in 1666 for saltpetre, which they exported by ships sailing up the Hooghly River. This refinery was reported to have been burned down in 1711 by a group of rebels.

Shia Masjid, Chhapra

The British decided to make their presence felt in the region in 1757, when a small army led by Eyre Coote arrived in Saran as they were on the hunt for Monsieur Law, a man who propagated Siraj-ud-Daula's right to rule Bengal. They reached Chapra on August 4th, and found out that Law had already fled to Benares; so Eyre held a Council of War in the region to decide on their next course of action. As supplies dwindled and the men fell sick due to the concentration of saltpetre in the soil, they finally decided that the best course of action would be to return to their base at Patna.

The second instance of British troops arriving at Saran was in 1763 after Ellis, the Agent at Patna, attempted to capture the district as a security measure when he believed that there was soon to be a conflict with Nawab Mir Qasim Ali. Hearing of this advance, the Nawab sent his troops to the region and pushed back the British soldiers, forcing them to take refuge in a factory. As supplies began to dwindle, the British concluded that the safest course of action would be to ask the Nawab of Awadh for aid and shelter. On August 29th they crossed the Ganga and marched towards Chapra, fending off the Nawab's pursuing troops, all the while battling the elements of heavy rain and floods. Unbeknownst to the British, Mir Qasim's general, Somru led a contingent across Buxar in advance to intercept the British, who got as far as Manjhi before being fully surrounded by Somru and Ram Nidi's (Faujadar of Saran) troops. Thus began the Battle of Manjhi on July 1st, 1763, where the British troops under Captain Carstairs suffered a miserable defeat. In the aftermath of the battle, many of the sepoys switched sides and pledged allegiance to Mir Qasim, while those who did not, had their weapons and supplies taken away. A few of the European soldiers switched sides as well, some managed to escape during the battle, and the rest were taken to Patna where they were executed. Saran was eventually conquered by the British the very next year, after Shuja-ud-daula had been driven away from Patna by Major Carnac.

After the Battle of Buxar (1785), Saran officially became a part of the lower provinces of Bengal.

Mythological Links

The history of Saran can be traced by referring to its myths and legends, which describe the Videhas' occupation of the region. Literary texts describe this tribe as having marched eastwards from the Saraswati River until they reached the banks of the Gandak, where they were informed by Agni (God of Fire) that their true home was waiting to the east of the Gandak. Following his directions, the Videhas crossed the river and established their kingdom on the eastern bank. Some members of the tribe, not keen on continuing the journey, settled in Saran, which was on the way.

It is generally believed that Saran was occupied by aboriginal tribes like the Cheros, based on archaeological remains like mounds and the remains of fortifications, who were eventually driven out of the region by Aryan invaders. Others believe they were removed from their position of power by Rajput forces, expanding their power in this region. The latter point has more reliable evidence, family records of the Harihobans Rajput of Haldi (located in the adjoining district Ballia) states that their ancestors had settled themselves at Manjhi on the banks of the Ghagra in this region after a lengthy struggle against the Cheros.

Events *of* Interest

Sonepur Cattle Fair

The fair is held on Kartik Poornima (the full moon day) in the month of November-December in Sonepur, Bihar, at the confluence of river Ganga and Gandak. It is also known as Harihar Kshetra Mela and it attracts visitors from all over Asia. Till date, it is the biggest cattle fair of Asia and stretches from fifteen days up to one month. It has its origins in ancient times. This is when Chandragupta Maurya (340 - 297 BCE) used to buy elephants and horses from across the river Ganga. The Sonepur Cattle Fair once used to attract traders from places as distant as Central Asia. Originally, the venue of the fair was Hajipur and only the performance of the puja used to take place at the Harihar Nath Temple

The Battle of Manjhi started on July 1st, 1763, where the British troops under Captain Carstairs were defeated. In the aftermath of the battle, many of the sepoys switched sides and pledged allegiance to Mir Qasim

of Sonepur. However, under the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the venue of the fair got shifted to Sonepur. The temple of Harihar Nath is believed to have been originally built by Lord Rama, on his way to the court of King Janaka to win the hand of Mata Sita. It is further said that Raja Man Singh later got the temple repaired. The Harihar Nath temple, as it stands today, was built by Raja Ram Narain, an influential person during the late Mughal period.

Since Sonepur is situated at the confluence of the sacred rivers Ganga and Gandak, Hindus regard it as a holy site. One of the purposes of the people visiting the Sonepur Cattle Fair, apart from the fair, is to take a holy dip at the convergence and pay respects at the Hariharnath Temple. .

It is generally believed that Saran was occupied by aboriginal tribes like the Cheros, based on archaeological remains like mounds and the remains of fortifications

People who Fascinate

Dr. Rajendra Prasad

(1884-1963)

A lawyer, journalist, President of the Indian National Congress (1934, 1939 and 1947), and the first President of India after independence, Rajendra Prasad was one of the most prominent figures to emerge during the Independence movement, taking part in some of the most important events like the Non-Cooperation Movement. One of the campaigns he strove to achieve was to get Hindi recognized as the national language of India.

Rajendra Prasad wrote several books over time, including his autobiography Atmakatha (1946), India Divided (1946), and Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar, Some Reminiscences (1949). For his lifetime of achievements and contributions, he was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1962, India's highest civilian award.

Jaiprakash Narayan

(1902-1979)

A prominent Indian politician and political theorist, Jaiprakash Narayan received his higher education in America, where he was introduced to Marxist thought. When he returned to India in 1929, he joined the Indian National Congress and took part in several movements over the course of the freedom struggle. For his involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement, he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1932, and upon his release he co-founded the Congress Socialist Party, a left-wing group within the overarching frame of the Indian National Congress. He was imprisoned once more for protesting Indian troops' participation in World War II but managed to escape from the prison. While on the run, he tried to organize a violent movement against the British but was recaptured in 1943. He was released in 1946, and he began to appeal to the Congress leaders to adopt a more militant policy against British rule. Tired of the Congress' moderate policies, he, along with most of the Congress Socialists, left the party and in 1952 founded the Praja Socialist Party. J. P. Narayan became dissatisfied with party politics entirely by 1954, and became involved in the Bhoodan Movement (founded by Vinobha Bhave), which campaigned for the distribution of land among the landless. While he may have left party politics, he did not leave the political arena entirely as he advocated for a four-tier hierarchy of village, district, state, and union councils in 1959, as a means of reconstructing the Indian polity. In 1975, he led the Sampoorna Kranti Movement to dislodge the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Bhikari Thakur

(1887-1971)

Bhikari Thakur is arguably one of the most prominent luminaries from Saran. A poet, playwright, lyricist, actor, folk dancer, folk singer, social activist, and considered to be the greatest writer from Bhojpur, his skill accorded him the reputation of Shakespeare of Bhojpuri and Rai Bahadur. Throughout his life, he wrote as many as 29 books, including popular plays like Bidesiya, Beti-Viyog, Vidhva-Vilap, Ganga-Snan,

Gabarghichor and Kaliyug-Prem, and composed songs and *kirtans* like Shiv-Vivah, Ramlila-Gaan, Budhshalake Beyan, and Shanka Samadhan. One of his lasting legacies was establishing an oft repeated style in films, called Bidesiya (focusing on the lives of ordinary people in folk culture), a concept based on the name of his most significant play. This style uses elements from folk tradition and theatre, like *nautanki* and *tamasha*.

Ramchandra Manjhi

(b. 1925)

Recipient of the 2017 Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the 2021 Lok Theatre and Padmashri Award, Ramchandra Manjhi is one of the most prolific artists to ever grace the stages of traditional Indian theatre. Born in Chapra, he is the sole surviving artist from the troupe organized by Bhikhari Thakur. A versatile actor, he is best known as a *Launda Naach* actor. This form of theatre involves comedy, satire, musical and dance numbers, and its distinctive characteristic is that men impersonate women characters in a performance which goes on till the wee hours. The oeuvre of this performance is generally traced through oral sources back to the 11th century, and today it can be seen performed mainly in Bhojpuri circuits during celebrations like Chhath Puja. Some of his most well-known plays include Gabarghichor, Beti Bechawa, Gunga Snan, Krishna Leela, Vidhawa Vilaap, Nanad-Bhaujai, Putr-Vadh, Bhai-Virodh, and Piya-Nisaeel.

Dharni Das

(1646-1688)

A Ramanandi saint and Bhojpuri poet from Chapra, he is credited with raising the standard of Bhojpuri literature. He was born as Gaibi into a Kayastha family and was a contemporary of Aurangzeb. His followers are generally referred to as *Dharnidasis*. They wear a beaded string around the neck, chant his *bhajans*, and abstain from eating meat. There is a popular myth regarding how he ascended to sainthood. One day, as he was working, he poured a pot of water on some sacred scriptures belonging to his landlord. When his landlord demanded to know why he had damaged his texts, Dharni Das responded that he could see that the God Jagannath was being burned and so he poured water on the texts to save him. His landlord discovered that he was not lying, and so he was elevated to the status of a saint.

Panch Mandir, Chhapra

Neolithic Tools Found at Chirand

Monuments *that* Matter

Dhorh Ashram

Situated north of Parsagarh, this site contains a treasure trove of artefacts. On the banks of the river Gandaki, the remains of an ancient temple dedicated to Dhadheswar Nath can be found alongside a giant Shiva *lingam*.

Gautam Asthan

The Ashram of Gautam Rishi, located 5 km west of Chapra, is a space of peace and solace.

Silhauri

Located about 26 km north of Chapra, it is believed that this is the place where Indra and Yamraja undertook a test organized by King Shivi, as described in the Shiva Purana and Ramcharitamanas.

Chirand

Situated 11 km of southeast of Chapra near Doriganj Bazaar at the northern bank of the Ghagra, this site has undergone several excavations which have revealed artefacts dating back to the Neolithic Period. This discovery was made in the 1970s in the low-lying plains region, affected by the monsoon climate.

Dutch Mausoleum

Bengali Baba Ghat

During the survey a sacred Ghat along Ganga River, known popularly as Bengali Baba Ghat by the local residents was located in Chirand Village. Upon interaction, the interlocutors reiterated that a saint from Bengal had migrated here in 1962 and practiced penance on the bank of Ganga River. The saint also established a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva which soon became a popular site for religious activities in this region. Upon his death, the Ghat came to be known as Bengali Baba Ghat and is thronged by numerous visitors, especially on auspicious occasions and festivities such as Shivratri and Chhath Puja. A fair is also organized at this site on Kartik Purnima and Makar Sankranti.

Revelganj

Situated on the Chapra-Ghazipur National Highway, this area contains several important temples like the Srinath Temple. On the eve of Kartik Purnima, a month-long fair called Godhna Semaria is organized annually.

Boats Engaged in Sand Mining Near Dariganj

Nature's Abundance

Saran district falls in the North West Alluvial Plain Zone with the major soils being alluvial saline soil, alluvial soils, heavy clay soils with sodicity and light sandy soils (NICRA-ICAR, 2013). Agriculture is the major source of income and it is benefitted by the fertile alluvium brought by Ganga River and its tributaries. This region is an important hub for *parwal* cultivation which is a popular vegetable throughout Bihar.

There are 173 wetlands in the district of which Rajendra Sarowar, Jatahi Pokhara and Brahma Baba Pokhara are well known.

the riparian vegetation has a patchy distribution along the district with it being dense in few places and sparse in most. Shrubs and herbs are dominant in terms of growth and extent of distribution as compared to the trees. The common tree species in the district include Mango, *Peepal*, Banyan, *Neem* and *Bel Patra* among which *Peepal* and Banyan are associated with various religious sites. The commonly found shrubs and herbs in the study region are *Croton bonplandianus, Parthenium hysterophorus* and *Zizyphus sp.* The floodplain grass, *Saccharum sps.,* is a major component of riparian vegetation throughout with its luxuriance dominating the other flora at some sites.

Gangetic Dolphins, Blackbuck, Turtles, Nilgai and Wildboar are commonly sighted along with a variety of avifaunal species.

A dumbbell shaped riverine island between the Ganga-Sone and Ganga-Gandak confluences is the biggest *diara* in the district. It has dense settlements with most residents involved in agriculture as their chief source of occupation followed by fisheries and sand mining. Crops such as mustard, maize, rice, wheat and different vegetables are grown on this *diara*. Boats are used to commute from this *diara* towards Saran district as well as pontoon bridges are laid during non-monsoon period. Saccharum grassses are widely collected in dried form for thatching roofs and making boundaries on agricultural fields.

The boats used for fishing are small sized and hand-rowed made chiefly from '*Sakhua/Sal*' wood (*Shorea robusta)* which is available from the market. These boats were earlier mainly constructed using the raw materials available in the villages by local Mallah community members.

The natives tell that Hilsa fish, which was once available in the Ganga river in the district was no longer seen since the last few decades. Similarly another fish – Silver carp was also absent from the catch but was known in the region till about a decade ago.

Ramchandra Manjhi is one of the most prolific artists to ever grace the stages of traditional Indian theatre

Rajendra Sarovar

Rajendra Sarovar is believed to be one of the oldest water bodies in the district. It is said that this pond was built by the British officers and was revamped post-independence. It was named after the then President of India – Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who inaugurated this revamped pond and dedicated to the residents of this town.

Jatahi Pokhara

Jatahi Pokhara is a natural wetland spanning over an area of 4.23 Ha. It derives its name owing to a small Shiva temple along its bank which is believed to be quite old. It used to be an important source of water for the local residents.

Brahm Baba Pokhara

Brahm Baba Pokhara is a asmall pond with an old Shiva temple and a sacred Banyan tree associated with it. It is claimed that this pond is sacred and the local residents do not kill any fish in it.

Wildscape on Riverine Island Providing Wildlife Habitat

Small Wooden Boats Used For Fishing

Rajendra Sarovar

CHAPTER 34

PATNA

Ancient Patliputra

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Patna

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Patna district is situated in the heart of South Bihar alluvial plain. It is bounded by the Ganga River on the north, beyond which lie the districts of Saran, Vaishali and Samastipur; Lakhisarai and Begusarai in the east, and Arwal, Jahanabad and Nalanda in the south. It is administratively divided into six divisions Paliganj, Masaurhi, Patna Sadar, Patna City, Danapur and Barh. The entire district forms a part of the Gangetic Plain characterized by alluvial formations. The ground level of Patna forms a gradient away from the Ganga River and the topography of the city resembles a saucer.

The headquarters is Patna City which has also served as the capital of Bihar state since 1911. It is an ancient city with its history thriving across the ancient, medieval and colonial period. The city has a long river line surrounded on three sides by rivers Ganga, Son and Punpun. The river Gandak flows into the river Ganga from the north making it a unique place having four rivers in its vicinity to the north of Patna.

RE-LIVING *the* PAST

Tabqat-i-Nasiri mentions Tirhut (North Bihar) and Bihar (South Bihar) as two separate po-

Gandhi Setu Connecting Patna and Vaishali Districts

Fragments of pillar from old Patliputra found at Kumhrar Archaeological Park

litical regions in the first half of the thirteenth century when Bhakhtiyar Khilji carved his own principality in Bengal. Bihar first appeared as a single province for some time under Ghias-ud-din Tughlaq in 1324, but this excluded Bhagalpur and Monghyer (Munger).

The city of Patna, is much older and was established in the 5th century in times of the Magadh *Mahajanapada*. It was then known as Pataliputra, the greatest city of India, during the Gupta Period. Patna has always been the centre of power, learning and culture. The district is spread along the banks of river Ganga and has the Sone and Punpun rivers flowing along the width of the district to meet Ganga at Maner and Fathwa respectively. The history of the region dates way back to Pre-historic period. The Ganga Valley region is known to have shown signs of human settlement since Stone-Age Period. The evolution of the region unfolded over multiple layers of history, from the Magadha, Maurya and Gupta period to its downfall during the Kannauj rule and then being the trade and commercial capital of India.

Due to the strategic location of the city on the banks of river Ganga, the *diara* land was best suited for cultivation. Patna became a base of the East India Company which traded in rice, cotton, textile, saltpetre and indigo. The Company set up factories and also civic administration when Patna became a district in 1793. The river was the primary mode of transportation and trade which attracted rulers to establish their base in Patna which was the confluence of many rivers. The fertile countryside provided many a produce for trade. Following the partition of the Bengal Presidency in 1912, Patna became the capital of Bihar and Orissa Provinces which led to a further elevation in its stature. Each time period has left a mark on the city thus making it what we see today.

During the Mughal period, the city was under the rule of Asim-us-Shan, the grandson of Aurangzeb, who named the city Azimabad. Later, during the British company rule, the city was again called Patna. The origin of the name has two versions: according to one, Patna means city par excellence, and according to another, it is adopted from the name of a Hindu goddess Patan Devi.

The archaeological significance of Patna dates back to 3rd and 4th century BCE when the Magadh Empire founded the city of Pataliputra. The significant archaeological site and their findings are as follows:

- The exploration of Kumrahar

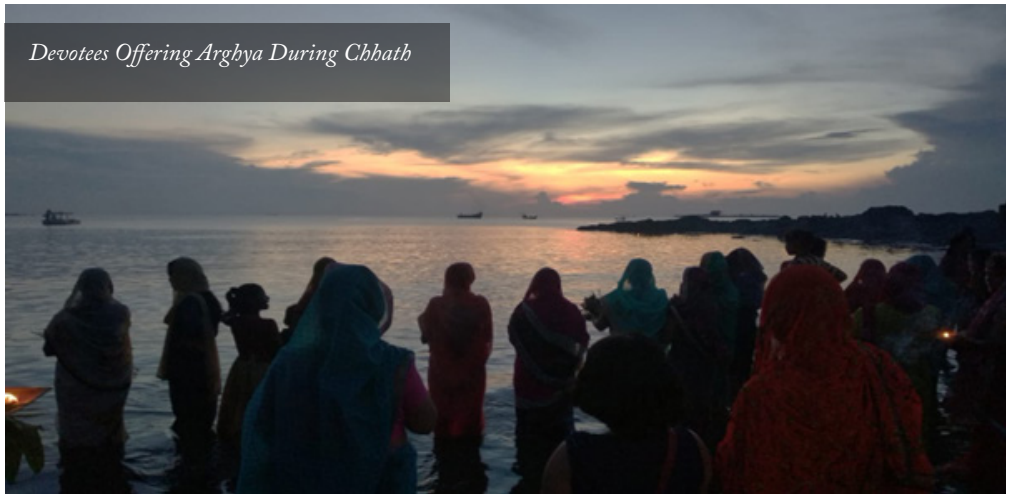
Archaeological Park was the archaeological treasure of Patna. Remains from the Mauryan Period were found in the form of Ashoka's 84 pillared palatial hall, the *stupas* and remains of Pataliputra's protective boundary walls.

- Artifacts and coins from the Sunga and Kushana Period were also found here. Another important discovery was of the brick *Vihara* from the Gupta Period.
- Bulandibagh excavations also revealed the monumental Pataliputra capital and wooden palisades that formed the protective city walls.
- Similar excavations at Mangal Talab provided further evidences and also the expanse of the historic city in the form of more wooden palisades that formed the protective city walls.
- Another excavation near the Qadami-i-Rasul mosque revealed the famed sculpture of Didarganj Yakshi, from the Maurya Period.

Events *of* Interest

Chhath

Chhath is a Vedic ritual dedicated to Hindu solar deity Surya, and goddess Shashthi (also called *Chhathi Maiyya*). It has also been mentioned in both the major Indian epics—in Ramayana, when Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya, then people celebrated



Devotees Offering Arghya During Chhath

Deepawali and on its sixth day *Ramrajya* was established. On this day Rama and Sita kept fast and *Surya Shashthi*/ Chhath Puja was performed by Sita. Hence, she was blessed with Luv and Kush as their sons. In the Mahabharata, Chhath Puja was performed by Draupadi after Pandavas escaped from Lakshagrih. The main worshippers, called *parvaitin* (from Sanskrit *parv*, meaning occasion or festival), are usually women. However, many men also observe this festival as Chhath is not a gender-specific festival. The *parvaitin* pray for the well-being of their family, and for the prosperity of their offspring. In some communities, once a family member starts performing Chhath Puja, it is their compulsory duty to perform it every year and to pass it on to the following generations. The festival is skipped only if there happens to be a death in the family that year. If the person stops performing the ritual on any particular year, it stops permanently and one cannot resume it.

The *prasad* offerings include sweets, Kheer, Thekua and fruit (mainly sugarcane, sweet lime and banana) offered in small bamboo *soop* winnows. The food is strictly vegetarian and is cooked without salt, onions or garlic. Emphasis is put on maintaining the purity of the food.

This day is spent preparing the *prasad* (offerings) at home. On the eve of this day, the entire household accompanies the *vratins* to a riverbank, pond or a common large water body to make the offerings (*Arghya*) to the setting sun and again to the rising sun the next morning. It is during this phase of Chhath Puja that the devotees offer prayers to the setting sun. The occasion is almost a carnival. Besides the *vratins*, there are friends and family, and numerous participants and onlookers, all willing to help and receive the blessings of the worshippers. Folk songs are sung on the evening of Chhath.

Boat Making Near Haldi Chhapra

Art *at the* Heart

Some members of local communities are involved in boat making activity at Haldi Chhapra area near Sone-Ganga confluence in Patna District. Upon interacting, they revealed that most of the boats constructed by them were large-sized and made from metal alloys (mainly comprising of iron). According to them, the main reason for this is the low cost involved as compared to the wooden boats and the weight of boats is suitable for carrying heavier loads (mainly sand/silt). The locals procure the raw material from factories nearby and involve welders from neighbouring villages for construction of these boats. Along with these, some boats were also made of wood but have smaller sizes when compared to metal boats. The wood of Sekua tree (*Shorea robusta*) is the chief raw material involved in construction of wooden boats.

Biharis seem to have a sweet tooth. They turned the plain old vegetable like Parwal/ Patol (pointed gourd) into a popular sweet dish of Bihar

Gastronomic Delights

The lip-smacking taste of Litti Chokha, savoured by one and all, needs no introduction. It is your grand welcome to the food of Bihar, in all its *ghee*-dripping glory. It consists of wheat and *sattu* with spices, kneaded into round spicy balls, dipped in *ghee*. The texture of Litti along with the crunchy crust makes it a foodie's delight. Chokha is prepared by mashing boiled vegetables (most common being potatoes, brinjal, tomatoes), adding spices and chopped onion, garlic etc. and served with Litti as a complimentary delicacy. *Sattu* or fried gram flour forms a distinctive element of Bihari food and cuisine. *Sattu* is mixed with spices and filled in wheat dough balls, rolled and cooked with *ghee* on a hot plate to form Sattu Paratha which is also called Makuni.

Very similar to Gujia, Chandrakala is another heavenly dessert for those with a sweet tooth. Stuffed with sweetened *khoya*, coconut, cardamom powder and dry fruits in a crispy covering and dipped in sugar-syrup. Chandrakala is a dish from the traditional food of Bihar that is enough to sweeten your senses.

Chana Ghughni is a spicy-tangy evening snack item from the food of Bihar. Extremely common yet equally delicious, this mouth-watering snack is prepared in almost every household of Bihar. Boiled chickpeas, fried with onion and spices along with *Chuda ka Bhuja* (flattened rice) makes it a perfect answer to satisfy your hunger!

Dal Peetha is the Bihari way to cook dumplings or momos. This quintessential food of Bihar is covered with rice flour and stuffed with lentil paste, along with spices and pickle. The dumpling is then steamed or fried and makes for a very healthy breakfast. Another variant of this is when the lentil paste is mixed with

spices and rolled into chapatis and is called Dal-Puri. Khajuria is the most commonly prepared snack of Bihari food.

One can also use rice flour instead of wheat flour and sugar instead of jaggery to make different varieties. Malpua is another Bihari food delight that needs no introduction. Its batter is a mixture of flour, milk, mashed bananas and sugar which is deep fried in ghee and dipped in sugar syrup. The crispy crust and soft centre melts in mouth, making it all-time favourite delicacy of Bihar. Malpuas are also complimented with thick Rabdi, only to add to the taste.

Biharis sure seem to have a sweet tooth. They turned the plain old vegetable like *Parwal/Patol* (pointed gourd) into a sweet dish of the favourite food of Bihar. The inner pulp of the Parwal is scooped out, boiled, dipped in syrup and filled with sweet *khoya* preparation. The end result looks as royal as it tastes. Rice flour and Jaggery come together to create this beautiful Bihari food dish that is found all year long. It is then coated in sesame seeds and fried over medium heat until it achieves the perfect shade of red. Bite into an Anarsa and soak in the sweet treat that awaits you.

People who Fascinate

Some of the greats from Patna have been Aryabhatta, great mathematician-astronomer, Ashoka, Indian

Dutch Administrator Berner's Kothi

Inner Sanctum of Harihar Nath Temple

Silver Punch Mark Coin, Mauryan Empire, 3rd century

Jalan Museum

Golghar

Emperor of the Maurya Dynasty and Samudragupta, third ruler of the Gupta Dynasty hailed from Patna. Chanakya, teacher, philosopher, and royal advisor and Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan Empire were also from here. Guru Gobind Singh, tenth of the ten Sikh Gurus, spent his childhood in the city. Moggaliputta-Tissa, Buddhist monk and scholar also came from this city.

Amongst the nationalists and freedom fighters were Bindeshwari Dubey, freedom fighter and former Chief Minister of Bihar, Indradeep Sinha, freedom fighter and communist leader and Jagannath Sarkar, leader, freedom fighter, and writer.

Aryabhatta

He was an astronomer and mathematician from the Gupta period, credited with the discovery of the zero, its position in the place value system and many other phenomena. He was born in Pataliputra, modern day Patna and completed his education there, and proposed that the Earth spins on its axis. His seminal work Aryabhatiya contains quadratic equations and table of sines. He also explained lunar and solar eclipses besides giving speeds of different planets in relation to the sun. His findings have been quoted by mathematicians and astronomers over the centuries.

Guru Gobind Singh

Guru Gobind Singh was a spiritual leader, poet, warrior and philosopher and the tenth Sikh Guru. He was born in Patna in 1666. The Harmandir Sahib in Patna also called the Patna Sahib was built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and marks the site where he was born and spent the first four years of his life. He founded the *Khalsa* community of Sikhism and introduced the 5 Ks which are essential for a Sikh.

Sir Khan Bahadur Khuda Bakhsh

Sir Khan Bahadur Khuda Bakhsh was an advocate, philosopher and historian who founded the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library of Patna. His father began an oriental library which he vowed to expand and set up a public library. He went on to collect rare manuscripts for the library which includes 35,000 manuscripts(21,000 Rare Manuscripts, 14,000 Small Manuscripts) in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish and Pashto

languages. Some of the notable manuscripts include Timur Nama (Khandan--Timuria), Shah Nama, Padshah Nama, Diwan-e-Hafiz and Safinatul Auliya, carrying the autograph of Mughal Emperors and princes, and the book of Military Accounts of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The library also has specimens of Mughal paintings, calligraphy and book decoration, and Arabic and Urdu manuscripts, including a page of Quran written on deer skin. It has a good collection of rare manuscripts including a page of the Holy Qur'an on parchment in Kufic script belonging to the 9th century AD, in addition to a collection of about forty Sanskrit manuscripts, written on palm leaf

Sahajanand Saraswati

A towering leader of the peasant movement in India, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati was born in Ghazipur but moved to and worked extensively in Bihta in Patna. He formed the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in 1929 to mobilize peasants for their occupancy rights against *Zamindars* and became the first president of the All India Kisan Sabha. He started the Baksht Movement in Bihar against the eviction of tenants by *zamindars* on self-cultivated or *baksht* lands which led to the passing of the Bihar Tenancy Act. He was arrested during the Quit India Movement and when news of his arrest broke out, leaders like Subhash Chandra Bose decided to observe 28th April as All-India Swami Sahajanand Day.

Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha

Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha, known as *Bihar Vibhuti*, was an Indian nationalist statesman, participant in Champaran Satyagraha, Gandhian and one of the architects of modern Bihar, who was the first Deputy Chief Minister and the Finance Minister of Bihar.

A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna was established by the Government of Bihar in memory of Dr. Anugrah Narayan Sinha. The research interest of the institute broadly focuses on development and change, with special reference to Bihar and the Eastern region.

Bindeshwar Pathak

Pathak is a sociologist and entrepreneur who started the Sulabh International to promote awareness and action in the field of sanitation and hygiene. He studied at the Patna College and has been conferred the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award for Excellence in Public Administration, Academics and Management and the Padma Bhushan.

Vikram Seth

Famous author Vikram Seth, best known for his epic novel, 'A Suitable Boy', spent his childhood in Patna where his father worked at the Bata Factory at Bataganj in Digha, Patna. He studied for a few years at the St. Michael's School and St. Xavier's School in Patna. He has been honoured with the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, Sahitya Akademi Award, Order of the British Empire and the Padma Shri.

From the **world** *of* **entertainment** *&* **cinema**

Patna has been home to film directors Imtiaz Ali and Prakash Jha, singer Daler Mehndi, actors Pankaj Tripathi, Sanjay Mishra, Roshan Seth, Sushant Singh Rajput, Vineet Kumar, Suhasini Mulay, Shatrughan Sinha and Shekhar Suman.

Monuments *that* Matter

Known as Pataliputra in ancient times, Patna boasts of an ancient legacy. The city, which was founded by the king of Magadha in 490 BCE, served as a cultural centre and the seat of learning and power under the Maurya and Gupta empires. Its rich legacy is mirrored through the many archaeological sites, monuments, religious centres, museums, and other historical places.

Golghar

Golghar may look like a Buddhist *stupa* but it was built to serve as a huge granary. Though constructed in 1786 as a protective measure against famine, the structure was never used for the intended purpose. Designed by Captain John Garstin under the orders of the then Governor General

Chhoti Dargah Jheel In Maner

of India Warren Hastings, Golghar is today one of the top tourist places in Patna. The pillar-less structure of Golghar resembles a beehive and has a spiral stairway around it with 145 steps, leading to the top of the dome. One can enjoy a splendid view of the Ganga, the surrounding garden area, and the city from the viewing area at the top of the dome. The inside of the granary, however, is not open to visitors.

Ruins *of* Pataliputra

The ruins of Patna's predecessor, Pataliputra, lie at a short distance from the city in an area called Kumrahar. During ancient times, Pataliputra was one of the greatest cities in the world that flourished under the rule of legendary kings like Chandragupta, Ajatshatru, and Ashoka. Today, one does not find much in this medieval city that points towards its illustrious past. Archaeological excavations have discovered remains of the Mauryan period from this site, making it one of the top historical places to visit in Patna. Ruins of a 80-pillared hall, a polished sandstone pillar, wooden platforms that support the stairway, Arogya Vihar, Durakh Devi Temple, and foundations of a brick Buddhist monastery called Anand Vihar are the key attractions here.

Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleucus Nicator, in his book 'Indica' (round 321 BC), wrote that Pataliputra was among the first cities in the world to have a highly efficient form of local self government.

Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited Pataliputra in 399 - 414 BCE, mentioned the elegant carving and inlay wood sculpture work of the buildings, *"in a way that no human hands of this world could accomplish."*

Agam Kuan

One of the oldest monuments in Patna, Agam Kuan dates back to the Mauryan period when King Ashoka ruled over the region. This 105-feet-deep well has a surface structure with eight arched windows. It is said that it was a part of Ashoka's infamous hell chambers used by him for torturing people before he embraced Buddhism. Throwing coins into this ancient well to get wishes fulfilled is a long-standing ritual practiced by visitors even today.

Patna & Bihar Museums

Patna Museum is a treasure trove of artifacts that are housed in a grand building, displaying a blend of Rajput and Mughal architecture. The museum, which started operating in 1917, is locally known as *Jadu Ghar,* translating to magic house. Among the main attractions of the museum is the fossil of a tree that is around 200 million years old and a casket that is believed to contain Gautama Buddha's ashes. Other exhibits at this site include British Raj paintings, works of Rajendra Prasad, musical instruments, and much more.

The Patna Museum is an contemporary architectural marvel and

Patna High Court

Gurudwara Takht Sri Harmnadir Sahib

houses some great treasures such as the Didarganj Yakshi, archaeological finds from the various periods of Bihar's history and works of great contemporary artistes. It has a special gallery for children and for crafts of Bihar.

The Patna Museum is an contemporary architectural marvel and houses some great treasures such as the Didarganj Yakshi, archaeological finds from the various periods of Bihar's history and works of great contemporary artistes

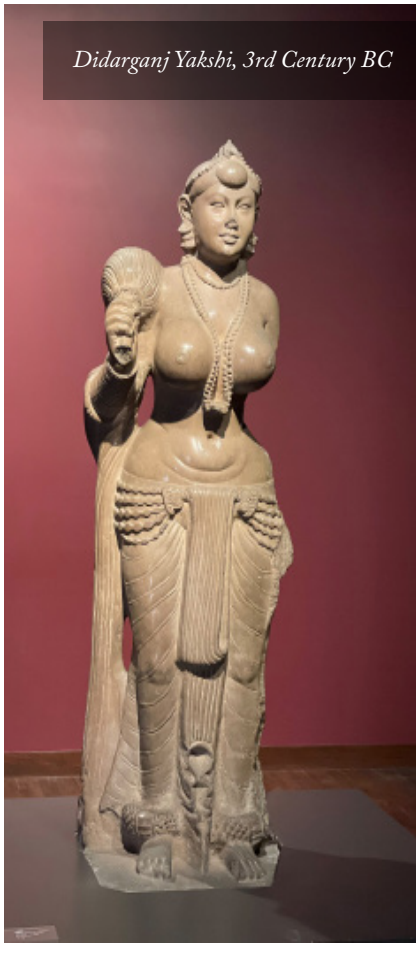
Takht Sri Harmandir Sahib

Harmandir Takht or Takht Sri Patna Saheb is a popular name among the pilgrimage sites in Patna. It is a Gurudwara built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to honour Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, who was born in Patna. This religious site attracts not just the Sikhs but tourists from across religions as well. While here, you can get a glimpse of several relics of Guru Gobind Singh, including weapons, four iron arrows, a cradle with gold-plated stands, and a pair of the guru's sandals.

Close by flows the Ganga where at Kangan Ghat, the Guru often went swimming as a child. Once he lost his *Kangan* or bracelet here. When questioned by his mother, he took her to the Ghat and to show where the bracelet had been lost, he tossed the other one too in the same direction, giving a lesson of not attaching any significance to material things. Guru Gobind Singh ji has professed his love for the Ganga in the holy book, Vichitar Natak.

Padri Ki Haveli

While talking about the historical buildings in Patna, one cannot miss out on Padri Ki Haveli – the first Catholic Church in Bihar. It stands on the same spot where a small church built by the first Roman Catholics in the city once stood. In 1722, the edifice was redesigned by the Venetian artist, Tirreto. Touted as one of the most revered churches in Patna, Padri



Didarganj Yakshi, 3rd Century BC

Ki Haveli is well-known for its splendid architecture, intricate details and the huge cathedral bell etched with inscriptions. An interesting point to note about this church is that Mother Teresa received her training here.

Jalan Museum

Jalan Museum, a wonderful museum in Patna, was established in 1919 by R.K. Jalan, an art collector, and a businessman. The museum is located inside the Quila House, which is a blend of Dutch and English architectural styles. The major exhibits at this museum include a rich collection of over 10,000 artifacts, many of which belong to the Mughal period. Among the unique attractions of Jalan Museum are the wooden bed of Napoleon III and Tipu Sultan's ivory palanquin.

Colonial Structures

The city of Patna is spread across three zones - ancient Pataliputra, colonial Patna and post-independence city spread. In view of the Ganga being the main transport artery, most of the important colonial structures are located on the river front. These include the Collectorate, Clubhouse, Patna University, Patna Medical College, Science College, Golghar, amongst others.

There are several *ghats* on the river, some of which are named after the cargo which landed or was exported from them. Thus, for eg., Patthar Ghat, Koyla Ghat, Mirchi Ghat, Adrak Ghat, Afeem Ghat, and many others.

Nature's Abundance

Patna district forms a part of the Gangetic plain characterized with alluvial formations. Traditionally soils in the area are divided into three groups on basis of deposition: Recent alluvium, Tal and Older Alluvium. The soils are predominantly sandy loam with clay loam.

While the tree cover was sparse to negligible in many riparian areas of the Distt., the shrubs and herbs were found to be growing more in number with the dominant species being – *Polygonum glabrum, Xanthium strumarium, Argemone mexicana* and *Rumex dentatus*.

The Ganga course has been shifting northwards towards Saran district and this might leave the Patna river front drier than before. Much riverbed dredging in this area to improve navigability is also causing damage to the benthic habitats in the river.

The biggest *diara* in Ganga River stretch of Patna district is Raghopur Diara which forms a part of Vaishali district as a community development block. Measuring about 30 kms long and 8-10 kms wide, this *diara* is situated between the two bifurcated streams of Ganga River. is connected with rest of the district through pontoon bridges which is used by the natives to access this island along with use of boats. Many residents of this *diara* practice agriculture including crops such as Mustard, Rice, *Chana* and Wheat.

Gangetic Dolphin

While the presence of Gangetic Dolphin was reiterated by the local communities throughout the district, the visual sightings were recorded near Pontoon Bridge at Kothiya (three) and near Sati Sthan, Barh (two). Upon

interacting with the fishermen, it was found that the sightings of dolphin is usually more during monsoon season and drops drastically during remaining time of the year.

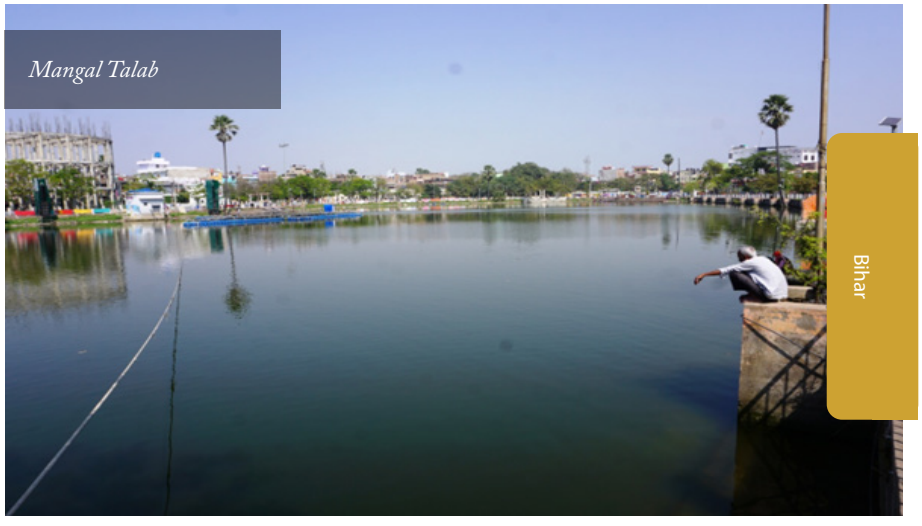
Chanda Oxbow Lake

This oxbow lake, spread over an area of 7.19 ha is an important source of fresh water for household activities including bathing and washing.

Mangal Talab

This is an important water body in Patna city and has a rich history associated with it. This historical Mangal Talab is a reservoir of fresh water having an area of about 4 ha and is believed to have been constructed in the year 1876 by the local Zamindar. During its construction, wooden planks were found from the excavated area which was later identified to be linked with the fortification walls of Mauryan Empire.

Residential Settlements on Raghopur Diara



Mangal Talab

Pontoon Bridge Connecting Raghopur diara to the Rest of Patna District

Chanda Oxbow Lake

CHAPTER 35

VAISHALI

The World's First Republic

Bihar

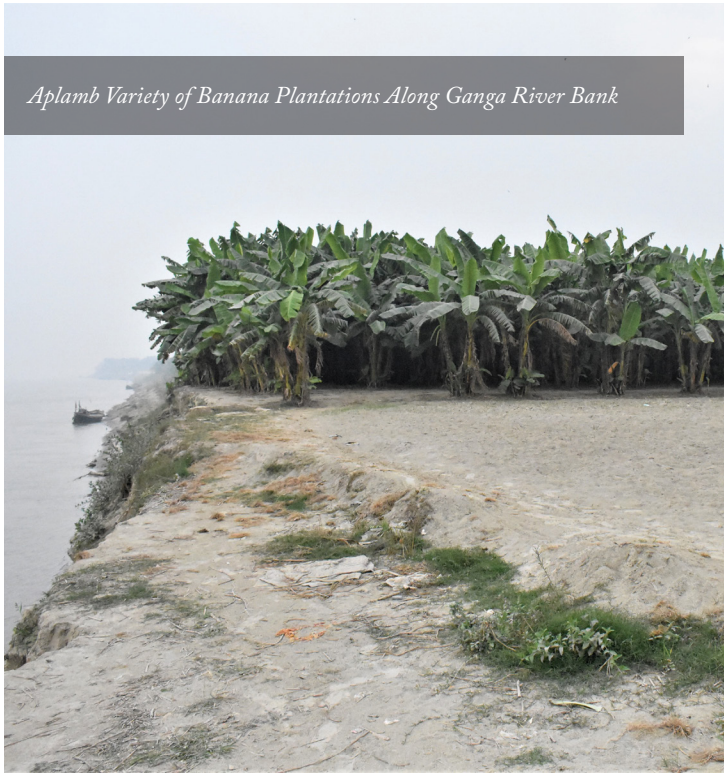
Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Vaishali

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Vaishali district is one of the centrally located districts of Bihar having a very special place in history owing to being the birth of the last Jain *Tirthankara* Lord Mahavir. Another important reason is that at Vaishali Gautam Buddha delivered his last sermon after which he announced his *Parinirvana* rendering this soil holy. Due to these reasons, numerous references of Vaishali can be found in various texts of Buddhism and Jainism which have preserved much information on Vaishali and the other *Mahajanapadas*. Based on the information found in these texts, Vaishali was established as a republic by the 6th century BCE, prior to the birth of Gautama Buddha in 563 BC, making it the world's first republic

Until 1971, this district was known as Hajipur sub-division under the erstwhile Muzaffarpur District. It has a current geographical area of 2,015.37 sq km. It is bounded by Muzaffarpur on the north, Patna on the south, Samastipur on the east and Saran on the west. The district is divided into three sub-divisions, Hajipur, Mahua and Mahnar which are further divided into sixteen development blocks.



Aplamb Variety of Banana Plantations Along Ganga River Bank

Bhola Mandir Ghat Along Ganga

Re-living *the* Past

Vaishali was a part of the Videhas Kingdom which was also known as Mithila, an ancient Indian kingdom in Late Vedic India (c. 900–c. 500 BCE). During that time, Videha along with Kuru and Panchala, rose to prominence under King Janaka. Videha's region and culture are frequently mentioned in Hindu texts. Their stories can also be found in ancient surviving Buddhist and Jain texts, indicating that renunciation by kings was a respected tradition that was widely accepted in this region.

Videha joined the Vrijji confederation, near the end of the Vedic period. The Vrijjian Republic was a confederation of eight clans, the most powerful of which were the Lichchavis. This was the time when Vaishali rose to prominence. The centre of power shifted from Mithila to Vaishali, the republic's capital, which is believed to be modern Basarh.

The great Lichchavi clan controlled the administration of Vaishali in the sixth century BCE, and its empire extended all the way up to the hills of Nepal. It is mentioned in the Jataka tales that Vaishali was ruled by a slew of Lichchavi Kings. Historians believe that during the reign of the Lichchavis, the world's first democratic republics with an elected assembly of representatives flourished. While Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital ruled over the Gangetic plain, Vaishali was the centre of trade and industry.

Lord Mahavir, also known as Vardhaman, was born in the early 6th century BCE in Vaishali. He is Jainism's 24th *Tirthankar*. His father was King Siddhartha, and his mother Trishala was the sister of Lichchavi King Chetaka. He renounced the

The Ashokan Pillar at Vaishali

world after his parents died when he was 30 years old. Vaishali was quite significant in Buddhism as well. It was a densely populated, wealthy, and prosperous city during Buddha's time and he visited Vaishali several times. According to legends, it had many pleasure grounds and lotus ponds. The city was surrounded by three walls, each one a *gavuta* apart, with watchtowers at each of the three gates. Outside the town, the Mahavana, a large forest, spread up to the Himalayas. Vaishali was located at the present Basarh Village in Vaishali District. It is believed that Buddha paid a special visit to Vaishali at a time when the city was in the throes of a deadly disease that was killing many of its inhabitants. When he arrived in town, the pestilence's wrath was greatly reduced, after which many of the citizens were initiated by him and became his disciples. Buddha delivered his final sermon in Vaishali and declared his *Parinirvana*. During this time, Ambapali/Amrapali, the great Indian dancer associated with many folktales, was at her peak. She later became a *sanyasin*, or Buddhist monk, in order to follow the Buddha's path.

The powerful kingdom of Magadh eventually came into conflict with the Lichchavis. Bimbisar (519 BCE), the founder of the Magadh Empire, had established a matrimonial alliance with the two neighbouring states of Kosalas and the Lichchavis. Bimbisar's son Ajatashatru (492–460 BCE) assassinated him, after which he invaded Vaishali and expanded his kingdom to Tirhut. The entire area in this region between the Ganga and the Himalayas is said to have fallen under the control of the Magadha empire at this time.

The Lichchavis, who had recognised Magadh's authority and dominance, continued to rule the region. During this time, the area was ruled by the Magadh Empire's Haryanaka, Shishunaga, and Nanda Dynasties, as well as the Mauryan and Sunga Dynasties later. The Second Buddhist Council was held in Vaishali in 383 BC under the patronage of Shishunaga Dynasty King Kalasoka, which was most likely a century after the first.

Following the Buddhist councils, Vaishali appears to have gradually lost its glory. For the next century, not much is known about it until Ashoka (268 BC to 232 BC) visited Vaishali and had a *stupa* and a lion pillar erected here.

In the beginning of the first millennium, Vaishali was still ruled by the Magadh Empire. However, it was briefly ruled by the Kushan Dynasty in the 2nd century when Kanishka attacked and captured Vaishali in 120 CE. Vaishali was recaptured by the Magadh Empire during the Gupta period and remained under their control until the end of Gupta Dynasty in the late 5th century CE. It was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien in the early 5th century.

After the Guptas fell out of power, the Gaur King Sasanka took control of the region in 602 CE and ruled until his death in 625 CE. His death marked the culmination of Gaur's reign, and the territory eventually fell under Harsha's do-

main. Hiuen Tsang, another Chinese traveller visited Vaishali in 637 CE during Harsha's reign. Many abandoned and ruined monasteries were mentioned in his archives. There were numerous Jains at the time, indicating that Buddhism was on a decline. Starting with Hiuen Tsang's visit to Vaishali and ending with the emergence of the Pala dynasty, there is a severe lack of material on the history of Vaishali and North Bihar. Gopala, the first of the Pala rulers, ruled Bengal in the eighth century CE. In around 750 CE, he extended his power over Bihar. The Palas maintained control of Tirhut until 1019 CE. The Sena monarchs rose to dominance at the close of the century, seizing not only their eastern provinces from the Palas, but also appearing to have carried their arms northwards to North Bihar. Mithila was the Senas' north-western province, and their rule in this part of Bihar is still commemorated by the use of the Lakshmana Sena era, the first current year (1119-20 CE) of which was either the date of accession or coronation of Lakshmana Sena, the Sena dynasty's last great king.

Ghias-ud-din Iwaz, Governor of Bengal from 1211 until 1226, was the first Muslim invader of Tirhut which included Vaishali at the time. He conquered the King of Tirhut and extorted taxes but was unable to capture the kingdom. It was not until 1323 that Ghias-ud-din Tughlak was able to consolidate his power in the district.

The monarchs of Jaunpur seized control of all of North Bihar by the end of the 14th century. North Bihar was ruled by the king of Jaunpur for about a century until Emperor Sikander Lodi of Delhi conquered and reclaimed the province.

Following the fall of the Afghan rule, a separate *Subah* (state or province) of Bihar was formed and placed under the control of a Mughal Governor. This state included Tirhut, which had Vaishali. The chieftains who assisted the Emperor were rewarded with *Jagir* grants, and they settled in Hajipur with their entourage. However, with the shift of the headquarters to Patna, Hajipur's former status faded.

Tirhut fell under British control alongside the rest of Bihar with the British victory at Buxar in 1764. From that point forward, the district's history was confined to the development of orderly governance, the expansion of agriculture and commerce, and the general improvement of facilities. However, the administration's principal goal was to collect revenue and foster trade for and on behalf of the Company. Tirhut was entrusted to the Commissionership of Patna on October 15, 1856. Tirhut at the time included the present-day districts of Muzaffarpur, Vaishali and Darbhanga.

The triumph of the insurgents in Delhi during the Revolt of 1857 alarmed the English residents in the area. A huge number of indigo planters from the interior fled to Muzaffarpur for protection, fearing that an uprising in neighbouring districts might lead to turmoil in Muzaffarpur as well. Orders were given to effectively guard the Gandak and Ganga Ghats. The movement was eventually crushed, and the district remained peaceful for a long period.

In 1875, Muzaffarpur was established as a separate district under the Commissionership of Patna after being detached from Darbhanga and the Begusarai Subdivision. Muzaffarpur was divided into three subdivisions: Muzaffarpur, Hajipur, and Sitamarhi. The district responded vigorously to Mahatma Gandhi's demand during the Non-Cooperation Movement and later, during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-31. The earthquake of 1934 was the worst natural disaster to strike Muzaffarpur in the first half of the twentieth century. While it had a significant impact on other districts in Bihar, including Munger, Champaran, Patna, and Darbhanga, it is possible that the greatest number of casualties occurred in this area. The district was in ferment during the Quit-India Movement in 1942 and played an important role in the country's struggle for independence.

Hiuen Tsang, another Chinese traveller visited Vaishali in 637 CE during Harsha's reign. Many abandoned and ruined monasteries were mentioned in his archives

Tirhut fell under British control alongside the rest of Bihar with the British victory at Buxar in 1764

Mythological Links

If Jain tradition is to be believed, this region was a part of the Kingdom of Videha, with Vaishali as its capital. However, the Puranas and the Bala Kanda of the Ramayana both mention Vaishali as a separate kingdom. Raja Vishal, the founder of the Kingdom of Vaishali, has been represented in the Ramayana as a son of Iksvaku; but the Puranas describe him as a son of Nabhaga. Sumati, a contemporary of Raja Dasharatha of Ayodhya, was tenth in descent from Vaishala, according to the Puranas. The Vishnupurana contains a list of thirty-four Vaishali kings, demonstrating that monarchy had a long history in this region. According to the Ramayana, when Ram and his brother Lakshman, accompanied by the sage Vishvamitra, crossed the Ganga and reached its northern bank on their way to Mithila, they saw the city of Vaishali.

Events *of* Interest

Vaishali Mahotsava is a festival celebrated every year in Vaishali on the 13th day during the full moon in the month of *Vaishakh* (mid-April) to honour the birth anniversary of Mahavir, the 24th and last *Tirthankara* of Jainism. Vaishali Mahotsava generally goes on for a duration of three days. This is one of the few festivals celebrated by Digambara and Shwetambara Jain monks alike. A key event which marks every celebration is a procession led by lavishly decked out chariots that carry the images of Mahavira. Jain scriptures are read everywhere and devotees flock to temples to pray. A lot of charity work is also done during this festival, which is celebrated not only in Vaishali but in other regions like Pawapuri, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, which contain a sizeable Jain population.

People who Fascinate

Yogendra Shukla

(1869-1906)

An Indian nationalist, freedom fighter and revolutionary from Jalalpur village who was one of the founders of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association(HSRA) as well as the Congress Socialist Party in Bihar. For leading several revolutionary movements and activities. His exploits made him well-known and a hero among the revolutionaries in India) in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Shukla was imprisoned by the British government from 1932-1937 in the Cellular Jail (*Kala Pani*) in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago.

After being in and out of jail for several terms, even in fetters, he was eventually released in April 1946, and in 1958 he was nominated as a member if the Bihar Legislative Council by the Praja Socialist Party. He would continue to hold this position until his death in November 1960, when he succumbed to long-term scarring and weakness because of his numerous arrests.

Basawon Sinha

(1909-1989)

A freedom fighter from Jamalpur, Hajipur who also campaigned for the rights of the underprivileged, industrial labourers and agricultural workers. A brilliant student, he acquired scholarships for education in primary and middle school, later attending Dighi High School. Coming from an impoverished background, he soon associated himself with revolutionaries and became a part of what is known as the Lahore Conspiracy. He carried on the struggle against the British in hiding alongside Chandrashekhar Azad and Keshab Chakravarty but was eventually caught and sentenced to seven years in Bankipore Central Jail. He escaped but was recaptured.

Once he was released from prison, he became thoroughly in-

Abhishek Pushkarini, A Coronation Tank

Vishwa Shanti Stupa

volved in trade union movements from 1936 till his death in 1989. Sinha would go on to establish a number of trade unions in the coal, sugar, mica mining and railway sectors of Bihar and become one of the founders of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (later becoming its President at the state and central levels). He joined Jai Prakash Narayan. During the first General Elections of 1952 he won a seat in the Lok Sabha as a representative of Dehri-on-Sone. He was forced to go underground during the Emergency, and in 1977 he would once more represent Dehri-on-Sone and again become the Union Cabinet Minister for Labour, Planning, and Industry.

Monuments *that* Matter

Ashokan Lion Pillar

This pillar is part of a series of stone pillars which Ashoka erected throughout the subcontinent and is one of the few pillars that is still intact today. The pillar is relatively heavier and less adorned than the others, and a stepped footing was carved out of a single stone slab to effectively distribute the shaft's load. While it bears no edict issued by Ashoka, it is still the most complete of the lion pillars in the series apart from the Lauriya Nandangarh Pillar. The pillar is carved out of red sandstone, standing at around 18.3 metres tall with a life-size sculpture of a lion mounted on top facing north (the direction Buddha took on his last journey). The capital on the pillar is of the usual bell-shaped *loti* form with plump bulging and is crowned with a sejant lion. The *loti* form bell's bulge is more pronounced at the bottom compared to the elegant S-shaped bulge in the other pillars' capital. A single echinus ring is present between the abacus and the bell *loti* form, engraved with the motif of a rope. One of the lower two astragals joining the shaft has a bead-and-reel pattern, while the other is of the rope pattern.

Abhishek Pushkarini

Otherwise referred to as the Coronation Tank, this large body of water situated a few hundred metres from the Relic *Stupa* (from which Ashoka took

Raja Vishal ka Garh

the remains of the Buddha's ashes) has a long history associated with Vaishali. It is revered as a sacred body of water, used time and again in the past for the coronation of several Vaishali Kings.

Vishwa Shanti Stupa

Otherwise referred to as the World Peace Pagoda, this structure was constructed by the Japanese Nicheren Buddhist sect, Nipponzan-Myohoji, right next to the Abhishek Pushkarini. It is believed that this was the sixth *stupa* to be established in India. A fraction of Buddha's relics has also been enshrined in this structure in the *chhatra* (umbrella) of the *stupa*.

Raja Vishal *ka* Garh

It is a large mound near the Abhishek Pushkarini which contains a tower encompassed by a water channel (43 metres wide) and a stage where the Ancient Parliament of King Vishala would convene. The stage has an outline of around a kilometre with dividers that are 2 metres high. The stage is large enough to accommodate almost 7000 people at the same time. Excavations at this site have revealed settlements dating back to 183-173 BCE as well as artefacts which go back to 600 BCE. Among the many items excavated, there were gold coins, precious jewels, terracotta figurines, utensils, and deer horns. There are also traces of a drainage system as well as artefacts from the Gupta, Kushana and Shunga periods.

Bawan Pokhar Temple

A temple built during the Pala period on the northern banks of the Bawan Pokhar tank, it was dedicated to several gods. The temple has a unique architectural structure as it was inspired by the medieval era architecture of the time, and numerous images of gods and goddesses can be found engraved on the temple walls. Most of the deities are enshrined in one place so that they could be worshipped collectively. The temple also contains a rich collection of images made from black basalt, that can be dated back to the Gupta and Pala period. There is also a large four-headed Shiva *lingam (Choumukhi Mahadeva)* buried within the temple complex, discovered when a reservoir was being dug in the area.

Lotus Tank

A spot frequented by the Lichchhavi nobility for excursions and outings, thus granting it historical significance.

Mahavana

A forest which is said to have stretched till the Himalayas according to Buddhaghosha in his work Sumangalavilasini, a commentary to the Mahali-Sutta in the Digha-Nikaya. The name *Mahavana* literally translates to Great Forest.

Kutagarashala

Arguably the most famous Buddhist monastery which was established within the Mahavana. According to the Northern Books (Divyavadana), this monastery was built on the banks of the Monkey Tank or Monkey Lake (*Markatahrada-tire*). The building's foundations were laid out north to south and faced eastwards, and a

number of trees had been planted to provide ample shade for the disciples and teachers. Buddhaghosha describes it furthers, stating that a storeyed-building (*prasada*) was constructed with several pillars to support the base and a pinnacle was established above. The building as a whole was meant to resemble a chariot of the gods (*deva-vimana*). Fahien's travel accounts corroborate Buddhaghosha's details and add that the pillars held up a gabled room which formed the main part of the Buddha's *Gandhakuti*.

Chaityas

There are eight Buddhist funerary sites in Vaishali, and they are an important pilgrimage destinations revered by many Buddhists. Rhys Davids believes that these *chaityas* were probably first established as trees or barrows. They are named as Udena/Udayana, Gotamaka, Sattambaka/Sattamba/Saptamraka, Bahupatta/Bahupatraka, Sarandada, Chapala, Markatahrada and Kapinyaha.

The capital on the pillar is of the usual bell-shaped loti form with plump bulging and is crowned with a sejant lion. The loti form bell's bulge is more pronounced at the bottom compared to the elegant S-shaped bulge in the other Ashokan pillars' capitals

Remains of Buddha's Relic Stupa

Ramchaura Temple

Located in the Rambhadra locality, Hajipur, this temple is believed to have been constructed during the Ramayana period, when Lord Ram passed through this region on his way to Janakpur, and during the journey left traces of his footprints behind (it is also believed that he had his *Mundan*, that is, head-shaving ceremony, conducted at this site). Many devotees flock to this temple to pray at the spot where Lord Ram's footprints were said to have left his mark, and there is an annual celebration of Ram Navami, and a small fair is organized within the temple complex on the eve of its celebration. Several artefacts uncovered after excavating the site have been kept inside the Patna Museum at present.

Nature's Abundance

It comprises of an extensive plain formed by the alluvium brought by the Ganga, the Gandak and other rivers which flow through it. It lies on the south of the Burhi Gandak and is bounded by the Ganga on the south and the Gandak on the south-west. The morphology of the area has been shaped mainly by processes of the river Gandak which has its origin in the Himalayan ranges in Nepal. Morphologically it can be classified into three broad categories:

- Hajipur Surface: It is the oldest morpho-unit of the area compris-

ing yellow brown to brownish-grey compact clay.

- Vaishali Surface: It overlies the Hajipur surface. This surface comprises ashy grey silt, silty clay and has been found over the eroded very gently sloping Hajipur surface.
- *Diara* Surface: It is the lowest and youngest geomorphic unit which emerges from the riverbed. The *diara* forms after the main channel has migrated and can also be called as the old riverbed.

The district is characterized by a wide variety of soils which can be broadly grouped into two categories: Entisols, also known as *Balsundari* - these are the younger alluvial soil with a light friable loam with a higher proportion of sand and silt.

Inceptisols, locally known as *Mathivari* - these calcareous alluvial soils occur mostly in the central part and are richer in lime content and *kanker* than Balsundari soil.

Ganga River enters Vaishali Distt. just after its confluence with Gandak river in Hajipur sub-division. It flows as a single stem till a little distance after Mahatma Gandhi setu and then is divided into two branches by Raghopur diara.

Vaishali district falls under the North West Alluvial Plain Zone according to NARP (National Agricultural Research Project) with the major soils being sandy soil, coarse sandy loam soil, fine sandy loam soil, clayey soil and saline/calcareous soil. Banana is a major horticultural crop throughout Vaishali district with huge lands under its cultivation including many fields situated on Ganga river banks.

The riparian vegetation in Vaishali district is sparse and comprised of few species of trees and herbaceous flora. Among the trees, Teak, *Peepal* and *Tad* are dominant along with *Polygonum glabrum* and *Bambusa bambos,* which is used by the locals for setting up structures during various functions.

Gangetic Dolphins, Turtles, Gharials, Nilgai, Wild Boars and Jackals are the most common fauna species along with a wide avifaunal biodiversity comprising of White throated kingfisher, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Alexandrine Parakeet and River Lapwing.

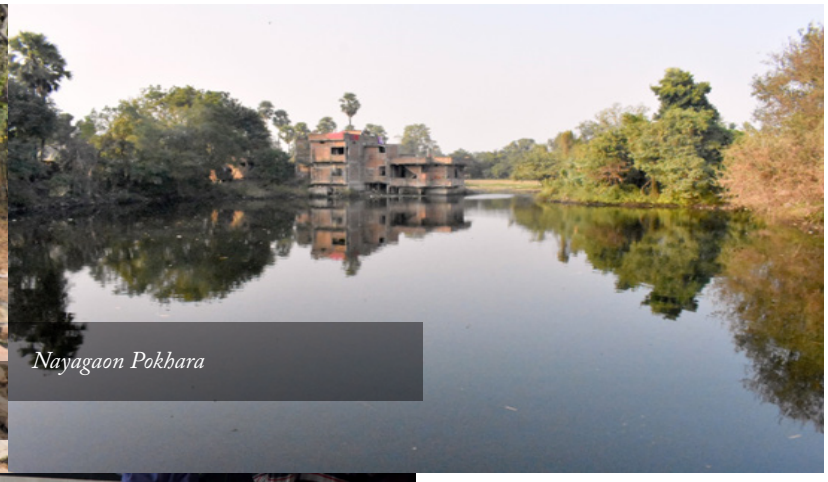
Fishing from Ganga and Gandak rivers is an important source of food and income second to agriculture. Many local residents, specially belonging to the Mallah community were involved in riverine fishing using small boats. The main fishing techniques used by them include fine mesh sized nets spread across the stream, which are mostly made of plastic and available from nearby markets, and rope-based drag nets some of which are made locally.

The most commonly caught fish in the study region included *Buari (Wallago attu), Chepua (Cabdio morar), Bachwa (Eutropiichthys vacha)* and *Tengara (Mystus tengara).*

A Nilgai in fields near Bidupur

Alpan variety of Banana

Dried Saccharum Grass Collected For Roof Thatching



Nayagaon Pokhara

Fishermen Making Ropes For Drag Nets

Selling Fish In Jadhua Macchli Bazar

Mining Sand From Ganga River Bed Near Northern Bank of Raghopur Diara

CHAPTER **36**

SAMASTIPUR

Where Ganga embraced Vidyapati

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Samastipur

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Samastipur is one of the thirty-eight districts of Bihar state with its headquarters being at Samastipur town. It is bound on the north by the Bagmati River which separates it from Darbhanga District, on the west by Vaishali and some parts of Muzaffarpur District, on the south by the Ganges, and on the east by Begusarai and some parts of Khagaria District. The District is part of the Great Ganga Basin with the Burhi Gandak and Ganga constituting the principal drainage of this region. Physiographically, the District has almost a flat topography. Samastipur comes under the Agro-Ecological Zone-I of the Bihar state, that is, the North-West Alluvial plains and is noted for its fertile alluvial soil which supports good cultivation of different crops.

Ganga River enters Samastipur just after it passes Baba Ganninath Temple in Hasanpur Village of Vaishali. For a short distance at this place, it flows as one of the two Ganga river braids bifurcated by Raghopur Diara. Thereafter, a little further downstream of Kutubpur Village, both these separated braids merge together and flow as a single river stem through the rest of this district. The river flows for approximately 19.5 kms in this District. It encompasses a small Diara in the stretch along Sultanpur and Raspur Patasia before exiting Samastipur and entering Begusarai District. Baya River is a tributary while there are several

Riverscape at Samastipur

Sikki Grass Craft

Paleo-channels and a very active flood-plain.

Re-living *the* Past

Since prehistoric times, the Darbhanga Division has played a crucial role in the development of civilisations. Recent excavations have revealed that the Samastipur District was once a thriving region with a distinct cultural heritage. Hunting and fishing appear to have been a source of sustenance in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, according to archaeological findings. The growth of Mithila culture was influenced by Vedic influences, as well as Buddhist and Jain movements. The Kushanas, Lichchavis, Guptas, Palas, and Karanatas all had an impact on the district's evolution. Following that, Afghans and Mughals brought Islamic influences to Samastipur before the British took control. After India's independence, the region continued to contribute to agricultural production. The rivers' contributions, as well as the fertile alluvial soil they brought with them, aided the region in steadily sustaining agricultural practises.

As a former part of the Darbhanga District, Samastipur's history is inextricably linked to the history and evolution of Darbhanga, which was at the heart of the Mithila Empire. Due to its geographical features of a hilly north and river-bound east, west, and south, Darbhanga had a distinct identity. This region thus developed the distinctive, exclusive and insular Mithila culture, which is an excellent example of geography influencing history and culture. Samastipur can be considered as a cultural and linguistic crossroads between Maithili in the north and Magadhi in the south.

The Videha Kingdom was ruled by Janakas, and this region was part of it. It was between 900-500 BC when Videha rose to power. It is believed that the god of fire, Agni (Vaiswanara), accompanied the Videhas on their march eastwards from the Saraswati's banks. They were informed by Agni himself that their home was east of the Gandak River, which is where they settled. The re-

Kameshwara, the dynasty's founder, lived in the village of Oini, near Pusa in the Darbhanga District

Clay Idols of Sama Chakeba

gion grew into an important learning centre for Vedic scholars and philosophers. The scholars who flocked there enriched Vedic literature. One of the significant contributions is by the chief priest, Yajnavalkya, who began the monumental task of revising the Yajur Vedas. The sacred texts known as the Upanishads that contain the king's own speculations, were also written during this time. Excavations in Vaishali Districts' Chechar, Muzaffarpur, and Madhubani district's Balirajgarh, shed light on Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements in the Mithila Plain. These have also been confirmed by excavations of Neolithic-Chalcolithic pottery at Panr.

Following the last Janaka's tyrannical rule, monarchy was replaced in Videha by a republican-style federation that lasted from the 6th century BCE to the 4th century CE. The centre of power shifted to Vaishali with the rise of the Vrijji Republic which was one of the 16 Mahajanapadas. The Vrijji is mentioned in Panini, Chanakya, and Hieun Tsang's records. Vrijji was predominantly Hindu, whereas Vaishali was both Buddhist and Hindu.

In the fourth century BC, the Mauryans took control of the confederation. They were succeeded by the Sungas (185 BCE) and then the Kanvas. In his Imperial History of India, K.P. Jayaswal suggests that the Bharasivas and Vakatakas ruled in this region between the fall of the Kushanas and the rise of the Guptas. The Lichchavis regained political power after the Kushanas were defeated. Guptas eventually rose to power in Magadha through matrimonial alliances between 320 and 1097 CE. The revival of the classical Sanskrit language was brought about by the Gupta Reformation. Yasovarman of Kannauj is said to have conquered the district after the fall of the later Guptas (700-740 CE). Udayanacharya, one of the most eminent exponents of the Nyaya system, lived in the present-day subdivision of Samastipur's Village Karion.

King Gopala extended his power over Bihar in 750 CE. The Palas of Bihar and Bengal played a significant role in Samastipur's history. Dharmapala and Devapala reigned between 810-850 CE. The Palas had established a foothold in North Bihar, and they ruled until 1097 CE, when the Karanatas finally ousted them. Darbhanga was under the Mithila Karanatas from 1097 to 1325 CE.

The Oinwaras (1325-1525 AD), also known as the Kameshwara Thakurs or Sugauna Dynasty, ruled Darbhanga after a brief period of instability. They were known for encouraging learning and the fine arts, and their court was the centre of Sanskritik letters and philosophy. Gadadhara, Sankara, Vachaspati Mishra, Vidyapati, Amartakara, and Amiykara were among the prominent scholars of the time. Kameshwara, the dynasty's founder, lived in the village of Oini, near Pusa in the Darbhanga District.

When the Bengal King Hazi Ilyas divided Tirhut into two parts, the Oinwara Raja relocated his capital to Sugauna, near Madhubani. Hazi Ilyas ruled in the south, while the Oinwaras ruled in the north. Hazi Shamsuddin Ilyas of West Bengal founded the modern subdivision of Samastipur (originally Shamsuddinpur). Between 1200 and 1556, the region was ruled by a number of Muslim rulers, including Tughlak in 1324, when it became a part of the Tughlak Empire, and later under Sher Shah from 1540 to 1545. Daud Khan, the last Afghan ruler, surrendered to Akbar in 1574, ushering in Mughal rule in the region. Darbhanga was made the seat of the Imperial Fauzdar or the military governor of Sarkar Tirhut during Akbar's reign, and it was included in the province of Bihar. Law and order could not be maintained effectively, and the district was frequently the scene of revolts and riots. Many of the historic structures from this time are in ruins and are not well documented. The great Mutiny of Bengal and Bihar broke out in 1590.

The Darbhanga Afghans rose to prominence after the Mughals were defeated in the early eighteenth century. After that, there was a period of instability and rebellion until Aliwardi Khan took over the throne in 1744. Darbhanga, along with the rest of Bihar came under British rule in 1764-65, following the decisive Battle of Buxar. The Patna executive administration had jurisdiction over Tirhut. To maximise the revenue, the region which included Samastipur was developed into major tobacco and indigo plantation centres. Indigo factories were established as well. After the introduction of cheap dye from Germany in 1895, the indigo industry took a hit. By the time Mahatma Gandhi paid a visit to indigo planters in Champaran, the industry had reached the end of its life cycle, with farmers switching to other types of farming.

In 1857, a wave of popular nationalism erupted, with poems and folksongs reflecting it. Tirhut district was divided into Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts in 1875 because it was too big an area to handle effectively. Bihar and Orissa separated from Bengal in 1912. A national school was established in Samastipur as part of the growing nationalist sentiments influenced by Gandhiji and the Congress. A severe earthquake had hit Muzaffarpur in 1934, which had caused massive damage to the surrounding areas, including Darbhanga.

Mythological Links

It is believed that the Pandavas visited some parts of the current district during their exile, and Pandoul (District Madhubani) is associated with them. Kirata culture arose in this region as well, and is mentioned numerous times in the Mahabharata.

Events *of* Interest

Sama Chakeba

The Hindu holiday Sama Chakeba originated in the Mithila area of the Indian subcontinent. It is a holiday dedicated to the bond between brothers and sisters. It is observed in November and coincides with the start of bird migration from the Himalayas to India's plains. The celebration, which incorporates folk theatre and singing, is based on a fable told in the Puranas and honours the love between brothers and sisters. It narrates the narrative of Sama, Krishna's daughter who was wrongfully accused of misbehaviour. Her father punished her by turning her into a bird, but her brother Chakeba's love and devotion allowed her to reclaim her human form. The

According to the Ramayana, Samastipur was geographically located in the Mithila Region ruled by the Janakas

festival begins on the night of Chhath Puja. This is the seventh day of the *Kartik* month. At night, young, largely unmarried ladies gather along the Chhath Ghats with a basket carrying miniature idols of Sama and Chakeba, candles, kohl, clay-made everyday appliances, and other items. They practice several rites, such as creating kohl and sharing baskets and singing traditional songs. This festival lasts until Kartik Purnima, when females bathe in the Ganga River, and the idols of Sama and Chakeba are offered to the river.

A popular fair is held on the occasion of Durga Puja in the Ram-Janaki Temple at Narghoghi Village

Ram Navami *of* Malipur

The village of Malipur is famous for the Ram Navami fair held there, annually, in the vicinity of the nineteenth century Mahadeo Temple, from which the village is said to have derived its name. The annual fair lasts for almost five days. Ram Navami and Vivaha Panchami Fairs are also popular among the residents of the Muktapur Village, in the Kalyanpur Block. A popular fair is held on the occasion of Durga Puja in the Ram-Janaki Temple at Narghoghi Village.

Nagpanchmi Mela

At the festival of Nag Panchami, a snake fair is conducted in Samastipur every year. This fair is organized on a small or large scale across the entire area of Samastipur, including Singhia, Narhan, Dumaria, Khadiahi, Besari, Chakhabib, and Mustafapur. Locals collect snakes and keep them in their houses, then on Nagapanchami, they march to the river Ghat early in the morning. The celebrations take place in the Bela Bhagwati Sthan. The responsibility for looking after the Sthan is passed down through the generations. A night vigil occurs the day before Nag Panchami. Everyone gathers with snakes, and after a night of worship, walk to the river in a procession in the morning, take a wash, and offer milk to the snake or *nag*. They feed them and then release them in the woods.

Snakes are held aloft by believers to fend against evil and ill karma. People queue up at the local temple to obtain blessings from the snakes as the priests chant hymns. Thousands of people around the country celebrate Nag Panchami, which occurs in July and August. These snakes, on the other hand, are captured two weeks ahead of time to be paraded as part of the celebrations. Before the procession, these snakes are sometimes plucked from their snake burrows with sticks and placed in pots.

Nag Panchami Mela of Samastipur

Janmashtami Mela

On the occasion of Janmashtami, the Nagar Basti Village of Samastipur has been celebrating with a special fair. All the avatars, or reincarnations of the Hindu god, Krishna are shown through tableaus, or floats, during a procession. Janmashtami is an annual celebration of the birth of Krishna, the 8th reincarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. It is celebrated on the Ashtami of the Krishna Paksha in

Bhadrapada Masa according to the Hindu calendar.

Chhata Holi Mela

The Chhata Holi Mela is held annually in Mohiuddinnagar at the Baba Niranjan Swami Mandir. It is said that the fair was first held in 1935. The organisation of the fair is done by the residents of the Dhamon Village. Thousands of people visit the fair every year and the people who create the best umbrella are also given a special award. On the morning of Holi, villagers with umbrellas offer *Abir-Gulal* to their deity Swami Niranjan in the temple. There they sing *Dhammar* and *Phaag*. Chhatri Milan takes place on the temple premises. Acrobatic performances using umbrellas also take place. The whole area reverberates with bells. After this, the festivities proceed to a procession and reach door to door after eating and drinking. Late in the evening, the procession reaches the temple. Here, people end Holi by singing *Chaiti* after midnight. According to the villagers, their ancestors first started this tradition by making umbrellas out of bamboo. Gradually it became quite famous and carved its own identity among the people.

ART *at the* HEART

Kathghodwa Nach

The Kathghodwa Dance style is usually performed during auspicious occasions. The purpose of the dance is to provide entertainment as opposed to any ritualistic connotations. Kathghodwa translates to wooden horse. The costume is therefore made of wood and bamboo in the shape of a horse and decorated with brightly coloured cloth and flowers. The figure of the wooden horse is tied to the back of the male dancer, who also wears attractive bright clothes. The performance usually consists of the main dancer and other four to six musicians who play various instruments such as *shehnai* and *mridang*. The main dancer plays the character of a soldier riding a horse.

Natua Nach

Natua Nach is an ancient folk dance from West Bengal's Purulia district, as well as districts in Bihar's Mithila region, such as Samastipur. It is far less well-known than the more well-known Chau, which has martial roots. Natua is the mother form of Chau, and it is thought to be between 600 and 700 years old. Natua is performed by enthusiastic males who have their body chalk painted. The Natuas perform a high-powered blend of martial art and acrobatic routines, brightly costumed and with colourful strips of cloth tied to their body. They prance, leap, roll, somersault, and do exceedingly risky moves with logs of wood, bullock wagon wheels, hoops, and fire, accompanied by the throbbing rhythm of the *dhamsha*, a kettledrum, and the *dhak*, and sometimes the wail of the *Madan* (or *madanbheri*, a trumpet-like instrument).

The origins of this folk form are said to be rooted in a ceremonial plea to the gods for rain, as the Chhota Nagpur plateau, which is home to this folk style, is a dry mountainous region. Natua, according to another hypothesis, is an ancient dancing form mentioned in the Shiv Puranas. The word Natua is thought to be derived from Lord Nataraj's name. Lord Shiva, according to the dancers, performed this dance as part of his *Tandav Nritya*. Lord Shiva is claimed to have created the gigantic J*ai Dhak,* whose rhythms accompany the dance. Local rulers used to hire Natua dancers to be a part of their parade, and they would put on a spectacular, spirited show, complete with acrobatics and heroic physical feats, to the accompaniment of enormous, heavy drums.

Natua Nach is an ancient folk dance from West Bengal's Purulia district, as well as districts in Bihar's Mithila region, such as Samastipur

Jhijhia

Jhijhiya is mostly performed at the time of Dusshera, in dedication to Durga Bhairavi, the goddess of victory. While performing Jhijhiya, women put

The 84-year old Hariram Kalindi Group Performing Natua Nach

Kohbar Painting

lanterns made of clay on their heads and they balance them while they dance. This is mostly performed on the occasion of Dusshera. Associated with the cultural landscape of Mithila, this dance form is marked by women taking the charge of propitiating the deities for the well-being of their family and close ones, as well as the participation of women from the marginalized sections of rural society.

Jat-Jatin Dance

Also associated with the cultural landscape of Mithila, this dance form is generally dedicated to Lord Indra, the god of rain and thunder. It is generally only performed at the time of rainfall. However, the subject matter and content of these songs have very little to do with the seasons. Again, this is primarily performed by women, across castes and classes, and the audiences also include only women. The word *jat* refers to the husband, while *jatin* refers to the wife.

Dom Kach

Dom Kach is a traditional folk dance from the states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Domkach Dance is practised in the Mithila and Bhojpur regions of Bihar. During all major wedding ceremonies in a courtyard, the women and men of the groom's and bridegroom's families perform this dance. The dance usually lasts for ten to twenty days before the wedding. They form a semi-circle, holding hands, to execute this unique dance, and the song's lyrics are humorous and joyful. The performance usually starts after *biari,* the last meal of the day, and lasts until after midnight.

Kohbar & Aripan Painting

The folk art of Mithila is an integral part of the lives of the people living across Mithilanchal, and this continues to be one of the best-known cultural manifestation of this region. Maithili paintings are generally executed on the walls and floors of houses, by women, using bamboo reed tipped with raw cotton, or some other medium. These art forms manifest themselves in various forms on various media: handicrafts, utensils, clothes, woodwork, and several others.

According to the purposes and specific meanings of these paintings, they are named and classified into different types. Thus, Kohbar Paintings are the ones executed on the walls of the room or house of the newly-wed couple, or in their bed-chamber, where several of the nuptial rites after marriage are to be performed. On the other hand, Aripan paintings are generally sacred squares or other geometric figures, made on the floor with ground rice flour, to sanctify the place of worship. It is made during auspicious and popular celebrations, such as the Deepavali.

Sujani Embroidery

This needlework is a craft that arose out of need. Swaddling clothes for new-born babies were made by sewing patches from old *saris, dhotis,* and outgrown clothing together. The worn, soft, and comfortable old textiles were

Sujani Embroidery Work

ideal for wrapping the baby in. Sujani embroidery, as it is known (*su* means aiding and *jani* means birth), is a mark of a mother's affections. Sujani work, which was once limited to swaddling new born babies in village houses, has now expanded to include cushion covers, letter holders, and embroidered patches to adorn *kurtas* and sarees, among other items. Embroidered items are typically sold at art and craft fairs and exhibitions. It is often referred to as Mithila painting's relative. Two ancient ideas underpin the Sujani method. It symbolized the presence of a divinity known as Chitriya Ma, the Lady of the Tatters, in a ritualistic practice. It represented the concept of holistically uniting disparate pieces into a united whole. The second goal was to create a soft coverlet to wrap around the new born kid, as though it were in the warm embrace of its mother.

Sikki Grass Craft

Sikki Grass crafts are a variety of handicrafts fashioned from a unique type of grass found here. In Bihar's province, the art of crafting objects out of Sikki Grass is centuries old. The Sikki Grass is taken from the base and dried to prepare it. Following that, the flowering stem is eliminated. After that, the grass is shaved and cut. The stems now have a lovely golden tint to them. The fibre is now ready to be woven. *Munj*, Raffia Grass, or *Khar*, which is much cheaper and more widely accessible, is used to shape the framework or form. The product's core strength comes from this. The *Munj* is then coiled and wrapped with Sikki so that the framework is hidden. The *Takua* is a 6-inch long needle-shaped instrument used by artists. It features a lac circular head that is used to hold the needle while coiling the grass. The Sikki is lightly moistened before coiling around the munj. The painting is completed afterwards with the use of special dyes that are boiled. *Dolchiis* are woven baskets that have been passed down through generations. These items are occasionally painted in bright pinks, blues, and greens, or a colour that contrasts with their original colour. Pauti is the name given to Sikki boxes. The Pauti are given to daughters by their parents on their wedding day. *Sindoor*, decorations, and jewellery are kept in these boxes.

Gastronomic Delights

Panch Phoron

Panch Phoron is a combination of five whole spices commonly used in Eastern Indian, North Eastern Indian and Bangladeshi cuisine to add flavour to savoury dishes such as curries and dals. *Panch* means five and *Phoron* refers to the Indian cooking method of tempering, in which whole spices, onions and garlic are fried in oil or ghee to release their essential oils. The five spices include fenugreek seed, nigella seed, cumin seed, black mustard seed and fennel seed in equal parts. In Maithili cuisine, it is often used during the tempering process to enhance the flavour of *dals*.

Thekua

Thekua are fennel and green cardamom flavoured deep-fried cookies from Bihar. They are usually enjoyed during tea-time in households, but the central occasion to enjoy them is during Chhath Puja. Its main ingredients include wheat flour, fennel, cardamom and jaggery. Thekua are generally given floral or geometric shapes to decorate them.

Dolchiis have woven baskets that have been passed down through generations. These items are occasionally painted in bright pinks, blues, and greens, or a colour that contrasts with their original colour

Dal Bhaat Chokha

Geographically, Bihar lies on the Indo-Gangetic plain which makes it suitable for intensive agriculture. It is one of the major producers of rice in India. More than 60 varieties of rice are cultivated here. It is both the commercial and the staple crop, and *Dal-Bhaat* (*dal* and rice) is the most commonly eaten food in Bihar. The combination of *Dal* and *Bhaat* is especially enjoyed with *Chokha*, a dish usually made out of Brinjals. This dish is part of the day-to-day diet of the people of Samastipur. To create the *Chokha*, Brinjal is fire-roasted till very soft and the outer layer has charred. The peel is then removed and the inside is chopped and mashed. The final dish is served by mixing the mashed brinjal with flavouring ingredients such as mild spices, onion, garlic and coriander.

Impressed with Vidyapati's devotion, Shiva appeared before him in his Ugna Roop and began to spend time with him

Pirikiya

Pirikiya, as known in Bihar and also known as Gujiya, is a deep fried sweet dish served in North and East India. Sweetened milk *khoya* and dry fruits are stuffed in a dough made out of *suji* (semolina) and *maida* (all-purpose wheat) flour. The dumplings are then deep fried in *ghee*. The sweet is usually served as a holy *prasad* during Hindu festivities and *pujans* like Holi, Chhath and Teej. Two types of Pirikiya are made in Bihar: one with *suji/rawa* and another with *khoa*. In Suji Pirikiya, suji is roasted in *ghee* with sugar, almonds, cardamom, raisins and other nuts and then deep fried in *ghee*. In Khoa Pirikiya, pure *khoa* is mixed with nuts and sugar and then deep fried.

People who Fascinate

Vidyapati

Vidyapati Dham is considered to be the *Nirvan Bhumi* of the renowned Maithili poet, Vidyapati. Vidyapati is regarded as one of the greatest poets in Eastern India. His influence on Maithili, Bengali and Odia literature is significant and continues to this day. He is revered as *Maithil Kavi Kokil*, literally the poet cuckoo of Maithili. He was a devotee of Shiva, Parvati and Ganga but also wrote devotional and love songs in the Vaishnava tradition. According to one version of his legend, Vidyapati achieved *samadhi*, the Hindu final stage of attaining union with God, with Shiva at this spot. Impressed with Vidyapati's devotion, Shiva appeared before him in his *Ugna Roop* and began to spend time with him. One day, *Ugna Mahadev* left Vidyapati and in his search, Vidyapati decided to travel back to his home village, Bisfi, in Madhubani. On the way, Vidyapati stopped 4 km away from the bank of the river Ganga to pray to her and *Ugna Mahadev*. Listening to his call, Ganga came and swept him away with her water. It is said in his final moments Mahadev appeared before him and assumed the form of Baleswar Shivling. In another telling of the story, Vidyapati became quite ill after becoming old and wanted to assume *samadhi*. He called upon his sons to carry him in a palanquin to the river Ganga before his final moments. About some distance from Ganga in Samastipur, Vidyapati asked to stop the palanquin believing that Mother Ganga would come to collect her son. Accordingly, Ganga is said to have come and swept him away.

Surendra Jha Suman

Surendra Jha Suman, also known as Acharya Surendra Jha Suman, was a Maithili poet, writer, publisher, editor, and elected member of the legislative assembly and parliament. He is also recognized for his work as a publisher, editor, writer, social and cultural reformer, and Mithila culture booster. He was the editor of several magazines and books in Maithili, Sanskrit, and Hindi, and produced over forty volumes in Maithili. In 1971, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Payaswini, and in 1995, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Translation of Rabindra Natakavali Vol. I. He

Hazrat Sarwar Shah Khankah

Jama Masjid at Mohiuddinnagar

was born in a village known as Ballipur in the Samastipur district of Bihar.

Bharti Dayal

Bharti Dayal is a Madhubani artist. Dayal learned Madhubani painting from her mother and grandmother when she was a child, and she has been doing it professionally since 1984, following her official education in science. She has worked to introduce innovation to Mithila's traditional art and maintains an art studio in New Delhi. She has made it her mission to assist other female artists in her community, advising them on how to improve their work.

Karpoori Thakur

Karpoori Thakur was an Indian politician from the state of Bihar who served from January 24, 1924, until February 17, 1988. He dropped out of graduate school to join the Quit India Movement as a student activist. He served 26 months in prison for his role in the Indian independence struggle.

Sharada Sinha

Swar Kokila Sharada Sinha (born October 1, 1952) is a Maithili folk singer from India. She also sings in the languages of Hindi, Bangla, Nagpuri, Magahi, and Bhojpuri. Her Maithili rendition of the Chhath Puja hymn *Ho Dinanath* is well-known. On the eve of Republic Day in 2018, Sinha received the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian honour. Her devotion to music earned her the Padma Shri Award in 1991.

Monuments *that* Matter

Mohiudinnagar Fort

Mohiuddinnagar reminds us of the Mughal past. In the ruins of historic structures here, the stories of Babur, Ruhale, and Afghani are told. Ruhale and Afghani expanded to Bengal and Tirhut after Babur took control of Delhi in 1526. When they reached Bihar, Alivardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, provided him sanctuary. Shamsher Khan, the chief of Ruhale, became Alivardi Khan's principal soldier, but was assassinated by opponents. As a result, Alivardi Khan fulfilled his obligation and married his daughter Ayesha to Shah Mohammed

Asaak, giving him the dominion of 20 villages as a gift. The Ayesha Biwi fort was built on the same ground that is now in ruins and conveys history. Shah Mohammed Munovwarud-din's tomb is located to the north of the Ayesha Biwi Fort. In honour of Ayesha's spouse, it was given the name Mohiuddinnagar. Apart from that, the Lodhi lineage may be traced back to Hazrat Sarwar Shah's *Khanqah* and an Iranian-style mosque established in 1497. The Fort of Ayesha Biwi, whose remnants may be seen there, has a house for hanging too. The offenders are reported to have been punished in this same mansion. Government was the name given to the fort region to the north of Mohiuddinagar Bazar. Previously, the successors of Ruhe-la Afghan Sardar Shamsher Khan's daughter were known as government.

Pandav Banam, Pandavgarh

Pandav Banam, Pandavgarh is a re-nowned and historical archaeological site located 10 kilometres southwest of Dalasinhasarai Railway Station on the Samastipur-Barauni track. From now to twenty-five years ago, statues of monks were discovered here. The walls of this location's mounds are composed of old Kushan bricks (2'x1'x3'). Kashi Prasad Jaiswal Research Institute, Patna, has been extracting antiquities from archaeological excavations for many years. The majority of the antiq-uities are from the Kushanakera. This location is more likely to be a com-mercial centre than a royal fort, based on the artefacts found here. Despite the historic finds, many people asso-ciate this location with the Pandavas and the Laakchhagrih setting.

Nature's Abundance

Wetlands

Wetlands are one of the most pro-ductive and unique ecosystems. They help in maintaining the food web and provide habitat for aquatic biodiversity. Total of 57 different wetlands were identified in Samastipur. A prominent one is:

Mohiuddinagar Oxbow Lake

This oxbow shaped lake is situated in Mohiuddinagar town close to the Barauni Road. According to the local residents, this lake receives water from a tributary of Baya river flowing close by and remains filled during monsoon and post monsoon season while dries

Battisa Banana Cultivation

Mohiuddin Nagar Oxbow Lake

up during summer months. Parts of this lake are covered extensively by the growth of water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*).

Chapar Jheel

Spread in an area of about 29.6 hectares with a 4,480 m perimeter, Chapar Jheel is an important wetland situated in the Ganga river floodplain region near Bishanpur Village of Samastipur District. Not only does this Jheel provide water resources for household activities but is also an important source of irrigation for the farmers residing and practising agriculture in its vicinity. Mustard is a major crop cultivated in the fields surrounding this Jheel. Observed at Chapar Jheel is an abundance of water birds such as Red Crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Little Cormorant and White-throated Kingfisher.

Of special significance is the river stretch between Hetanpur and Kutubpur Villages where a large number of Gangetic Dolphin sightings were recorded and this area can be termed as Dolphin hotspot of the region.

Abundance of Aquatic Birds in Chapar Jheel

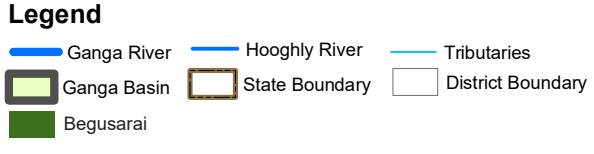
Fine-Sized Plastic Nets Spread In Ganga River For Catching Fish Near Patthar Ghat

Riparian Vegetation Along Ganga near Chandpur

CHAPTER 37

BEGUSARAI

Land of Mimamsa & Advaita



WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Begusarai District comprises of five divisions, Bakhari, Ballia, Begusarai, Manjhaul and Teghara, which is further subdivided into 18 municipal blocks. Covering a total area of 1918 sq km, the district is bounded by Samastipur on the north, on the south by the river Ganga and Lakhisarai, Khagaria and Munger districts on the east and on the west by Samastipur and Patna. The rivers flowing through Begusarai are Ganga, Balan, Bainty, Baya, Burhi Gandak, Kiul and Chandrabhaga. Ganga River enters through the south-west part of the district, and its boundary in the southern part is determined by floodplains, *Tals* (lake) and *Chaurs* (wetland).

Begusarai lies in the middle of the Northern Ganga Plain and has a low-lying terrain, having a southerly to south-easterly slope. On the basis of geographical factors, the river Burhi Gandak forms the dividing line between the two sub-micro regions:

1. Ganga-Burhi Gandak Floodplain forms the southern part of the district and comprises of the entire Bachhwara, Teghra, Barauni, Begusarai, Matihani, Sahebpur Kamal and major portion of Balia community development blocks.
2. Burhi Gandak-Kareha Floodplain covers the northern part of the district and comprises of the entire Khudabandpur, Cheria, Bariarpur,

Bakhri community development blocks and some parts of Balia blocks.

The district had a network of embankments from its very early days. The Munger *Bundh* (embankment), one of the two oldest embankments, runs along the left bank of the Baya river and protects a large part of Teghra and Bachhwara blocks from inundation. To the south of Begusarai lies the famous Gupta *Bundh*, an old *zamindari*-era embankment.

Kabar Tal, a 7,400 hectare lake, which surrounds the famous Jaimangalgarh, is one of the most ecologically important wetlands in the Bihar State. It was declared as protected area in 1986 and was designated as Ramsar Site in 2020. Situated on the north of Begusarai District, Jaimangalgarh is an important religious centre where hundreds of people assemble to worship the goddess Jaimangala.

Kiul River near Garhi Bishanpur Village

Re-living *the* Past

The etymology of the place comes from two words *begum* and *sara*i which makes it Begusarai. It is believed that the queen would often visit the banks of river Ganga in Simariya to participate in ritualistic traditions which were (and still are) popular in Begusarai. The location of the town on the banks of river Ganga is testimony to this historic connect with the river.

The two newly discovered Pala inscriptions at Nawlagarh and some rare images of the Pala period at Jaimangalgarh point to the existence of Pala rule in Begusarai. The Nawlagarh Inscription No. 1 throws considerable light on Pala history in North Bihar. Nawlagarh Inscription No. 1 also throws light on the Krmila Visaya of Begusarai. The area spanning over 72 square kilometres of the city has a large number of historical monuments, particularly Buddhist *Stupas* and Hindu Temples. Beglar and Cunningham explored the area and reported the antiquity of the region in the 19th century. There are more than sixty big mounds of various sizes which are lying unexcavated between Valgudar and Daitabandh in Lakhisarai District of Bihar. During the Gupta Period, the present state of Bihar was divided into two administrative centres, known as Shrinagara-bhukti and Tira-bhukti. The former, Shrinagara-bhukti, comprised of three *visayas*, Gaya, Rajagriha and Krmila respectively. The name Krmila among these visayas got its origin from the nearby river Krmikala which is no other than the river Kiul of present day Bihar. The early reference to this river is mentioned in Buddhist texts, Anguttara Nikaya and Moghyevagga in which this river is called Krmikala. Kiul is one of the most important rivers of Southern Bihar.

Recent explorations have yielded six image inscriptions and more than a 100 Buddhist as well as Hindu sculptures. Stylistic analysis of these sculptures suggests early medieval dates, and different phases of construction. The whole area falls in approximately 72 square kilometres,

which has more than sixty mounds, around fifty ponds and three lakes. A few brick structures over the mounds are exposed as a result of natural calamities or due to encroachments by local people. An overall survey of the area, and deciphering of the discovered inscriptions, suggests the existence of a large religious and administrative centre of early medieval eastern India here.

Previous research had also revealed many archaeological sites in this region. The following are some of the important sites in this region: Nongarh, Rampur, Garhi, Brindavan, Ghosi-Kundi, Bichwe, Neri, Kiul, Hasanpur, Jainagar, Jalappa Sthan, Ramsir, Arma, Pokhrama, Uren, Balgudar, Chowki, Rajaouna.

The Nawlagarh Inscription No. 2 shows that there was a Buddhist Vihara at Nawlagarh. The Nawlagarh Inscriptions belong to the reign of Vigrahpala II or Vigrahpala III. By the time of Rampala, the empire of the Palas had definitely broken into pieces. Up to the end of Vigrahpala III's reign, Mithila and consequently Begusarai District was included in the Pala dominion. It is difficult to say how long the Palas continued to rule in this region. Nanyadeva of the Karnata Dynasty began his rule in 1094 CE and his dynasty ruled over the area for a long period. There has been a certain amount of research regarding the antiquities at Nawlagarh and Jaimangalgarh which shows that this area played a very important part particularly in the early Pala period.

The origin of the temple of goddess Jaimangala is believed to be very ancient. Some very fine black stone images of Varaha, Badrinarain, Ganga, Shiva Parvati, and an artistic column in black stone have also been found. All these indicate that Jaimangalgarh, like Nawlagarh, was also an important centre during the Pala period. The theory that Jaimangalgarh was the centre of *Shakti* cult during the Pala period has also been advanced. The Pandas of Jaimangalgarh had been granted rent-free land which they held during the Hindu and Muslim periods. The Pandas are in possession of three *Sanads* dated 1794 CE.

Events *of* Interest

Kalpavas Mela

The fair or festival of Kalpavas is supposedly one of the biggest religious fairs of Asia Minor. Lying in the ambit of Mithila province, the festival is auspicious for its inhabitants and hence the month is referred to as *masa* and the devotee as *masi*. The place Mokama, where Simariya is located lies on the northern banks of the Ganga and most of the devotees live there for a month in make-shift huts and other kinds of tents. According to Hindu oral narratives and beliefs, during the month of *Kartik* (October), if someone decides to live on the banks of the river Ganga for a month and takes a daily bath in it for 30 days (specifically when the sun is in the northern hemisphere or *Uttarayan*), they might attain *moksha* in a lifetime.

It is also believed that Raja Parikshit had to visit and stay here on the banks of the Ganga for a month to get rid of his snake-imposed sin, the precise reason why mostly people from Nepal and other provinces of Mithila come here to follow the rituals. Parikshit was a Kuru king who reigned during the Middle Vedic period (12th - 9th centuries BCE). Along with his son and successor Janamejaya, he played a decisive role in the consolidation of the Kuru State, the arrangement of Vedic hymns into collections, and the development of the orthodox *srauta* ritual, transforming the Kuru realm into the dominant political and cultural centre of northern Iron Age India.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Kalpavasi's stay is that they plant a *tulsi* in front of their tent, sowing it with *khaad* or the manure of cows' waste. They worship the plant before each meal. This is an important part of their ritualistic performance. It is also observed that some devotees stay for a month without eating anything but just imbibing Gangajal or water.

According to the old legends and tales, the name Simariya came into being due to two stories. One is that the place is related to the Mahabharata period and is associated with the death site of Karna and also where many important *rishis* or saints performed various ritualistic processions. The other tale, according to the Ramayana, is that Rishi Shringi spent the last days of his life on the *ghats* of Simariya, and hence the name

Madhubani Painting

came into being.

Ardha-Kumbha Festival

The Kumbha Mela's popularity as a devotional congregation is currently limited to the main enshrinements of Allahabad (Prayag) Ujjain, Nasik and Haridwar. However in recent times, there is a revival in the organisation of Ardha-Kumbha Mela in this region too. The Ardha Kumbha was sought to be revived here in 2011, in an attempt to re-establish the lost importance of the other 8 places where Ardha-Kumbha was held. Kumbha provides a platform for the seers to hold discussions and introspect on worldly problems.

Kartik Purnima Snana

The full moon of *Kartik* month is also known as *Kartik Purnima*, *Tripuri Purnima* or *Ganga Snana*. Kartik Purnima has religious and spiritual significance in Indian culture as bathing in the Ganga on this occasion is of great significance and is believed to free one from all sins. It is also known as *Deepan Poornima*. Many pilgrims flock to the Ganga for a ritual cleansing on this day.

Art *at the* Heart

Madhubani Painting

Vidyapati refers to this art form in his Purusa-Pariksha, where he mentions two artists, Sasi and Muladeva, who specialized in images with two deer on one side and portraits of a princess and a prince on the other. Possibly, the love of Krishna and Radha also influenced the Madhubani painting style after the sixteenth century. The Madhubani Style of Painting has remained confined to a compact geographical area and the skills have been passed down through generations, such that the content and style have remained largely the same. These paintings use two-dimensional imagery. They are made with the paste of powdered rice, and the colours used are derived from plants. Ochre and lampblack are used for reddish-brown and black, respectively.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Kalpavasi's stay is that they plant a tulsi in front of their tent, sowing it with khada or the manure of cows' waste

Madhubani Paintings mostly depict people and their association with nature and scenes and deities from the ancient epics. As mentioned earlier, no space is left empty; the gaps are filled by drawings of flowers, animals, birds, and geometric designs. Traditionally, painting was one of the skills that was passed down from generation to generation in the families of the Mithila region, mainly by women. It is still practiced and kept alive in institutions spread across the Mithila belt. Kalakriti in Darbhanga, Vaidehi in Madhubani, Benipatti in Madhubani District and Gram Vikas Parishad in Ranti are some of the major centres of Madhubani Painting which have kept this ancient art form alive.

Abandoned Begusarai Kacheri

Madhubani Art has five distinctive styles: *Bharni, Kachni, Tantrik, Godna* and *Kohbar*. In the 1960s, *Bharni, Kachni* and *Tantrik* styles were mainly done by Brahman and Kayastha women, who would be considered upper caste in India and Nepal. Their themes were mainly religious and they depicted Gods and Goddesses, plants and animals in their paintings. People of the so-called lower castes included aspects of their daily life and symbols, the story of Raja Shailesh (guardian of the village) and much more, in their paintings. Today, when Madhubani Painting is recognised globally, there is no difference in the work on the basis of the caste system.

The women artists of Mithila use different local colours for their paintings. They use bright red, yellow and black; black from soot, red from the local clay and yellow from the petals of flowers. They prepare vegetable colours from different flowers, fruit and barks. Roots of gum prepared naturally from the Babul tree is mixed in the colours for durability. Black is generally obtained from lamp soot and is easily dissolved in gum water. A light brown colour is obtained by mixing cow dung and gum in fresh water. The bark of the *Peepal* Tree is dried in the sunshine and then boiled in water till it yields a pink hue. Blue is obtained by crushing the berries of a wild herb called *Sikkar* in the local language. The juice of the herb is collected in a cup, dissolved in gum Arabicum and thereafter filtered through cloth. Dark green is made from the leaves of the Siam creeper and parrot green from the sepals of the *Gulmohar*. Other organic and mineral colours are increasingly coming into use today; indigo for blue, arsenic for yellow, red sandalwood and iron oxide for red and their various mixtures. They also sometimes use water colour mixed with rice powder. These colours are used according to the artist's imagination and vision.

The artists use bamboo splint or their fingers to draw. Generally, they do not use modern brushes, but apply the colour with a piece of raw cotton or lint attached to the end of the bamboo splint. They prepare their brushes by wrapping cotton around the end of a twig or match stick.

Patna School *of* Painting

Another important painting tradition which emerged in the late sixteenth century was the Patna School of Painting also recognised as Company Painting or *Patna Kalam*. The paintings of this genre reveal interesting information on the socio-cultural and economic history of the entire region, not just Patna as it is delineated today. *Patna Kalam* is an off-shoot of Mughal Painting. The Mughal Style of Painting matured during the regime of Jahangir, and his period was considered the golden era of Mughal painting, but during the rule of Aurangzeb in the late 17th and early 18th century, artists faced

mass prosecution and an abhorrence towards art and painting. These artists migrated from Delhi, looking for shelter in different places. One such group moved eastwards and located themselves in Murshidabad under the patronage of the Nawab of Bengal and other local aristocrats.

In the mid 18th century, after the fall of the Nawab of Bengal and subsequent decline of Murshidabad, the artists started moving to the next biggest city in the east, Patna. In Patna, they came under the patronage of local aristocracy and Indophile scions of the early East India Company and started a unique form of painting which came to be known as the Company Painting style, or *Patna Kalam*. *Patna Kalam* is regarded as an off-shoot of Mughal painting with influences from both Persian and Company (British) styles. The portraits can be clearly seen to have colours and lines of the Mughal style, and the shading can be seen to be adopted from the British style. Diverging from the Mughal and Persian style of wide and exquisitely decorated borders, *Patna Kalam* primarily focused on the subject of the painting.

Unlike Mughal painting, which focused on royalty and court scenes, flag bearers of *Patna Kalam* were deeply influenced by daily life of the common man. Their main subjects were local festivals, ceremonies, *bazaar* scenes, local rulers, and domestic activities. The paintings were done on diverse surfaces such as paper, mica, and even ivory diskettes that were used as brooches. A distinguishing characteristic of *Patna Kalam* is lack of any landscape, foreground or background. Another characteristic was the development in the shading of solid forms.

Patna Kalam paintings are painted straightaway with the brush without marking with pencil to delineate the contours of the picture and the procedure of painting is popularly known as *Kajli Seahi*. Some well-known painters of Patna Kalam were Sewak Ram, Hulas Lall, Shiv Lal, Shiva Dayal, Mahadeo Lal, and Ishwari Prasad Verma. There is currently no one to carry on the tradition. Only three collections of Patna Kalam paintings exist in Bihar, one at the Patna-Bihar Museum and others at Khuda Baksh Library, Patna, and Patna University's College of Arts and Crafts. The Patna Kalam flourished only as long as its western patrons existed.

Basketry

Basketry here traces its origins to India's colonial past and if traced, even older. All the basket makers are here sometimes recognised as from Dom Bansphor community; they make mats out of strips of bamboo neatly interwoven. This is only done on commission and their chief product for the ordinary market is *Dalis* (baskets), *Soops* (winnowing fans), and *Pangkha* (hand fans), sometimes used also for ritualistic purposes.

Sohar-Kilauna Dance

The birth of a child is celebrated all over India with different traditional rituals. The ladies compare the child with gods like Rama and Krishna. In Bihar, ladies always sing *Sohar* at the birth of a child. The ladies bless the baby by singing, acting and dancing by the words of *Sohar*. This is a regionally important function where women gather and celebrate.

Jhumeri

Jhumeri is a folk dance from Mithilanchal. This folk dance is performed by married women in the month of *Kartik* when the sky is clear and the full moon spreads its rays all over. On this full moon night of *Kartik*, young maidens of the village sing and dance to celebrate the turning of the season. The words of the Jhumeri song *Kartikmaas naakashey badri* and the graceful movements of the dance cast a spell on the audience.

People who Fascinate

Mandana Misra

The narrative of Mandana Misra becomes an integral aspect of understanding the oral traditions of the region. He was a Maithil philosopher who wrote on the *Mimamsa* and *Advaita* systems of thought. He was a follower of the Karma Mimamsa School of Philosophy and a staunch defender of the holistic sphota doctrine of language. He was a contemporary

of Adi Shankara, and is said to have become a disciple of Adi Shankara.

Mandana Misra lived in the ancient village of Mahishi located in Mithila during the time of Adi Shankara. The location of this is in the present district of Saharsa in Bihar. Mandana Misra reportedly lived in the present day Mandleshwar and debated with Shankaracharya at the Gupteshwar Mahadev Temple. The town supposedly derives its name from him. Mandana Misra is known to have been a student of a *Mimamsa* scholar Kumaril Bhatt, who also wrote on *Advaita*. Mandana Misra is best known as the author of the Brahma-Siddhi. Being a follower of the Karma Mimamsa School, he was a ritualist and performed all of the ritualistic duties prescribed by the Vedas.

The Theory of Error set forth in the Brahma-Siddhi became the normative Advaita Vedanta Theory of Error. Along with Hastamalaka, Padmapada, and Totakacharya, he was one of the four main disciples of Shankara and was the first head of the Sringeri Math, one of the four *mathas* that Shankara later established.

Monuments *that* Matter

Purani Masjid

Built in 18th century, it is a single storey structure, rectangular inplan and is built on a low plinth. The mosque is accessed by a gateway which leads to an open area. The praying hall has a colonnaded veranda for its access having octagonal columns with different types of *jaalis* built between them.

Kachehri

The structure was built during the British rule. It was used as a court by the local administration to resolve the native disputes.

Nature's Abundance

Flood Plain *of* River Ganga

Begusarai is a part of Middle Ganga plain. It falls in doab region between the Ganga and the Burhi-Gandak. The general slope of left bank of River Ganga is towards the south-east while right bank of River Ganga is towards north-east. Common cropping sequence practised within the district are: Rice-Wheat, Maize-Wheat, Rice-Wheat- Green gram, Vegetable-Wheat, Rice-Rabi Maize, Maize-Rabi Maize, Rice-Pulses, Rice-Oilseeds, Rice-Vegetables, Rice-Potato and Soybean-Wheat. Major vegetable crop in the district includes - (Bitter gourd, Lady's Finger (Okra), Onion, Cucumber, Cabbage, Tomato, Cauliflower, Bottle gourd, Radish, Carrot, Sponge gourd, Chili and Potato.

Begusarai has ample amount of plantation area. South and North left bank of the Ganga has plantation area which is locally called *Gachhi* or *Bagichha*. The major plantation in the region is Mango and Litchi. Major varieties of Mango harvest at Begusarai are *Malda, Biju, Dhashari*. Begusarai is the second-largest litchi producer after Muzaffarpur.

Wetlands

Wetlands in Begusarai include Murdaha/Chauki Tal, Rahua Tal, Sahebpur Tal and Kabar Tal. The riparian patches are dominated by *Saccharum spontaneum (Kaas/ Kans), Saccharum munja [Munj], Ziziphus nummularia* (Wild *Ber*), *Sesbania spp. (Dhaicha), Polygonum glabrum, Desmostachya bipinnata (Kusha), Ailanthes excelsa, Calotropis spps., Ricinus communis, Achyranthes aspera, Boerhavia diffusa, Cassia sp., Ocimum sp., Parthenium hysterophorus* (invasive) and *Pithecellobium dulce* (Jungle Jalebi). The canopy in this stretch mainly comprises of trees such as B*ombax ceiba (Semal), Mangifera indica (Aam), Ficus religiosa (Peepal), Acacia nilotica [Babool], Aegle marmelos (Sirfal/Bel), Phoenix dactylifera (Khajur), Borassus flabellifer (Taad/ Tar), Tamarindus indica (Imli), Gmelina arborea* and *Azadirachta indica (Neem)*. The grasses in this region are mainly members of Cyperaceae and Poaceae plant families.

Some riparian grasses are economically valuable in the district. *Saccharum spontaneum* and *Saccharum munja* are used for making huts, basket and ropes. Leaves of *Borassus flabellifer (Taad/Tar)* are used for making handmade fan, mats

and for thatching roofs of huts. Small sized baskets made from *munj* are locally called *Daliya* and large sized baskets are called *Dala*. Baskets made from *munj* are generally considered as sacred and are widely used for performing rituals especially Chhath Puja. Bamboo baskets and mats are commonly sold.

Palm Juicem, *Taad* or *Tar* tree or Doub Palm, scientific name *Borassus flabellifer* is commonly found in the Magadh, Angika and Mathili region of Bihar. *Taad* tree has a long grey trunk and reaches a height of 30 meters. Juice obtained from *Taad* tree is a local beverage called *Taadi*. Pasi community is associated with collection of *Taadi* from the sap and are famous for their *Taad* tree climbing skill. This is the major source of income for Pasi community. Pasi community collects juice from the sap twice a day where fermentation starts naturally as soon as the juice begins to trickledown in the earthenware or gourd. Fresh palm juice is non-alcoholic and is healthy for the digestive system but as time passes fermentation takes place and the juice becomes alcoholic in nature.

Forest land provides habitat to Jungle Cat, Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), *Nilgai* (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) and Indian wild boar (*Sus scrofa*). Plantation mainly of *Litchi senensis, Bombax ceiba, Mangifera indica* and Psidium guava provides the habitat to Monkey (Rhesus macaque) and Langur (*Semnopithecus spp.*).

Man-animal conflict, especially with Nilgai, is rampant.

Local Communities Fishing in Murdaha Lake

Old and Sacred Trees at Simariya Ghat

A Temporary Hut Made From Bamboo

CHAPTER 38

MUNGER

Confluence of Art, Literature, Engineering & Yoga

Bihar

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Munger

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Munger district has an average elevation of 53 metres above msl, is divided into three subdivisions and nine developmental blocks. Munger was spelt as Monghyr by early British. With a total geographical area of over 1419.7 sq km, the district is bounded on the north by Khagaria, on the west by Lakhisarai and Begusarai, in the east by Bhagalpur, while in the south it is bounded by Banka and Jamui. The important rivers flowing through the district are Ganga, Kiul, Harohar and Mohane. The Ganga River flows a total distance of approximately 62.9 km. in Munger District.

The landscape of the District comprises of hill tract, pedi plain and alluvial plain. The Kharagpur hill tract is formed of dominantly elevated and craggy landmasses. Pediplain is characterized by rolling topography and comprises of residual soil superimposed by mixture of sheet-wash deposits. The older Alluvial Plain constitutes the major part of Tarapur, Asarganj and part of Sangrampur blocks and it is composed of sediments derived from the erosion of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and Kharagpur Hills. The northern part of the district is constituted by the younger alluvial plain, confined to a few kilometres from the river Ganga, locally known as *diara*.

A major part of Munger consists of red sandy soil especially in the central areas. It has poor fertility and is

Kastharni Ghat

Goods Loaded on Boats At Kankar Ghat

suitable for the highland crops.

Munger was covered with thick forests, occupied by several hermits. One of these holy men was the first to build Munger Fort. Bishop Heber compared the architecture of the fort with Khitairgorod in Moscow. Presently, most part of the fort is occupied by administrative buildings and police barracks but still entaills many historical landmarks. The city is also well known for the Bihar School of Yoga. It is the only university of yoga in the entire world. More than 400 people from foreign countries register annually. The Jamia Rehmani University in Munger, built in 1927, excels in Islamic Studies attracting national and international students.

Re-living *the* Past

The name of the city is believed to be derived from *Madhya-desha*. This translates to the mid-land of the first Aryan settlers within the region. General Cunningham believed the city to be named as Mundas, after the Mons Clan. They inhabited the region prior to the Aryans. It also finds mention in the Puranic Literature of Mahabharata, as Moda-Giri. This name is also mentioned in the Monghyr copperplate, dating back to the reign of Devapala. The Mahabharat mentions this place as Mudagiri, also known as Maudagalayagiri after Maudagalya, a famous Buddhist monk. However, a widely dominant tradition credits the name to the sage Mudgala Rishi, the grandfather of the epical Ahilya. In course of time Mudgalgiri, so named after Mudgala Rishi, was corrupted to Munger. Spread over an area of around 222 acres, the Munger fort has been occupied by many regimes like the Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Lodis, Mughals, Nawabs of Bengal and later the British. Munger is one of the historic towns of Bihar, and part of Anga, once known to be ruled by Karna. Its last Indian ruler was Mir Qasim who fought valiantly against the East India Company which then went on to conquer Bengal in the later part of the 18th century.

At the dawn of history, the present site of the town was appar-

ently enclosed within the former Kingdom of Anga, the capital of which was at Champa near Bhagalpur, while a portion in the west of the present district was included within the boundaries of the capital kingdom of Magadha. Anga was an independent kingdom till the sixth century BCE, and there are traditions of war between it and Magadha. During the lifetime of Buddha it was annexed by Bimbisara, the ambitious ruler of Magadha in 519 BCE, and never regained independence. Thenceforth its history is merged with that of the Magadhan Empire.

Unfortunately, there is a historical gap of almost two centuries when we find its fresh mention in the Munger Copper Plate of Devapala discovered in Munger. We learn from this copper plate about Dharamapala (770-810 CE). The tripartite struggle between the Palas, Rashtrakutas and Gurjar-Pratihars for supremacy over Kannauj was a predominant element in the history of north India. Till the advent of Turkish Rule in India, Munger was under the sway of the Karnatak Dynasty of Mithila. However, Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded Bihar and took possession of the territory of Munger towards the close of the 12th century and Munger came under the rule of the Islamic conquerors. After a tussle and in the aftermath of a peace treaty Munger came under the control of the Sultan of Bengal between 1301-1322, which is corroborated by the Lakhisarai Inscription. Munger then came under the possession of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq who annexed Munger to Delhi for some time. During this conflict between the Tughlaqs of Delhi and the Bengal Sultan, some portions of Munger came under the possession of the Sharqis of Jaunpur. Later, the name of prince Danyal, who held the post of Governor of Eastern Bihar, appears prominently. It was prince Danyal who had repaired the fortification of Munger and built in 1497 the vault over the shrine of Shah Nafah.

The fortress of Munger was built along a bend in the Ganga. In the rainy season the fortress projected towards a vast sheet of water northwards. Thus, from this fortress, one could easily command both the overland route and the Ganga. So, for the Mughals, it was natural to make Munger the seat of a high-ranking officer, and a military station. In the seventeenth century, Sultan Shuja strengthened the fortification and about a century later it became the centre for Nawab Qasim Ali Khan's (1760–64 CE) resistance against the English Company.

After the British established the southern New Military Road in the second half of the eighteenth century, the strategic importance of the Ganga Route was undermined. Aside from its strategic importance, Munger functioned as an administrative centre and customs post for the river and overland traffic.

During Akbar's period, when the revolt in Bengal started, Munger was, for some time, the headquarters of Akbar's officers in their expeditions against the rebels. It was in this period that Raja Todarmal took possession of Munger and tried to deal with three refractory, powerful, semi-independent *zamindars*, namely Raja Gajapati of Hajipur, Raja Puran Mal

Munger Fort Entry Gate

of Ghidhaur and Raja Sangram Singh of Kharagpur. The last two belonged to the district of Munger. After the final occupation of Bihar, Raja Man Singh was appointed as the Governor and on the basis of Akbarnama, it can be said that Raja Man Singh succeeded well in his administration. Kharagpur at that time was a great principality extending from the south of Munger to the south of Bhagalpur and Santhal *Parganas*. Sangram Singh remained loyal to the Mughal rule till Akbar's death in 1605. But the accession of Jahangir and the rebellion of Prince Khusrau led him to make a final attempt to recover his independence. He collected his forces, which, according to Jahangir's memoirs, consisted of about four thousand horses and a large army of foot-soldiers.

During the reign of Aurangzeb we find mention of Munger in connection with the death and burial at Munger of the poet Mulla Mohammad Saiyad, who wrote under the nom de plume of Ashraf. The poet Ashraf stood in high favour with prince Azim-us-Shah, Aurangzeb's grandson, who was the Governor of Bihar. The poet Ashraf had also been for a long time the teacher of Zebunissa Begum, Aurangzeb's daughter, who was herself a poetess of repute. In 1704 while on his way from Bengal to Mecca, the poet died at Munger where his tomb is still pointed out. Nicholas Graafe, a Dutch physician who visited Munger in the beginning of the century, was struck with admiration at the sight of its white walls, towers and minarets. But by 1745, when Mustafa Khan, a rebellious general of Alivardi Khan, advanced against it in his march northwards, the fort was in a ruinous state. The Governor and his little garrison tried to put up some defence but failed miserably.

Munger was politically and strategically so important that it did not escape even the Maratha expeditions. The second Maratha invasion under Raghujee Bhonsle occurred in 1743. Balaji Maratha marched into Bihar and advancing through Tekari, Gaya, Manpur, Bihar and Munger, he reached Bhagalpur. It is also mentioned that during the fourth Maratha invasion in 1744, Raghuji passed through the hills of Kharagpur.

In 1757, when the British forces were pursuing Jean Law, the French adventurer and partisan of Siraj-ud-Daula, who was fleeing northwards after the Battle of Plassey, Major Coote reached Munger late at night on 20th July, 1757, and requisitioned a number of boats which the *Diwan* of Munger supplied. But Munger Fort was in such a strong position that he was not allowed to enter the fort and when he approached the walls he found that the garrison was ready to fire. Coote wisely resumed his march without any attempt to enter the fort.

Nearly three years later, in the spring of 1760, the army of Emperor Shah Alam passed through the district, pursued by Major Caillaud and Miran. The Emperor had been defeated by Caillaud and Miran at Sirpur on 22nd February, 1760. Johan Stables, who had succeeded Caillaud, was given charge of Munger.

During Akbar's period, when the revolt in Bengal, Munger was, for some time, the headquarters of Akbar's officers in their expeditions against the rebels

The modern history of Munger came again into prominence in 1762 when Kasim Ali Khan made it his capital instead of Murshidabad in Bengal. The new Nawab removed his treasure, his elephants and horses and even the gold and silver decorations of the Imam Bara from his old capital. The army was reorganised and equipped after the English model. An arsenal for the manufacture of fire-arms was established and it is from this time that Munger can trace back its importance in the manufacture of guns. Even today that tradition is being carried on by hundreds of families who specialize in the manufacture of guns.

With the extension of the British dominions, the town of Munger ceased to be an important frontier post. There was no arsenal, no regular garrison was kept up and no attempt was made to bring the fortification up-to-date. Munger, however, was still important for its fine location and salubrious air, and was used as a

sanatorium for British troops. It was considered so great a resort that the journey up the Ganga followed by a stay here was regarded as healthy as a sea voyage. A trip to Munger was prescribed for Warren Hastings' wife when she was in ill health. In 1781, when Hastings was on his way to meet Chet Singh at Banaras, he left her here, believing that the surroundings would be of immense benefit to her.

People who Fascinate

Nandlal Bose

Nandlal Bose was born on 3rd December, 1882 in a middle-class Bengali family of Kharagpur, in Munger district. Keen to study art, Nandlal was not given permission by his family. After repeated failures at other subjects, he persuaded his family to let him study art at Calcutta's School of Art. As a young artist, Nandlal Bose was deeply influenced by the murals of the Ajanta Caves. To mark the 1930 occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest for protesting against the British tax on salt, Bose created a black-on-white linocut print of Gandhi walking with a staff. It became the iconic image for the non-violence movement. He was also famously asked by Jawaharlal Nehru to sketch the emblems for the Government of India awards, including the Bharat Ratna and the Padma Shri. Along with his disciple Ram Manohar, Nandlal Bose took up the historic task of beautifying/decorating the original manuscript of the Constitution of India. Bose died on 16th April, 1966 in Calcutta. Today, the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi holds 7000 of his works in its collection, including a 1930 linocut of the Dandi March depicting Mahatma Gandhi, and a set of seven posters he later made at the request of Mahatma Gandhi for the 1938 Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress.

A trip to Munger was prescribed for Warren Hastings' wife when she was in ill health. In 1781, when Hastings was on his way to meet Chait Singh at Banaras, he left her here, believing that the surroundings would be of immense benefit to her

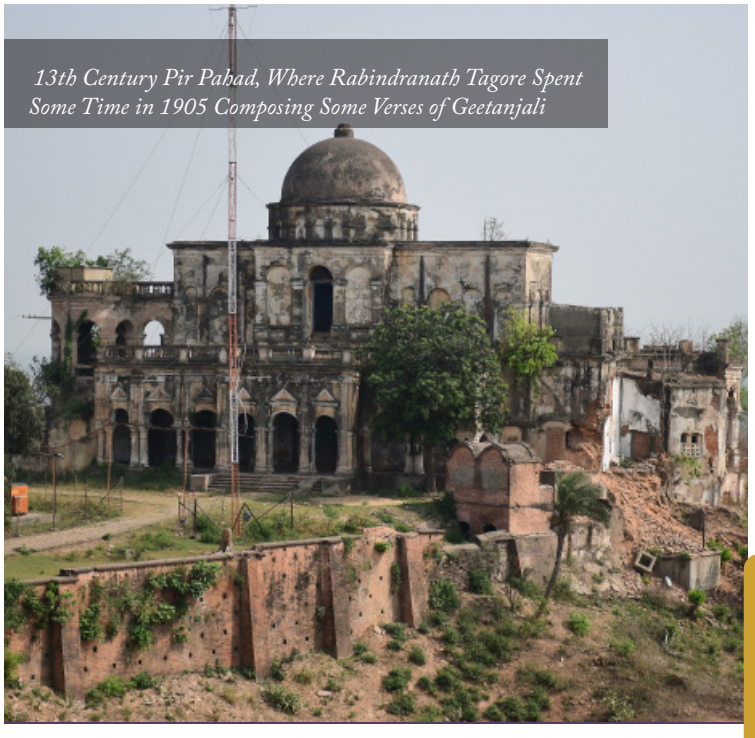
Baba Tilka Majhi

Also known as *Jabra Paharia*, he was the first *Adivasi* leader to take up arms against the British. He organized the *Adivasis* to form an armed group to fight against the resource grabbing and exploitation of the British. Due to a famine in 1770 and the consequences of Court of Directors orders influenced by William Pitt the Younger, there was little chance to negotiate between local *Zamindars* and Santhal villagers. Baba Tilka Majhi attacked Augustus Cleveland, the British commissioner with a weapon similar to a slingshot, resulting later in Cleveland's death. The British surrounded the Tilapore Forest from which Majhi operated but he and his men held them at bay for several weeks. When he was finally caught in 1784, he was said to have been tied to the tail of a horse and dragged all the way to the collector's residence at Bhagalpur. There, his lacerated body was hung from a Banyan tree. After India gained independence, a statue to honour him was erected at the spot where he was hanged. The Bhagalpur University was renamed after him in 1991.

Ramdhari Singh Dinkar

Known by his nom de plume, Dinkar, was a Hindi poet, essayist, patriot and academic, who is considered one of the most important modern Hindi poets. He emerged as a poet of rebellion as a consequence of his nationalist poetry written in the days before India's independence. His poetry exuded *veer rasa*, and he has been hailed as a *Rashtrakavi*, national poet, on account of his inspiring patriotic compositions. During the Emergency, Jayaprakash Narayan, addressing a gathering of over a lakh at the Ramlila Grounds, recited Dinkar's famous poem: *Singhasan Khaali Karo, Ke Janata Aaati Hai* (Vacate the throne, for the people are coming). His works are mostly of *Veer Rasa*, or the brave mode, although 'Urvashi' is an excep-

Central Jail



13th Century Pir Pahad, Where Rabindranath Tagore Spent Some Time in 1905 Composing Some Verses of Geetanjali

tion to this.

Some of his greatest works are 'Rashmirathi' and 'Parashuram ki Prateeksha'. A progressive and humanist poet, Dinkar chose to approach history and reality directly and his verse combined oratorical vigour with a declamatory diction. Dinkar was born and brought up along the river Ganga and his poetic skills portray the true essence of the Ganga. In one of his verses he has depicted the image of the river, standing witness to history. He describes the Ganga as a living expression of a Goddess, and her relationship with the human race. The poet asks several questions of the Ganga and reminisces over the rich historicity the land presents—the various powerful rulers, the teachings of the Buddha and the many stories which revolve around the river. He highlights the fact that it is the Ganga which has witnessed everything about Bihar/Pataliputra and therefore it is a mystical embodiment, above any ruler or the state.

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Born 14th February 1960, Swami Niranjanananda is the successor of Satyananda Saraswati, founder of Satyananda Yoga. Born in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, Niranjanananda is considered by his followers to be a *yogi* by birth. He began his training at the Bihar School of Yoga at the age of four through the use of *yoga-nidra* and practice of other yoga techniques. At the age of ten, he was initiated as a *sanyasi* and thereafter for eleven years he lived overseas. From 1971, he extensively toured Europe and North and South America. This experience gave him an understanding of the Western mind and society. In 1983 he returned to India and was appointed the Head of the Bihar School of Yoga. For the next eleven years, he spearheaded the research and development activities at Ganga Darshan, Shivananda Math

Mir Qasim's Escape Tunnel

and the Yoga Research Foundation. In 1990, he was initiated in the tradition of Paramahamsa and in 1993 he was chosen as the spiritual successor of Satyananda. He was awarded the third-highest civilian award of the country, Padma Bhushan, in 2017, for distinguished service of high order in the field of Yoga.

The Ganga river that runs in front of Munger Fort turns in its flow towards the north; it is uttar vahini which in Sanskrit means north flowing

Monuments *that* Matter

Kashtaharini Ghat

Kashtaharini Ghat on the Ganga has an interesting story. The Ganga river that runs in front of Munger Fort turns in its flow towards the north; it is *uttar vahini* which in Sanskrit means north flowing. At this location, a *ghat* was constructed, which has a legend linked to it. An inscription at Kannauj records that Govind Chandra of Kannauj, a Gahadvala King, granted land on the river bank to build a gate, after bathing in the Ganga river at Mudgagiri (Munger) on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya. There are several antiquities that have been unearthed at this *ghat* such as an inscription of around the 10th century CE on the wall of the gateway that refers to King Bhagiratha and the construction of a Shiva Temple, the discovery of carvings and sculptures by archaeologist Bloch in 1903, and an inscribed image of *Dhyani Buddha* (Buddha in meditation pose) describing the Buddhist doctrine (preserved now in the Indian Museum at Kolkata). Hence, this location is venerated by Hindus.

The popular legend associated with this site is that in the Ramayana, Lord Rama along with Lakshmana came to this particular spot to stay here and rest after their encounter with the legendary *asura* (demoness) Tadaka. This gave it the name Kashtaharani Ghat. The place is also associated with the Hindu sage, Mudgal Muni.

Chandika Sthan

This is a temple situated in Munger. It is one of the *Shakti Peethas* that are places of worship consecrated to the Goddess Shakti. Located in the northeast corner of Munger, the Chandika Sthan is just two kilometers away from the town centre. It is believed that the left eye of Sati fell in Munger, which subsequently became a place of worship in popular themes of Maya Chandi. Amongst the various *shakti peethas,* this enshrinement is a *Siddha Peeth* as well and it is widely known for curing eye problems.

Karnachaura

A natural rocky hillock dated to the ancient Raja Karna is named after him as the Karnachaura or *Karan Chabu-*

tara (meaning the slab of Raja Karan). It is the highest point in the fort and the location commands a fine view of the surroundings. Raja Karan (said to be a contemporary of King Vikramaditya) had built a house on the hill, which was later converted by the British to a saluting battery. In 1766, this base on the hill was crucial in subduing a rebellion by some European officers of the garrison. Further refurbishing of the fort occurred during General Goddard's time when it was converted for use as the large residence (as it exists now) of the Commanding Officer of the British Garrison. This building later came under the ownership of the Maharaja of Vizianagram and then of the Raja of Murshidabad. Since 1978, it is under the ownership of the Bihar School of Yoga. Swami Satyananda Saraswati, founder of the Yoga School, has renamed it Ganga Darshan. The Yoga School is now renowned as a world centre for modern *yogic/tantric* renaissance. An old platform near the hill, in front of the bungalow, is also linked to the period of King Karna and his wife.

Mir Qasim Tunnel

The Mir Qasim Tunnel is another important site in Munger. It is said that Princess Gul and Prince Bahar used to hide under the tunnels by the riverside in order to wreak vengeance upon the British officers. They would clothe themselves with tiger skins during the night. Once Bahar, on his rounds in the dark of the night was sighted by a British officer who instantly shot the Prince dead. The truth was revealed the next morning and the Prince was said to have been buried by the *dargah* of Pir Shah-Nafah-Gul. The Princess was later found dead in a man's attire by the side of her brother's tomb, where she was also buried. The officer, responsible for Bahar's and, indirectly, Gul's death, felt ashamed and ordered a daily salute of guns in the evening, to mourn the loss of the children.

Pir Pahad

Pir Pahad is one of the sites of Munger district, in existence from the 13th century onward. The site is around 4 kms away from Munger and the fertile land of the Ganga near the hillocks is easily seen from the top of the hill. When Shah Jahan's son Shah Shuja came here, there was said to be a Pir Sahab on this hill. After the death of Pir Sahab, his tomb was built here, and it came to be known as dargah of Shah Nafah, nafah being a Persian word meaning pod of musk. The hill is known after the Pir Sahab.

It is said that some verses of Gitanjali were composed here. In 1905, Rabindranath Tagore came to Munger to live with his uncle, Prasanna Kumar Thakur. He made this Pir mountain his residence and composed parts of Gitanjali during his stay here.

Sitakund

Sitakund is a village close to Munger, and has a hot spring known as Sitakund, after the famous episode from the Ramayana. When Sita entered a blazing fire to prove her chastity after she was rescued from Ravana, she came out of the ordeal unscathed but imparted to the pool in which she bathed, the heat she had absorbed from the fire. The pool, enclosed in a reservoir, is visited by many pilgrims, especially during the full moon of Magh.

In 1905, Rabindranath Tagore came to Munger to live with his uncle, Prasanna Kumar Thakur. He made this Pir mountain his residence and composed parts of Gitanjali during his stay here

Nature's Abundance

Forest area within the Munger District is 285.24 sq km and is distributed South to North up to Jamalpur. A few kilometres from the Amjhol Pahar there is a wildlife sanctuary named Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sanctuary supports diverse mammalian fauna as Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*), Sambhar (*Rusa unicolor*), Four-horned Antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*) and Chital (*Axis axis*). Acclaimed for its rich bird diversity, over 100 species of bird have been reported from here, including a

number of winter migratory birds that take refuge in the water bodies of the Sanctuary.

The District Gazetteer of Monghyr (1926) mentions the presence of Tigers, Leopards, Sloth Bear, Indian Civet, Jackal, Indian Fox, Indian Ratel (Badger), Fungivorus Bats, Palm Squirrel, Long-Tailed Langur, Shorter-Tailed Bengal Monkey, Sambhar, Chital, Ravine Deer, Barking Deer and Nilgai. Apart from the protected areas, the hilly areas turned quarry sites are habitat to Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), Indian Porcupine (*Hystrix leucura*), Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Indian wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), Rhesus Monkey (*Macaca mulatta*) and Langur (*Semnopithecus spp.*).

The riverine island and active floodplain area at the left bank of River Ganga provides habitat to Smooth-Coated Otter. This species is kept under Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act. Otters are considered as apex predators and are found to be hunting in packs. The Munger-Bhagalpur stretch of River Ganga provided suitable habitat to crocodile species: the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*) and Mugger (*Crocodylus palustris*). Upon interaction with fishermen community they mentioned that crocodiles are often sighted at sand bars and several encounters are reported in inhabited areas during flood season.

A Lesser Adjutant Along with a Jungle Crow and a House Crow

Installed Fishing Nets (Locally known as Jalads)

Kali Pahadi Talab

CHAPTER 39

KHAGARIA

Land of Katyayani

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Khagaria

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Khagaria district is located on the Ganga with a total geographical area of over 1485 sq km. The district is bounded by Samastipur and Darbhanga district on the north-west, Saharsa district on the north, Madhepura and Bhagalpur district in the east, while in the south it is bounded by Munger and in the west by Begusarai district. The major rivers flowing through the District are the Ganga, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamala Balan and Kosi, which causes floods almost every year. The Ganga River flows west to east covering a distance of approximately 29 kms, forming large riverine islands and active floodplain area. Due to regular inundation, the entire region is called Dahnal.

The normal annual rainfall of Khagaria District is 1170.2 mm of which 83.95% occurs during the monsoon season. The normal rainfall during monsoon season is 982.4 mm and during non-monsoon season is 187.8 mm.

Khagaria District is spread over vast tracts of flat alluvial plain and swampy lands. The soils in general, except those of the Diara lands and Tal lands, are moderately well drained to somewhat poorly drained. The climate of Khagaria District represents a transition between the dry and extreme climate of northern India and the warm and humid climate of Bengal.

Active floodplain of Ganga River is generally under cultivation,

Bairam Singh ki Kothi, Bharatkhand

excluding few patches of scrubland and plantation.

Re-living *the* Past

Since historic times, Khagaria was primarily under the Zamindars, who took control since late 18th century CE. It became an important trade centre, involved in the trade of chillies and grain. Thus, over time, several merchants and traders settled along the river within the district, belonging to the Marwari and Bengali communities.

The historical significance of Khagaria district dates back to prehistoric times, when it was a part of Munger district. The ancient river route also allowed several traders, travellers, saints and rulers to traverse Khagaria district. They brought their cultures and traditions along, which is displayed by the multiple historic layers of the urban fabric across the region.

Khagaria was known as Pharkiya *Pargana* during the rule of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. As the terrain was covered in dense forests and a difficult terrain, the district was difficult to map. Thus, it was named *Farak Kiya* which means separate, excluding the area. Over time, the name of the district was adopted as Khagaria.

Khagaria comprises several mounds, spread across its terrain. The ancient sites have been encroached or destroyed due to neglect over the years. One of the important Buddhist sites identified in the district lies in Alauli. The mound over the Bagmati-Kosi embankment in the district has been eroded. It finds mention in the puranic scriptures of Mahabharata, as Modagiri. It was the capital of the Eastern Kingdom of Vanga and Tamralipta. Khagaria District, a forested region, was also occupied by

the early Aryan settlers. It was a part of *Madhya-desa* or Midland of the Aryans.

Between 1200 CE to 1700 CE, the Sultans and Afghans traversed the northern plains, originating from the north-west. They visited Munger district, which earlier included Khagaria as well. In 15th century, the Lodi Sultans of Delhi sent a Rajput, by the name Biswanath Rai, to obtain land in Khagaria District. He was successful in his task and ruled over the region for ten generations. In 16th century CE, the region came under the Mughal Empire. As per historic records, Akbar sent Raja Todarmal, his revenue minister, to map the extents of the northern region. While he surveyed the neighbouring region, Todarmal faced great difficulty to study the area which fell under present-day Khagaria district. Its challenging terrain, dense forests and meandering rivers forced him to leave the land un-mapped. So, for keeping records, he named it Farakiya, which means separate or different. He advised the emperor to exclude this area, and named it Pharkiya Paragana.

Munger district gained prominence in 1762, when it was annexed by Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal. He shifted his capital from Murshidabad to Munger. Consequently, its surrounding region also gained prominence. In 1763 CE, the East India Company established control across the district. Khagaria was primarily a forested region, lying along the northern banks of river Ganga. Many chiefs undertook the administration of vast tracts of land, under the British dominion. Bairam Khan was one of the prominent *zamindar* chiefs who resided in Bharat Khand along the banks of Burhi Gandak River. He established a *kothi* dating to 18th century CE. It presently lies in ruins. The settlements near the banks of river Ganga comprise a vernacular architectural landscape.

As the district is situated along the ancient river route, it was developed as an important trading town. The chief items of export were chillies and grain. Several Marawari and Bengali communities settled here. However, the dominance of the Marwaris drove the Bengalis further eastward, into West Bengal. Gradually, the river ceased to be the primary source of transportation. The British enhanced road and rail connectivity. They laid the railway line through the district, with a major junction at Khagaria City. The station lies along the Hajipur-Katihar Branch of the Bengal and North-Western Railway. Over time, a Dak Bungalow, health centre and other civic buildings were built in Khagaria town.

The frequent shift in the course of river Ganga has led to the settlement of towns and villages further away from the flood plains. Some important townships are built along Burhi Gandak River. Presently, Khagaria town is a major trade centre, with an important railway junction in the city centre.

A Desolate Spot on the Burhi Gandak River

Between 1200 CE to 1700 CE, the Sultans and Afghans traversed the northern plains, originating from the north-west. They visited Munger district, which earlier included Khagaria as well

Songs of Shiva: ***These are divided into two categories: Nachari, in which a devotee expresses her helplessness to the lord, singing and dancing, and Mahasbani, in which the tale of Shiva and his family members is told***

Gaushala Mela – A Popular Cattle Fair

Events *of* Interest

Gaushala Mela

The Gaushala Mela is one of the most popular historic fairs in Bihar and attracts many tourists. The Fair has been running for more than 130 years. It is also known as the Gopastami Mela. Currently the fair is organised and coordinated by the Gaushala Karyakarini Samiti. The fair is a religious focal point as well as an entertainment focal point with many regular attractions such as traditional *Dangal* or wrestling competitions for Indian wrestlers. With the beginning of the Gaushala Mela, North Bihar's grand Kashth Mela begins its preparations and traditionally begins on the second day after the end of the Gaushala Mela.

Janmashtami

Janmashtami is a festival celebrated in honour of the birth of Krishna. Janmashtami is celebrated widely in Khagaria with various temples and thakurbadis participating in preparations such as Vasudev Thakurbadi, Meerjanaki Thukurbadi, Ramjanaki Thukurbadi and Manokamna Dham Mandir.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja is a much-celebrated festival of Khagaria with many Durga Puja *pandals* being set up during the time. The Sarraiya Durga Sthan in Chautham under the Khagaria district is regarded with special significance. According to legend, Raja Surendra Narayan, the then-king of Chautham, prayed for an heir at this spot and subsequently Raja Murari was born to him in 1942. Thereafter he installed a Durga idol at the spot. Ever since, Durga is worshipped at the spot and his descendants sponsor the annual installation of the Durga idol for Durga Puja. *Tantric* as well as *Vedic* forms of worship are followed there.

Makar Sankranti

Makar Sankranti is believed to be the day on which the Sun God, Surya, begins ascendancy and enters into the Northern Hemisphere. Once the day dawns, people bathe and then touch rice, jaggery (*gur*) and sesame (*til*). It is then customary to eat Dahi-Chawal aur Gud ka Bhuja. The rice used to prepare this dish is flattened rice, also known as *poha* in several north Indian languages. This preparation of rice is unique to the Indian Subcontinent. After food has been eaten, devotees go to the Ganga Ghat to perform a ritualistic bath (*snan*).

Art *at the* Heart

Maithili Music

Maithili music can be classified as Songs representing life-cycle events, songs representing the annual calendar of events, seasonal songs, wisdom songs and devotional songs. Songs from the devotional genre include:

- **Bhajan and Kirtan**– devotional songs sung in honour of Lord Vishnu, Ganga, Shiva, and Shakti.
- **Prati (Morning Songs)** – Reverential morning songs sung in adoration of gods and goddesses. Bhairavi, Jajamanti, Vihaga, and other Prati variations are among the most popular.
- **Gosaunik git and Bhagabati git** - sung in appreciation of the family deities in general.
- **Songs of Shiva:** These are divided into two categories: i) Nachari, in which a devotee expresses her helplessness to the lord, singing and dancing, and ii) Mahasbani, in which the tale of Shiva and his family members are told.
- **Mendicant Songs:** These are songs sung by beggars or the helpless. The texts express the singer's miserable condition and distress.
- **Songs of Love and Beauty:** Some songs convey a beloved's innermost feelings. The most common type of these songs is known as Lirahut. These are sung both for religious and recreational purposes. These melodic, pleasant, and emotional songs explore many elements of love relationships. Lirahuts are songs about both separation and union. This genre of songs include

◊ **Batgamani:** It primarily depicts the beloved in *abhisara* during the time when she is on her way to meet her lover. It is sung in an unusual melody.

◊ **Gwalari:** These are the songs of the *Gopis*, cowherd ladies who portray Krishna's sports and youthful antics in their company.

◊ **Raasa:** These are yet more songs about Krishna's sporting *Lilas* with the Gopis.

◊ **Maana:** These songs are a type of theatrical lyric that depict S*trimanaa's* (female thought process) annoyance and request to make amends with the *Purushmaana* (male thought process). Caravan songs, folk-dramatic songs, and so forth are also included in this genre.

◊ **Songs of Glory:** These songs extol the magnificence, history, and beauty of the land and its inhabitants, among other things. Through theatre and storytelling, the heroic actions of historical and mythological heroes are sung and played on the stage or in the streets. These Katha-Gatha lyrics provide a thorough account of the events.

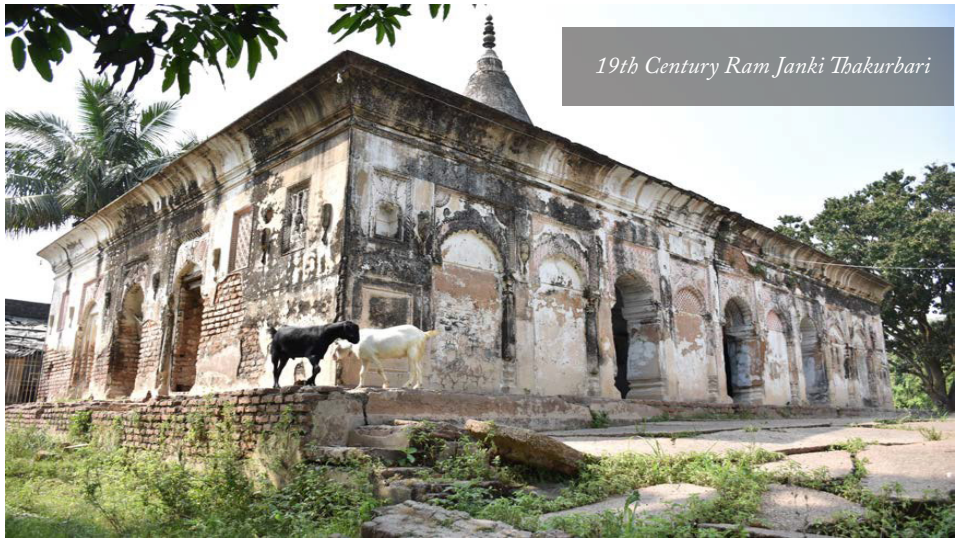
These classifications and descriptions reveal the significance of Maithili folksongs and the fact that these folk tunes are emblematic of humanity's boundless ingenuity. Through these songs, the society retains its wisdom and knowledge.

Gastronomic Delights

The region of Khagaria lives up to expectations of a varied and rich cuisine. *Khichdi*, a blend of rice and lentils cooked with spices and served with various accompaniments, is one of the most common dishes prepared in every family. *Kadhi* is another famous cuisine in this region, consisting of soft fried dumplings made of gram flour and served in a spicy yoghurt gravy. This meal is frequently served with simple rice, also known as *bhaat* in many dialects in Bihar.

One of the local favourites and popular among tourists is *Jhal Moori*, made of puffed rice and *sev*. Apart from the various delicious snacks and street food, the region is also famous for some mouth-watering sweet dishes. Some of the famous sweets include, but are not

Some of the famous sweets include, but are not limited to the region - Kala Jamun, Moti- choor ka Ladoo, Murki and Parwal ki Mithai



19th Century Ram Janki Thakurbari

limited to the region - Kala Jamun, Motichoor ka Ladoo, Murki and Parwal ki Mithai. Another important characteristic of the cuisine is that the sweets found here are not overtly filled with sugar syrups, leaving a unique crispy and delicious taste to the food.

The traditional cuisine of a region can, to some extent, be reconstructed by tracing the major raw materials found. Here, it becomes important to note that Khagaria is a leading maize-growing district.

During festivals like Ganesh Chathurthi and Diwali, sweets like Badam ka Halwa are also found here. Thekua or Khajuria is one of the most loved sweet snacks in Bihar, specially prepared as *prasad* during festive occasions like Chhath Puja. For its simplest version, a batter of flour, desi *ghee,* sugar and nuts is prepared and then shaped into discs that are deep fried till golden brown.

It is also popularly believed in the region that around three centuries ago, Bhakt Sripat Maharaj had a dream where he saw Goddess Katyayni and therefore began the task of building the temple

Monuments *that* Matter

Bairam Singh ki Kothi

As per locals, the residential complex was spread across 6 *beegha* (approx. 6100 sqm.). It used to have 52 residences and 53 doors in total where it got its literal name. It was built by the *zamindar* Bairam Khan, who left and settled in West Bengal.

Katyayani Asthan

The Katyayani Asthan is situated on the banks of river Koshi. Along with the idol of the goddess Maa Katyayani, idols of other gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon including Ram, Lakshman, and Maa Janaki are present here. According to the local folk customs, the goddess Katyayani is worshiped in two forms. Some devotees perform worship to Ma Katyayani as *Siddha Peeth*, while a majority of devotees in this region worship her in the form of *Lok Devi* i.e. the Goddess of Cattle. Due to her worship as *Lok Devi,* devotees offer raw milk as *prasad* or holy offering to the goddess. According to local mythology, the sage Katyayan was performing penance on the banks of the river Kaushiki (now known as river Koshi). Pleased with the devotion of the sage, Goddess Durga took an *avatar* as the sage's daughter and hence came to be known as the goddess Katyayani. It is also popularly believed in the region that around three centuries ago, Bhakt Sripat Maharaj had a dream where he saw Goddess Katyayni and therefore began the task of building the temple.

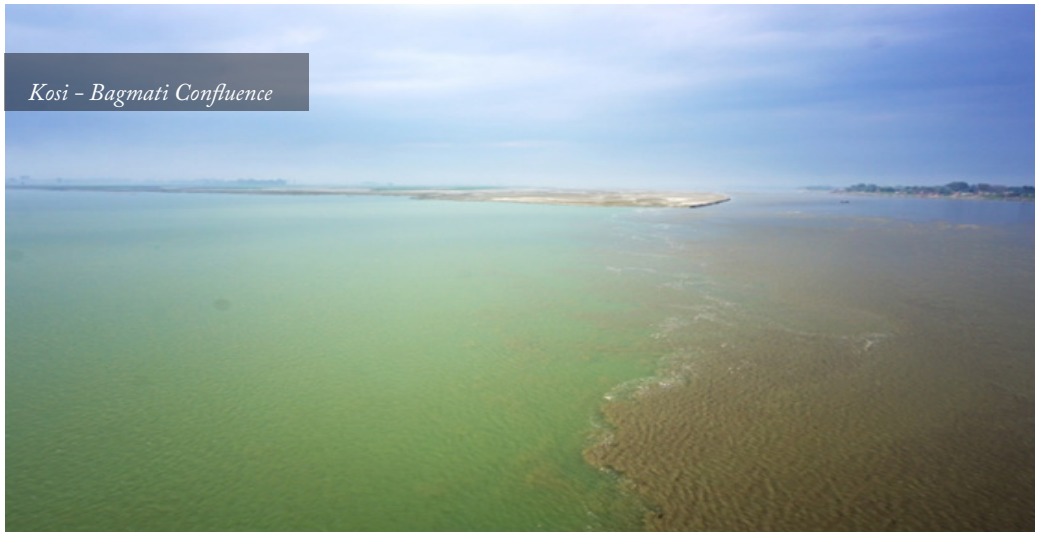
Ram Janki Thakurbari

It was built in the 19th century by the local *zamindars* and businessmen, to cater for the religious needs of the settlement.

Nature's Abundance

Few patches of riparian vegetation are found at the confluences, *diaras* and at the river bank within the study corridor. The riparian patches provide habitat to Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*), Hare (*Lepus ruficaudatus*), Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) and Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*). Plantation mainly of *Litchi senensis, Bombax ceiba, Mangifera indica*, and *Psidium guyava* provides the habitat to Rhesus Monkey (*Macaca mulatta*) and Langur (*Semnopithecus spp.*).

Some of the common fish species occurring in Khagaria stretch of Ganga include *Aspidoparia morar, Mystus tengara, Mystus cavasius, Mystus menoda* and *Nangra punctata*. However, the major economically important fish species caught in this region included *Labeo rohita, Labeo bata, Ailia coila, Cirrhinus mrigala* and *Mystus vittatus*.



Kosi - Bagmati Confluence

Mahaddipur Talab

Eroded Bank at Agwani Ghat

CHAPTER 40

BHAGALPUR

Land of Baidyanath & Silk

Bihar

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Bhagalpur

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Bhagalpur is situated in the southern region of Bihar state occupying an area of about 2,569 sq km. The district has three sub-divisions, Bhagalpur Sadar, Kahalgaon and Naugachia which are further divided into sixteen development blocks. The district is bounded by Munger in the southwest, Katihar in the north east, Madhepura and Purnea in the north, Khagaria in the west and Banka in the south. The Sahibganj District of Jharkhand lies on the east.

The district is principally drained by the river Ganga and its tributaries Badua and Koa. Apart from these, a number of seasonal streams such as Gahra, Chanan, Kadwa, Gerua and Bhena from Chota Nagpur plateau join the mighty Ganga. Geomorphologically, Bhagalpur District forms a part of the Mid-Ganga Foreland Basin having soils mainly derived from the older and newer alluvium. The older alluvial soils are chiefly loamy in character with moderate to heavy texture and well-drained. The sandy soil derived from the younger alluvium is light-textured, well-drained and are moderate to highly fertile calcareous soils found along the banks of the river Ganga.

The Ganga enters into Bhagalpur District near west of Sultanganj at Jahanvi Chowk and covers a distance of nearly 50 kms in this district exiting the district at Mirja Chouki into Jharkhand. On its course,

Vikramshila Setu Bridge Over Ganga

The Remains of the Vikramshila University, Centre of buddhist Learning, Founded in 8th Century AD

it flows past the island temple of Ajgaivinath Temple, Sultanganj and the Bateshwar Sthan Temple, on the right bank of Ganga at Kahalgaon. The district lies on both banks of the river. Bhagalpur, being an old town, is rich in heritage. As the city initially developed near the river, most of the heritage structures are found close to the river. The river also served as the main mode of transportation and therefore many old administrative and commercial structures can be found close to the river.

Bhagalpur produces high quality silk and is known as Silk City. It is placed in the stretch of of the Vikramshila Dolphin Sanctuary from Bhagalpur to Kahalgaon, the only one of its kind on the Ganga.

Re-living *the* Past

Between 320 and 455 CE, Anga was part of the Gupta Empire, a period known as the 'Golden Age', during which the region flourished economically and culturally. There were great developments in Indian art and metal works. Fa-Hien visited India in the course of his travels in the beginning of the 5th century CE. After the fall of the Imperial Gupta line, the latter Guptas, began to rule the region. Madhav Gupta was installed as the King of Magadh. His son Adityasena, who was well known for his military and administrative abilities, has left an inscription in Mandar Hill indicating the construction and dedication of Narsimha or Narhari Temple by him and his wife. A tank constructed by them was also excavated at the foot of the Mandar Hills known as Papaharini.

Bhagalpur, being an old town, is rich in heritage. As the city initially developed near the river, most of the heritage structures are found close to the river

There was a military revolt against Akbar in 1580. Akbar sent his Finance Minister, Todar Mal, to quell the rebellion which he successfully accomplished

Goud King Sasanka gained control over this area in 602 CE. He continued to rule here till his death in 625 CE, with his capital at Karnasuvarna near Berhampore in Bengal, after which this area came under the influence of King Harshavardhana of Sthaniswara. Hiuen Tsang visited India during his rule and visited the major Buddhist centres. He also visited the flourishing Champa and describes the twenty Deva temples and fortification in his accounts. From his works, the boundaries of Anga are concluded to be from Lakhiterai to Rajmahal on the Ganga and from Paresnath Hill to Kalna on the Bhagirathi.

In 755 CE, the adjoining region of Bengal came under the rule of the Palas. King Gopala soon conquered Bihar. Vikramshila, the seat of the famous University, was founded by Dharmapala (770 AD–810 CE), who himself was a Buddhist and a patron of education and scholarship. His son, Vighrapala, gained control over Anga. A copper plate ascribed to his son Narayanpal has been found at Bhagalpur. The Senas also ruled over Anga after the fall of the Palas. Lakshmansena (1185–1206 CE), son of Ballal Sena, consolidated the Sena Kingdom but his kingdom eventually fell to the Turks under Bakhtiyar Khilji.

Bakhtiyar Khilji attacked Bengal and Bihar in the wake of the 13th century during the rule of Lakshman Sena. He destroyed large parts of Nalanda and Vikramshila Universities. He became the first Turko-Afghan Viceroy of Bengal and Bihar under the Delhi Sultanate. By the end of the 13th century, the whole of Bihar became annexed to Jaunpur and remained so for almost a hundred years being ruled by the Turko-Afghans, the Saiyyids and the Lodis. The rule of Jaunpur was terminated when it was conquered by Hussain Shah of Bengal.

Humayun tried to annex Bengal and Bihar in 1540 CE, passing through Bhagalpur, but was checked by Sher Shah Suri between the Ganga and the Rajmahal Hills. In 1556 CE. With Akbar ascending the throne of the Mughal Empire in Delhi, Afghan power was finally defeated and Mughal rule was established in the region. Bhagalpur was constituted as a part of the *Sarkar* of Munger, one of the seven *sarkars* in which Bihar was divided. Akbar's forces marched through Bhagalpur in 1573 and 1575. There was a military revolt against Akbar in 1580. Akbar sent his Finance Minister, Todar Mal, to quell the rebellion which he successfully accomplished. He prevailed upon the local *zamindars* to cut off all supplies to the insurgents who had perforce to disperse. For two centuries Bihar was ruled by the Viceroys of the Mughal Emperor with their seat in Rajmahal. Bhagalpur was later made the seat of *Aumil* (Governor) or Imperial *Fauzdar*. During the Muslim rule, Bhagalpur did not attain any exceptional political prominence.

In 1769 CE, British East India Company appointed the first supervisors in the district to oversee the local revenue collection. In 1779 the first position of the Collector was formed. Augustus Cleveland, the first Collector, was responsible for subjugating the hill tribesmen of the Santhal *Pargana*, who were otherwise problematic for the British and previously the Mughal administrators. The Santhal Rebellion led to the creation of the new non-regulation district of the Santhal *Pargana* in 1855-56. The next few years in the history of the Bhagalpur District remained quite uneventful. Between the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, many Europeans had settled in the towns of Bhagalpur. There were also a number of Indigo planters at Bhagalpur.

Mythological Links

As the waters of the Ganga at Sultanganj are central in this particular pilgrimage, the story of the Ganga becomes significant. Born in the heavens, Ganga dwelt in the celestial sphere in Brahma's (the God of creation) *kamandalu* or sacred pot. In the

Ganga Ghat at Sultanganj, with the view of Ajgaibnath Temple in the Flood Season

Satya Yuga, King Sagara performed the *Ashwamedha Yagna*, a royal sacrifice in which a horse would be let loose and the land over which it wandered unchallenged would be claimed by the king who sponsored the sacrifice. King Sagara's horse had wandered into the hermitage of Kapil Rishi, situated today near the mouth of the Ganga.

The Gods, fearing Sagara's expansion, tied the horse to a post in the *rishi's ashram*. When Sagara's son reached here, they found the horse tied and Kapil Rishi deep in meditation. As they boldly untied the horse, the *rishi's* mediation was disturbed. They accused the *rishi* of appropriating their property. Angry at the accusation, he cursed the sixty thousand sons of Sagara, who disappeared underground. Sagara was devastated by the loss of his sons and even more so because of the belief that they would not be able to enter heaven without cremation. Kapil Rishi advised that only the regenerative waters of the Ganga could restore their bodily remains for the rites to be carried out. King Bhagiratha (Sagara's great grandson) undertook severe penance to request Ganga's descent upon earth. But Ganga residing in celestial sphere was not ready to do so.

After much pleading and prayers to Shiva, Ganga agreed to descend in Shiva's hair, where she wandered for years until her torrents were subdued. Finally, King Bhagirath drew his chariot down from the Himalayas and the Ganga followed, crashing and thundering behind. As they passed the rocks of Sultanganj, where stood Jahnu *Rishi's ashram*, the thunderous tumult of the waters shattered his meditation. In a fit of rage he swallowed the Ganga. King Bhagiratha meditated again, calling upon Shiva. Shiva appeared to Jahnu Rishi, whereupon he released her from his thigh. To release her from any other orifice of his body would have made her impure. At Ganga Sagar, where the river joins the sea, her waters washed over and retrieved King Sagara's sons who then attained release. This is also the story of how the Ganga came to have her second birth at Sultanganj. An old name associated with Sultanganj is Jhangira which is derived from the term *Jhang* (thigh) from the incident related to Rishi Jahnu. The temple, therefore, is also sometimes referred to as Jhangira's Rock.

Event *of* Interest

The Kanwad Pilgrimage

The Kanwad Pilgrimage is an integral part of culture in the region. The pilgrimage begins at Sultanganj with the first rite, the drawing of *Ganga Jal*. In the Kanwar pilgrimage, the waters of the Ganga at Sultanganj constitute the sacred offering. The Ganga Ghat at Sultanganj is very special for pilgrims and people from the surrounding areas, for here the river bends northward in its generally southward course to

In the Kanwar pilgrimage, the waters of the Ganga at Sultanganj constitute the sacred offering. The Ganga Ghat at Sultanganj is very special for pilgrims

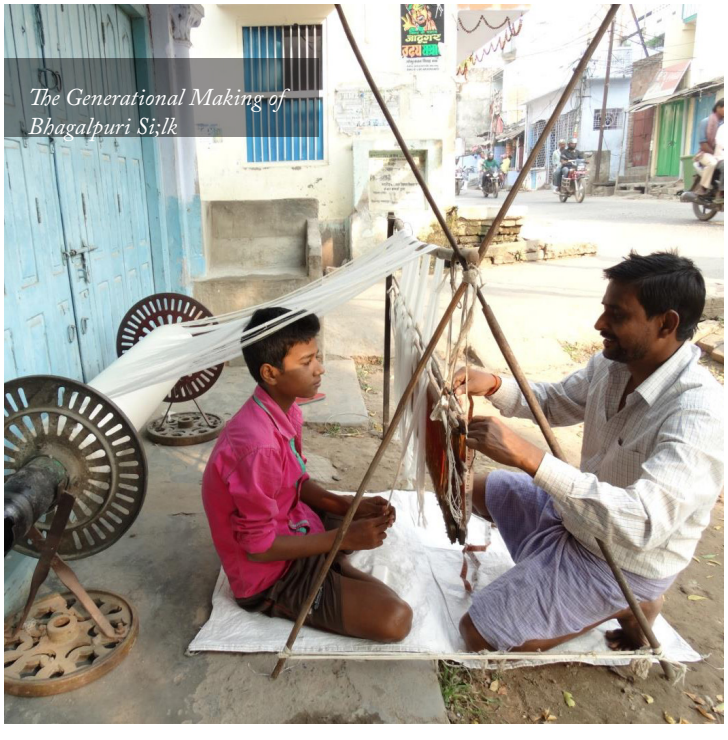
the Bay of Bengal. In Hinduism the direction south is associated with Yama, the god of death, and wherever the river turns north, it is deemed very auspicious. Pilgrimage places along a north bend of the Ganga occur only at a few places like Varanasi and Prayag. The discovery of several ancient Buddhist, Jain and Hindu sculptures around Sultanganj, suggests that it has been a place of religious importance since antiquity.

During the Kanwad Pilgrimage, large groups move on foot from Sultanganj towards Deoghar *Jyotirlinga* where the holy water is offered to Shiva. The journey takes days for the 108 kms to be traversed by these devotees. Vaidyanatha Jyotirlinga Temple, also known as Baba Baidyanath Dham, is one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas*, the most sacred abodes of Shiva. It is located in Deoghar in the Santhal *Parganas* Division of Jharkhand. It is a temple complex consisting of the main temple of Baba Baidyanath, where the *Jyotirlinga* is installed, along with 21 other temples. According to Hindu beliefs, the demon king Ravana worshipped Shiva at the current site of the temple to get boons that he later used to wreak havoc in the world. Ravana offered his ten heads one after another to Shiva as a sacrifice. Pleased with this, Shiva descended in order to cure Ravana, who was injured. As he acted as a doctor in this instance, he is referred to as *Vaidya* (doctor). The temple derives its name from this aspect of Shiva. Kanwar Yatra is thus an annual pilgrimage of the devotees of Shiva, known as *Kanwariyas* or *Bhole*, to the Hindu pilgrimage place of Sultanganj to fetch holy waters of the Ganga River. Millions of participants gather sacred water from the Ganga and carry it for miles to dispense as offerings in the Baidyanath Temple in Jharkhand.

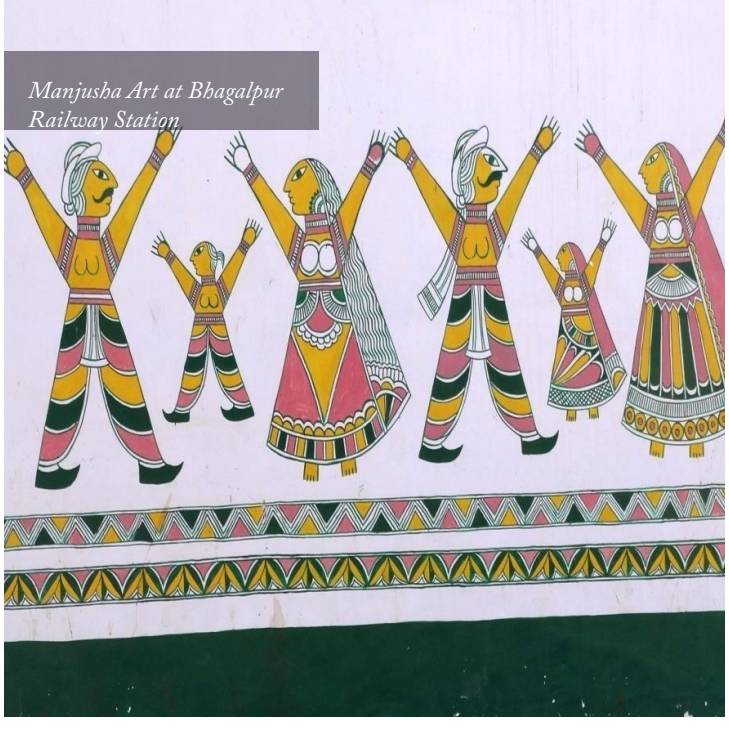
ART *at the* HEART

Silk Traditions

Bhagalpur has been associated with the silk industry for hundreds of years, and is famous all over India for its Tussar Silk and Bhagalpuri Saree. Silkworms



The Generational Making of Bhagalpuri Si;lk



Manjusha Art at Bhagalpur Railway Station

are cultivated to produce the renowned Tussar Silk from which the Tussar Saree is made.

The Tussar Silk industry is an indigenous industry that is most closely associated with this district. Around 1810, Francis Buchanan Hamilton estimated that there were about 3275 looms at work in the district. According to him, the kind of clothes now, as then, are mostly *dhurries* in which the warp consists of three parts of cotton and two parts of Tussar of a different colour. *Charkhanas* are about 18 cubits long and eight-seventh of a cubit wide. Different sized looms can produce from six to eight pieces in a month. *Baftas* are pieces of a uniform colour, dyed after being woven. *Khasaris*, which are produced chiefly for home use, are like *dhurries*, but of smaller size and inferior firmness. He goes on to elaborate that the pure tussar silk is called *tul*; the *Lahan Gowal* is a figured silk worn by the aristocracy.

The winding of the silk from cocoons is effected by a very simple instrument, a *tariya*. The process of cultivating the silk worms on the Mulberry tree, and extracting the silk thread onto the spinning reels is quite painstaking. Machines have now made this task easier and quicker.

Manjusha *or* Angika Art

Manjusha Art is an ancient and historically significant art form, considered at par with Madhubani Art. Manjusha Art or Manjusha Kala is often referred to as Snake Paintings by foreigners as swirling snakes in the art depict the central character Bihula's tale of love and sacrifice. A recent study on Manjusha art provides an excellent analysis of how this art reflects the history of ancient Anga *Mahajanapada.*

Manjusha art is believed to be one of few, among the many art forms in India, which has a sequential representation of the story where visuals are displayed in a series. This is also known as a scroll painting. Manjusha Art comes from Bhagalpur, and has been dated back to the 7th century CE. The name Manjusha is also associated with an elaborate story, a goddess, as well as a festival celebrated in Bhagalpur. The Sanskrit word *Manjusha* means a box; Manjushas are temple-shaped boxes, made of bamboo, jute-straw and paper in which the devotees keep their ceremonial materials. These boxes are, however, illustrated with paintings that tell a tale. The tale is that of Bihula who saved her husband from the deity's wrath and a snakebite; they also relate the story of Bishahari or Mansa, the snake goddess known for her anger when displeased but also her fierce protectiveness when propitiated. Earlier the story, Bihula Bishahari Gatha, had an oral tradition of being sung. Not many people sing it now, but in Assam and Bengal, the tradition is still continuing and songs are sung with the story of Bihula.

Gastronomic Delights

Bhagalpur traditional dishes are simple yet tasty. Kadhi Bari, Khichdi, Ghugni, Choora are some of the popular cuisines of the region. Bhagalpuri people prepare Chokhaa, a dish of boiled and mashed brinjals, potatoes and tomatoes, in hot spices, along with chutney.

Desserts like Kheer, Sewai, Halwa are some of the items that enhance the joy of celebrating any special occasion in Bhagalpur. While Kheer is a rice pudding made by boiling rice with milk and sugar, Sewai is a popular dessert prepared with Sewian and Milk. A huge variety of sweets are prepared in Bhagalpur. Some of the popular sweet products are Tilkut, Malpua, Churna, Balushahi, Motichoor ke Ladoo, Peda, and Rabri.

Manjusha Art is an ancient and historically significant art form, considered on par with Madhubani Art

People who Fascinate

Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay

The famous Bengali author who has penned many significant books including his ever famous Devdas, spent twenty years of his life in Bhagalpur. It was his maternal uncle's home.

Ajgaibanath Temple, situated in Sultanganj is devoted to Lord Shiva. The origin of this temple is shrouded in mystery

A prominent part of his work was composed in the city and influenced by his stay here.

Rabindra Nath Tagore

The noble prize winning Geetanjali by Rabindra Nath Tagore has some of its parts written in Bhagalpur. Rabindra Nath Tagore resided in Tilha Kothi for a considerable period of time. He wrote many verses of Geetanjali here. This house, Tilha Kothi, was built by the first Commissioner of Bhagalpur, Augustus Cleaveland.

Tilka Manjhi

Bhagalpur has also given birth to many freedom fighters. Baba Tilka Manjhi was one of them. The Santhal leader raised his voice and fought against the atrocities of the English around 1780s. He was the one to shoot an arrow to end the life of the British Commissioner, Augustus Cleaveland. He was captured by the British in 1784, dragged by a running horse and then hanged from a Banyan Tree. A statue of this inspiring freedom fighter has been erected as a memorial.

Ashok Kumar

The famous Hindi film actor was born in Bhagalpur as Kumudlal Kunjilal Ganguly. The Bhagalpur born lad also known as Dadamoni later became Ashok Kumar of Indian Cinema. He made his acting debut in 1936 and had an extremely successful career that lasted for 6 decades.

Monuments *that* Matter

Sultanganj today is a small agricultural town boasting an administrative complex and several associated modern-day embellishments. The economic life of Sultanganj closely mirrors the rhythm of pilgrimage. Old sculptures, mostly Buddhist and Jain in origin, lie scattered at the base of both the hills as reminders of the ancient history of Sultanganj stretching back in time. There are three major religions (Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism) associated with the sites at Sultanganj.

The Christ Church

Ajgaibanath Temple

Ajgaibanath Temple, situated in Sultanganj is devoted to Lord Shiva. The origin of this temple is shroud-

The Ajgaibanath Temple

The Monument of Augustus Cleveland

ed in mystery. Locals claim it to be a *Swayambhu* idol that appeared on its own on the rock. Later, it was given an abode. The temple is built on a rock protruding out from the river Ganga. It can be reached by hired boat, which is available at Murali Hills in Sultanganj.

The temple, also known as Gaibinath Mahadev, is popular for the sanctity of the idol of Lord Shiva. It has a series of rock sculptures and some inscriptions. Some of the rock panel sculptures at this temple are one of the best known specimens across India. The sculptures could belong to the later Pala period. During the rainy season, the swirling waters of river Ganga wash the base of the temple. The pilgrimage to Ajgaibanath Temple is considered to be holy due to the presence of the river Ganga. A part of the river here is seen washing the temple rock. The rock sculptures, inscriptions and Hindu, Buddhist and Gupta images are spectacular. According to legend, Lord Shiva was given his *Ajgaiv* or bow here, and hence the place is known as Ajgaibanath.

Originally, this place was known as Jahngira which was derived from the name of Jahnu Rishi. Jahngira is now a small village within the Sultanganj town. According to a local belief, Kala Pahad, a general of the Bengal Sultanate under the reigning Karrani Dynasty, wanted to destroy the Ajgaibanath Temple in his quest against temples, but did not succeed. He, however, destroyed the Parvati Temple on a nearby hill. Ram Navmi, Vasant Panchmi, Bhadra Purnima and Ganga Dussehra are the major festivals celebrated at this temple. The month-long fair, the Shravani Mela, has great importance and is celebrated on a grand scale in the temple. Shravani mela starts in the month of *sawan* or *shravan*. Lakhs of devotees flock to Sultanganj to collect holy waters of Ganga river. After collecting water in their Kanwads, they lift these on their shoulders and walk 108 km to the Baba Baidyanath Temple at Baba Dham in Deoghar.

Tilha Kothi, Also Known as the Rabindra Bhawan

Digambar Jain Mandir

Champapur is the ancient and historic *Teerth Khestra* of Jainism, where the 12th Jain *Teerthankar* Bhagvan Vasupujya came and lived. Champapur was the capital of Anga *Janpada*. The main temple of Champapur *Siddha Kshetra* is quiet ancient.

Vikramshila Setu

The Vikramshila Setu over Ganga is the 5th largest bridge over water in India. This bridge serves as a link between NH-33 and NH-31. One can also see the monument of Augustus Cleveland, the first District Collector of Bhagalpur, towards the end of the 18th century.

The area of the Ganga between Sultanganj to Kahalgaon is a Dolphin Sanctuary. It is a protected area since 1991.

Vikramshila University, Kahalgaon

It is said that Dharampala, the first king of the Pal Dynasty had laid the foundation of the Vikramshila University in about 8th - 9th Century CE. It was once a famous centre of Buddhist learning across the world, along with Nalanda during the Pal Dynasty.. The ruins of the university are an impressive sight and a reminder of the pioneering academic excellence of ancient India.

Bateshwar Sthan

Kahalgaon, also known as Kohalgaon after Kohal Rishi is located close to Vikramshila and hosts Bateshwar Sthan, a famous temple associated with Rishi Vashisth, who did penance here and erected a Shiva *lingam*.

Nature's Abundance

Greater Adjutant

The Garuda Rescue and Rehabilitation Area is located in Bhagalpur, the second largest of its kind. It caters to the Greater Adjutant stork *(Leptoptilos dubius)*. Loss of nesting habitat and feeding sites through drainage, pollution and disturbance, together with hunting and egg collection, has caused a massive dip in the population of this species.

Fishing in Kalwaliya Oxbow Lake

Jardalu Mango

Jardalu is a unique mango variety from Bhagalpur, Bihar. It is known for its light yellow skin and distinct special aroma. According to agriculture department sources, a person named Ali Khan Bahadur had first planted a Jardalu Mango Tree in the Bhagalpur region.

Katarni Rice

Katarni Rice is a unique tasting, aromatic, short grain rice grown in Bihar. It is native to Bhagalpur and Banka districts. Katarni rice is not only in demand in Bihar, but throughout the country.

Magahi Betel

The Magahi Betel leaf is good for digestion and an anti-depressant. The word *Magahi* comes from Magadh.

Vikramshila Dolphin Sanctuary

This is a 60 km stretch of Ganga from Sultanganj to Kahalgaon, notified in 1991 as a protected sanctuary of gangetic Dolphins *(Platanista gangetica)*. The Sanctuary hosts the largest number of the National Aquatic Animal. Greater awareness of protection and prosecution has brought dolphin hunting to an end. This stretch is also inhabited by Smooth Coated Otters, and Crocodilians.

Rocky Outcrops

Three rocky outcrops in the middle of the river at Kahalgaon are a sight to behold. While two of them host temples, the central one remains uninhabited except for amphibian fauna. It is believed that the outcrops came to be in the centre of the river owing to massive shift in the river course.

Fauna

The Gazetteer of Bhagalpur (1963), based on the original Gazetter of 1911, a part of the Bengal District Gazetteer series notes, "The hog badger or *bhalsur* is an inhabitant of *terai* and walks erect on its hind feet.... The Indian otter or *uth (Lutra nair)* is found in muddy streams and is trained for fishing purposes..... The Tiger *(Felis tigris)* and leopard *(Felis pardis)* are found south of Ganga. The Indian Wolf *(Canis pallipes)* has been seen on both sides of Ganga."

The principal species of fish are *Rohu, Katla, Buari, Tengra, Lilpa, Bachua, Jhinga* and *Pothia*.

Sand Being Mined from a Sandbar

Old and Sacred Banyan Tree near Bateshwar Sthan Temple

A 4 m Long Adult Gharial Spotted Near Sultanganj

CHAPTER 41

KATIHAR

Gateway to Bengal

Bihar

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Katihar

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Katihar district is situated in the north-eastern region of Bihar state occupying an area of about 3057 sq km. It is one of the largest districts of Bihar which was earlier part of the Purnia district as a sub-division. Currently it is divided into 3 sub-divisions, Katihar, Barsoi and Manihari, that altogether consist of 26 Community Development Blocks. The district is bounded on the north by Purnia and parts of West Bengal, on the south by Bhagalpur and parts of Jharkhand State, on the east by the state of West Bengal and on the west again by the district of Purnia. The district takes its name after the chief town of Katihar which probably derived its name from a small village on the north-east, called Dighi-Katihar where there is a big tank (*dighi*) excavated for the troops, when the soldiers of the Nawab of Purnea fought with the troops of Nawab of Murshidabad.

This district is part of the lower Ganga basin, falling in the Kosi and Mahananda sub-basin. The Kosi River and the Mahananda River with their numerous tributaries like Pamar, Dhar, Kamla, Saura Nadi, Morabrandi Nadi, Fariyani Nadi and Nagar, drain the district. Ganga passes through the southern border of the district. The area represents flat topography with regional slope towards the south. The areas in northern parts are at higher elevation that gradually slopes down towards south. Overall, the soil is non-calcar-

Traditional House at Kursela

eous and non-saline in nature and is a mixture of clay, sand and silt in varying proportions. Under Mughal rule, this district consisted of Sarkar Tajpur, east of the Mahananda and Sarkar Purnia, west of the river.

Under Mughal rule, this district consisted of Sarkar Tajpur, east of the Mahananda and Sarkar Purnea, west of the river

Soon after the Kosi-Ganga confluence, Ganga River enters Katihar from Bhagalpur in a north-easterly direction where it is braided by the presence of a group of irregularly shaped riverine islands. After crossing Karhagola Ghat, the river makes south-easterly turn and continues to flow in that direction more or less as a single channel until Manihari. Close to Manihari, the river is again braided due to interspersed riverine islands after which it takes turn in southern direction entering Jharkhand and West Bengal. The river stretch in this region was navigable by boats, steamers and even ships of large sizes carrying tonnes of goods mainly during monsoon season when water depth was suitable in a large width of the expanded river. However, during summers the water level in the river is recorded to have receded rendering the navigation possible only in a narrow width.

Re-living *the* Past

Ancient India was divided into 16 *Mahajanapadas*. The kingdoms represent the transformation from a semi-nomadic tribal society to an agrarian society. Trade and political structure was also introduced across the kingdoms. Katihar was under the rule of the Anga. It was later taken over by the Magadha Empire. Post

Lord Krishna is also believed to have travelled through Katihar. He lost his gemstone here, known as mani in the local dialect. The settlement at this spot was, thus, named Maniharan, which ultimately gave the tehsil its name

the Christian Era, the region was under the empire of the Gupta rulers. However, the Huns and other tribes invaded the region and drove the Guptas away. The proximity of the district to West Bengal also led to the settlement of many Bengali tribes as well. Katihar was earlier a part of Purnea District, which was visited by the famous Buddhist traveller, Hiuen Tsang in 640 CE. Subsequently, Katihar District came under the rule of the Pala Dynasty from 9th to 12th century CE.

During 13th century CE, the district came under the rule of Bakhtiyar Khilji. He was succeeded by Ghiyas-ud-din Iwaz. He conquered beyond the limits of his ancestor's kingdom and included almost the entire territory of Bihar. Later, post 16th century CE, Katihar came under the rule of the Mughal Emperors. Akbar divided his kingdom into multiple *sirkars*, for regulating smooth administration. Mahananda River passing through the district divides it into two portions. The area to the east of the river was called Tajpur *Sirkar,* and the portion towards the west was included in the Purnea *Sirkar*. The earlier Purnia District became a great military frontier province for the Mughals. This region was under the Faujdar, who was independent of the *Diwan* of Bengal. He owned major portions of the entire district as a *jagir* to maintain himself and his troops. In the following years, Katihar, like its neighbouring region, was under the Faujdars who were known as the Nawabs of Purnia.

The district was also visited by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru. He was traveling from Assam to Patna and rested in Barari Kant Nagar. Here he gave sermons to several devotees. A gurudwara was later built at the historic site. It comprises the Guru Granth Sahib and a written order by Guru Gobind Singh from Anandpur Sahib.

The region gained significance under the new Governor of Purnea, Saif Khan. He was a nobleman, having descended from Amir Khan, a famous Governor of Kabul. He came to the region under the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb, as requested by Murshid Kuli Khan, the Nawab of Bengal. Over time the two ruling powers engaged in several conflicts. In 1740 CE Saif Khan also clashed with Ali Vardi Khan who had strong connections with the imperial Court. Realizing his mistake, in 1749 during his march to Patna, Saif Khan provided him with his troops. Over the years, his successors ruled over the entire region, including Katihar district, as the Nawabs of Purnia. They often fought with the Nawabs of Murshidabad in Bengal. At one time, a large tank was excavated in present-day Katihar City as a refuge for the troops. Under them, the trade of the district increased. The neighbourhoods developed as residence-cum-market zones, which was enhanced by its location along Ganga river, one of the primary sources of travel during the time. Its eastern location along the Northern Plains, encouraged trade with Calcutta.

In 1770, the Governor of Purnia, who also ruled over Katihar district, was Mohammad Ali Khan. The British took over the land in the same year, as Katihar was a rising trade centre, interconnected with their eastern ports. As trade via the river route declined, they established the railway line across the district. It crosses Ganga River at Manihari Ghat.

Katihar District actively participated in the freedom struggle of 1947. Post-independence, Katihar witnessed a major influx of migrant population from Bangladesh. Land was provided in the region for the refugees, who contributed to the cultural landscape of Katihar as well. The villages also comprise Bengali communities as it lies along West Bengal territory. The district continues to carry out trade in the region and is connected with Purnia city. It acts as a gateway to West Bengal.

Mythological Links

Katihar District finds mention in the puranic scriptures. During the Mahabharata era, the tract along Ganga in Katihar district comprised a thick forest cover. This region was under King Virata's kingdom. During their exile the Pandava brothers journeyed through this region, and rested within the forests. Lord Krishna is also believed to have travelled through Katihar. He lost his gemstone here, known as *mani* in the local dialect. The settlement at this spot was, thus, named Manihari, which ultimately gave the *tehsil* its name.

The Kingdom of Videha is also known as the Kingdom of Mithila and the Kingdom of Tribhukti. During the late Vedic period (900 – 500 BCE), Videha arose as one of the central political and cultural powers of ancient India, along with the Kingdoms of Kuru and Panchala. Present-day Katihar and other districts around Bihar constituted the kingdom. The philosopher and king of Videha, Janaka, has been mentioned in late Vedic literature such as the Brahmanas and the Brihadaranyaka. The court of Janaka was also a huge patronage centre for philosophy and other intellectual pursuits and critical to the works of sages such as Yajnavalkya.

Events *of* Interest

Durga Puja

Shardiya Navratra, also known as Durga Puja, is celebrated with much joy in Katihar. Along with the setting up of many *puja pandals,* the celebration is often accompanied with a citywide fair with rides and attractions. The date and time of installation of the idols is charted according to the traditional *Manikanchan Sanyog* of the Bengali Bihari Community of Katihar. The installation of a *pandal* is usually preceded by a *Bhoomi Poojan* (literally Earth/ Soil Worship) to sanctify the *pandal* grounds.

Diwali

Diwali is one of the major festivals celebrated in Northern India and Katihar. Traditionally, families clean their homes and surroundings and decorate them with earthen lamps and flowers. The Goddess Lakshmi and God Ganesha are worshipped in work places and households before proceeding with the celebrations with firecrackers. Katihar has a huge market for the sale of earthen lamps, and terracotta-clay idols of Lakshmi and Ganesha along with other earthen toys. The use of Banana trees and leaves for decoration is unique to this region of India.

Durga Puja Pandal in Katihar

One of the local favourites and popular among tourists is Jhal Moori, made of puffed rice and sev

Janmashtami

Janmashtami is a festival celebrated as the birth of the Hindu god Krishna. In Katihar, the Bania Tola area is known for observing Janmashtami for 400 years. Since the 16th century, the Das family of Katihar has provided their patronage for all the celebrations which include the creation of the idols of Krishna and other gods, the *matka phod* tradition, the worship and the subsequent immersion of the idols. In the *matka phod* tradition, an earthen pot filled with Indian white butter is hung at a high point. Young boys and men are challenged to create a human pyramid to reach the pot and break it. This tradition is meant to mirror the myths surrounding *Bal Gopal* (another religious name associated with Krishna when he was a toddler). After the immersion, people smear each other with *Abeer* and *Gulal* – perfumed, coloured powder made with flowers, and married women put vermillion on each other's *maang* (the middle hair parting).

Gastronomic Delights

One of the local favourites and popular among tourists is *Jhal Moori,* made of puffed rice and sev. Apart from the various delicious snacks and street food, the region is also famous for some mouth-watering sweet dishes. Some of the famous sweets (but not limited to the region) are Kala Jamun, Motichoor ka Ladoo, Murki and Parwal ki Mithai. Another important characteristic of the cuisine is that the sweets found here are not overtly filled with sugar syrups, leaving a unique crispy and delicious taste to the food.

Amongst the traditional recipes of the region, Litti Chokha is one of the most prominent and beloved dishes of the region. It is a complete meal which has Litti, Chokha, Ghughni and Sarson Chutney. Litti is prepared using whole wheat flour with a stuffing of *Sattu* (roasted gram flour mix). In Khagaria, the Chokha can be made through roasted brinjal as well which provides a very distinctive flavour. During festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Diwali, sweets like Badam ka Halwa are also served hot.

Thekua or Khajuria is one of the most loved sweet snacks in Bihar, specially prepared as *prasad* during festive occasions like Chhath Puja. For its simplest version, a batter of flour, desi *ghee,* sugar and nuts is prepared and then shaped into flat rounds that are deep fried till golden brown. It is crunchy and sweet – all in one.

People who Fascinate

Dhruv Kundu

Dhruv Kundu was a freedom revolutionary from Katihar. On 10th August 1942, the British officials arrested Congress party workers who were protesting for independence and sealed off the Congress Ashram in Katihar. On 12th August, many of the town's telegraph and railway lines were attacked and disrupted. Subsequently on 13th August, Dhruv Kundu, a 13-year-old revolutionary, organised protesters and removed the Union Jack from the munsif court and raised the Indian Tricolour instead. British officials attacked the court and shot Dhruv Kundu and 13 other revolutionaries. He gave his martyrdom in the Purnia Hospital.

Sitaram Kesri

Sitaram Kesri (1919 – 2000) was an Indian politician and parliamentarian, who became a union minister and served as President of the Indian National Congress from 1996 to 1998. Kesri became politically active at a young age during the Quit India Movement. He was arrested for his political activities quite often between 1930 and 1942. He was elected to the Lok Sabha as a representative of the Katihar constituency in 1967.

Arabinda Mukhopadhyay

Arabinda Mukhopadhyay (1919 –

Cast Net fishing at Karhagola Ghat

Ganga Near Karhagola Ghat

2016) was a filmmaker born in Katihar. His family was originally from the Hooghly District of modern-day West Bengal. His elder brother was the noted writer Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay. Arabinda Mukhopadhyay's career spanned four-decades and he directed many Bengali film classics like Nishi Padma (1970), Dhanyee Meye (1971) and Mouchak (1974). He was also affectionately referred to as *Dhulu Babu*. He received a nomination for the President's Award in 1959 for his film Kichukkhon. His movie, Ahban, was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961. In 1972 he received the Filmfare Award for Best Screenplay for the Hindi classic film, Amar Prem.

Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay

Padma Bhushan-recipient Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay was born in Manihari, in modern-day Katihar district. He was the elder brother of Arabinda Mukhopadhyay. He was a Bengali writer and physician who was widely celebrated for his contributions to Bengali literature. He wrote under the pen-name Banaphul, meaning the wild flower in Bengali. He was most noted for his short vignettes, but his entire body of work spanned sixty-five years and included thousands of poems, around 586 short stories, 60 novels, 5 dramas, and many essays. He received the Filmfare Award for Best Story for the Hindi-language film, Arjun Pandit. He won many prestigious Bengali literary awards, including Ananda Puroshkar, Rabindra Puroshkar and Jagattarini Puroshkar.

Monuments *that* Matter

Gandhi Ghar, Kursela

Gandhi Ghar in Kursela of Katihar district was created in honour of

In Khagaria, the Chokha can be made through roasted brinjal as well which provides a very distinctive flavour. During festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Diwali, sweets like Badam ka Halwa are also served hot

The conservation of all the birds is critical as approximately 90 species of bird are termed as Threatened in the IUCN list

Mahatma Gandhi. In 1934, Mahatma Gandhi visited Kursela to meet and aid the victims of a disastrous earthquake. Touched by his visit, an *ashram* was founded near the Kursela Railway Station. It is maintained by the Ashram Samiti. The historical site also has a museum dedicated to the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Peer Mazar, Manihari

The *mazaar* of Baba Hazrat Jeetanshah Rahemullah is situated at an elevation of approximately 60 feet. Built in 1330 CE, a local legend states that a Manihari resident, Atul Mukherjee, made a *mannat* (prayer) to the Baba and promised to create a proper structure if it was fulfilled. As his wish was eventually fulfilled, Mukherjee built the *mazaar*. According to a local ritual, devotees come to the *mazaar* and pray upon a stone and tie it in a piece of cloth. Upon fulfilment of their prayer, they come back to provide offerings of holy blankets (*chadar*) and *prasad*. *Urs* is celebrated annually.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurudwara

Nature's Abundance

Besides the terrestrial fauna, Katihar district supports highly rich and diverse avifauna. A good number of local and migratory birds can be observed. Some of the larger lakes in the District, like Goga Bil and Baghar Bil provide suitable habitats for winter visitors. A total of 100 different avian species are sighted in Katihar out of which 41 are wetland species and other 59 are of forest and grassland ecosystems including 5 species of raptors. Based on the identified species, following observations were made: Little Egret, Great Egret, Indian Pond Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Common Moorhen, Little Cormorant, Asian Pied Starling, Indian Jungle Crow, House Crow, Common Pigeon, Common Myna, Red-wattled Lapwing and Eurasian Collared Dove were the most frequently sighted species. Black-Headed Ibis, Ferruginous Duck, River Lapwing, and Alexandrine Parakeet fall under Near Threatened category, Lesser Adjutant, River Tern, and Common Pochard have Vulnerable status whereas Greater Adjutant has been listed as Endangered in IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species.

The riverine fluvial islands are present here, namely, Gobrahi Diara near Karhagola Ghat, which is the most significant riverine island in this region - it is roughly lens shaped. The *diaras* also hold temporary settlements and are under extensive agriculture with crops such as mustard, water melon and wheat being grown there in different

seasons. On some fringe parts of this *diara*, natural vegetation dominated by *Saccharum sps.* grasses are present which is an important bioresource for construction of huts, thatched roofs and making boundaries for agricultural fields on this *diara*. Fishing was also observed to be a prominent activity on and around this *diara*. However, today these rich fish resources are threatened by over-fishing, pollution and introduction of exotic species.

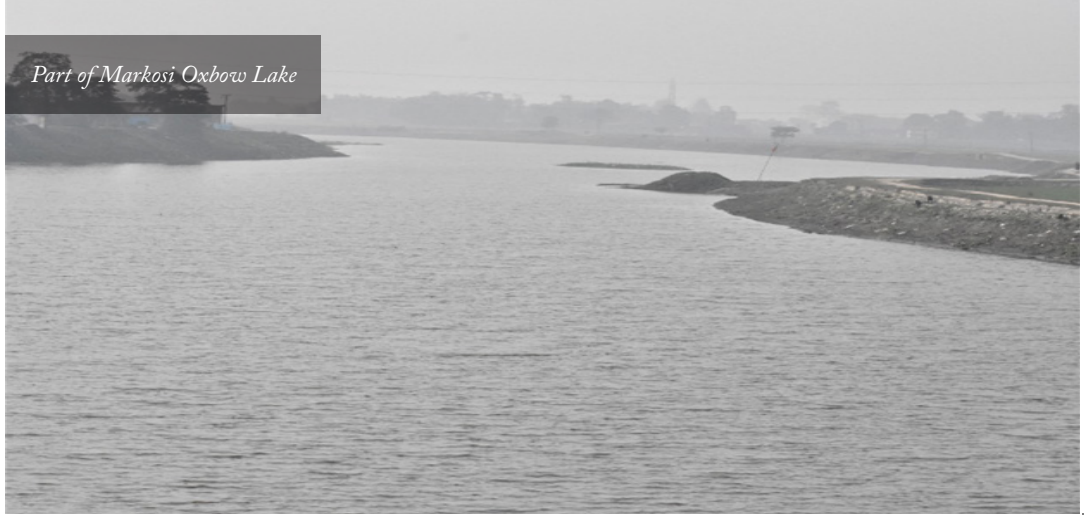
Gogabil Lake, Manihari

The Gogabil Lake lies in Manihari and is considered to be one of the largest wetlands of Bihar. It was declared as the state's first Conservation Reserve by the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The lake becomes home to nearly 300 different species of migratory birds during migration season in winters, with migrants from as far afar as the Caspian Sea and Siberian region. The conservation of all the birds is critical as approximately 90 species of birds are termed as Threatened in the IUCN list. These species include the Black-necked Stork and the White Ibis.

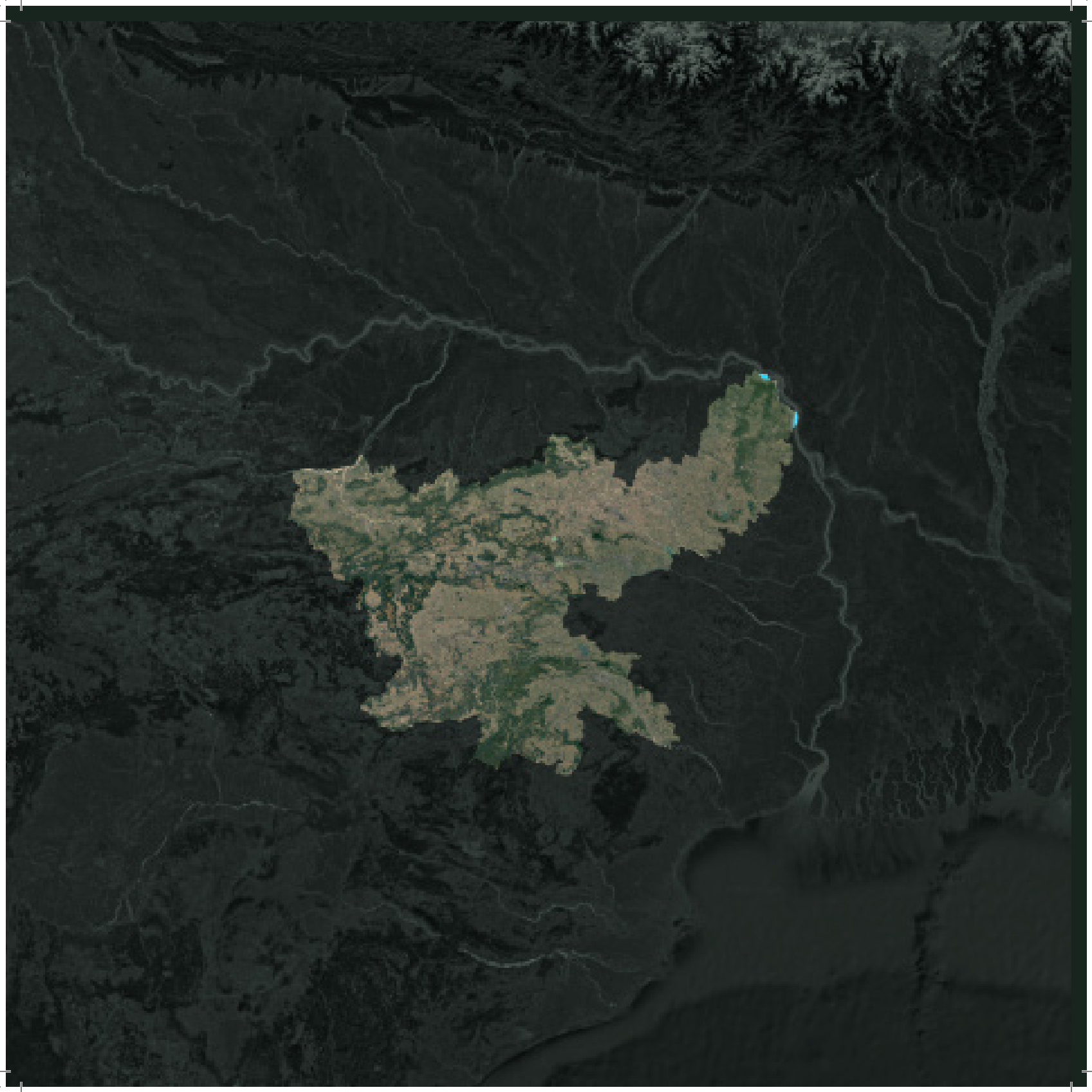
The Gogabil lake is an oxbow lake spread over 73.88 acres of land. The waters in the lake are fed by the Mahananda and Kankahar in the north and Ganga in the south.

Greater Adjutants - An Endangered Species

Ships Carrying Trucks at Manihari



Part of Markosi Oxbow Lake



GANGA THROUGH

JHARKHAND

CHAPTER 42

SAHIBGANJ

A Sufi's Space

Jharkhand

Legend

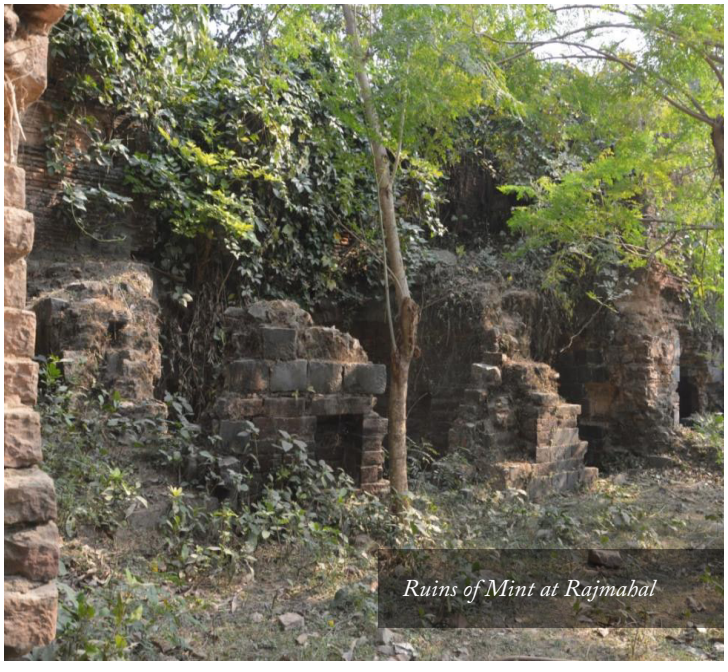
Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Sahibganj

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Sahibganj is one of the twenty-four districts of the state of Jharkhand and the only one abutting Ganga. With a total area of 1702.10 sq km, the district is set in a lush green region with a predominantly tribal population. It is part of the old Santhal *Pargana* and lies at its eastern most tip. The district is divided into two sub-divisions, namely Sahibganj Sub-division and Rajmahal Sub-division, which are further sub-divided into nine community development blocks. On its western periphery are Bhagalpur and Godda Districts, Malda and Murshidabad Districts of West Bengal in the east, whilst the Ganga River and Katihar District flank the north. Moti Jharna Waterfall, Shivgadi Temple, Udhwa Bird Sanctuary and National Fossil Park are some of the important sites of Sahibganj District.

The region has a rich mix of uplands, undulation along ridges, and depressions. The Ganges, Gumani and Bansloi rivers flow across this area, bestowing it with an abundance of fertile lands.

The Ganga forms the northern boundary and enters the district from its north western corner. From here, it meanders eastward up to Sakrigali where it takes a turn to the south and forms the southern boundary of the district up to a little beyond Radhanagar in the Rajmahal Sub-division. The river has been drifting gradually northwards and Sahibganj town,



Ruins of Mint at Rajmahal

Santhal Tribesmen Performing a Folk dance

which was once at the riverbank, is now about a mile away from the right bank. The average width of the Ganga in the district is about four and a half kilometres. The river swells during the rainy season and inundates the lowlands. There is a ferry across the river between Maharajpur Ghat in the Sahibganj district on one side and Manihari Ghat in the Katihar district on the other side. Country boats and jetties plying on the river also connect Rajmahal and Malda in West Bengal.

Re-living *the* Past

The area is believed to have been inhabited since time immemorial only by Malers (*Mal Paharia*), who were the early settlers of the territory of Rajmahal Hills. They still reside in some areas of the same hills. In Chinese Buddhist texts, the town was mentioned as Kajangla literally translating to an old town. Historical records also state that Bhaskaravarman, the King of Kamrupa, passed river Ganga with his army which included his warships, elephants, horses and infantry to proceed in alliance with King Harsha in 642 CE.

Stone Age implements, largely weapons, and tools in the form of axes, arrow heads, hammers and agricultural implements have been found in the erstwhile Santhal Parganas. Upper Paleolithic tools characterized by scrapers, cores and flakes have been found. The hill slopes of Rajmahal also contain microliths which can be dated to the Mesolithic period. The shoulder-headed celts found in the region have similarity with those

This plain region has an interesting mix of uplands, undulation along ridges, and depressions. The Ganges, Gumani and Bansloi rivers flow across this area, bestowing it with an abundance of fertile lands

Marked and Identified Fossil at Fossil Park, Mandro

found in the Malay Peninsula and Chotta Nagpur Plateaus.

Historical records of this region date to 302 BCE when Megasthenes visited the court of Chandra Gupta at Pataliputra (Patna). He talks about the Malli People (Mal Paharia), who are still found today

The historical record of this region revives in the medieval period when the Teliagarhi Pass became the key gateway of armies marching between Northern India and Bengal

north of the Rajmahal Hills, whose territories were bound by the Prasi (people of Magadha or Bihar) and the Gangaridae (people of Lower Bengal) and the Ganga. From the 4th Century BCE till the visit of Hieun Tsang in the 7th century CE there is no known history of this region.

The historical record of this region revives in the medieval period when the Teliagarhi Pass became the key gateway of armies marching between Northern India and Bengal. In 1202 CE, Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Bengal by marching through Teliagarhi laying the foundation of 500 years of Islamic rule in Bengal. In 1538, Sher Shah Suri strengthened the fortifications at Teliagarhi as a defence against the Mughal Emperor Humayun. On 12th July, 1576 the battle of Rajmahal was fought between the Bengal Sultanate, led by Daud Khan Karrani, and Akbar's army at Teliagarhi. Daud Khan took up a strong position in Rajmahal behind the entrenchments of Teliagarhi which were garrisoned by 3000 Afghans and the Mughal forces were held at bay for many months. Eventually Daud Khan was captured and beheaded, paving the way for Mughal Rule in Bengal.

The next significant event in the history of the region was the establishment of Rajmahal as the capital of the Bengal Bihar *Subah*. It was Man Singh, the general of Akbar, who in the capacity of Viceroy of Bengal shifted the capital of Bengal from Gaur, which had been the capital of the province from 1202, to Rajmahal in 1592. Sher Shah had selected this site for the seat of his government, but it was Man Singh who executed the plan since the Ganga had shifted from Gaur and the city had become overpopulated with poor hygiene. Man Singh made fortifications, built a palace and established a capital there. He changed the name of the city from Agmahal to Rajmahal but as the city grew, it began to be called Akbarnagar in honour of the emperor. But this honour of Rajmahal was short-lived for, the capital was shifted to Dacca in 1608 by Nawab Islam Khan. Shortly after this, Teliagarhi became the site of a fierce battle between Prince Shah Jahan and his uncle, Ibrahim Khan, Viceroy of Bengal and brother of Empress Nur Jahan. Shah Jahan had rebelled against his father Jahangir and invaded the province. Ibrahim Khan

marched from Dhaka to Rajmahal and retired to the fortifications of Teliagarhi realizing that his army were too few in number. The defences of Teliagarhi were mined and blown up and Shah Jahan's army breached the garrisons of the Fort, taking control of the Bengal Province. However, Shah Jahan's victory was short lived as the Imperial forces decisively defeated the rebel Prince at Allahabad in 1624, after which he retreated to Rajmahal and finally to the Deccan.

In 1639 CE, Rajmahal regained its glory and was again made the capital of Bengal by Shah Shuja, the second son of Emperor Shah Jahan. He built a palace by the river and strengthened the fortifications made by Man Singh and engaged in largescale building activity to make the city worthy of being the capital of Bengal. However, nearly the whole city and a large part of the palace were destroyed soon after due to a fire. The course of the Ganga also changed its direction washing away many edifices along the river. In spite of this, Rajmahal continued as the seat of the Mughal Viceroy up to 1660 and a mint town till 1661. A year before this, Shah Shuja had marched towards Delhi to take control of the Imperial throne but was defeated in Monghyr by Aurangzeb's army led by Mir Jumla and Aurangzeb's son, due to which he retreated to Rajmahal and fortified Teliagarhi and Sakrigali. However, the imperial army stormed the fortifications causing Shah Shuja to flee to Tandah. After this, the capital was shifted from Rajmahal to Dhaka. The change in capital, as documented by Bernier, was due to a shift in the course of the Ganga and to check the attacks of the Portuguese bandits and the King of Arakan (Burma).

Rajmahal did not come into much prominence during the remaining Muslim rule, though it continued to hold some of its glory as a trading town. In 1712, after the death of Emperor Bahadur Shah, Izz-ud-daula fortified himself at Rajmahal guarding neighbouring passes and intercepting all communications. However, his fortifications did not offer any resistance to Farrukh Siyar who advanced through the Teliagarhi Pass on his way to Murshidabad without much effort. In 1728, Alivardi Khan was appointed as the *Faujdar* of Akbarnagar (Rajmahal) and there was peace and prosperity in the region under his administration. In 1742, Rajmahal was taken by the Marathas. In 1757, Siraj-ud-Daulah was captured here by Mir Daud, brother of Mir Jafar, while he was fleeing from the Battle of Plassey.

The British had established trade at Rajmahal during the reign of Shah Shuja. Even the Portuguese had attempted to establish trade at Rajmahal which was a great mart of saltpetre, sugar and silk. With the fall of Shah Shuja, the Europeans experienced much difficulty due to resistance from Mir Jumla who would try to stop their ships at Rajmahal. However, they soon came to an agreement and by 1656 there was an English warehouse in Rajmahal. In 1676, they established a small agency at Rajmahal. In 1696, the rebellion of Shuja broke out and Rajmahal was captured

In 1696, the rebellion of Shuja broke out and Rajmahal was captured along with all regions on the west bank of the Ganga till Midnapore, where all the property of the English were seized

along with all regions on the west bank of the Ganga till Midnapore, where all the property of the English were seized. In 1702, Aurangzeb ordered the arrest of Europeans in India and all the servants of the East India Company at Rajmahal were captured.

With their decisive victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British took control of the region under today's Sahibganj district which was part of erstwhile Bengal. British rule in the region was not peaceful due to the constant rebellion of the Paharias (hillmen). The early history of the British at Rajmahal is mainly a record of their attempts to pacify the Paharias. The Maler and Mal Paharias to the north and south of the district wreaked havoc plundering ships. In 1772, Warren Hastings organized a special corps of 800 men to curb the Paharias, under the command of Captain Brooke, who was appointed the Military Governor of the Jungle Terai. Captain Browne, his successor, found himself busy mostly in suppressing the rebellion of the Bhuiyas.

A Villager Disembarks From the Boat and Bikes to his Destination

Old Police Station, Sahibganj

He, however, prepared a scheme to win over the Paharias, which was executed by Augustus Cleveland. He introduced the system of trial of cases by an assembly of chiefs which was sanctioned in 1796. This show of self-rule continued till 1827 when hillmen were declared amenable to ordinary courts of law, though they still enjoyed the privilege to settle petty disputes.

Sutherland, successor to Cleveland, in his capacity as Joint Magistrate of Bhagalpur toured the old district of Santhal *Pargana* in 1818. He enquired into the causes of local unrest and in 1819 suggested that the hill tracts inhabited by the tribals should be declared the direct property of Government so that they could be looked after better. This estate was named Damin-i-Koh, a Persian term meaning, skirts of the hills.

The Santhal rebellion of 1855 under the leadership of Sidhu, Kanhu, Chand and Bhairab shook the British. As the Company tried to arrest the Santhals and thereby protect the *dikus* whom the Santhals had branded as their enemy, trouble spread quickly. Large troops were forced into action. Martial Law was proclaimed on the 10th November, 1855 and with characteristic ruthlessness, the East India Company succeeded in suppressing the rebellion by December 1855. Though the Santhals were defeated, the tremendous courage shown by the Santhals made the British realise that reasonable demands of Santhals must be met if they wanted to rule over the area. A separate district was created by the name of Santhal Pargana to remedy the grievances of the Santhals and to give them a homeland with a sense of security.

The people of Santhal Parganas were very active during the Independence Struggle. The district played its role in the Salt Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930.

Events *of* Interest

Sarhul

Sarhul is celebrated during the spring season when the Sal trees get new flowers on their branches. It is a worship of the village deity who is considered to be the protector of the tribes. People celebrate the appearance of the new flowers. The deities are worshiped with Sal flowers. The village priest or *Pahan* fasts for a couple of days. In the early morning he takes a bath and puts on a new

dhoti made of virgin cotton (k*achha dhaga*). The previous evening, the *Pahan* takes three new earthen pots and fills them with fresh water; the next morning he observes these earthen pots and water level inside. If the water level decreases he predicts that there would be famine or less rain, and if the water level is normal, that is the signal of good rain. Before *pooja* starts, the wife of the *Pahan* washes his feet and gets blessings from him. At the *pooja*, Pahan offers three young roosters of different colors; One for the almighty god, another for the village deities and the third for the ancestors. Traditional drum, *Dhol, Nagara* and *Turhi* players keep drumming and playing along with the *Pahan* chanting prayers to deities. The *Pahan* offers Sal flowers representing brotherhood and friendship. He also puts Sal flowers on every house's roof which is called *Phool Khonsi*. At the same time *prasad*, a rice beer called Handia, is distributed among the villagers. And the whole village celebrates the festival of Sarhul with singing and dancing.

Karam

The Karam Festival is a worship of Karam Devta, the god of power, youth and youthfulness. Karam is held in the *Bhadra* month. Groups of young villagers go to the jungle and collect wood, fruits and flowers. These are required during the *puja* of Karam God. During this period people sing and dance in groups. The entire valley seems to be dancing with the drumbeats. This is one of the rare examples of such a vital and vibrant youth festival in Jharkhand's tribal area.

Jawa

At the same time, the unmarried tribal girls celebrate the Jawa Festival, which has its own kind of songs and dance. This is held mainly for the expectation of good fertility and better households. The unmarried girls decorate a small basket with germinating seeds. It is believed that the worship for good germination of the grains would increase fertility.

Usu

Usu is a harvest festival held during the winter on the last day of the *Poush* month. It is also a celebration for unmarried girls. Girls decorate a wooden/ bamboo frame with coloured paper and then gift it to the nearby hill streams. Although there is no documented history available on this festival, it has a huge collection of scintillating songs full of life and zest. These songs reflect the simplicity and innocence of tribal people.

Hal Punhya

Hal Punhya is a festival which begins with the fall of winter. The first day of *Magh* month, known as Akhain Jatra or Hal Punhya, is considered as the beginning of ploughing. The farmers, to symbolize this auspicious morning, plough two and half circles on their agricultural land. This day is celebrated as the harbinger of good fortune.

The Karam Festival is a worship of Karam Devta, the god of power, youth and youthfulness. Karam is held in the Bhadra month

Bhagta Parab

Bhagta Parab is the festival that comes between the period of spring and summer and is celebrated by the tribals. It is best known as the worship of Budha Baba. People fast during the day and carry the bathed *Pahan*, the priest, to the tribal mandir called Sarana Mandir. The *Pahan* sometimes called *Laya*, gets out of the pond, the devotees make a chain, locking their thighs with each other and come forward to offer their bare chest to *Laya* for a walk over. After worship in the evening, devotees take part in dynamic and vigorous Chhau Dance with lots of gymnastic actions and masks. The next day is full of sports of valour. The devotees pierce hooks on skin and get tied at one end of a long horizontal wooden pole, which is hanging on the top of a vertical Sal wood pole. The height of this goes up to 40 feet approximately. The other end of the pole which is connected with a rope, is pulled around the pole by the people and the tied devotee displays the breath-taking and astonishing dance in the sky.

Jani Shikar is a festival held once every twelve years where the womenfolk wear men's attire and go hunting in the forest

Handia - A Popular Alcoholic Beverage Made from Rice

Rohini

Rohini is perhaps the first festival of Jharkhand. It is a festival of sowing seeds in the field. Farmers start sowing seeds from this day but there is no dance or song like other tribal festivals, just a few rituals. Some other festivals like Rajsawala, Ambavati, and Chitgomha are also celebrated with Rohini.

Bandana

Bandana is one of the most famous festivals celebrated during the new moon of the month of *Kartik* (Kartik Aamavasya). This festival is mainly for the animals. People are very close to their livestock. In this festival, people wash, clean, paint, decorate, feed their animals well and put ornaments on their cows and bulls. The song dedicated for this festival is called Ohira which is an acknowledgement for animals' contribution in their day-to-day life. The belief behind this festival is that animals are an integral part of life and have souls as human beings do. Generally the colours used for decorating animals are natural colours and the artwork is vibrant.

Jani Shikar

Jani Shikar is a festival held once every twelve years where the womenfolk wear mens' attire and go hunting in the forest. Jani-Shikaar is performed in memory of driving away the attackers, who wanted to capture the fort in Rohtasgarh, on the Sarhul Festival, the new year day for the tribal community, when men used to be in a drunken state. The attackers who had tried to capture the fort twelve times in twelve years, were driven away by the Kurukh womenfolk, who wore the men's clothes while in the battlefield.

Art *at the* Heart

The traditional cottage and village industries practiced by the Santhal and the Paharia tribes constitute Tussar Silk Rearing, Blacksmithy, Carpentry, Handloom Weaving, Rope making, Bidi making, Earthenware making, and Stoneware making. Most employment is generated by works based on mining and related quarrying activities. Sahibganj is by far the most important place for trade and commerce in the district. The main exports are Paddy, Jawar, Sabai, Grass, Stone Chips, Hides, Fibres, Kaolin and Bentonite. Poultry farming, piggery, animal husbandry and fisheries also provide supplementary income. Clay idol making is also one of the main industries during festival season.

Gastronomic Delights

Handia

Handia is a drink which is a rice beer, prepared by the local community. It is made from the Ranu Tablet which is a combination of 20-25 herbs, which is mixed with boiled rice and left to ferment. This drink which gets ready within a week, is popular on account of its lower alcoholic content compared to the country liquors.

Rugra, Also Known As Local Mushroom

The Shivgadi Temple

Rugra

Rugra tastes like mushroom and is an native variety of vegetable, rich in protein and minerals, high on calorific value. This is a very healthy dish. It is available in abundance during the Monsoon season.

Dhuska

Dhuska is one of the most popular edible items in Jharkhand which is usually consumed as a fried breakfast item and is prepared from rice and lentil batter. It is normally served with traditional Ghugni, which is a simple curry made with black chickpeas. Food is served in traditional bowls made from Sal leaves.

Bamboo Shoot

Bamboo shoots are totally edible and are a part of the staple food of Jharkhand. This shoot which has a tough exterior has a faintly sweet flavour and a unique taste. People prepare a variety of dishes from the bamboo shoot and mainly use it as a vegetable.

Desserts

People of Jharkhand seem to have a fascination for desserts, which would explain the mind-boggling variety of sweets available here. They prepare desserts like Halwa, Gujia, Kheer, but what tops it all is Mitha Khaja. It is a dish which is prepared in almost every household and then exchanged with friends and relatives during the festive season. Another dessert that is synonymous with Sahibganj is Chamcham, a traditional Bengali sweet, popular throughout the Indian subcontinent. The history of Porabari Chamcham, an oval-shaped brownish variety of Chom-Chom from Porabari in Tangail District of modern-day Bangladesh, dates back to the mid-19th century. The modern version of this dish was made by Matilal Gore, based on a sweet dish prepared by his grandfather Raja Ramgore, who was a native of Ballia District in Uttar Pradesh.

People who Fascinate

Paharia & Mal Paharia

The word Paharia has an etymological significance. It stands for the people residing in hilly or mountainous re-

Handia is a drink which is prevalent in the state of Jharkhand. It is a rice beer which is prepared by the local community

Ruins of Teliagarhi Fort

The Baradari at Mangalhat

gions. The Pahari are nearly all Hindu and follow the basic Hindu customs and traditions. They are the earliest inhabitants of the region and find mention in Megasthenes' book 'Indica' as well as Hiuen Tsang's travelogue, but have now been pushed to the periphery and their existence is tenuous.

The Paharia practice cultivation. Some of them even have developed expertise as hunters and gatherers. Also some have developed skills in fishing and basketry. Though in the earlier times, the Paharia were nomadic people, they later settled down. They have also mastered the art of making clothes and fibres. They go on hunting-expeditions, practice share-cropping as well as shifting cultivation, live in mud houses, collect firewood from the forest and also practice herbal medicine. While the majority of the Paharia practice Hinduism, some practice Christianity. Especially during Christian weddings, singing of Christian religious hymns is common.

Santhals

Santhals are the largest tribal group of Sahibganj. The Santhals were well-known fighters in the time of the British rule in India. The first Santhal leader was Baba Tilka Majhi who picked up cudgels in the year 1789 against the British. People of this community waged war against the Permanent Settlement. During the later parts of 1850, one of the tribal leaders named Sidhu gathered about 10,000 Santhals to run a parallel government against the British.

The day-to-day life of the Santhals revolves around the forests they inhabit. The Santhals fulfil their basic requirements from plants and trees in the forests. They also engage in fishing, hunting and cultivation in order to sustain their livelihood. People of this community have rare skills in constructing musical equipment, baskets and mats from plants and this talent is passed safely from one generation to another. The Santhals follow the religion called Sarna. They believe in supernatural beings and ancestral spirits. Santhals do not build any temples and they worship no idols. Thakurjiu is their ancestral deity. Goddess and Gods of Santhals are Jaheraera, Marangburu and Manjhi. They give respect to the spirits like Lakchera, Kal Sing, Beudarang. Dancing is very much loved by the Santhalis. It is the most prominent component of the festivals and fairs. The Santhal men play the music with instruments like *Tirio, Hotok, Dhodro banam, Phet banam, Tamak, Tumdak, Junko* and *Singa* while the women dance. The Santhals generally celebrate the Karma Festival which occurs every year in September and October. This festival is celebrated to please the Gods to bless them with prosperity and overcoming their enemies. Some of the other major festivals observed by the Santhals include Baba Bonga, Sahrai, Maghe, Ero, Namah and Asaria. Santhals also enjoy the hunting festival known as Disum Sendra on Baishakhi Purnima.

Monuments *that* Matter

Teliagarhi Fort

Named after its builder, Teli Zamindar, this fort is a magnificent piece of architecture. This ruined fortress is a reminder of a rich heritage that still remains hidden and unexplored.

Shivgadi Temple

The iconic Shivgadi Temple is a place of solace for the worshippers of Lord Shiva. The temple is built in a cave carved into a mountain, where water continuously flows onto the *lingam* in a way to show that nature itself is serving its creator. Worshippers flock this temple during the festival of Mahashivaratri.

Jama-i-Masjid *or* Hadafe Mosque

The Jama-i-Masjid (Akbari Masjid) in Mangalhat at Rajmahal was built in 1592 CE, during the reign of Raja Man Singh. He was one of the *navratnas* (nine gems) in Emperor Akbar's court, in the 16th century. The mosque, made of Vindhyan sandstones and brick, is an epitome of Mughal architecture and is protected. The mosque originally consisted of a large prayer hall to the west and a spacious courtyard in the front. A high compound wall encloses it with arched recesses inside. Attesting to an unsung magnificence of Mughal architecture, it is said that at one time Jami Masjid was considered the most beautiful building in all of the Gaur (Bengal) Kingdom.

Jami Masjid at Mangalhat

Baradari

Opposite to the Jami Masjid, Baradari is also located in Nageswar Bagh, in the Rajmahal Block of the Sahibganj District. Baradari is a building that was considered as a social symbol among the South Asian Muslim royals. The buildings used to have twelve doors which is why it is called Baradari. Square in shape, Baradari had three doorways on all its sides. It was mostly used to host religious congregations or live performances and private concerts by various musicians and poets in front of the ruling kings. Baradari, due to its many doors, was known for circulating fresh air and therefore was also used by the kings to relax during the hot summers. According to the study some scholars believe that there was an ongoing dispute between the builders of the monument. Some attribute its building to Fateh Jung Khan, rival of Raja Man Singh, whereas another group attributes it to Mir Kasim Ali, the Nawab of Bengal, prior to 1763 CE.

Kanhaiya Sthan

Situated on the banks of Ganga, is a village situated about 13 km northwest of Rajmahal town and owes its name to the temple of Lord Krishna (*Kanhaiya*). It is believed that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu once stayed here on his way to Brindaban from Bengal and got the vision of Lord Krishna. Footsteps of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu are also preserved here.

Sang-i-Dalan

Palace of Shah Shuja consists Sang-i-Dalan, a marble pavilion facing the river Ganga. The view is ideal from the Sang-i-Dalan Hall in Shah Shuja's Palace at Rajmahal. The Sang-i-Dalan or Hall of Stone, dates from the mid-17th Century, and is one of the principle remaining sections of Sultan Shuja's palace.

Bindudham Temple

Bindudham Temple is an ancient temple, but was lost in time. Swami Hariharanand Giri, popularly known as *Pahari Baba*, realised this ancient temple's importance. It is thanks to the work and direction of Pahari Baba that this Bindudham, Barharwa, has again gained its glory. Binduwasini Temple (the temple of Tridevi) is related to the Story of Goddess Sati. Three sacred blood drops of Sati are placed in the form of *Shakti Peeth*; this is why people call Sati Maa Binduwasini and the place Bindudham, a place of *Adi Parashakti* (Divine Mother) in the form of a *Bindu* (droplet). In metaphysical terms, *Bindu* is considered the point where creation begins and the many become the unity. It is also described as the sacred symbol of the cosmos in its unmanifested state.

Nature's Abundance

Udhwa Bird Sanctuary

The Udhwa Lake Bird Sanctuary is the only bird sanctuary in the entire state of Jharkhand. This Sanctuary is famous as a stop point for a large number of migratory birds that come here in winters from as far afar Europe and Siberia. This entire sanctuary is spread over a total area of 5.65 sq km. The main birds in the place include Pratincole, Egret, Wagtail, Plover, Lapwing, Stork, Ibis, Heron, Wader, etc. Apart from being a popular birdwatcher's site, this sanctuary is also home to two lakes namely Berhale and Pataura. Pataura Lake covers 155 hectares and Lake Berhale, 410 hectares. Birds like Darters, Jacanas, Dabchicks, Cormorants, Teals, and Gulls make their home in the region around the lakes.

Pataura Lake

Pataura Lake and Berhale lake are two lakes which form the Udhuwa Lake in the Udhuwa Lake Bird Sanctuary. Pataura Lake is surrounded by hillocks on one side and plantations on the other. It is perennial in nature and its average depth is 2 m.

Fishing Cat

The Fishing Cat, recently sighted after four decades in Jharkhand, is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, which means that it faces a major extinction threat in the wild. The animal, whose scientific name is *Prionailurus viverrinus*, is also placed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The major aquatic and semi-aquatic mammalian species found in the Ganga River include the Gangetic River Dolphin and three species of Otter; Smooth-coated Otter, Asian Small Clawed Otter and Eurasian Otter. Occasional sightings are possible on the river.

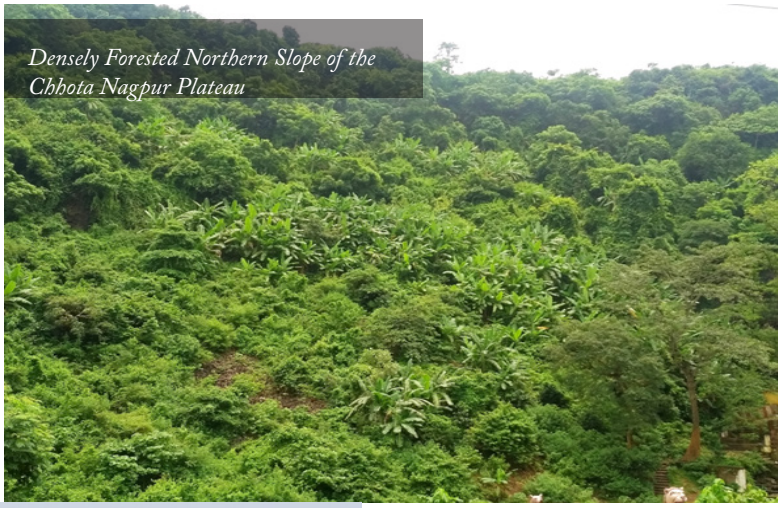
Moti Jharna Waterfall

The name of the waterfall translates to pearl which is an apt name for this gem of a cascade. Flowing from the Rajmahal Hills, it is also a celebrated picnic spot where tourists flock for entertainment and peace of mind. Eco tourism has been developed here and it is also an upcoming heritage site which needs to be conserved.

Fossil Park

The Rajmahal Hills are home to plant fossils which are 68 to 145 million years old. The Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany in Lucknow has an impressive collection of these fossils. The fossils here have attracted geologists and paleo-botanists from all over the world.

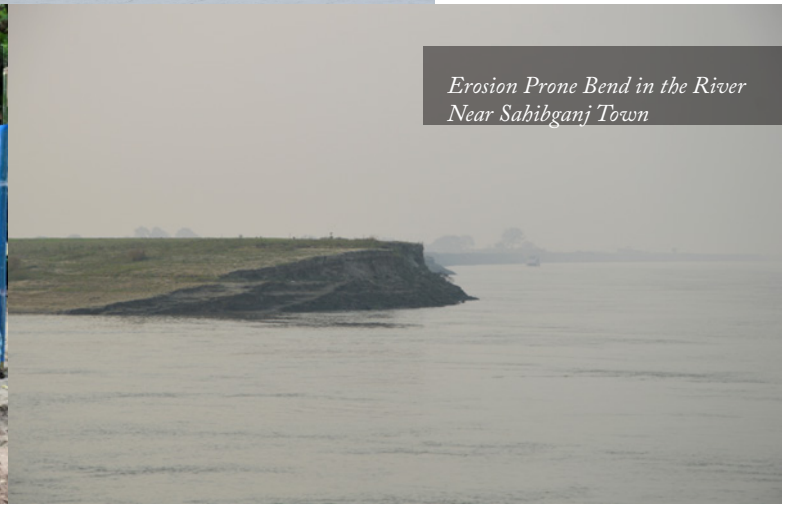
Udhwa Lake



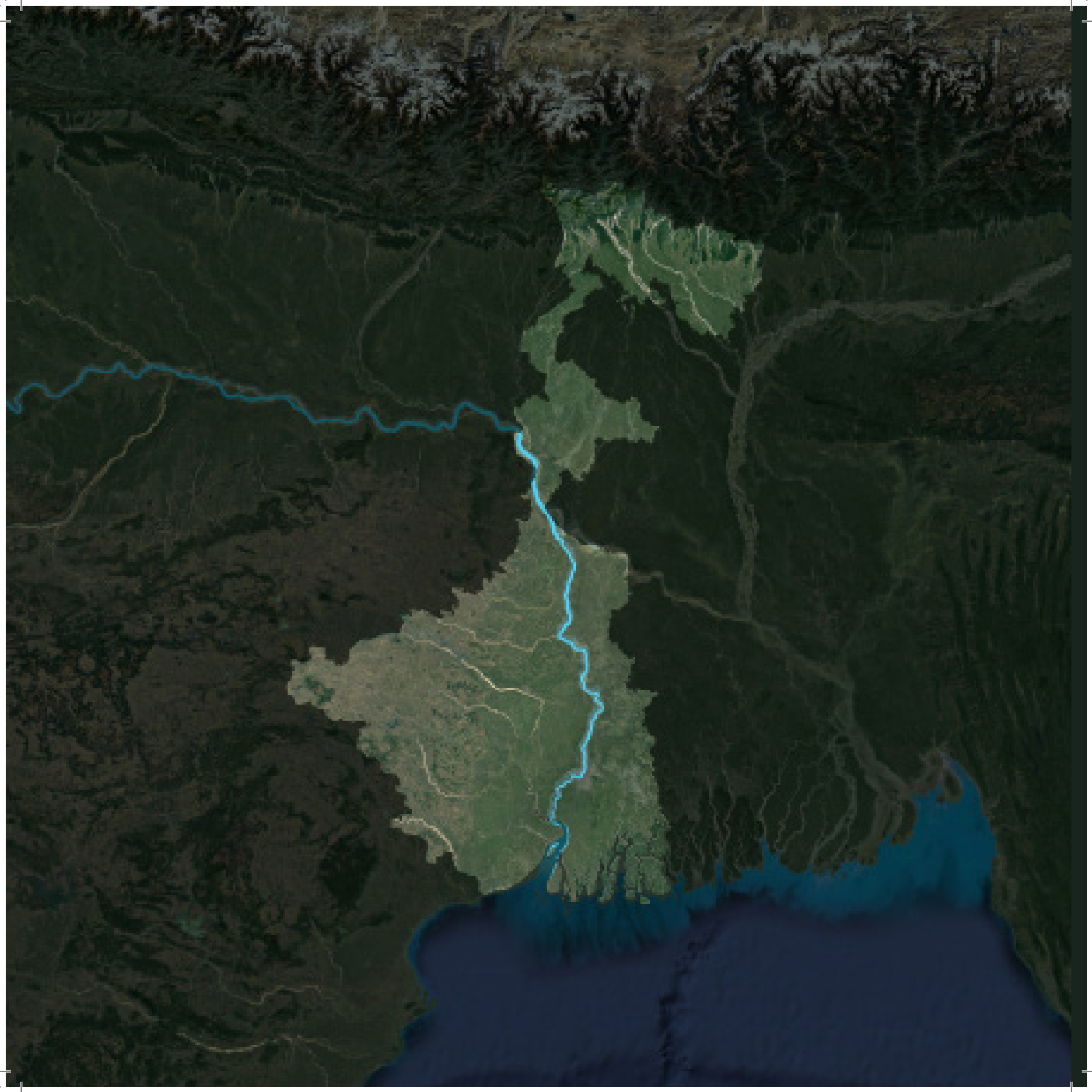
Densely Forested Northern Slope of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau

Open Billed Storks near a Riverine Island

Ghinna jali Used for Fishing



Erosion Prone Bend in the River Near Sahibganj Town



GANGA THROUGH

West Bengal

CHAPTER 43

MALDA

The Aroma of Mangoes

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Malda

West Bengal

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

The district of Malda, also pronounced as Maldah, was once the Capital of Gour or Gauda Empire. To the south is Murshidabad district, to the north are Uttar Dinajpur District and Dakshin Dinajpur District, to the east is the international border with Bangladesh and to the west is Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand and Purnia of Bihar. The area of the district is 3733 sq km.

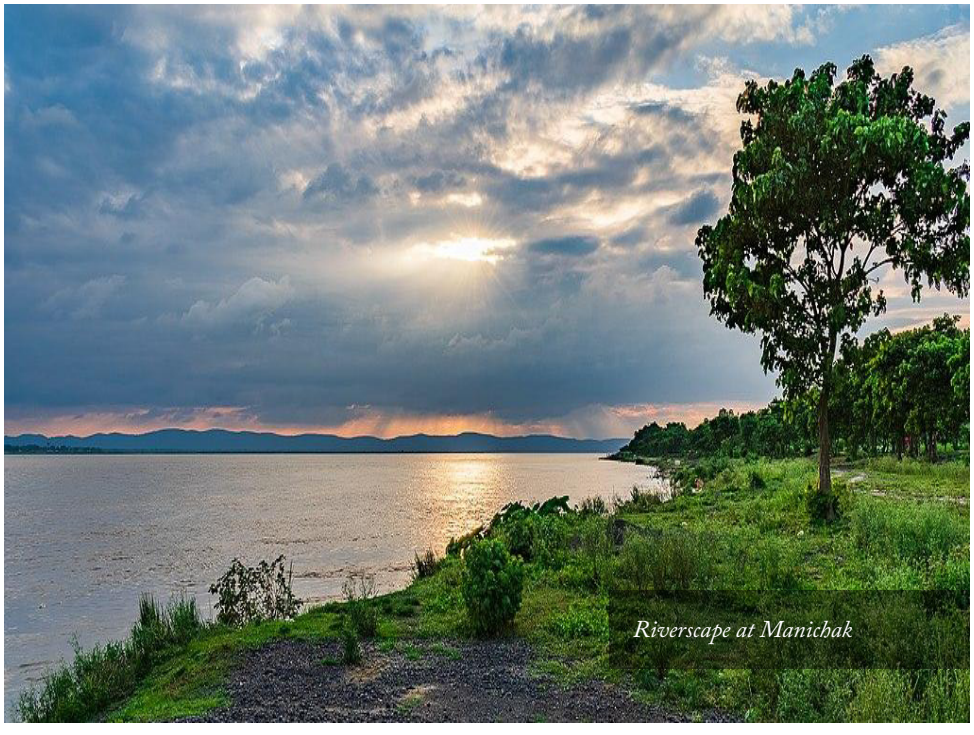
The district takes its name from the town of Malda, which is situated on the left bank of the Mahananda River at its junction with the Kalindri River, and is about 6.5 km north of English Bazaar (Engrezabad). A story is current of an old woman who had the wealth (*mal*) to buy up the entire stock of mercury of a merchant who had come to the place to trade but was unable to dispose of his goods. She used the mercury to clean one tank, called the *Parpukur* (mercury tank) to this day. This gave the place the name of Malda or the place of wealth. Another fanciful derivation is from Maladahy a string of deep pools, a feature of the town being the deep depressions left by old water courses.

The district comprises two subdivisions: Chanchal and Malda Sadar. English Bazar is the district headquarters, also known as Malda, which was once the capital of Bengal.

The Ganga first touches the district as it sweeps south round the Rajmahal Hills. About 3.2 km south

of Rajmahal, the Ganga disgorges a distributary stream, the Chhota Bhagirathi, which is presumably an old bed of the great river itself and is still revered equal in holiness to any other part of the sacred stream. It flows first to the east and then generally in a southern direction for about 21 kms skirting the ruins of the city of Gaur. A little further down, another distributary, the Pagla takes off from the Ganga again towards the east into which the Chhota Bhagirathi merges. After their junction they flow past Kansat merging near Tartipur into the Mara Ganga. The main stream of the Ganga flows past Tartipur. During the rains, these streams carry off immense volumes of water to re-join the Ganga near the mouth of the Mahananda. Somewhere upstream of the point where it finally leaves the district, the Ganga sends off another distributary southwards which retains the name of Bhagirathi. Boats come from East Bengal to take Ganga water from Tartipur which is the nearest present point of the sacred stream to East Bengal.

Malda District is a low-lying plain, through which flow a number of rivers. On the basis of topography and drainage pattern, the district can be divided into three regions i.e. Tal (north portion above river Kalindri), Diara (southern portion below river Kalindri) and Barind (eastern part near river Mahananda).



Riverscape at Manichak

Re-living *the* Past

The town rose to prominence as the river port of the old capital of Pandua. During the 18th century, it was the seat of prosperous cotton and silk industries. It remains an important distribution centre for rice, jute, and wheat.

The district of Malda came into existence under the British informally in 1813, who obtained the *Diwani* of the *Subah* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from Emperor Shah lmam in 1765. The District of Malda contains within its limits the sites of Pandua and Gaur, the capital cities of Bengal through the medieval times. The two towns are almost equidistant north and south from English Bazaar and on opposite sides of the Mahananda, Gaur being on the western and Pandua on the eastern side. They contain some of the most interesting archaeological remains now to be found in Bengal. The early history of both these cities, as of the kingdoms of which they formed a part, is obscure. It is still uncertain which of them is the older. If, however, the claims of Pandua to identity with Paundranagar be admitted, Pandua is the older town, being a capital city of the Bengal of early history when the foreign influences were from the

Remains of Ballal Bati

Adina Masjid, Pandua

east and north. Similarly, Gaur stands for Aryan and Buddhist rule. Later both cities were, for five centuries, the centres of Islamic rule in the province. Their history is consequently the history of Bengal from the earliest times till the 17th century.

Ballal Bati is one of the latest excavations in Gauda. Ballal Bati was uncovered only in 2003 and as of now, literature about it is scarce

Ballal Bati is one of the latest excavations in Gauda. Ballal Bati was unearthed only in 2003 and as of now, literature about it is scarce. The legend was that under the mound were the remains of Sena Dynasty king Ballal Sena's (or Ballal Sen's) palace. Excavations did reveal the foundations of a large building,which remains to be identified. Another theory is that these are the remains of a Buddhist Vihara or monastery.

A few metres away from Ballal Bati is another recently excavated site, known as Jahajghata, literally meaning port (*Jahaj* = ship, *Ghata* = wharf/quay). These are the remains of an ancient port. The Ganga flowed right through this place at one time, and some signatures of the old course of the river are still visible. Unfortunately, Jahajghata has been repeatedly vandalised by locals and tourists alike. The tiles that decorated the walls have vanished. Part of an old chain, probably used to anchor ships is visible, and locals say several links of it have been stolen. This may well have been the principal port used by the inhabitants of the citadel of Gauda.

Gaur or Gauda does not appear at any time to have been the name of any considerable tract of country in Bengal. The origin of the name is obscure; several other places in India of historical importance bear the same name. Cunningham, in his Archaeological Reports connects the word with gur (molasses) and thinks that the city of Gaur was originally a great sugar mart. The ancient Sanskrit grammarian Panini mentioned a city named Gourpura, which is most likely the city of Gour, the ruins of which are still seen in Malda District. The ruins of Gour now stretch on both sides of the international border, and are divided between Malda District

and Chapai-Nawabganj District of Bangladesh. The Kotwali Gate, formerly part of Gour's famed citadel, now marks the border checkpoint between the two countries.

Sasanka, who flourished about 606 CE, was known as the king of Karna-subarna, the riverain tracts of the Padma, as well as king of Gaur.

In Bengal, two powerful independent kingdoms of Vanga and Gaur were created in the 6th century CE. The Gaur Kingdom comprised of the northern and most of the western parts of Bengal. Here, the imperial Gupta hold was stronger than in Vanga and so the latter Guptas continued to maintain their pre-eminence until the end of the 6th century CE. The Pala Kings, whose dynasty begins at the end of 8th century of the Christian era, were originally Buddhists, though the later members of the family became Hindus under Brahminical influences. Most of the stone-work, bearing traces of Buddhistic art, to be found in the ruins of Malda, belongs to their period. The little that is known of the history of the period is mainly derived from inscriptions on copper and stone of which a number have been found in recent years.

The Pala Empire was founded in Gaur during the rise of Gopala as king with the approval of an assembly of chieftains. The Pala kings carried the title Lord of Gaur. The kingdom endured for four centuries (8th to 12th century) and its territory included large parts of northern India. The empire reached its peak under kings Dharmapala and Devapala, its territory stretching across parts of modern-day eastern Pakistan. The Pala period saw the development of the Bengali language, script and other aspects of Bengali culture. Vijay Sen (ruled from 1096 to 1159) helped establish the administration's frameworks, and had a surprisingly long rule of more than 60 years. In 1203–1204 CE, the Turkic general Bakhtiyar Khilji assaulted Nabadwip. Khilji defeated Lakshman Sen and captured northwest Bengal, albeit Eastern Bengal stayed under Sena control.

Excavation Site of Jahajghata

Abyssinian army chief, Firoz Shah, who reigned for 13 years till 1470 CE built the Firoz Minar in Gaur and several mosques

For a brief period Gaur was under Abyssinian rule also. During 1487-94, the Bengal Sultanate was ruled by a series of kings of African origin. From the beginning of the Muslim rule in northern India, in addition to Turkish slaves, *Habshis* (Ethiopians) were imported to serve nobles, military commanders and the sultans, primarily as slave soldiers. Some of them rose through the ranks and achieved high positions, becoming commanders, senior officials, nobles, governors and even rulers. In the case of the Bengal Sultanate, several Africans became the rulers, but only for a very brief period.

Abyssinian army chief, Firoz Shah, who reigned for 13 years till 1470 CE built the Firoz Minar in Gaur and several mosques. Hossain Shah ruled for 27 years and

The historic buildings particularly worth seeing are the Bara Sona Mosque aka Baro Duari Mosque, Dakhil Darwaja aka Salami Darwaja (1425), Qadam Rasul Mosque and the ruins of the extensive fortification

completely restored the fortunes of Gaur, so much so that Gaur became a synonym for Bengal and Gauriya for its inhabitants. It was in the reign of Hossain Shah in the year 1509 that the famous religious reformer, Chaitanya Deb, became a *sanyasi* and founded the *bairagi* cult. This religious movement, which after Kulinism has most profoundly determined the distinctive Hinduism of Bengal, found two prominent adherents in Gaur, in the highly placed officers, the brothers Rup and Santan, who left their homes and positions to follow Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to Brindaban. Chaitanya himself visited Ramkel near Gaur, where Rup and Sanatan lived. The well-known Bairagi Mela at Ramkel perpetuates their memory.

Humayun remained for some three months in Gaur and renamed it Jannatabad (the city of Heaven). Sher Khan defeated Humayun to recapture Gaur and make good his rule over Bihar and Bengal. Later, in 1540, Sher Khan again defeated Humayun and made himself Emperor. In the re-organisation of the provinces, Sher Shah introduced the fiscal division of the pargana, and that in which Gaur lies, bears the name Shershahabad.

By 1500 CE, the city of Gaur had a population of nearly 2,00,000, and many historical accounts, primarily by the Portuguese, attest to its pre-eminent status. The Sultans built a citadel, mosques, a royal palace, canals and bridges, and the city thrived until the collapse of the Bengal Sultanate in the 16th century. Gaur fell victim to the plague, and its glory diminished when a change in the course of the Ganga caused the Mughal provincial capital to shift to Dhaka. Today, most of the surviving structures in Gaur date back to the Bengal Sultanate. The relics particularly worth seeing are the Bara Sona Mosque also known as Baro Duari Mosque, Dakhil Darwaja also known as Salami Darwaja (1425), Qadam Rasul Mosque and the ruins of the extensive fortification. The colourful enamelled tiles on the Gumti Darwaza and Firoz Minar also survive to this day. Indeed, legend has it that real gold was used as part of the decorations on Gumti Darwza.

Mythological Links

Johura Kali

The myth can be traced back to 1083 *Bangabdo* (Bengali Calendar), when Salwa Tewari, a wealthy *sadhak,* who lived in Gobindapur village under Bhatiya *Pargana* in Malda, had consecrated this temple after envisioning Devi Chandi in meditation. At the time, Gaur, once the citadel of power was struck by enemy attacks, natural calamities like earthquakes, famine and other conditions and series of epidemics which turned Gaur to ruins. Salwa Tewari was deeply perturbed by the despair and distress of the people of Gaur. Thus, he decided to pray to Devi Chandi to give him the power to emancipate the people from their troubles and bring peace in their lives. In a trance, Salwa Tewari envisioned the goddess who ordered him to consecrate a temple in her name at that spot. The *sadhak* immediately established a simple shrine where he built a mound or *vedi* dedicated to the goddess. The formless deity soon became revered among people of all castes and religions. It is believed that Salwa Tewari had established the temple in the month of *Baisakh*. He established the tradition of offering prayers to the goddess only on Tuesday and Saturday. Even today, the descendants of Tewari maintain the traditions.

Ramkeli Festival Celebrates the Arrival of Sri Chaitanya 500 Years Ago

Events *of* Interest

The monthly cycle of festivals and rituals which are very predominant in this district specially on the banks of Bhagirathi-Malda are:

- Chaitra – Gajan, Ashok Sasthi, Neel Sasthi, Shitala, Olaichandi
- *Baisakh* – Shitala
- *Jaisthya* – Jamai Sasthi, Aranya Sasthi,
- *Ashar* – Rathajatra, Ambubachi
- *Shravana* – Manasha, Janmasthami, Srabani Mela
- *Bhadra* – Arandhan, Biswakarma, Dhaner Lakshmi, Chapra Shasti
- *Ashwin* – Durga Puja, Kojagori Lakshmi
- *Karthik* – Kali, Dipanwita Lakshmi, Itu, Raas, Jagadhatri
- *Agrahayan* – Nabanno, Itu
- *Poush* – Poush Parban, Auni Bauni, Notun Dhaner Lakshmi, Borodin
- *Magh* – Saraswati Puja, Sheetal Shasti
- *Falgun* – Dol

Ramkeli Mela

The 500-year-old famous Baishnab-fair, Ramkeli Mela, near Gaur is held in June. The six day fair has drawn scores of pilgrims and monks from across the country with several forms of rituals and devotional songs being performed. The fair is organized to commemorate the arrival of Sri Chaitanya in this holy place on Jaishtya Sankranti, some 500 years ago. It is said that the great saint of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), met and converted two of his principle disciples, the brothers Rup and Sanatan Goswami, who were important courtiers of the Sultan of Gaur, in Ramkeli. The fair marks that occasion. It is a great gathering for singers of the Bengali *Kirtan* style of Vaishnavite devotional music.

A small village on the way to Gaur, Ramkeli is famous for being the temporary home of Sri Chaitanya, where he had stayed for a few days on his way to Brindaban. A conglomeration of two *Tamal* and two *Kadamba* trees can still be seen, under which the saint is said to have meditated. A small temple under this tree contains Sri Chaitanya's footprints on stone.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), met and converted two of his principle disciples, the brothers Rup and Sanatan Goswami, who were important courtiers of the Muslim Sultan of Gaur, in Ramkeli

Chhath Puja

In Malda, Chhath Puja is celebrated all along Mahananda and Ganga River. Thousands of people take holy bath and offer *puja* to Sun God and Chhathi Maiya. People from Jharkhand, and Bihar celebrate Chhath Puja here.

Lukochuri Darwaja, Gaur

Adi Kangsabanik Durga Puja

Banke Bihari Kartick Puja

The Kartick Puja of Roy Bari is also known as Banke Bihari Babar Pujo. It is a tradition that was initiated by their forefathers. According to a family member of the revered family, their forefathers settled in Phoolbari from Uttar Pradesh during the 18th century. Legend says that the *puja* was commenced to avert threats from miscreants and since then, generation after generation have been abiding by the rituals at the Dalanbari. There is a 20-foot Kartik idol in Bansbari in Malda town. The *puja* is held annually by descendants of Monomohan Saha, who is said to have begun the event 4 centuries ago. It is the largest and most famous Kartik Bari in Malda. Popular fairs are held here every year.

Durga Puja

Like every part of Bengal, Durga Puja is also celebrated at Malda with much vibrancy. However, here the traditional face of Durga is quite different from other areas. Then along the bank of Ganga, the location of the *puja* changes because of tremendous bank erosion. The big Durga Puja celebrations of Malda are Manikchak, Adi Kangshabnik Durga Puja and the Durga Bari.

Bolla Kali

The Bollakali Temple is located in the Bolla Village that lies on the Balurghat-Malda Highway, which is 20 km from Balurghat. The temple is dedicated to Goddess Kali and Kali Puja is conducted in this shrine every Friday after Rash Purnima. A 3 day fair also takes place on this occasion. During this time, the temple is visited by thousands of devotees.

Maa Buri Kali

Situated at Kuttipara, Old Malda, the speciality of this *puja* is that the rituals take place in the middle of the night. The *bisarjan* too, takes place in the dark.

Kali Puja *of* Manikchak

Social harmony pervades two popular Kali Pujas celebrated in two villages of Malda. Every year, unlike the *pujas* held in most places, Hindus and Muslims join in Habibpur Block, a Kali Puja initiated by a Muslim woman is joined by thousands of Hindus. In Manikchak, members of the Muslim community outnumber Hindus in a

Kali Puja committee, the venue being a temple near a mosque. The Kali Puja at Madhyam Kendua in Habibpur Block, some 20 km from Malda town, is extremely popular, with "going to see Shephali Kali" (*Puja*) being a common idiom among residents. Shephali Bibi, who started this Kali Puja 34 years ago, did not care for resentments articulated by various dogmatic members of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Eventually, the determination of Shephali Bibi won over orthodoxy, and more than three decades on, Hindus and Muslims join hands to organise the *puja* and maintain a gigantic crowd. Many residents recount a tale that they have heard for decades now on how Shephali Bibi started the Kali Puja. She was only twenty-one when she suddenly fell very ill. No medicine worked. Then, apparently, she shared a dream with villagers, claiming she was directed by Goddess Kali to worship her to get cured in order to celebrate these two Kali Pujas.

Initially, her claim was denounced by both communities. Brahmins refused to worship the idol. But an undaunted Shephali, then a young girl, went ahead with the preparations. Eventually, a priest appeared claiming he received orders from the goddess, in his dream, to worship the idol. This is how the Kali Puja started. Miracle or coincidence, Shephali was cured. The idol has grown over the years, so are the crowds. This continues to be one of most popular Kali Puja celebrations in the region.

Another Kali Puja held in the vicinity of Manikchak Police Station, some 30 km from town, is also special. Around 120 years ago, this Kali Puja was started by Fudina Singh, then head constable, in a temple facing a mosque.

Guru Nanak's Birthday, Old Malda

Malda, situated on the banks of the River Mahananda, is sacred because both Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur visited it in the course of their travels through eastern India. A Sikh shrine once existed here in Sarbari Area of Old Malda, but with the development of new Malda town across the river, Old Malda declined in importance and population, and all that was left of the Sikh shrine was a site with an old well and two platforms, one dedicated to the First Guru and the second to the Ninth Guru. Native Sikhs from the neighbouring Purnia (now Katihar) District of Bihar used to assemble here once in a year to celebrate the birthday of Guru Nanak. In the mid 1970's efforts were initiated to reconstruct the Gurudwara. The shrine is now called Sri Prayag Sahib, Sarbari, Old Malda, though an old marble slab, kept in Gurdwara Singh Sabha, describes it as Gurdwara Nima Sarai, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur, Old Malda.

Malda Mango Festival

From 2014 onwards, food processing industries and horticulture department of the West Bengal government are organising Mango Festival at New Delhi, showcasing premium quality Malda mangoes like *Himsagar, Lyngra, Fazil*. Litchis from Malda and Murshidabad

Clay Snake Heads Offered to Goddess Manasha

are also on the platter for fruit lovers. For locals, the festival is truly celebrated in the streets with these delicacies being available to all.

Gambhira Loko Utsab

This Loko Utsab has become the heart beat among the people of countryside. Bera, Karticker Lorai, Tusu Mela, Karam Utsav, Hazra Puja, Charak, Neel Puja, all these folk festivals are related. Among all these *utsavs*, Gambhira is a

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Peerer Ghora Made of Clay

very famous Loko Utsav in Malda.

The word *Gambhira* refers to a House of God. The Gajan Utsav of Rarh area became Addyer Gambhira in Malda District. But these days it is renowned as *Gambhira*, which means festival of Lord Shiva. The festival Gambhira is basically famous amongst Rajbanshi, Chnai, Koch, Mahali communities. In Gambhira festival there is no traditional play. Though there is no particular myth in Gambhira but the character of Lord Shiva is always there, and remains part of the celebrations as Nana.

In 1937, encouraged by Kazi Nazrul Islam, the first recording of a Gambhira song, voiced by Gambhira artist Tarapada Lahiri was recorded by HMV Company. This record reached out to millions.

ART *at the* HEART

Clay Art - Snake Heads

Snake Heads (hoods) are made as offerings to Goddess Manasha. They are hand crafted, unbaked and painted with earth colours. Made of clay, they are hand pressed, made by a particular potter family carrying the title of *Pandit*. Their ancestors migrated (about seven generations ago) from Danapur, Bihar. During previous Manasha Pujas, these snake heads were in great demand but now demand has declined. It is believed that by offering snakes to Manasha, she, as the Goddess of snakes, will protect people from snake bites. It is a handicraft mostly made by the method of pinching. Clay and earthy colours are used for the craft. Shri Sankar Pandit is involved in this craft for generations. He and his family members create these products mostly for local consumption. They sometimes send their products to English Bazaar.

Peerer Ghora

Small horses are made with clay using techniques of pinching the clay as in the Snake Heads. Devotees buy these to offer as votives to the Peer Thaan. These horses were offered at *dargahs (Thaan)* of Peers as a goodwill gesture, generally by those whose wishes were fulfilled. The demand for these horses rises considerably during Muharram. Jubili Road, Uttar Baluchar, English Bazaar, Malda are the centres where these horses are prepared.

Gambhira Mask

One of the most important traditional

Gambhira Masks during Performance
Credits - Palashkd

Bamboo Items om Display at Gajole

Kantha Embroidery Patterns Tell a Tale

handicraft is the Gambhira Masks. The Gambhira Dance is performed all over the Malda district of North Bengal during the festival of Chaitra Sankranti. The masks are made out of *neem* and fig trees by the local Sutradhar community. Sometimes they also make masks of clay. Three dimensional crowns are a specialty of these masks. First, the facial features are carved out from a piece of wood and then coloured according to the character. This mask dance is performed with Gambhira songs. The songs of Gambhira originated among the Hindu community of Malda in West Bengal and it is also called *Mukha Khela*, meaning the game of masks. Like the Chhau dance, the Mukh Khela dance too is based on themes related to ancient tales, which are largely inspired by the numerous musical chapters adapted from incidents from the Ramayana. There are also dances with themes of Mahishasura Mardini, along with masks representing the characters of Lord Rama, Ravana and even animal masks of tigers, deer, bears, and monkeys. The Mukh Khela dance also depicts other popular Hindu deities like Goddess Kali, and Goddess Bhadrakali.

Bamboo Basket Making

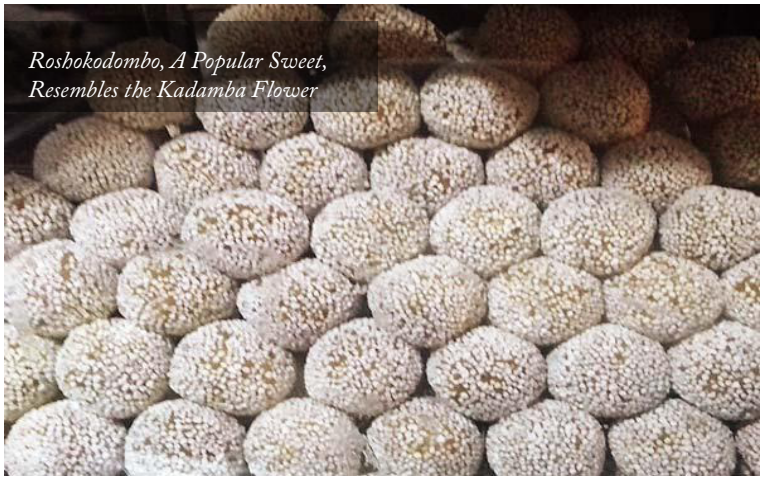
Bamboo Basket making of Gajole, Harischandrapur and Habibpur of Malda is well known. In Malda, majority of the craftspersons belong to Mahali community. Bamboo works as the primary source of livelihood for majority of the crafts persons. In India, basket weaving is an ancient art. Indigenous communities developed special shapes and patterns of baskets based on their local traditions, needs and techniques. Today it is a well-developed art form based in Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Bardhaman and Bankura.

Silk Weaving

Silks of Malda are world famous due their flair and thread characteristics. Gorgeous sarees were woven from the magical silk threads in the region. And in this matter. Malda Silk is the first preference of master weavers. Sericulture is an agro-based industry and plays a vital role in the economy of Malda District comprising 60% of national share and 75% of state share in raw silk production. Sericulture is now practiced in about 660 villages in Malda district. More than 19,000 acres of land is under mulberry cultivation and more than 60,000 families are directly and indirectly earning their living from sericulture.

Kantha *of* Malda

Kantha embroidery is an indigenous household craft that is also considered a form of art, due to the uniqueness of individual creations, its ability to convey a story and its use as a form of personal and artistic expression. What sets this form of needlework embroidery apart from others is the wide use of the running stitch, also known as



Roshokodombo, A Popular Sweet, Resembles the Kadamba Flower

Mango Processing Cluster at Atarapur

kantha. Yarn used for running stitches is often taken from old *sarees* or *dhotis,* and covers almost the entire piece of fabric onto which motifs and designs are embroidered. The repetitive use of the running stitch contributes to Kantha's signature wrinkled and wavy effect on the fabric. Malda, has now become globally known for its earthy silk and intricate Kanthas. The designs are *Lahari* and geometric, with small series used in the vacant spaces of the designs. The motifs generally seen are those of peacock with feathers spread, betel leaves, boat, mat, sun, and flowers.

Jute Handicrafts, Old Malda

The jute fibre comes from the stem and ribbon (outer skin) of the jute plant. The fibres are first extracted by retting. The retting process consists of bundling jute stems together and immersing them in low, running water. There are two types of retting: stem and ribbon. After the retting process, stripping begins. Women and children usually do this job. In the stripping process, non-fibrous matter is scraped off. Jute floor coverings consist of woven and tufted and piled carpets. The traditional Satranji mat is becoming very popular in home décor. Jute non-woven and composites can be used for underlay, linoleum substrate, and more. Jute is the most environment-friendly fibre starting from the seed to expired fibre, as the expired fibres can be recycled.

Gastronomic Delights

Roshokodombo & other Desserts

During the reign of Sultan Hussain, Chaitanya Dev also known as Gaurango came to Malda. It was in Gaur that he preached the language of love to Roop and Sanatan. And it was this event that led to the creation of a famous Bengali sweet, Roshokodombo. It resembles the *Kadamb* flower, the tree under which Chaitanya Dev preached. The minute one bites the hard outer shell, the tongue gets a chance to savour a Rosogolla inside. Roshokodombo also uses *posto* or poppy seeds. Malda is not just famous for its Roshokodombos, it is also a land that churns out Halwa Patti and Tara Khhaja. Both are sweets of the Sultanate period.

Kansat

Kansat is another signature sweet of Malda. Originally Kansat came to Epar Bangla from Bangladesh. In East Bengal this sweet is very famous and had almost twelve names! Kansat is a prosperous village in the *upa-zila* of Shibgunj. Mahendra Kumar Saha, the first maker of Kansat lived in this village during the British era. He even started a sweet shop in Shibgunj, that later turned famous under his son Vijaykumar Saha, who made a new Kansat with his own recipe.

Chamkati Masjid

Sanatana wrote a number of important works in the bhakti tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and was the senior most of the influential Six Goswamis of Vrindavan, among whom was his brother Rupa Goswami

Hatthi Paiya Luchi
(Luchi Like Elephant Foot)

Sadullapur of English Bazaar Block is very famous for a specialized Luchi which resembles the foot of an elephant. Refined Wheat *Atta* (from a special type of wheat from Purnea, Bihar) is used to prepare these Luchis, which are basically fried but unleavened breads. They are eaten along with Potato Curry, *Chutney* and fried chilies.

Amsotto

Dried Pulp of Mango, sweetened or un-sweetened, is flattened and made into thin sheets. It is produced in different parts of our country, but the best Amsatto comes from Malda district of West Bengal. This is the Best Amsotto available in India. In fact, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was the first one to popularize it where such mango pulp candies are mixed with milk and consumed. In fact, these mango pulp candies are also used to prepare different types of Bengali cuisines. The candies are reportedly quite popular among the residents of Buckingham Palace. The pulp here is extracted from Gopal Bhog.

Jaggery *or* Gur *from* Gaur Banga

It might be interesting to know that once, the entire Birbhum, Burdwan, Malda, and Murshidabad area was the hub of ancient jaggery making, and probably, it was the reason that the name Gourbanga was given to that particular territory.

The source of *Gur* can be primarily classified in two varieties—sugarcane and date tree—thus the name, *Akher Gur*, and *Khejur Gur*. Even, jaggery from the dates' tree or *Khejur Gur*, can be classified into two varieties, Nolen and Jiren. Every evening, the containers or *handis* are tied to the tree with the insertion and the juice gets accumulated inside them, for the whole night. In the early morning, they are taken down and *gur* is processed. *Gur* made from the first fetch of juice is named as *Nolen Gur*. The tree is left for some rest for some time and jaggery made from the second fetch is named as the *Jiren Gur*. *Nolen Gur* is considered to be the superior variety. Royal varieties of dessert, like Sandesh or Rasogolla are made with the *Khejur Gur* and mostly, with the *Nolen Gur*.

Rice Pancakes/Pitha

Pitha is a palm-sized winter-special sweet treat, made with fresh palm and date jaggery, scented rice flour, milk and coconut. Preparing Pithe during winters is a tradition for every Bengali. Visit any house in Bengal (and Bangladesh) during this time of the year and you will be welcomed with hot and fresh Pithe and Gurer Payesh (*gur ki kheer*). While some are steamed (Bhapa Pithe), others are cooked in

The other part of the Palace is now Chanchal Subdivisional Court. Victor Banerjee is an Indian actor who appears in English, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese films, was born in a Zamindari Bengali Hindu family

syrup (Rosh Bora) and kheer (Kheer Puli). One will also find Pithe that are deep-fried (Bhaja Puli) and baked (Chitoi Pithe).

People who Fascinate

Sanatan Goswami

Sanatan Goswami (1488–1558) was a principal follower of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Sanatana wrote a number of important works in the bhakti tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and was the senior most of the influential Six Goswamis of Vrindavan, among whom was his brother Rupa Goswami. Sanatana Goswami wrote four important books in Sanskrit on Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy, Brihat-Bhagavtamrita, Hari-Bhakti-Vilasa, Krishna-Lila-Satva and Brihad Vaishnava Toshani. Soon after Sanatana discovered the deity, a rich officer in the Moghul army named Krishna Dasa Kapura built a temple for Madana-Mohana. This later became one of the seven principal temples of Vrindavan. The temple is called Radha Madan Mohan Temple. Sanatana Goswami disappeared in the year 1558 CE. His *samadhi* (tomb) is located next to the Madana-Mohana Temple. His commentary on the Bhagavata Purana is also known as the Dasama-tipanni.

Rup Goswami

Rup Goswami (1489–1564) was a devotional teacher (*guru*), poet, and philosopher of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. He is known as one of the Six Goswamis of Vrindavan and was the nephew of the two leading figures, Rupa Goswami and Sanatana Goswami. After the passing of Rupa and Sanatana, Jiva Goswami became the foremost authority in the Gaudiya Vaishnava line.

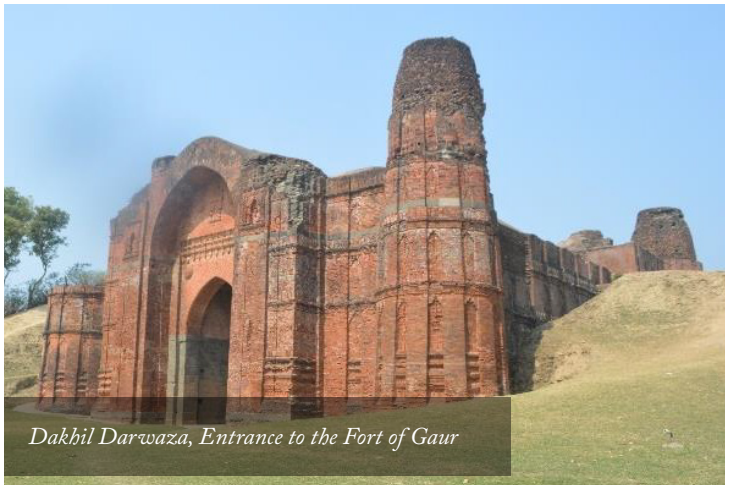
Shibram Chakravorty

Shibram Chakraborty (1903–1980) was a popular Bengali writer and humourist whose best known short stories and novels are renowned for their unique use of pun, alliteration, play of words and ironic humour. He was a prolific author who also wrote poems, plays, non-fiction and novels for mature audiences in his long career.

Victor Bannerjee *& the* Chanchal Raj Family

Victor Banerjee is an Indian actor who appears in English, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese films, was born in a Zamindari Bengali Hindu family. He is a descendant of the Raja Bahadur of Chanchal (Malda District) and the Raja of Uttarpara. He has worked for directors such as Roman Polanski,

Sadullapur Ghat



Dakhil Darwaza, Entrance to the Fort of Gaur

Firoz Minar

James Ivory, Sir David Lean, Jerry London, Ronald Neame, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Montazur Rahman Akbar and Ram Gopal Varma. He won the National Film award for best supporting actor for the film Ghare Baire.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar

Benoy Kumar Sarkar(1887–1949) was an Indian social scientist, professor, and nationalist. He founded several institutes in Calcutta, including the Bengali Institute of Sociology, Bengali Asia Academy, Bengali Dante Society, and Bengali Institute of American Culture. Binoy Kumar Sarkar was born in Malda Town, in Bengal Presidency.

Abu Barkat Ataur Ghani Khan Choudhury

A B A Ghani Khan Choudhry (1927–2006), known as Barkatda to his supporters, was an Indian politician from West Bengal. Choudhury was a senior leader of Indian National Congress party. His home is in Kaliachak, Malda, West Bengal.

Monuments *that* Matter

Dakhil Darwaza

This is the main entrance gate of the Fort of Gaur which housed palaces of Palas, Senas and subsequent Islamic rulers up to 1608 CE before shift of the capital. A stone inscription on the gateway suggests that it was built in 1519 CE by Sultan Nasrat Shah. Affiliated with sultanate architectural style, the Dakhil Darwaza is a rectangular gateway structure with a long thoroughfare/passage flanked on either side by a guard room entered through four doorways on each side. The entire thoroughfare is roofed by three arched vault structures. There is a large archway and the entire structure has beautiful terracotta ornamentation and it is an excellent example of integration of Islamic style and regional characteristics. The faces of the towers are panelled and ornamented with usual bells and chain relief. The gateway is constructed in thick brick masonry. Gaur, the capital of Bengal till 1575 was established on the banks of Ganga.

> ***The old flow of Ganga has silted now and diverted southwards, though still traceable through large water bodies and marshy lands along the abandoned path***

Baish Gaji Wall

The wall can be precisely dated back to 1442-1459 CE. Built in Sultanate architectural style, its is a defensive structure. The brick masonry wall is the only remaining portion of the enclosure wall of the palace, which is now under ASI's protection. The entire enclosure wall measured 700 yards in length in North-South direction and 250-300 yards in East-West direction.

Constructed by Sultan Nasrat Shah, son of Sultan Hussain Shah in 1531 as per a stone inscription, this mosque is a single storied structure, rectangular in plan measuring 63' x 49'

Great Sona Masjid/ Baroduari

Inspired by the sultanate architectural style, this mosque was erected in 1526 CE. Erection of this Mosque was started by Alauddin Hussain Shah and completed by his son Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah. It is the largest mosque of Gaur. Since the domes were gilded with gold it is called Sona Masjid.

Chamkati Masjid

Built in 1575 CE, this mosque is presently under ASI's protection. The mosque is noted for use of enamelled bricks in its cornices lending a graceful appearance to it. The mosque was erected by Sultan Yusuf Shah. The name may have originated from Chamkatis, religious devotees, who in religious frenzy, used to gash their skins (*Cham*) with knives (*kattis*) and thus called Chamkati Masjid.

Firoz Minar

This civic structure was assembled in 1486-89 CE in Sultanate architectural style. It is a five tiered Minar with ornamental cornice bands demarcating each tier. The tower is 84 feet high and 62 feet in circumference at base. According to popular belief, the tower was erected by Sultan Saifuddin Feroz Shah (1486-89), an Abyssinian commander of the royal forces to commemorate the victories in battle achieved by him. It may have also been used to call people for Azan.

Kadam Rasul

This structure is an embodiment of sanctity which contains the prophet's footprints in stone brought by a saint from Arabia. Constructed by Sultan Nasrat Shah, son of Sultan Hussain Shah in 1531 as per a stone inscription, this mosque is a single storeyed structure, rectangular in plan measuring 63' x 49'. There is a single chamber of 25' x 15' surrounded on three sides by a 9' wide veranda. The veranda has a triple arched entrance way supported on massive stone pillars. The walls are made of bricks and the front facade is divided into ornamented rectangular panels. The hoods over the arch of the openings are also ornamented. In each corner of the edifice there is an octagonal tower crowned by a tapering single stone minaret.

Nature's Abundance

Tamal Tree

In Ramkeli, Sri Chaitanya Dev had delivered his first sermon under a pair of 600-year-old Kadamba and Tamal trees. It is as famous as the Mahabodhi Tree of Bodh Gaya.

Adina Deer Park

Adina Deer Park was established in year 1982 on a transferred vested land at Adina Mouza with an area of 9.99 hectares inclusive of two water bodies. The park is an important breeding centre for cheetal or spotted deer rich and in butterfly and birds, specially Asian Openbill, Paradise Flycatcher, Prinia, Oriole, and Fish Eagle.

Siali Wetland

Siali wetland is located within Chanchal subdivision of Malda district. The nature of this waterbody is a unique representation of natural fresh water wetland system. In the pre-monsoon period, the wetland is divided into

three fragmented water bodies, which are locally known as a) Kachua beel, b) Pajoa beel and c) Siali beel. The wetland is also locally known as “Monla beel”. During the rainy season all the three parts merge into one and take a huge shape.

The fish fauna in this wetland namely *Ar, Katla, Mrigel*, and *Koi* are cultivated for thecommercial purposes. Fish are the good source of food for piscivorous bird species and also for other higher vertebrates like frogs, snakes, fishing cats, the presence of which has been reported by the local people

Chatra Wetland

Chatra wetland is a peri-urban water body and is considered the only one of this specific type in the entire the North Bengal. Along with mitigating the flood risk, this natural water logged area acts as kidney of landscape by filtering the city's sewage, which is entering into this water body from adjacent municipal wards through the recovery of nutrients in an effective manner. Moreover, this wetland contributes to the well-being of the community by performing urban green space, as well as provides aesthetic appeal, landscape diversities and recreational opportunities.

The economically important fish species like *Rohu, Bot koi, Khalisa,* and *Mangur* are found moderately in this wetland.

Nayabandh Wetland

Typical Fishnets commonly used by Local Fishermen

Riverbank Erosion and Damaged Structures at Sahebpur

CHAPTER 44

MURSHIDABAD

Of Nawabs & Ethereal Textiles

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Murshidabad

West Bengal

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Located almost in the central position of West Bengal, this district plays an important role in connecting North and South Bengal. It shares the international border with Bangladesh in the east. The Padma River flows through the entire eastern boundary, separating the district from Malda and Rajshahi (Bangladesh). Burdwan and Nadia are on the southern side and Birbhum and Pakur (Jharkhand) are on the western side of the district. The River Bhagirathi runs through the middle of the district. In the west of the district, river Mayurakshi and its tributaries are the main channels.

Covering an area of 5,341 sq km and having a population around 7 million (according to 2011 census), it is a densely populated district and the 9th most populous in India. Bahrampur is the headquarters of the district which comprises five subdivisions: Bahrampur, Domkol, Lalbag, Kandi and Jangipur. In total there are 29 urban units: 8 municipalities and 22 census towns. Bahrampur and Kasim Bazar together form an urban agglomeration.

The western half of the district slopes eastwards toward the Bhagirathi; but the greater number of the hill streams do not find their way directly into that river, but are intercepted by *beels* or marshes and for the most part carried off to the south by the Dwarka River. The two

Jalangi River at Murshidabad

Ahiran Beel

chief drainage basins in this part of the district are that of the Bansloi in the north, and that of the Dwarka in the south. The large *beels* act as reservoirs to moderate the torrential flow of these hill streams, and also serve to drain the surrounding country, discharging their surplus water through the streams which issue out of them. The greater part of the surplus water ultimately falls into the Jalangi by means of the Gobra Nullah, the Bhairab, and the Sialmari. These channels, during the rains, are connected with the different *beels* and creeks (*khals*), forming a network of water communication. In the hot weather a number of springs may be observed along their banks, caused apparently by the drainage waters percolating through the understrata of sand and sandy soil.

Geologists have classified the triangle shaped Ajoy Bhagirathi Valley into four geomorphic plains. All these geomorphic units can be co-related with the major geologic horizons of the region. The whole district is covered by unconsolidated sediments of the Late Pleistocene to Holocene times. The Quaternaries mainly belong to Rampurhat, Kandi and Bhagirathi formations whereas the older formations belong to the Rajmahal Trap. The Rarh region is dominated by Rampurhat formation with sandy and silty clays making the predominant lithology. The Rarh Region, mostly of higher elevation, is occupied by the older alluvium of Pleistocene Age (upper Tertiary) deposited by the Ajoy-Damodar-Mayurakshi River System. The geological formations of the district can be classified into three parts; *1) Recent Alluvium 2) Pleistocene-recent older Alluvium and Lateritic Clay and 3) Jurassic Rajmahal Trap*.

Re-living *the* Past

The name Murshidabad comes from the place known as Muksudabad, which was the capital of Bengal during Murshid Quli Khan's rule. Before the arrival of the British, the city of Murshidabad was the capital of Bengal. In 1757 the British defeated Siraj–ud–Daula at Plassey. Even after the conquest of Bengal by the British, Murshidabad remained for some time, the seat of administration. The town is studded with architectural

Murshidabad remained the capital of Bengal for 74 years (1717-1790) with 3 major dynasties – Nasiri, Afshar and Najafi

Ruins of Karnasubarna – The Capital of Gauda Kingdom

heritage reminiscent of the rule of the Nawabs. It retains industries such as carving in ivory, gold and silver embroidery and silk weaving. Of historic interest are Nizamat Kila (the Fortress of the Nawabs) also known as the Hazarduari Palace (Palace of a Thousand Doors), the Moti Jhil (Pearl Lake), the Muradbagh Palace and the Khushbagh Cemetery. Murshidabad today is a centre for agriculture, handicrafts and sericulture.

Murshidabad remained the capital of Bengal for 74 years (1717-1790) with 3 major dynasties – Nasiri, Afshar and Najafi. The recorded history of Murshidabad begins under the Mughal Rule. It has been suggested that the present village of Rangamati, six miles south-west of Berhampore, marks the ancient site of Karna Suvarna, the capital of the kingdom of the great Gauda King Sashanka. According to the Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsiang (or Yuan Ohwang), who visited Bengal in the first half of the seventh century, the city, which was about 7 miles in circuit, had by it a splendid monastery, called Lo-to-wei-chin, which is Hieun Tsang's phonetic rendering of Raktavitti or Raktamitti, a name meaning red earth, of which Rangamati is the modern equivalent. This theory is disputed by other scholars.

Coins Issued by King Sasanka

No details of the history of the district are forthcoming for several centuries after this, but the rule of the Palas is commemorated by the large Sagardighi Tank, which is said to have been excavated by Mahipala, who ruled in the early part of the eleventh century. His palace is said to have been not far off, at a village called Mahipal after him, which is situated to the north of the Barela Railway Station. The district got its present name and in the early eighteenth century and its present shape in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Murshidabad town, which lends its name to the district, derived its name from its founder, Murshid Quli Khan. Travellers marvelled at its glory through the ages. The city, lying just east of the Bhagirathi River is an agricultural trade and silk-weaving centre. Originally called Makhsudabad, it was reputedly founded by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the 16th century. Kartalab Khan was appointed as *Diwan* of Bengal *Subah* in 1701 CE by Aurangzeb. He shifted his office from Dacca (present day Dhaka) to Maksudabad in 1702 CE. In 1703 CE, Aurangzeb honoured him with the title of Murshid Quli Khan and granted permission to rename the town as Murshidabad in 1704 CE after his newly acquired title. The Nawab Murshid Quli Khan made

Murshidabad the capital city of *Subeh* Bangla, comprising Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. The family of Jagat Seth maintained their position as state bankers at Murshidabad from generation to generation.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century the town of Murshidabad, began to assume importance as a commercial depot. Its silk attracted the attention of two English agents, Hughes and Parker, who were sent from Agra to Patna to set up a trading station there — so much so that next year they reported that they had invested Rs. 500 in purchasing samples of silk from Makhsudabad. When, at length, the English established their factories in Bengal, Cossimbazar was one of the first places selected for a station, which was subordinate to the agency at Hooghly.

The French had also set up a factory at Cossimbazar at this time, and the Armenians had made a settlement at Saidabad under the authority of a *firman* granted by Aurangzeb in 1666 ; while the Dutch had a thriving factory at Kalkapur. The object of all was the silk trade, of great significance at the time.

Murshid Quli Khan was succeeded by his son-in-law Shuja-ud-Daulah, who ruled in between 1725-39. He was from a Turkoman family from Khorasan in the east of Persia. During his time the administration was mostly under the Executive Council comprising of Rai Raian, Alam Chand, Haji Ahmed and Jagath Seth. They soon entered a conspiracy with the Deputy Governor, Alivardi Khan, to depose the natural successor of Shuja-ud-Daulah, his son Sarfaraz Khan. In the Battle of Giria, 1740, Ali Vardi Khan defeated and killed Sarfaraz Khan to ascend the *masnad* of Bengal *Subah*. Out of the accumulations which he found in the treasury, he sent large presents to the Emperor and his courtiers, and was forthwith confirmed as the Governor of the three provinces. It appears, however, that he never remitted the revenues to Delhi, for soon after this date the Mughal Dynasty lost all semblance of real power. He ruled Murshidabad for 16 years, during a most troubled period of Bengal history. The commencement of his reign was disturbed by outbreaks in Orissa, and these were no sooner quelled, that the Marathas began their annual invasions, ravaging the entire country to the west of the Bhagirathi, and even penetrating to the suburbs of the city of Murshidabad.

In October 1742, Ali Vardi Khan crossed the Bhagirathi by a bridge of boats, and defeated the Marathas, who were encamped at Katwa. Another raid on the district of Murshidabad followed. Bhaskar Pant, the Maratha general, sent a body of armed *Bairagis* towards Bihar, and Ali Vardi Khan hastened to follow them. The *Bairagis* then doubled back and swooped down on Murshidabad, but Ali Vardi Khan came upon them while they were busy looting Baluchar, and drove them out. From 1742 to 1761, with scarcely a break, Ali Vardi Khan was hard pressed both by the Marathas and the Afghans, as well as by the rebellions of his own generals and relatives.

Originally called Makhsudabad, it was reputedly founded by the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the 16th century. Murshid Quli Khan was appointed as Diwan of Bengal Subah in 1701 CE by Aurangzeb

Siraj-ud-Daula, was the grandson and spoilt darling of Ali Vardi Khan. The old Nawab had nominated him as his successor several years before, and in 1762 or 1763, when Siraj-ud-daulah was only 16 years old, had even placed him on the *masnad*. Siraj-ud-Daulah, was the last independent Nawab of Bengal. He made Nizamat Imambara in Murshidabad, West Bengal in 1740. The end of his reign marked the start of the rule of the East India Company over Bengal and later almost all of the Indian subcontinent. Betrayed by Mir Jafar, the commander of Nawab's army, Siraj lost the Battle of Plassey on 23rd June, 1757. The forces of the East India Company under Robert Clive captured Murshidabad.

Siraj soon grew to resent the politico-military presence of the East India Company in Bengal.

The forces of the East India Company under Robert Clive captured Murshidabad post the Battle of Plassey

In particular, he was angered at the Company's alleged involvement with and instigation of some members of his own court in a conspiracy to oust him. His charges against the Company were threefold. Firstly, that they strengthened the fortification around Fort William without any intimation or approval; secondly, that they grossly abused trade privileges granted to them by the Mughal rulers – which caused heavy loss of customs duties for his treasury; and thirdly, that they gave shelter to some of his officers, for example, Krishnadas, son of Rajballav, who fled Dhaka after misappropriating treasury funds. Hence, Siraj-ud-Daula ordered the Company to stop the fortification of Fort William in Calcutta. The Company did not heed his directives; consequently, Siraj retaliated and captured Calcutta (for a short while, renamed Alinagar) from the British in June, 1756. The Nawab gathered his forces together and took Fort William.

The Battle of Plassey (or Palashi) is widely considered the turning point in the history of the sub-continent, marking the start of British rule in India. After Siraj-ud-Daulah's conquest of Calcutta, the British sent fresh troops from Madras to recapture the fort and avenge the attack. A retreating Siraj-ud-Daulah met the British at Plassey. Betrayed by a conspiracy plotted by Jagat Seth, Mir Jafar, Krishna Chandra, and Omichund, he lost the battle and had to escape.

Siraj-ud-Daulah was executed on 2nd July 1757 by Mohammad Ali Beg under orders from Mir Miran, son of Mir Jafar in Namak Haram Deorhi as part of the agreement between Mir Jafar and the British East India Company. Siraj-ud-Daulah's tomb is located at Khushbagh, Murshidabad.

Events *of* Interest

Charak & Gajan

Among the many folk festivals of Bengal, Gajan Festival, Charak Puja and Neel Puja has a special place even in today's age. It is celebrated predominantly in rural Bengal, particularly in Nadia, North 24 Pargannas, South 24 Pargannas, Howrah, Hooghly, Bardhaman and also Murshidabad. The Charak and Gajan Festival are one such group of folk festivals linked to the agricultural community where the devotees pray to Lord Shiva for good harvest and rains. Thus, it is a pre-harvest festival. Charak Puja, Neel Puja and Gajan are

Charak Puja Ritual at Kandi

Dance Performance During Gajan Festival

the three parts to the festival. It is said that it is related to Tantric Buddhism and it started as a celebration by the Buddhist Community which was known as Dharmer Gajan and later when this was adopted by the Hindus, it was known as Shiber Gajan.

The Charak of Beldanga is very pictorial. Large number of people swing from the Charak tree. The most famous Charak at Beldanga is that of Harek Nagar and Begumbari while at Kandi the Charak Festival happens near Rudradev Shiva Temple.

The festival is celebrated mainly on the last two days of the month of Chaitra. This period is known as Chaitra Sankranti when Sun will enter Pisces sign. Chaitra Sankranti begins on 14th April of every year. People observe fast during this period devoting themselves to their God.

Gajan celebration is combined with marriages of the male forces of Siva, Nil or Dharmaraj with their respective consorts. In one way, it signifies the union of the forces of sun and earth. Although the festival takes place in its full intensity for three days, starting before the day of Chaitra Sankranti and ending the day after, it continues till the beginning on the month of *Ashadh* (June-July) which falls in the rainy season. Primarily arranged on the premises of different Shiva Temples, the festival is arranged mainly by mendicants (persons begging or relying on charitable donations) who are referred to as Gajan Sanyasis. During Charak, people dress up as Shiva, Parvati, Krishna and other deities.

Bera Utsav

The festival is celebrated in August-September; last Thursday of the month of Bhadrapada. Bera is a colourful and unique festival of Murshidabad. Taking place on the last Thursday of the month of *Bhadra*, it is an amalgam of history, folklore, fireworks and a very colourful spectacle. The festival of Bera was first started by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan whose childhood was spent in Persia, where Bera was celebrated. So, when he shifted his capital from Dacca to Murshidabad, he started the Bera Festival. Offerings are made to Kwaja Khijir, whereby small barges made with banana plants and laden with gifts are floated in the river Ganga. They are decorated with paper lights and coloured lanterns. The boats also contained a golden lamp which was also cast into the river. Nowadays, the golden lamp is there, but it is returned to the vault. Khwaja Khijir is believed to be the righteous man possessing great wisdom.

Durga Puja

Like every part of Bengal, Durga

Hazarduari Mela is held on an open-air stage keeping the Hazarduari Palace in the backdrop and includes performances by baul and Fakir artists

During Charak, people dress up as Shiva, Parvati, Krishna and other deities. Usually Rajbangshi castes are allowed to do such acts

Puja is celebrated throughout the district of Murshidabad. The royal families of Cossimbazar still celebrate Durga Puja with much grandeur.

Some of the well-known Durga Pujas are those of the Roy Family of Cossimbazar Palace, the Nimtita Rajabari, and the Dhuliyan Rajabari.

Ganga Puja

Every year, on the banks of River Ganga, in Azimganj under Azimganj Municipality, a fair is organized on the occasion of Ganga Puja. This 100-year-old *mela* happens in the month of *Jyeshtha* (May-June). Local traders put up their stalls in this fair and people belonging to all religions from the districts of Birbhum and Bankura visit this fair in large numbers.

Muharram, Nazamat Imambara

A Hosayniya or Hussainiya, also known as an *ashurkhana, imambargah,* or *imambara,* is a congregation hall for twelve Shia Muslim commemoration ceremonies, especially those associated with the Mourning of Muharram. Hussainiya is a large hall for the mourning of Muharram and other commemoration rituals of Shias which gets its name gets from Husayn Ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad. The Nizamat Imambara is a Shia Muslim congregation hall (Imambara) in Murshidabad, India. It was built in 1740 CE by Siraj-ud-Daulah and rebuilt in 1847 by Nawab Mansur Ali Khan, after it was destroyed by fires in 1842 and 1846. It is frequently mentioned as the largest Imambara in the world. During Muharram, in remembrance of Karbala, a huge congregation of Shia Muslims takes place.

The main festivals in Murshidabad include Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha (Bakri-eid, locally).

Holi

Holi of Murshidabad Shaharwali Society was an important and renowned event. Shaharwali Society used to play Holi with great enthusiasm in both Azimganj and Jiaganj. Earlier Holi, the festival of colour was enjoyed for a week in Murshidabad. It would start on the day of *Falguna Shukla Ashtami* (eighth day of bright half in Indian lunar calendar) ending on *Chaitra Krishna Pratipada* (*Ekam*, first day of dark half in Indian lunar calendar). Holi was a part of Raisi of Shaharwali Society. They used Saffron, Rose Water, *Tesu* (Herbal colour) and other beautiful colours and *Abir (Gulal)* to play Holi.

Hazarduari Mela

This fair is conducted by West Bengal State Tourism Department along with the Murshidabad District Administration. Hazarduari Mela is held on an open-air stage keeping the Hazarduari Palace in the backdrop. Between the Palace and the Imambara on southern flank of the palace ground, the stalls are set up with various handicrafts of Murshidabad district. The *mela* also includes songs by local *Baul* and *Fakir* artists of Murshidi and Marfati genre.

ART *at the* HEART

Murshidabad Miniature Painting

Murshidabad Miniature Painting, a school of painting with traditional Mughal Qalam at its root developed in Murshidabad. This province was

Famed Ivory Craft of Murshidabad

Murshidabad Miniature Painting, a school of painting with traditional Mughal Qalam at its root developed in Murshidabad, the capital of the far-flung Mughal province of Bengal during the first quarter of the 18th century

Shola Bark Substitutes Ivory in Crafts

earlier a great centre of art and culture during the Pala and Husain Shahi period. The Mughals, too, patronized art and culture of the area. Murshidabad School was established under the direct patronage of its governors when dispersed court artists of the crumbling Mughal Empire took refuge at the court of Murshidabad in search of their livelihood. During 18th century Murshidabad emerged into a new era of prosperity as a result of European trade and settled government. The real Murshidabad style of painting came into vogue under Alivardi Khan (1740-1756). A historian, Ghulam Hussein Salim, is of opinion that Alivardi Khan was an avid patron of art and culture. Some of the paintings of his court, titled Nawab Alivardi Khan hunting Roe Buck (1750-1755), Alivardi Khan seated on a Garden Terrace in conversation with his nephews, are now preserved in the India Office Library. Under Siraj-ud-daulah, the grandson of Alivardi Khan, Murshidabad painting reached its zenith.

Ivory Art

The principal centre of ivory-carving in Bengal has always been the district of Murshidabad. There are a number of interesting traditions current in the district regarding the introduction of the art. It is said that once the Nawab of Murshidabad asked for an ear-prick or ear-scratcher, and one of grass was brought to him. The Nawab said it was certainly not worthy of the Nawab-Nazim of Bengal, and he wanted one of ivory. An ivory-carver was at once brought to Murshidabad for preparing an ivory ear-scratcher for the Nawab. Girish Chunder Bhaskar, who may be said to be the head of the present ivory-carvers of Berhampur, highlighted the life of Tulsi Khatumber, the son of the man who cunningly obtained the secrets of the art from the unsuspecting Muhammadan artist, who was brought from Delhi by order of the Nawab by prying through a small aperture in the wall of the room in the Nawab's palace where the latter used to work. Tulsi learnt the art from his father and excelled. In fact, Tulsi is reputed to be the best master of the art Murshidabad has ever produced, and is regarded as the father of the art there. All the ivory-carvers of Murshidabad to this day bend their heads and raise their joined palms in veneration whenever his name is mentioned. In the present day, a ban on ivory has adversely impacted the art form.

Sholapith Carving

Sholapith Craft is one of the primordial handicrafts of the District Murshidabad. Probably influenced by the Mughal court, craftsmen in Murshidabad had mastered the fine art of ivory carving. But the lack of patronage after the capital's fall

Brass Bells of Khagra

from grace and later the ban on ivory trade may have led to the end of this craftsmanship if the artisans had not chanced upon a substitute, the *shola*. Owing to the whiteness of the material and the fine craftsmanship, one may mistake the *shola* handicraft for ivory. Some of the typical products made here that hark back to the ivory carving days are decorated elephants, *mayurpankhi* or the peacock shaped boat, palanquins, and flowers. Sholapith Craft of this district is recognized as one of the best example of craftsmanship. Sholapith items form an integral part of the major religious rituals in the district as well as the state of West Bengal. A particular community popularly known as Malakar is involved in making such beautiful craft. This unique handicraft requires specific techniques within different method such as Malar Kaj and Daker Kaj, with particular tools used. Sholapith, also referred to as *shola* or Indian cork, is a plant which grows wild in marshy waterlogged areas of Bengal, Assam, Orissa and the Deccan.

Bell Metal *(Kansa)*

Brass and bell industry, a cottage industry mainly concentrated in the Central and Eastern part of India, due to the availability of raw materials (zinc, copper, tin) in the plateau region of Eastern India. Bell Metal is an alloy with high proportion of tin to copper, and was the material used for making utensils for ritual and household use. Bell metal did not tarnish easily and was suitable for serving dishes. Traditionally, utensils were forged out of a lump of metals on anvils and steel shapers by a team, heating and beating the metal simultaneously. Bigger pots are shaped and forged in parts and joined or brazed with soldering paste finished and polished.

Balaposh

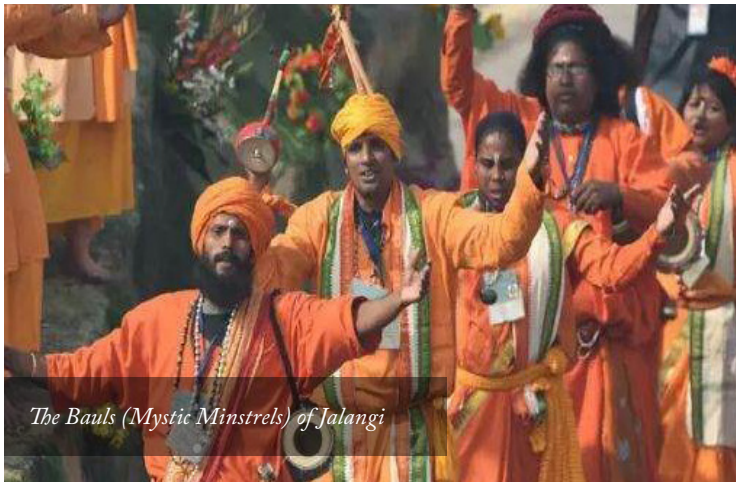
Balaposh or silk quilts are steeped in history and deft craftsmanship, with Balaposh of Murshidabad being one of West Bengal's finest creations that has travelled far and has won appreciation for the sweet scented warmth, spread by a layer of *attar*-scented cotton wool between two layers of silk cloth, using no quilting stitches at all apart from the stitches on the edges.

It is said that a single sheet of Balaposh would cost thousands

Bauls left their imprint on Rabindranath Tagore's own compositions as they were powerfully influenced by the Baul ideology which preaches mysticism and celebrating love

Balaposh - The Scented Quilt of Murshidabad

Baluchar Saree Design



The Bauls (Mystic Minstrels) of Jalangi

of rupees during the rule of the Mughals. The mild scent of Balaposh – that wafts through the quilted layers and lures one in, is often its main attraction, and the government is taking active measures – such as training to the younger generation of weavers, to ensure that this art is kept alive. The Nawabs of Bengal are to be given credit for the popularisation of Balaposh in the 18th century. Nawab Sujauddin's sense of perfection (then ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa) and his demand for an extravagant quilt is said to be what brought the Balaposh into existence. He wanted something that's soft as wool, warm as the lap and gentle like a flower to wrap himself in. Needless to say, this tall order was way beyond the reach of the then craftsmen of the region, except for one Atir Khan who took a vow to create that exclusive piece. Following the king's specifications, the Balaposh was quilted to perfection. Thus it was born and in its initial years, they only served the royals. Today as well, the art remains a well-hidden one, a closely guarded legacy carried forward by Sekhawat Hussain Khan, Atir Khan's great-grandson, the only true karigar (craftsman) existing in this near-extinct trade.

Baluchar Saree

The Baluchar Saree derives its name from the village of its origin, which is situated on the banks of the river Bhagirathi in the Murshidabad District of Bengal. Patronized by the aristocratic Jain traders and merchants who settled and flourished there in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Baluchar style acquired a special place among the traditional sarees of India. The uniqueness of this sari is as much in its design concept as in its weaving technique. Multicoloured motifs emerge on the ground through the introduction of extra wefts of floss silk with the help of small shuttles. What distinguishes the Baluchar from other brocades is the complexity of its design, executed in silk, on silk, without gold or metal thread, setting it apart even among the various rich brocades of India. The most distinguishing feature of the Baluchar Saree is the intricate design of its large *Pallu* (end of the sari). The *Pallu*, at the end, is decorated with an elaborate design, arranged in rectangles around a row of large *kalga*, or paisley motifs. The decorations on these rectangles consist of human figures, such as noblemen smoking a hookah, a king or a nobleman riding an elephant, or a lady holding a flower; some even depict couples, wearing European dress, seated in a railway carriage, or European soldiers carrying cannons, revealing the

Murshidabad has the claim to a 300 year old cuisine, the Sheherwali cuisine, which is a unique amalgamation of Bengali, Nawabi and Rajasthani cuisine

An Alkap Team in the Middle of a Performance

influence of European trade contacts. One of the central paisleys is sometimes a different colour from the rest, functioning as a *nazar battu* to ward off the evil eye.

Baul/Fakiri Music

The Bauls and Fakirs are an ancient group of wandering minstrels from Bengal, who believe in simplicity and sing about love, life and devotion. They are influenced by the Bhakti Movement and Sufism of the seventeenth century. Although Bauls comprise only a small fraction of the Bengali population, their influence on the culture of Bengal is considerable. Wearing a simple attire and carrying an *Ektara* in one hand and sometimes a small drum called *Bnaya* around their waist, the *Bauls* and *Fakirs* engross themselves in their music which represents a long heritage of preaching mysticism and celebrating love. It is believed that Lalon Fakir (1774 -1890), one of the greatest *Baul* composers, kept on composing and singing for decades without ever stopping to make any corrections or even recording his repertoire. It was only after his death that people thought of collecting and compiling his repertoire. Undoubtedly, the *Bauls* and the *fakirs* influenced Bengali culture in large measure; be it music or literature. *Bauls* left their imprint on Rabindranath Tagore's own compositions as they were powerfully influenced by *Baul* ideology. *Bauls* form an essential part of the culture of Murshidabad.

Alkap

Alkap is a type of theatrical derivative of the *Jatra* form of rural folk theatre of Bengal, popular in the districts of Murshidabad, Malda and Birbhum in West Bengal and Chapai Nawabganj, Rajshahi in Bangladesh. It has also spread to the adjoining areas of Jharkhand and Bihar such as Dumka and Purnea. *Kaap* means *kavya* (verse) and *Aal* means part of the verse. Another meaning of the word *Aal* is sharp. The word *Kaap* is also one of the many meanings of sam - a distorted form of gesture in the arena, or an image of a humorous comedian or subject if ridicule. Alkap is an amalgamation of music, dance and theatrical presentation. An Alkap group of ten to twelve performers

A Raibenshe Performance

is led by a *sarkar* (master) or *guru* (leader) and includes two or three young men called *chhokras,* one or two *gayens* or singers, dohar, choristers, and musicians. Alkap is presented in five parts: Asar Vandana, Chhora, Kaap, Baithaki Gaan and Khemta Pala. The programme is a reflection of rural society and puts the focus on the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the rural masses.

Raibenshe Dance

Raibenshe is one exceptionally unique type of folk dance form originally from West Bengal that reflects its folk heritage. *Rai,* which means royal and *bansh* meaning bamboo, is a unique martial arts dance in which the performers use a long bamboo stick and enact acrobatics and movements like wielding a sword, drawing an arrow and throwing a spear. This dance form is usually performed by men who belong to the lower castes of the Hindu community like Doms and Bauris. Raibeshe is distinctive because of the expression of military power and depiction of martial arts which serves as a reminder of the military expertise of the Bengalis. This dance has never been associated with any song or verse, instead men yell loudly while performing, which is the very essence of Raibeshe. It is often accompanied by *Dhols* (drums) and *Kanshis* (cymbals) whose rhythmic beats help the dancers to perform in unison.

Jagat Seth was a title conferred by the Nawab of Bengal and can be interpreted as banker or merchant of the world. It is believed that the entire British economy in the 1720s was smaller than Jagat Seth's wealth

Gastronomic Delights

Murshidabadi Mughaliya

Unlike the rich Mughal food, Murshidabad Mughaliya is lighter and the flavours are more subtle. Although it involves the trademark slow preparation and grinding of the *masalas* on a *sil-batta*, it somehow mingled with the local flavours. It emerged at a time when Mughaliya cuisine—or the food that the Mughals brought with them to India—was merging with different Indian tastes and giving birth to newer cuisines. The popular Awadhi and Hyderabadi cuisines were born during this period, as were the cuisines of Rampur, old Delhi, and of course, Murshidabad.

Mahi in Farsi means fish and Mahi Pulao is a dish which is originally Persian. But Mahi or Fish Biryani is a delicacy which originated in the Murshidabad province of Bengal where fish is a staple food and its presence in food is considered auspicious and enjoyed by all. It inherits the richness from the Persian and Mughal cuisine and the simplicity of flavours from the Bengali cuisine with its emphasis on fish and rice. The Mughals did not introduce non vegetarian delicacies alone. They were also known for their breads. In Murshidabad, one type of bread stood out in its distinctiveness and that was Chitua. This is equally true of other Mughal-inspired breads, right from the Baqarkhani of Delhi (supposedly invented by one Baqar Khan) to the Sheermal of Lucknow.

Chitua is a unique bread in the repertoire almost like a thick, spongy *appam* (though no yeast is added to the batter that is nonetheless fermented overnight), it comes topped with fresh, molten jaggery. It's a delicious creation, whether one wipes it off with a non-vegetarian curry or just eats it for dessert.

Shukto

The main course in a Murshidabadi Mughaliya platter at times begins with Shukto, the traditional first vegetarian course in a Bengali meal too. But here, the assorted vegetables have the bitters missing. In their place, and in a tribute to the Persian/Mughlai roots of the fare, there is a generous mish-mash of rich dried nuts (cashews, raisins and pistachios) with the vegetables.

Sheherwali Cuisine

In the 18th century, Murshidabad was

A Typical Sheherwali Thali

not only the capital of the Nawabs of Bengal, it was also an important trading hub. At this point in time, a few Jain families from Rajasthan settled mostly in Azimganj and Jiaganj, on either side of the Bhagirathi River. Since these men would go to the capital city (Sheher) of Murshidabad for business, they came to be known as Sheherwale or one who goes to the city. Now Murshidabad has the claim to a 300 years old cuisine, the Sheherwali Cuisine, that is quite unique and interesting, devoid of onion and garlic. It is said to be one of the best vegetarian cuisines in the country. Sheherwali cuisine is a strange amalgamation of Bengali, Nawabi and Rajasthani cuisine. It, of course, has all the ingredients of the Rajasthani kitchen with baked bread and a variety of pickles. Savoury snacks are a norm for the Sheherwalis. They made Kachoris stuffed with cucumbers (a local produce) and named it Khira ka Kachori. Sheherwalis had a particular liking for cucumbers which is why they prepared many dishes with it. Another example is Kheera ka Pitod where cucumbers were dunked in a batter made from gram flour and deep fried. Spiced gram flour balls are fried and dunked into a tangy tamarind syrup. This Khatte ka Pakori was provided as refreshment during the summer months. Kela Parwal ka Jholgiri is a delicious curry made using plantain and pointed gourds. Kheera Shimla Mirch ka Tarkari is a unique vegetarian curry made from cucumber and capsicum.

Sheherwalis had a knack of eating sweets before, during and after a meal. This sweet tooth is inherited from their Rajasthani roots and influenced by the Bengalis' love for sweets. One of the many breakfast customs include a glass of milk along with a sweet like Malpua, Chhena Bara or Raskadam. The Oswal Jains were in love with mangoes that grow in abundance during the summers. Kachhe Aam ke Kheer was a unique recipe of the Sheherwalis. They used unripe mangoes to prepare *Kheer*. The mango was grated, boiled to remove the sourness and then cooked in milk, saffron, sugar, rose water.

Rose Water

With the Mughals the incorporation of rose water in different dishes and for washing hands became more widespread. They brought it along with them to Murshidabad too and when the Sheherwalis settled there, they included it in their cuisine before long. Gradually rose water started being produced locally and outsourced too. In the present times, they are only available at Ittarwala house at Nashipur. Asif and his family are producing and supplying rose water since the last two centuries.

Bengali Sweets

The sweet shops of Murshidabad have their regular supply of Bengali sweets as well. Chhanabora, relished in all parts of Bengal, had its origin in Murshidabad. It is said that the credit of the sweet goes to one Patla Ustad and his employer Manindra Chandra Nandy, the Maharaja of Cossimbazaar, Murshidabad. It is deep fried and is filled with the flavour of cardamom.

Another sweet of Murshidabad is the traditional Khirmon from Jiaganj District. It is a kind of Rasogolla but hard in nature with the flavour of Elaichi or cardamom. In the winters, many varieties of sweets are made with Khejurer Gur as the sweetener.

Jhuripata Doi

There is another speciality of Murshidabad, the Jhuripata Doi. We have seen *Doi* or curd being settled in earthen pots or *Kullads*. But here they take a *Jhuri* or bamboo made pot and the inside is smeared with kheer or dried milk. The holes are covered and leakage prevented. And then, the curd is set inside it. The curd is generally less sweet in nature, but when one eats it along with the layer of *kheer,* it is delicious. The Doi is thick and yellowish in colour.

Nimtita Palace

People who Fascinate

Shashanka

Shashanka, also referred to as Gaudeshwar Maharajadhiraj Shashanka Deva was the sovereign Emperor of a unified polity in the Bengal region, called the Gaur Kingdom and is a major figure in Bengali history. Some historians place his rule between circa 600 CE and 636/7 CE, whereas other sources place his reign between 590 and 625 CE. He was a contemporary of Harsha and of Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. His capital was at Karnasubarna, in present-day Murshidabad in West Bengal. The development of the Bengali calendar is often attributed to Shashanka because the starting date falls within his reign.

Murshid Quli Khan

Murshid Quli Khan (1670 – 1727), also known as Mohammad Hadi, and born as Surya Narayan Mishra, was the first Nawab of Bengal, serving from 1717 to 1727. Born in the Deccan Plateau, Murshid Quli Khan was brought up by Mughal noble Haji Shafi. After Shafi's death, he worked under the *Diwan* of Vidarbha, during which time he piqued the attention of the then-emperor Aurangzeb, who sent him to Bengal as the *diwan* c. 1700. However, he entered into a bloody conflict with the province's *subahdar*, Azim-us-Shan. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, he was transferred to the Deccan Plateau by Azim-us-Shan's father, the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah I. However, he was brought back as deputy *subahdar* in 1710. In 1717, he was appointed as the Nawab Nazim of Murshidabad by Farrukhsiyar. During his reign, he changed the Jagirdari System (land management) to the Mal Jasmani, which would later transform into the Zamindari System. He also continued sending revenues from the state to the Mughal Empire. He built the Katra Masjid mosque at Murshidabad where he was buried under the steps of the staircase after his death on 30th June 1727.

Iskander Mirza

Sahibzada Iskander Ali Mirza (1899 – 1969), CIE, OSS, OBE, born in Murshidabad went on to become the first President of Pakistan. He was elected in this capacity in 1956 until being dismissed by his appointed army commander, General Ayub Khan in 1958.

Siraj-ud-Daulah

Mirza Muhammad Siraj-ud-Daulah (1733 – 1757), was the last independent Nawab of Bengal. He

got built the Nizamat Imambara in Murshidabad, West Bengal in 1740. Siraj succeeded his maternal grandfather, Alivardi Khan as the Nawab of Bengal in April, 1756 at the age of 23. Betrayed by Mir Jafar, the commander of Nawab's army, Siraj lost the Battle of Plassey on 23rd June, 1757.

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Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay

Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay (12 April 1885 – 23 May 1930), also known as R. D. Banerji, was an Indian archaeologist and museum expert. He was the Manindra Chandra Nandy Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture at the Banaras Hindu University from 1928–30. He is best known as the discoverer of the antiquity of Mohenjo-Daro, the principal site of the Indus Valley Civilisation through excavations. Bandyopadhyay is popular for unearthing pre-Buddhist artefacts at the ruins at Mohenjo-Daro; for noting similarities between the site at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Those discoveries lead to excavations at the two sites that established the existence of the then-unknown Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilisation. He won the Jubilee Research Prize of the Calcutta University for 'The Origin of the Bengali Script' published in 1919. He was the first to study the proto-Bangla script, the original form of Bangla script. He wrote the classic historical works on medieval Indian coins, and the standard works on the iconography of Indian art, in particular Gupta sculpture and architecture. His best known work was 'Eastern Indian Medieval School of Sculpture', published posthumously in 1933.

Jagat Seth

Murshidabad history remains incomplete without mentioning the Jagat Seths. The family sometimes referred to as the House of Jagat Seth, were a wealthy business, banking and money lender family from Murshidabad. Jagat Seth was a title conferred by the Nawab of Bengal and can be interpreted as banker or

Kherur Mosque

The House of Jagat Seth (Banker to the World)

merchant of the world. It is believed that the entire British economy in the 1720s was smaller than Jagat Seth's wealth.

House of Jagat Seth Museum contains personal possessions of Jagat Seth and his family including coins of the bygone era, muslin and other extravagant clothes, and Banarasi Sarees embroidered with gold and silver threads. Jagat Seth, also the title for the powerful moneylender family he belonged to, looked after the mint and treasury accounts of Bengal during the Nawabi period. He played a key role in the conspiracy involving the imprisonment and ultimate killing of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah., on account of having been humiliated and cheated by the Nawab. His house, complete with a secret tunnel as well as an underground chamber, where conspiracies were hatched, is what has been converted into the aforementioned museum.

Manish Ghatak

Manish Ghatak (1902 - 1979) of Berhampore was a leading poet-litterateur of the Kallol era. He often wrote under the pen name Jubanashwa. Among his famous works are 'Pataldangar Panchali' (a book of short stories), 'Kankhal' (novel) and books of poems like 'Shilalipi' and 'Sandhya'.

Mahashweta Devi

Mahashweta Devi (1926 - 2016), daughter of poet Manish Ghatak, is an author of short stories and novels. She wrote mainly about the downtrodden and the tribal people of Bengal, Bihar and Orrisa. She won the coveted Jnanpith Award for her literary accomplishments and also the Magasaysay Award for her social activities. Devi wrote over 100 novels and over 20 collections of short stories primarily in Bengali but often translated to other languages. Her first novel, titled 'Jhansir Rani', based on a biography of the Rani of Jhansi was published in 1956.

Paban Das Baul

Paban Das (b.1961) is a noted *Baul* singer and musician from India, who also plays a *dubki,* a small tambourine and sometimes an *ektara* as an accompaniment. He is known for pioneering traditional *Baul* music on the international music scene and for establishing a genre of folk-fusion music. Born in Mohammedpur, a small village in the Murshidabad District of West Bengal, where his early musical influences were his father, and wandering Baul singers. In 1988, Paban Das Baul started collaborating with Sam Mills, a London-born guitarist who had performed with the experimental, avante garde group Skidoo, between 1979 and 1982. Their collaboration resulted in the acclaimed album Real Sugar (1997), a Peter Gabriel's Real World Records release, which marked one of the first fusions of Bengali music and Western pop music.

Shreya Ghoshal

Shreya Ghoshal (b. 1984) is a playback singer. She has received four National Film Awards, four Kerala State Film Awards, two Tamil Nadu State Film Awards, seven Filmfare Awards and ten Filmfare Awards South. She has recorded songs for films and albums in various Indian languages and has established herself as a leading playback singer of Indian cinema.

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Monuments *that* Matter

Yellow House

Protected by the Murshidabad Government, this structure is inspired by British Colonial Palladian style that dates back to 1757 CE. The facade is interspersed with pairs of Doric columns. The building was constructed in 1767 on the banks of Ganga as a part of Barrack Square for establishment of an army headquarter of East India Company. Robert Clive and Warren Hastings resided here.

The 18th Century Armenian Church

> ***Since Berhampore was built on the banks of the river Ganga, most structures built by royals, nobles or zamindars were located near the river***

Armenian Church

Originally known as the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this 18th century built structure is of a colonial type with a single storeyed structure of 70' x 30', located in the Saidabad area. Above the front porch, there is a tower-like structure. The structure is entirely constructed in exposed brick masonry. The Armenians began trade in Saidabad prior to the advent of Europeans. An Armenian colony was established here in 1665 AD by virtue of a royal firman issued by Aurangzeb. Khoja Petrus Arathun, head of the Armenian community in Kolkata, erected this church. Saidabad area is near Cossimbazar and located on the bank of River Ganga. This church was built for Armenian traders and their families who came here for carrying out trade in silks, cottons, muslins, and nitres.

Kunjaghata Palace

This residential structure is presently owned by the descendants of Maharaja Nandkumar. This gracious palace is an amalgamation of colonial and regional architecture. Erected in 1757 CE, this double storeyed palace structure is now largely in ruins. There are circular Doric columns supporting the veranda on the upper floor. Decorative cast-iron railing is present in the veranda. The gate has a multi foliate arch with floral decorations in lime stucco. It has a Naubat Khana (for playing flute/ *shehnai*) on the upper floor of the gate which is supported by wooden beams and boarding. The gate has a marble plaque inscribed therein "Here resided Maharaja Nanda Kumar in 1775 AD". Maharaja Nanda Kumar, was a titled member of the Mughal aristocracy and an influential person in Bengal's history. He was a Faujdar of Hooghly Port during the Battle of 1757, Diwan of Mir Jafar and loyal to the East India Company, known as the Black Colonel. The palace is built on the banks of the River Ganga.

Saidabad Rajbari/ District Library

Formerly recognised as the Palace of Maharani Swarnamoyee, this building is structured with a combination of regional and colonial style architecture. Presently used as a library, it is a large double storeyed structure most of which is in an inaccessible dilapidated condition. There are four double height Corinthian columns supporting the entablature of the front porch which has floral decorations in lime, above which is a decorative pediment with sculptures of two lions. To the right of the porch is a rectangular wing with a corridor leading into rooms. Maharani Swarnamoyee Devi, Queen of Raja

Krishanath of Cossimbazar spent her last days here before her death in 1897. The palace was built by her son-in-law.

Dayamoyee Kali Mandir

Inspired by the architectural styles of Jor Bangla and Charchala Temples, this 18th century temple carries a charismatic aura that sets it apart from other religious structures of this region. The complex is entered through a semi-circular arched entrance leading into a Dalan type structure with five semi-circular arches supported on stout, rectangular pillars. The main temple is a Jor Bangla temple - 2 Dochala temples of about 15' height attached to each other longitudinally – one in front of another. The front temple serves as a Nat Mandir while the rear temple serves as sanctum sanctorum where the deity of Dayamoyee Kali is enthroned. Apart from the main temple, the complex has 13 Charchala Shiva temples (10' high) - 2 rows of 6 temples each and one temple built separately. All the temple facades were profusely decorated with terracotta panels depicting different deities (Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi and others) along with floral and animal motifs.

Bara Rajbari *of* Cossimbazar

Initially known as Shirpur Palace, this structure is currently in an unprotected state. Erected in the 18th-19th century, it is a Palladian style palace. It is a double-storied structure located within a site of eight acres. Along with the main palace, the complex comprises multiple temples, stables, ponds, cow sheds, dancing halls, record rooms and gardens. The front façade of the palace is 120' wide with a front porch. The porch has six double heighted Corinthian columns supporting an entablature and a triangular pediment which has lions and floral decorations. Behind the portico is the main entrance to the structure having a rectangular iron gate with a semi-circular arch above. Above this is the Naubat Khana with an overhanging balcony supported by cast iron columns and screens. It is the palace of the founder of the Cossimbazar royal family. Cantoo Baboo was one of the richest and most powerful people of Bengal in the latter half of the eighteenth century, closely associated with the British East India Company and the Crown.

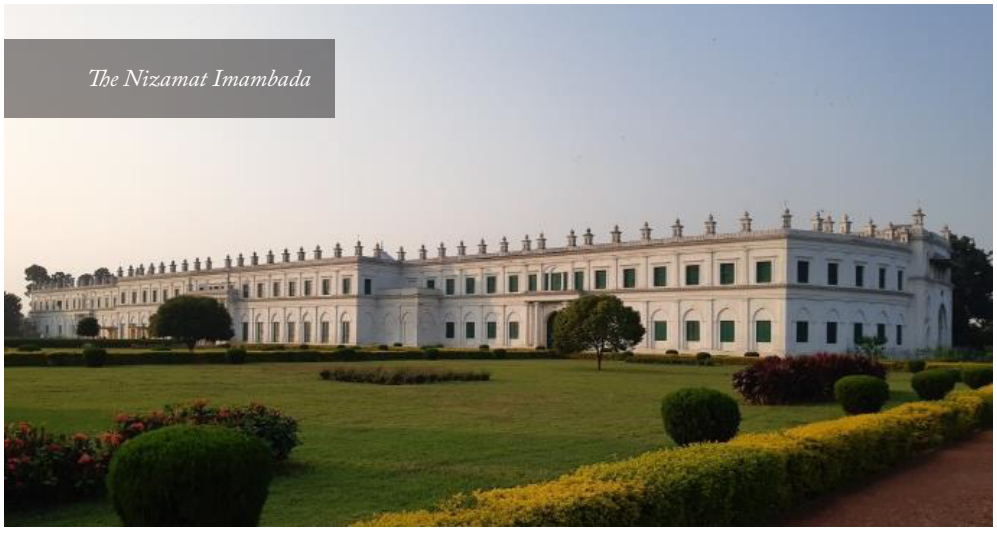
Cossimbazar Choto Rajbari

Choto Rajbari

Presently utilised as a guest house, this residential structure used to be a magnificent palace built by Dinabandhu Roy in 1740 CE, whose family gained massive wealth by exporting silk and was influential in the history of the entire region. His son, became a Diwan of East India Company, and the family was soon conferred with the title of Raja. Affiliated with colonial (Palladian) style, the palace was initially constructed in 1740 with major extensions in 1850. The denticulated pediment has the royal family crest with two lions and the flag.

Khoja Petrus Arathun, head of the Armenian community in Kolkata, erected this church. Saidabad area is near Cossimbazar and located on the bank of River Ganga

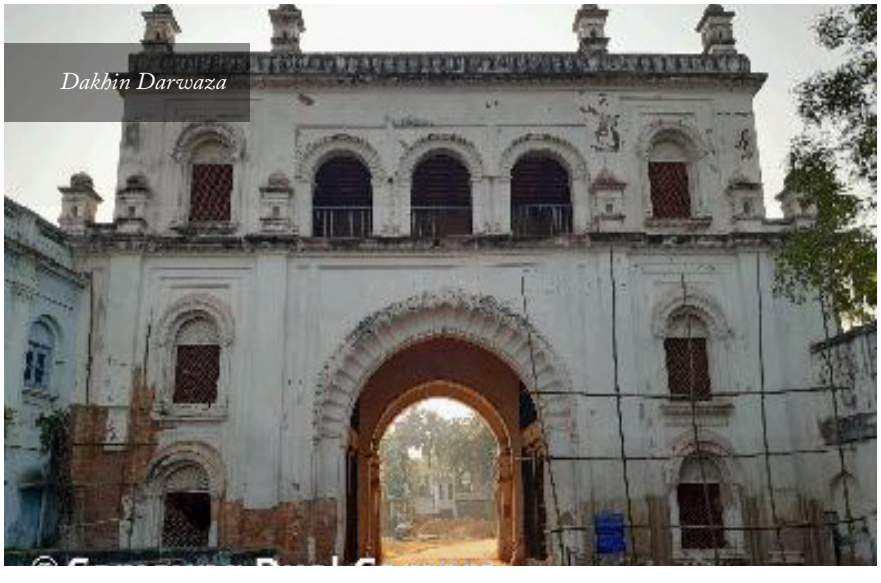
Initially known as Shirpur Palace, this structure is currently in an unprotected state. Erected in the 18th-19th century, Cossimbazar Bara Rajabari is a Palladian style palace



The Nizamat Imambada

Karbala Masjid

Established in 1490 CE, this rectangular structure was originally single storeyed and the first floor is a recent addition. There are 8 minarets, 4 at each corner and 2 on each side. The octagonal bases of the minarets are remnants of the original structure. The structure is flat roofed with the central bay having a small dome. Above this dome, a large semi-circular arch has been constructed recently. The inside of the mosque is colonnaded and on the west wall there is a Mihrab. It is one of the oldest mosques of Bengal established in 1490 CE during the rule of Sultan Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah of Habsi Dynasty.



Dakhin Darwaza

Dus Shiva Mandir

Presently under the family trust of Chhoto Raj family of Cossimbazar, these 18th century clusters of temples draw their design inspiration from Charchala and Atchala Temple architecture. The site incorporates a cluster of five temples to the south and five temples to the west, within a large open ground. The cluster on the west has three temples on a continuous plinth and two temples on another plinth. All five are square shaped in plan with Charchala Roofs. The clusters on the South are all placed on a continuous plinth with a small flight of steps in front of each temple. There is a square porch in each temple, which enters into a square shaped sanctum sanctorum. The first two temples have a flat roofed porch while the Sanctum has a conical roof over a hexagonal drum. The third and fifth temple have a Bangladhar roofed porch with an Aatchala roof over the Sanctum. The

The Hazarduari Palace (palace of thousand doors)

fourth temple has a Bangladhar roofed porch and a conical roof over an inverted lotus drum over the Sanctum. This cluster of temples was built by the Cossimbazar Royal Family in the 1760s.

Kherur Mosque

Associated with the Sultanate Architecture of Bengal, this masjid can be traced back to the 15th century. Restored by ASI, the mosque is rectangular in plan having a triple domed corridor, entered from the east through three arched openings leading into a single domed prayer chamber of 9m x 9m. The vaulted corridor and prayer chamber have two subsidiary openings on the north and south. The dome of the prayer chamber collapsed in the 1897 earthquake. There were four minarets in four corners.

Sheikh Dighi

Constructed in 1514 CE, this site is owned by the Trust of Nawab Family of Murshidabad. With its multipurpose usage for irrigation, fishery, bathing and washing, this water body is about 1 km in length and 0.5 km in breadth. It is one of the many *dighis* excavated by Sultan of Bengal Alauddin Hussain Shah, along the Badshahi Sadak constructed by him, from Gaur to Puri as part of his philanthropic activities. Saint Abu Sayed Tirmiz's Mazar also exists on western bank of the *dighi*.

Dhuliyan Rajbari Mejo Taraf

This palace is a classic example of European style architecture reflecting the position of Zamindars during the British reign. Constructed in the 19th century, this double storeyed structure has a continuous veranda running along the entire length of the front façade. The veranda is arched on the ground floor and colonnaded on the upper floor. The ground floor has rectangular pilasters while the first floor has eight pairs of circular columns with Corinthian capitals. Above the capital is a decorative entablature supporting a triangular pediment. The pediment has relief work in the centre. Jagabandhu Ray, a descendant of Raghab Ray who had amassed tremendous wealth by trading with European companies, constructed this palace, for various purposes necessary for maintaining Zamindari in 1855-56 CE.

Karbala Masjid is one of the oldest mosques of Bengal established in 1490 CE during the rule of Sultan Nasiruddin Muhammad Shah of Habsi Dynasty. The river Ganga flows within 3.5 km of the site

Zamindar Bari *of* Singhas

Composed in Baroque elements of the colonial style, this structure is an epitome of splendour that demonstrates excellence of craftsmanship of the 18th century artisans. Bengal, an important Subah in the Mughal empire, drew in many

North Indian communities like Rajputs, Marwaris, Gujaratis. Khoshal Singh, a Khatri, built this palace after earning wealth as Diwan of Rani Bhabani and becoming a Zamindar himself.

The Hazarduari Palace is divided into three blocks. There are 900 real and 100 false doors giving the palace its name of 1000 (Hazar) doors (Duar)

Hazarduari Palace

Protected by ASI, the palace is rectangular in plan, three storeys high measuring 424' x 200' x 80'. At the centre of the front façade, a grand flight of thirty-seven steps leads up to the portico on the first floor. The portico has eight double height Doric columns supporting a large triangular pediment, at the centre of which is the Coat of Arms of the Nawab. On either side of the grand staircase are statues of two seated masonry Victorian lions with stone slabs embedded in the wall behind them with inscriptions in English and Persian. There are 900 real and 100 false doors giving the palace its name of 1000 (Hazar) doors (Duar).

Nawab Nazim Humayun Jah, 14th Nawab of Bengal, descendant of Nawab Mir Zafar, reigned in Bengal during 1824-38. He laid the foundation in 1829 and it was completed by Colonel Duncan McLeod in 1837.

Imambara

A product of intermingled colonial and Islamic style, this 19th century structure is presently ASI preserved. This rectangular, double storied Imambara, 680' x 300', is the largest in Bengal and second largest in India. The structure has three large quadrangle blocks. In the central block there is Madina Mosque

16th Century, 7.5 ton Cannon named Bacchonwali Tope

constructed along with Imambara. The large single dome of the mosque is supported by massive pillars and arches between the pillars. The walls of the mosques and the top of the arches are decorated with texts of the Quran. Nizamat Imambara is a Shia Muslim Congregation Hall. Muharram is observed here by Shia Muslims with great fanfare. Nawab Nazim Feradoun Jah, 16th Nawab of Bengal, built the present structure.

Nature's Abundance

Murshidabad is rich in flora and fauna, particularly bird life. There are 13 major marshes/river cut-offs in the Murshidabad District, i.e. Ramnagar Beel, Kathalia Baor, Kodla Beel, Motijheel, Ahiran, Farakka Bird Watching Zone, Patan, Nirmal Char, Rampara Beel and Sagardighi Thermal power Ash Pond.

The gentle terrain of the district makes for highly meandering river courses, both, of the Hooghly as well as its tributaries. This meandering has given birth to a large number of oxbow lakes. Thus, there is a 2.4 km long oxbow lake right in the middle of the Murshidabad town. Moti Jheel, a 60 hectare water spread with a 20 hectare pleasure garden, lies to the north of the town. While the *beels* are majorly on the right bank, the oxbows are majorly on the left bank. The longest oxbow lake is 12 km long at Chuadangachar, 123 km south of Murshidabad town, whereas another one of 9 km length lies just north of Murshidabad.

The Moti Jheel has been excavated from the former bed of the Bhagirathi River, that once flowed near this lake. Moti Jheel was also the residence of Warren Hastings from 1771 to 1772.

The *beels* and oxbow lakes

are highly productive and play host to thousands of migratory birds. They would need to be conserved with alacrity.

Shifting Ganga, *1777-2010*

The entire course of the Ganga shows massive shift in the district of Murshidabad from Farakka to Jalangi. Old maps from 1777 (James Rennell's Map of Bengal Basin) till the Landsat Image of 2010 when overlaid, show this change. Geologists observed before the course diverted to the Padma eastward, there might have been two major channels, flowing more or less independently and building the deltaic tract west of Madhupur Jungle. Earlier, Ganga flowed through central Bengal. Early in the 16th century, the main course of the Ganga shifted eastward to the present Padma. This is due to tectonic changes leading to a rapid depletion of Bhagirathi. Sir William Willcock described the Bhagirathi , the Jalangi and the Mathabhanga as the overflow irrigation system in ancient Bengal. Others believe that Bhagirathi was a natural stream line and was the main channel of Ganga.

Bank Erosion

The main channel of the Ganges has a bank line of 94 km along its right bank from downstream of Farakka Barrage to Jalangi. Severe erosion occurs all along this bank. From a little above Nimtita, about 20 km downstream from Farakka, the Ganga flows along the

The Kiriteshwari Temple at Nabagram

A Boat Ferrying Passengers and Their Bikes Near Bhagirath Bridge

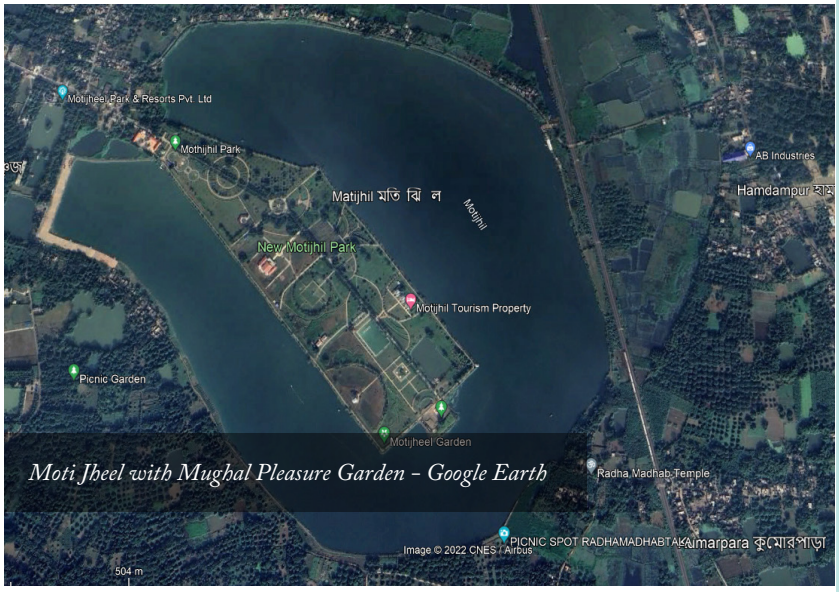
Silk Threads Getting Processed

Inayat Pasand, A Famed Mango Variety

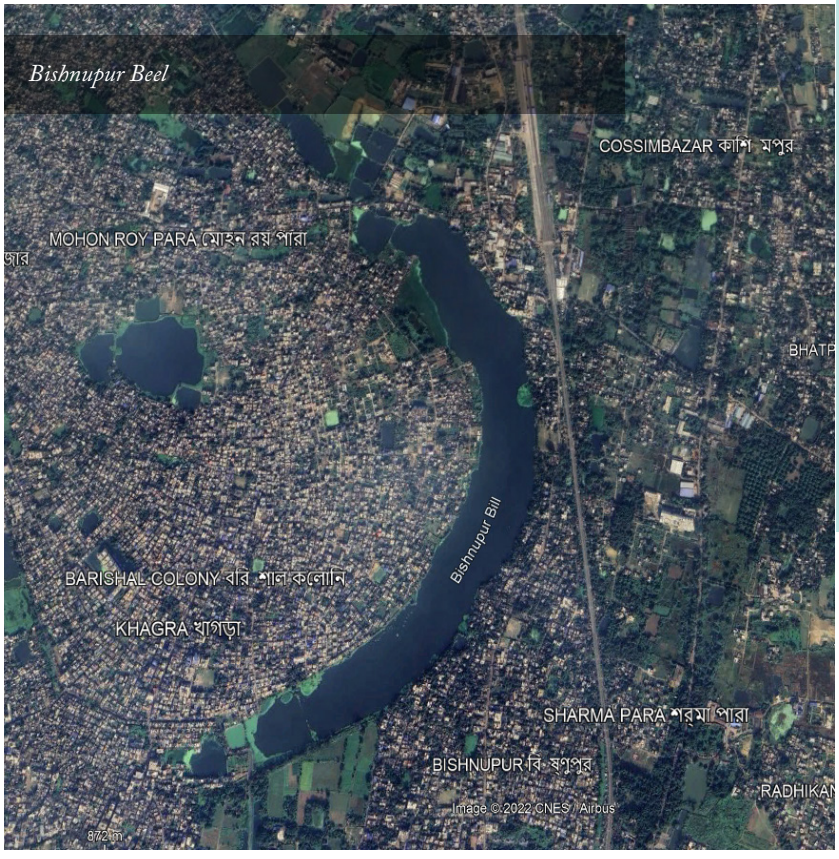
international boundary with Bangladesh in the left bank.

Bank erosion is a major concern and has wiped away boundary posts. A typical example is that of Nirmal char built by eroding Akheriganj.

Murshidabad grows several varieties of delicious mangoes, including Inayat Pasand, Rani Pasand and Gulabkhas.



Moti Jheel with Mughal Pleasure Garden – Google Earth



Bishnupur Beel

CHAPTER 45

NADIA

Land of Bhakti & Exquisite Weaves

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Nadia
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

The district of Nadia is situated in the heart of the Bengal Delta, held within the arms of the Ganga, namely, the Bhagirathi on the West and Mathabhanga on the North. The entire district lies in the alluvial plain of the Ganga and its tributaries. Most districts in West Bengal take their name from the headquarter station of the district, but Nadia district takes its name not from Krishnanagar, the headquarter, but from Nadia or Nabadwip hallowed by the memory of Lord Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who was born here on 18th February, 1486.

The British District of Nadia was formed in 1787 although modified subsequently in independent India. The district of Nadia is bounded on the north and north-west by the district of Murshidabad. On the south-east and east it is bounded by the Republic of Bangladesh. In the south and south-east, the district is bounded by the district of North 24-Parganas.

Nadia district is a large alluvial plain stretching southward from near the head of the delta formed by the successive rivers into which the Ganga has from time to time distributed itself.

The name Nadia or Nabadwip does not appear to be an ancient one. It's earliest mention of Nadia spelt as Nudiya is in Minhaj-us-Siraj's Tab-aqat-i-Nasiri in connection with the raid on this city by Bakhtiyar Khilji in circa 1200 CE. The post-Chaitanya

Bhagirathi-Hooghly River near Dignagar

Krishnanagar Palace

Vaishnava literature and popular traditions however identify Nabadwip with Nadia.

River Ganga, in form of its most important distributary, Bhagirathi-Hooghly covers about a 112 km stretch bordering this district. The nine blocks covered are Kalyani, Chakdah, Ranaghat, Santipur, Nabadwip, Krishnanagar I, Krishnanagar II, Nakashipara and Kaliganj.

Re-living *the* Past

According to some scholars, the meaning of Nabadwip is new island. In earlier times, it was an island in the middle of Ganga surrounded by Ganga and Jalangi Rivers. Later, the river changed its course and the island was pushed further. Gradually it changed into a populated place that became the capital of kingdoms. The new village that was established upon the island was called Naba-dwip. Some say that the name Nadia is derived from the collection of nine lamps (*dia* or *pradip*). The maiden mention of Nadiaho or Nudia is in the literary work Tabakat-I-Nasiri (1250 CE). As per the documents of Dr. Khudiram Das, Nabadwip is actually an island surrounded by Jalangi and Bhagirathi Rivers and the name Nadia was derived from it which later was identified with the entire district.

The history of Nadia is just not of Nabadwip. History starts from the time of decline of the capital Nadia of Lakshman Sen. This is because history of Nadia during the medieval ages is unknown. In the prehistoric time Nadia was supposed to be under the sea as assumed by the geologists. The deposition of silt by the Ganges and other rivers gave rise to this delta with silt, sand and gravel. Presence of many idols and evidences of Buddhist Sanghas from the time of Pal Dynasty proves that it was under the rule of the Pal Dynasty. Later, during Sen rule and from the time of the Muslim Rule, the recorded history of Nadia commences which can be

1757 Plassey Battle Monument

divided into three phases. The first phase is between the time of attack by Bakhtiyar Khalji to the arrival of Sri Chaitannya from 13th to 16th century CE. The history of the Nadia's inclusion in the society to Krittibash Kahini of Fulia marks the 2nd phase, 16th-18th century CE. The Bhuiyans of Jessore had helped Mughal General Mansingh against Pratapaditya and Bhabananda Majumder was awarded the title to the place (1606, 1631 firman granted by Mughal Emperor), which led to the establishment of the royal Kingdom of Krishnanagar according to Khitish Bangshabalicharit. The famous Krishnanagar Royal Family had produced equally prominent kings like Raja Krishnachandra, who had patronized poet Bharatchandra, the composer of Annadamongol.

While writing the history of Nadia, the foremost challenge is to define its boundaries as they have constantly changed with time. During the rule of Krishnachandra, Nadia had Plassey in the north, Bay of Bengal in the south, Dhuliapur in the east, Bhagirathi in the west. Nadia was then formed with 84 Parganas. Currently, Nadia is only 3927 sq km. The district is divided by the Tropic of Cancer in two equal parts. For official work, Nadia got its identity as a separate in district 1787, five years after the death of Raja Krishnachandra. The district shares boundary with Bangladesh border for 265 km.

Events *of* Interest

Raas Festival

In the Bhagavat Purana and in the Vishnu Purana, the Raas Yatra of Sri Krishna is mentioned. In the later autumn, Sri Krishna's union with the *Gopinis* with Dance and Songs is expressed in the *Raas Lila*. At Nabadwip, the *Shaktas* who are devotees of *Shakti* and the *Shaivas* who are devotees of Shiva become united with the *Vaishnavas*, the devotees of Vishnu. Hence the word *mela* or *milan*. Raja Krishna Chandra Roy of Nadia is responsible for this Raas Yatra at Nabadwip. Here Hari and Hara, Krishna and Kali are the halves of each other. Various types of images are worshipped in different pandals. They are well decorated with light and various types of *Sola* made ornaments and *Daker Saaj*. The beatings of drums, the music of flutes and Banjos and somewhere *Mridangas* and *Kartals* fill the air of Nabadwip. The next day after *Nawami*, that is on the *Bisarjan* Day, the idols on carts pass through the town encircling Poramatala Road with musical instruments and procession being called Arang. The *Ghat Bisarjan* or the immersion of *Ghatas* which has been taken from the Jagadhatri Puja of Krishnagar is another feature starting from 2001.

The frequent change in the historical context, rise of Baro Bhuiyan, decline of Sultanate, rule of subedars under Mughal Empire and beginning of Nawabi Rule and later the advent of the British rule and how all these have affected Nadia cannot be known in detail

Gaura Purnima Festival, Mayapur

Gaura Purnima is a Vaishnava Festival that celebrates the appearance of the supreme personality of Godhead, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534), who founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism. It occurs on the *Purnima* (full moon day) in the Hindu month *Phalguna*, usually falling in March or April. Gaura Purnima means Golden Full Moon, a reference to Chaitanya. His followers spend this festival fasting and chanting congregationally, and

then at moonrise a feast is enjoyed by all. It was celebrated on 1st of March in 2018 likewise in 2019 the very auspicious day will be witnessed on or around March 21. This festival is celebrated by Gaudiya Vaishnavas as part of Nabadwip-mandala Parikrama. Gaura-purnima is the most auspicious appearance day of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In Mayapur it is the biggest festival throughout the year. On the eve of Gaura-Purnima, an *adhivasa* ceremony is performed by the devotees to purify and get ready to worship and serve the Lord the next day. During the day, devotees go to the Ganga and take bath to purify themselves. A grand *abhisheka* of Gauranga Mahaprabhu is done in the evening. The ecstatic *hari-nama sankirtana* transports one to the spiritual world. Just like a caring mother, Ganga-Devi nourishes and protects the tender *Bhakti* keepers of those who take shelter in her by bathing in her sacred waters, and worship her. Immersion of the ashes of departed souls in Ganga helps them get liberated from all sins and awards them a birth to continue Krishna-bhakti.

Gaura-purnima is the most auspicious appearance day of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. In Mayapur it is the biggest festival throughout the year

Boat & Swing Festival

The Sri Sri Radha Madhava deities (*utsava-murti*) are brought in a procession amidst *kirtana* to the lake at Srila Prabhupada's Pushpa Samadhi Mandir. Their lordships are placed on a boat and taken on a boat ride during a boat festival evening. The festivities intend to engage everyone in Krishna service, thereby giving all a chance to perfect their lives.

Agmeshwari Festival

The Agmeshwari Festival at Nabadwip is held at Agmeshwaritala, the birthplace of Krishnananda Agambagis, who wrote Tantrasar.

Barodol Festival

On the auspicious eleventh day of the bright fortnight after the Indian festival of colours, Holi – usually in March - April, twelve idols of Krishna, in his various forms ranging from the crawling baby Gopal to the flute-playing avatar, are brought to the palace in Krishnanagar. The idols are displayed for public viewing on the first three days of the festival, after which they retire to a temple inside the palace as guests of the patron deity Boro Narayan. However, the month-long fair, held in the huge field next to the old fort's gate, is open to all. Barodol of Krishnanagar is one of the most important events in Nadia District. The deity of Krishnanagar Raj is Baro Narayan. The main festival is for three days and the festival is more than 200 years old. Though a month-long fair, one can witness thirteen Radha Krishna idols (including that of Rajbari, from Nadia district, are worshipped in the eastern side of the Puja Mandap within the Rajbari compound in the first three days and they are placed in separate wooden thrones.

Baruni & Ganga Puja

On the occasion of Ganga Devi's descent to earth, grand *puja* is offered on 4th June to Mother Ganga at Prabhupada Ghat, Mayapur. The highlight is the spectacular Ganga Arti with big, bright lamps. Maa Ganga, seated on her vehicle, the *makara*, decorated in a new *Saree* and many flower garlands, accepts *puja*, offerings and *arti*, offered with love.

Jagadhatri Puja

The Jagatdhatri Puja was first started by Raja Krishnachandra of Krishnanagar, Nadia, in Bengal. Jagatdhatri Puja is very popular in Krishnanagar, Tehatta, Rishra, Chandannagar, Bhadreswar, Hooghly, Boinchi, Ashoknagar-Kalyangarh. In Krishnanagar, Nadia, Raj Rajeshwary Jagatdhatri Puja is one of the oldest Jagatdhatri Pujas in Bengal. Legend has it that once during the Nawab Raj in Bengal, Raja Krishnachandra was arrested by Nawab Siraj-ud-Dualah for not paying tax in time. He was released from prison during the day of Vijayadashami due to which the entire festivity of Durga Puja in his kingdom was spoiled. So, to again rejoice, the

Raja started the ritual of Jagatdhatri Puja. Primarily, this *puja* was done by one Raj Rajeshwary (Raj Mata) in the Bengali language.

Mela *of* Fatima Bibi

The two-century-old festival and Mela of Fatima Bibi is held at Uttar Rajpur on the way to Haringhata in the Bengali calendar month of *Baisakh* (mid-April to mid-May). This festival lasts for three days.

Nrisinghamela

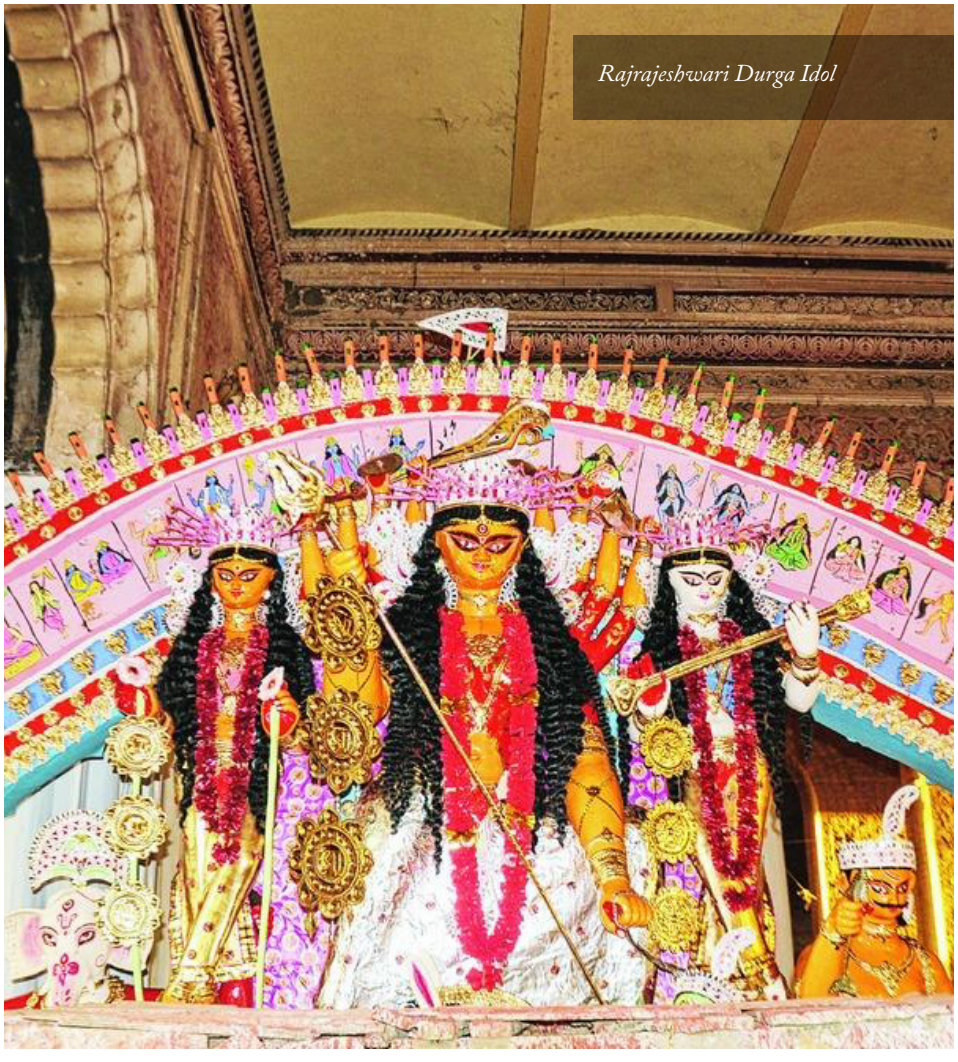
The Nrisinghamela at Deypara, near Krishnanagar is held on the fourteenth day in the Bengali calendar month of *Baisakh* (mid-April to mid-May) every year.

Sanajatra Festival

The Sanajatra Festival at Jasra is held to celebrate the worship of Jagannath and coincides with the chariot festival of Puri, Odisha.

Satimar Mela

It is an important event organized in Ghoshpara near Kalyani. This was introduced by Saraswati Debi alias Satima, wife of Ram Saran Pal of Sadgop caste. Ram Saran was a disciple of Aulechand, who is the founder of Kartabhaja Sect. No deity is worshipped by the Kartabhaja, it is the Guru (religious head) who is worshiped. The fair is scheduled for three days during Dol Yatra or Holi Festival. However, it may continue for a month. The people follow the practice of confession before the Guru which is similar to Christianity. Satima Festival and Mela is held at Ghoshpara near Kalyani during Holi. Satima, the founder of Kartabpuja Sect is worshipped during the festival.



Rajrajeshwari Durga Idol

ART *at the* HEART

Clay Art *of* Ghurni

Ghurni is a neighborhood of Krishnanagar in Nadia District in the state of West Bengal. It is the centre for the production of clay dolls, often referred

to as Krishnanagar Clay Dolls. Krishnanagar is situated at the right bank of river Jalangee in the Nadia district. Historical records tell us that the miracles started to happen under the kind patronage of Raja Krishna Chandra Ray, the ruler of Krishnanagar during 1710-83 CE. He was a connoisseur of fine arts, literature, and music, and benevolently supported artisans in continuous improvements of their trades. It is said that he relocated a large number of potter families from Natore in the erstwhile East Bengal (Bangladesh of today) to Ghurni and commissioned them to create clay idols of Hindu gods and goddesses for the palace. Impressed by their skills, the king then went on to support them in creating clay dolls with more varied subjects.

Many renowned clay artists from Krishnanagar received further training in foreign countries during the era of Raja Krishna Chandra Ray and the Colonial Government of India at that time. Some of them went on to create more splendid works of art all over the world based on patrons' requests and commissions, during the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A group of clay figurines by artist Jadunath Pal received the second order of merit in 1880 at the Melbourne International Exhibition. These figurines are now showcased in Australia-based Museum Victoria's Collection. Even in the more recent times, Krishnanagar's clay art form has received international recognition. For example, in 1976, Pope John Paul IV blessed Sambhu Pal, an acclaimed artisan from Ghurni for his flawless depiction of a Bengal village scene in clay art form. In 1990, when the Government of Russia wanted a bronze figurine of Rabindranath Tagore for display in one of their national parks, they sought the help of master craftsman Kartick Chandra Pal to give them a clay model. Paul provided it and later converted it into a bronze sculpture.

Miniature Clay Dolls of Ghurni

Many renowned clay artists from Krishnanagar received further training in foreign countries during the era of Raja Krishna Chandra Ray and the British Government of India at that time

Chalchitra

Chalchitra is a part of Bengal *Patachitra*, referred to as the *Debi Chal* or *Durga chala*, the background of the Durga *Pratima* or idol. *Patua*, the artists of Chalchitra called it as *Pata Lekha*, meaning the writing of *Patachitra*. Idols, 300–400 years old, of Nabadwip Shakta Rash used Chalchitra as a part of *pratima*. At a time, the use of Chalchitra had faded away, but now it has a great popularity.

Daaker Saaj

Saaj or decoration or accessorising is the last stage in idol making. The decoration depends on the choice of the client and can range from ornaments made of silver and golden foils to *shola* or *pith*. *Daaker Saaj* was derived from the word *dak* (post), as the raw materials required for making these ornaments were imported from Germany

Artist involved in Making Shola Ornaments

and arrived in Bengal by post. Another probable reason might be that raw materials used were manufactured by Duck Company. A kind of thread is wrapped with a glittering wire, popularly known as Rolex. *Daaker Saaj* was made extremely popular in Bengal for its highly intricate and detailed execution. There were *Sholar Saaj, Daaker Saaj, Tabaker Saaj* and *Bulener Saaj.* These days the foil work comes mostly from Krishnanagar in Nadia district.

Handlooms

Nadia is famous for special types of handloom sarees like Tangail, Jamdani, Dhakai-Buti, and Santipuri which command popularity all over India and abroad. Handloom plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic status of this district. The traditional production of Jamdani of Nabadwip, Santipuri of Santipur and Tangail varieties of Fulia zone have been popular and these three are the main centres of handloom industry of Nadia.

Shantipur Saree

The Neelambari Saree was the first product that made Shantipur famous. The indigo dyed, midnight blue cotton handloom saree was so alluring that it was called an enemy of modesty! The Neelambari's beauty lies in the fineness of the yarn and dyeing quality. Very fine hand spun yarn was used for weaving, resulting in a powder fine texture. A heady mix of fine weaving and subtlety of design, the Neelambari was the last word in sophistication. Today traditional handloom sarees woven in Shantipur are greatly valued. They are known for the *do-rookha* technique of weaving double sided design, where the saree looks the same on either side. Another unique feature of Shantipur Sarees is the finish. Cotton and silk yarn is used as extra warp in the border, and so is Zari. Backed by royal patronage and spurred by their encouraging gestures, it was a handloom weaving hub famed for its feather-like touch handloom woven dhotis and sarees.

Traditional Jamdani, the pride of Bengal handloom, is now woven in Habibpur and Ramchandrapur near Fulia

Tant

Weaving of Tant Saree is an age old craft of Bengal. The craftsmen deftly weave the cotton to thread which is woven to Tant Saree. Two shuttles are used for this purpose. Traditionally, handlooms were used by the weavers, which have today been largely replaced by power looms to weave these sarees. The typical Tant Saree is characterised by a thick border and a decorative *pallav,* woven using a variety of floral, paisley and other artistic motifs. Some of the popular traditional motifs are *Bhomra* (bumble bee), *Tabij* (amulet), *Rajmahal* (royal palace), *Ardha-chandra* (half-moon), *Chandmala* (garland of moons), *Ansh* (fish scale), *Hathi* (elephant), *Nilambari* (blue sky), *Ratan Chokh* (gem-eyed), *Benki* (spiral), *Tara* (star), *Kalka* (paisley) and *Phool* (flower). Printed, hand-painted and embroidered patterns are also used to get a larger variety of designs. Different motifs including floral element, solar element and recently even modern art elements are depicted in this sari. Tant Sari comes with colourful design and borders are made thicker because it is

subjected to tear easily. The traditional art of weaving Jamdani, considered the best variety of Tant clothing, has been listed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Fulia Tangail

Fulia, a small town in West Bengal's Nadia District, has a population of weavers who were refugees from East Pakistan who crossed over after Partition in 1947. Others came from Bangladesh after the 1971 war, and trace their lineage to the Tangail weavers near Dhaka. Fulia is famous for its Tangail Sarees, similar to the Dhaka Jamdani in technique but softer in feel, with the motifs spaced out.

Jamdani

Traditional Jamdani, the pride of Bengal handloom, is now woven in Habibpur and Ramchandrapur near Fulia. The true Jamdani saree is woven without using even a jacquard machine. The weaver uses fine needle-like spindles to conjure magic with extra weft work that can rival the most intricate embroidery. Birendra Kumar Basak, Saraswati Sarkar, Khagendranath Basak, Kamal Basak, Suchindra Nath Sen, Phanimoy Kashta and Kartick Chandra Bidyanta are award winning weavers of the region.

Silk Handloom

Silk bears a timeless legacy of the cultural heritage of West Bengal. Shantipur, Phulia in Nadia district, Dhaniakhali, Begampur in Hooghly district, Samudragrah, Dhatrigram, Katwa, Ketugram in Burdwan District and Bishnupur in Bankura District are the major handloom areas.

Shiva Mask

Shiva Mask

The ritualistic wedding of Shiva-Parvati takes place at the time of Basanti Puja, during the month of *Chaitra*, in Nabadwip, Nadia. The local *kumbhakars* (potters) make colourful

Saree (Tengali) Weaving, Nabadwip

Traditional Saree Looms

Putul Naach on streets of Nadia

busts of Shiva, the Shiva masks, on this occasion. This moulded soft clay structure is sun-dried before being coloured. The facial features are drawn on the white face of Shiva. Yellow *Kalki* flowers are painted on both ears and a golden crown (like that of a Bengali bridegroom) is placed on the head. This mask is taken door to door and the money thus collected is for wedding expenses. This is mostly done by children. This mask of Shiva is a significant piece of folk art.

String Puppetry

Puppetry in West Bengal, which finds mention in the medieval folk ballads of undivided Bengal, is commonly called *putul naach* (doll dance). Traditional forms of the art include rod and glove puppets. String puppetry, which is nowadays in practice, was a later import from East Pakistan. String puppets, originally manipulated with string and also with wire, are mostly found in Nadia.

Muragachha Colony, and its neighbouring Village Borboria, near Bagula, are home to families of String Puppeteers. The most popular plays are Sati Behula, Bhakta Prahlad, Raja Harishchandra, Lab-Kush, Nimai Sanyasi, Roopaban Kanya, Laila-Majnu, Phoolan Devi, Nati Binodini and so on. It is the dexterity and musicality of the lone performer that holds the audience enthralled.

Gorbhanga, *the* Land *of* Bauls & Fakirs

Gorbhanga Village of Nadia district is the home of the *Fakirs,* the makers of soulful, mellifluous music. The village symbolises a quiet celebration of peace and free flowing music - the elementary essence of the village, practised in the age old *Baul* tradition. The village that has evolved as a popular destination amongst music enthusiasts is an ideal one if one is seeking soul searching music in the natural habitat of the music genre. One can visit Gorbhanga round the year to enjoy the music, jam with the musicians, and experience the lifestyle and philosophy of the *Fakirs.* The *Baul* artists of West Bengal celebrate their songs and traditions through the annual festival, Baul Fakiri Utsav, in Gorbhanga. There are many other nearby fairs and festivals throughout the year in Nadia to explore, like the Raas Mela at Shantipur and Nabadwip and Lalonmela at Kadamkhali Village at Asannagar.

Akharas

A spectacle unmatched, *Akharas* are the heart and soul of Gorbhanga. They are places of devotion and transcendence and melting pots where musical geniuses come together to play their hearts out. There are five *Akharas* in Gorbhanga: Datababa Lalon Ashram, Azhar Fakir Ashram, Akbar Fakir Ashram, Siddique Ashram and Arshad Fakir Ashram where Mahajan songs are practised every evening. Mahajan songs is an umbrella term under which the songs of *Fakir* stalwarts like Lalon Fakir, Durdu Shah, Pandu Shah, Abdul Karim, Chandi Das and Bhaba Pagla are sung. The artiste community of Gorbhanga comprises of nearly 100 well-versed musicians with another 200 musicians practising the *Baul-Fakiri* faith under their guidance. The

Baul Fakir (Spiritual Minstrels) Ashram, Gorbhanga

Nadia has a glorious tradition of sweet making. Most of the famous sweetmeats of the district are made of cottage cheese and sugar. So it seems that they must have originated in the 18th century

Akharas of Gorbhanga are a revelation with their simplistic approach to life and their dedication to music. They have visitors coming in all day and discussions ranging from the life of Lalon and the philosophy of his songs to the *Baul-Fakiri* faith.

Bolan

Bolan is a popular folk drama of South Bengal. This performance is held during the Hindu Gajan Utsav when Lord Shiva is worshipped. Generally it is popularly known as a folk song, *Palagan*, in folk terminology. But today it is a popular folk drama like a performing art. Acting, songs, dance and dialogue are the main structure of Bolan. According to Gurusaday Dutta Bolan, it is a ballad dance. The root of this folk drama is at Nadia District of South Bengal, but it is disseminated through Bardwan, Birbhum and Murshidabad. The main performing areas of Bolan are Kaligang, Palashipara, Paglachandi, Tehatta, Debogram, Krishnaganj etc. in Nadia District.

Nagar Sankirtan

Sankirtan is a form of song or chanting that praises God and is performed in a public setting. The term comes from the Sanskrit root, *kirtan*, which means praising, celebrating and glorifying. *Sam* comes from the word, *Samyak*, which means complete. Westerners have been exposed to Sankirtan through the Hare Krishna Movement, whose followers publicly sing the praises of Lord Krishna, often to the accompaniment of drums or other percussion instruments and sometimes with dancing. When the Sankirtan takes to the streets, it is called Nagar-Sankirtan.

Gastronomic Delights

Nadia has an extremely rich cultural heritage. It is famous as the abode of Vaishnava scholars. The great seer Chaitanya Mahaprabhu founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Chaitanya has a significant influence on the cultural legacy in Bengal including on its gastronomic preferences. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas follow a Lacto-vegetarian diet which was adopted by the influential families too. Chakka, Dalna, Ghanta, Chhachari, Chhechra, Chhechki and Labra are some of the treasured vegetarian dishes gifted by Bengali widows. Later, many of these dishes have been adapted by including non-vegetarian ingredients like shrimp or fish heads. Upper caste Bengali widows would also cook a vegetarian spread for offering to *Shaligram Shilaa*, a small stone form of Narayana.

Nadia has a glorious tradition of sweet making. Most of the famous sweetmeats of the district are made of cottage cheese and sugar. The list includes well known dainties like Sarpuria, Sarbhaja, Sartakti (all made of milk cream), along with Dedomonda (made of cottage cheese and Khejur Gur or date juice syrup), Nikhuti of Shantipur, Chhanar Jilapi of Muragacha and Pantua of Ranaghat. All these are basically made of cottage cheese fried in ghee and dipped in sugar syrup. Late 19th century preparations include variants of Rossogolla and Chumchum.

Sarpuriya (A Sweet Meat), An Integral Part of Offerings to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

Lal Doi

Nabadwiper Lal Doi, also known as Kheer doi or Chakku doi, is one of the most famous types of dessert in the Bengal region of the Indian subcontinent, originating in present-day West Bengal, India. Though curd is usually white, red curd is a distinct type of confectionery. Red curd of the Nadia's Nabadwip type is very popular. Kalipad Modak of Nabadwip was the inventor of the confectionery in 1930. One of the most famous red curd shops is Laxmi Narayan Confectionery Store, that is 150-years old. Another name for this curd is Chakku yogurt. There is also a reason behind the name. The quality of the curd is judged on its stickiness. To test it, it is also seen by turning down the pot. Even a Chakku or a knife is inserted inside the pot and hence the name.

Sarbhaja, Sarpuria

Chaitanyadev used to eat three types of confectionery. One of them Sarpuri or Sarapuriya. It is mentioned in Chaitanya Charitamrita written by Krishnadas Kaviraj almost 520 years ago. Advaita Acharya himself sent Sarapuriya to Chaitanyadev. Sarpuria is an integral part of offerings made to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. According to the historical evidence, Krishnanagar and the nearby places were chiefly occupied by a lot of milkmen. Thus the Sarpuria emerged as a West Bengal treat.

Pantua *of* Ranaghat

Pantua is a fried sweet which is dipped in sugar syrup. A good Pantua should have the outer crust light and inside should be fluffy. The most famous sweet shop selling Pantua is Jogu Moira Shop near Ranaghat Station. The shape is little cylindrical and is prepared by Chhena.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's mode of worshipping Krishna with ecstatic song and dance had a profound effect on Vaishnavism in Bengal

People who Fascinate

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

(1486-1533)

Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a 15th century Indian saint and founder of Achintya Bheda Abheda. Devotees consider him an incarnation of Krishna. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's mode of worshipping Krishna with ecstatic song and dance had a profound effect on Vaishnavism in Bengal. He was also the chief proponent of the Vedantic philosophy of *Achintya Bheda Abheda*. Mahaprabhu founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism. He expounded Bhakti Yoga and popularized the chanting of the Hare Krishna *Maha-mantra*. He composed the Shikshashtakam or eight devotional prayers.

He is sometimes called *Gauranga* or *Gaura* due to his molten gold like fair complexion. His birthday is celebrated as Gaura Purnima. He is also called *Nimai* due to him

Lalon Fakir founded the institute known as Lalon Akhara in Cheuriya, about 2 kilometres from Kushtia Railway Station. His disciples dwell mostly in Bangladesh and West Bengal

being born underneath a Neem tree. Chaitanya was born as Biswambhar Mishra in 1486 as the second son of Jagannath Mishra and Sachi Devi in the town of Navadvipa in Nadiya. In his youth, Chaitanya was an erudite scholar, whose learning and skills in argumentation were next to none.

Krittibas Ojha

Mahakavi Krittibas Ojha (1381–1461) was a medieval Bengali poet. His major contribution to Bengali literature and culture was Indian epic Ramayana in Bengali. His work, the Shriram Paacaali , is popularly known as the Krittivasi Ramayan. His work, edited by Jaygopal Tarkalamkar, was published by the Serampore Mission Press. Krittibas Ojha was born at Fulia Village of modern-day Nadia. At the age of 11, Krittibas was sent to North Bengal (in other opinion, to Nabadwip) for higher studies. After finishing studies he was traditionally honoured by the Raja of Gauda by offering of a garland, some sandal water and a silk scarf. Upon returning to his home at Fulia, he translated the Valmiki Ramayana into Bengali.

Raghunatha Shiromani

Raghunatha Shriomani (1477–1547) was an Indian philosopher and logician. He was born at Nabadwip in present-day Nadia District. He was the grandson of Shulapani (14th century CE), a noted writer on Smriti. He was a pupil of Vasudeva Sarvabhauma. He brought the new school of Nyaya, Navya Nyaya to light, representing the final development of Indian formal logic, to its zenith of analytic power. Raghunatha's analysis of relations revealed the true nature of number, inseparable from the abstraction of natural phenomena, and his studies of metaphysics dealt with the negation or non-existence of a complex reality. His most famous work in logic was the Tattvachintamanididhiti, a commentary on the Tattvachintamani of Gangesh Upadhyaya, founder of the Navya Nyaya School.

Aulchand

Aulchand (1686–1769) was a Bengali Hindu spiritual leader who founded the Kartabhaja Philosophy. Kartabhajas consider Aulchand to be an incarnation of Vishnu, and therefore, think of him as one with Krishna and Gouranga. In 1694, Mahadeb Barui, a resident of Ula in Nadia discovered an abandoned male child in a betel plantation and decided to adopt him. At that time, the child was about eight years of age. He named the child Purna Chandra and raised him for 12 years. At the age of 24, he completely renounced material life and went about wandering from place to place. He travelled to various regions especially in the districts of Nadia, 24 Parganas and the Sunderban area. In 1769, Aulchand left for his heavenly abode in the village of Boalia near present-day Kalyani. He was cremated in Parari Village near Chakdaha in Nadia District.

Murali Pal

Sahebdhani is one of many minor religious groups or traditions (*sampraday)* that came into being between the 17th and 19th centuries in Bengal. The first *guru* of Sahebdhani, Murali Pal, received his *mantra* from a Sufi mystic living in Nadiya, a central district of Bengal. For the next three generations his sons continued the tradition as *gurus*, having established a centre of Sahebdhanis in Brittihuda Village, not far from Nabadwip, a renowned centre of Vaishnavism. The philosophy of Sahebdhanis is a mixture of Tantric, Vaishnav, Sahajiya Buddhist and Sufi ideas with a great emphasis on rejecting the holy scriptures of Hindu and Muslim communities. The religious practices of Sahebdhanis focus on the human body, regarded as a microcosm. Sexual yogic practices (*maithuna*) are described in an intentional language (*sandhya bhasa*) in the songs composed by two poets Kubir Gosai and Jadubindu. Sahebdhanis believe that the union of a man and a woman is necessary to achieve the state of non-duality.

Fakir Lalon Shah

Lalon, also known as Fakir Lalon Shah (1774 – 1890) was a prominent Bengali philosopher, author, *Baul* saint, mystic, songwriter, social reformer and thinker in British India. Regarded as an icon of Bengali culture, he inspired and influenced many poets, social and religious thinkers including Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Allen Ginsberg. He rejected all distinctions of caste and creed. Widely celebrated as an epitome of religious tolerance, he was also accused of heresy during his lifetime and after his death. In his songs, he envisioned a society where all religions and beliefs would stay in harmony. Lalon founded the institute known as Lalon Akhara in Cheuriya, about 2 kilometres from Kushtia Railway Station. His disciples dwell mostly in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Every year, on the occasion of his death anniversary, thousands of his disciples and followers assemble at Lalon Akhara, and pay homage to him through celebration and discussion of his songs and philosophy for three days. Lalon composed numerous songs and poems, which describe his philosophy. It is estimated that Lalon composed about 2,000 - 10,000 songs, of which only about 800 songs are generally considered authentic. Lalon left no written copies of his songs, which were transmitted orally and only later transcribed by his followers. Also, most of his followers could not read or write either, so few of his songs are found in written form. Rabindranath Tagore published some of the Lalon songs in the monthly Prabasi Magazine of Kolkata.

The songs of Lalon aim at reaching an indescribable reality beyond realism. He was observant of social conditions and his songs spoke of day-to-day problems in simple yet moving language. His philosophy was expressed orally, as well as through songs and musical compositions using folk instruments that could be made from materials available at home; the *ektara* (one-string musical instrument) and the *duggi* (hand held drum).

Soumitra Chatterjee

Soumitra Chatterjee (1935 – 2020) was an Indian film actor, director, playwright, writer and poet, whose early life was spent at Krishnanagar, Nadia. He is best known for his collaborations with director Satyajit Ray, with whom he worked in fourteen films.

He also worked with other noted directors of Bengali Cinema, such as Mrinal Sen, Tapan Sinha in Kshudhita Pashan, Asit Sen, Ajoy Kar and Tarun Mazumdar. He acted in more than 210 films in his career. He also received critical acclaim for his directorial debut Stree ki Patra (1986) which was based on the Bengali short story, Streer Patra, by Rabindranath Tagore.

Chatterjee was the recipient of multiple honours and awards. Chatterjee was the first Indian film personality who was conferred with France's highest award for artists, Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1999). He was also awarded the Padma Bhushan (2004) and France's highest civilian award Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur (2017). He received two National Film Awards as an actor and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for his work in theatre. In 2012, he received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest award in cinema given by the Government of India for lifetime achievement.

Jyotirmoyee Sikdar

Jyotirmoyee Sikdar is a Member of Parliament, India, representing Krishnanagar (Lok Sabha constituency) of West Bengal in the 14th Lok Sabha. She was an athlete and won the Bronze medals in 800 m and 1500 m events in the 1998 Asian Games. She is a recipient of the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award for the year 1998-1999. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2003.

Jhulan Goswami

Jhulan Goswami is an all-rounder cricketer who played for the India national women's Cricket team, Bengal Women, East Zone Women as well as the Asia Women XI women's Cricket team. On 1st February 2009, she was appointed to lead the team for the upcoming world cup. An integral part of the team, Jhulan was noted for both her batting and bowling. In the 2006-07 season, she guided the Indian team to first test series win in England. She won the ICC Women's Player of the Year, 2007.

Monuments *that* Matter

Poramatala Precinct

Built by the royal family of Krishnanagar, this ancient precinct is a 15th century structure that incorporates a small room that has been created in brick masonry surrounding a large tree and its aerial roots. Interestingly, this historical site is a shrine with no built up heritage structure. It is dedicated to the Goddess called Poraama, who is the village deity of Nabadwip, a folk goddess with no idols or images existing before Shri Chaitanya. Worshipped previously as *Jagatmata* (The Mother of the World) in a nearby jungle, it was brought to the present site in the 15th century. It is very close to river Ganga.

Bhabataran Shiv Temple

Designed in the exceptional Bengal *Ekratna* architectural style that reflects a single pinnacle structure, this temple reflects architecture dating back to 1825 CE. The 35 feet high temple is an octagonal *ekratna* type structure with an outer and inner part separated by a 4' corridor. The temple was constructed by Raja Girish Chandra of Krishnanagar in 1825, who found the Shiva *lingam* buried in the Ganga riverbed. The Shiva *lingam* was originally in a temple on the bank of Ganga and submerged in the river thereafter due to bank collapse and shift in course of the Ganga. Presently Ganga flows within 500 metres of the site.

Bhabatarini Kali Mandir

Built in 1825 CE, this *mandir* is inspired by Bengali *Ekratna* style. Unfortunately, the temple is almost ruined and largely covered with innumerable aerial roots of the famous banyan tree at the site. The temple comprises two parts. The inner portion is sanctum sanctorum. Walls of this portion converged into a pinnacle at about 35 feet high. Around the sanctum sanctorum the outer portion is a rectangular structure ending upwards in a flat roof. It appears that the pinnacle has emerged from the flat roof. In the outer portion there are three arched entrances - one is now closed. There are pairs of Doric pillars on both sides of the arched gates. Original temple, built in 1699 by Raja Raghab Ray was submerged due to flooding and rebuilt by Raja Girish Chandra of Krishnanagar in 1825 who retrieved the submerged deity of Ganesh, re-carved it into an idol of goddess Kali - Bhabatarini.

Shri Chaitanya Birthplace

Currently owned by the Trust, this building is a cottage shaped hut-like structure dating back to 1925 CE. This single storied structure is placed on a low plinth with a marble balustrade. It is a three bay structure with a central bay projecting out by a large extent. The site is entered through an ornamental gateway with sculptures of two icons protecting the gateway. The site also houses the famous Neem Tree under which the Lord Chaitanya is said to have been born. The site was identified as the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya. Nevertheless, it got washed away in the floods of 1747 and 1823. Consequently, a cottage was built in 1923 as the replica of the residence of Lord Jagannath Mishra, father of Lord Chaitanya. Remarkably, its association with Ganga is deep. The original site of his birthplace was submerged in Ganga due to its change of course and subsequently the site was discovered from a *Char* land emerged due to the shift in course of the river Ganga.

Shri Bas Angan

As the name suggests, this site is the residence of Shri Bas, the direct disciple of Lord Chaitanya. Inspired by the *Dalan* style of architecture, this structure is an embodiment of workmanship of 1871 CE. Though presently owned by the descendants of Nityananda Mahaprabhu, its original structure was inundated in floods way before the new structure was built.

Jaler Mandir

The Ruins of Ballal Dhipi

Yogpeeth - Birth Place of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu

The Sankirtan Movement and Naam Sankirtan, the pillar of Gaudiya Vaishnava philosophy commenced from this house. After its inundation, the present site was built upon in Puranganj.

Manipur Rajbari

This structure was constructed in the late 18th century in *Dalan* style with *Pancharatna* design. Owned by the Manipur Raj family, this structure is entered through a veranda with four pairs of circular columns having Corinthian capitals on the front facade and five pointed arches each on the two side facades. The veranda forms a circumambulatory path around the sanctum. The central spire of the structure was covered with gold plates. Now the plates have been removed and preserved. There is also a rectangular Nat Mandir in front of the temple with a flat-roof supported by semi-circular arches over stout circular columns on all sides. The site is entered through an ornamental gateway with two lion sculptures guarding the site and other sculptures like that of Jagai and Madhai. In 1798, the King of Manipur, Maharaja Bhagyachandra came to Nabawip and built a palace and temple and established the deity of Shri Anu Mahaprabhu. This also marks the initiation of political and cultural relationships with Manipur.

Debananda Gauriya Math

Listed by the local municipality as an important heritage building in Nabadwip, this religious structure is a *Navaratna* temple with a *dalan* roof. It is four storeyes and 50 m high. There are 5 chambers inside the temple - two *samadhis* of Vaishnav Gurus, amongst which one is of the founder. In other 3 chambers, there are idols of Shri Gauranga, Radha Vinod Bihari jiu, Koladeva or Varahadev, the deity of Koladwipa, Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati, Prabhupad and the founder. The temple was founded in 1940.

Ballal Dhipi

Preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, this site served as a palace cum temple since its inception in 1098 CE. Fortunately protected, the entire site of about 128 m by 100 m is enclosed with a huge boundary wall having a breadth of more than 3 m. The bricks used in the construction are made of terracotta representing a form most similar to that of 12th century used in construction of edifices in Bihar. On each side there is a hollow square or *homkund* spot for fires lit during worship. A *parikrama* pathway is visible in the north-western direction and it is apparent that it ran all around the temple. Brick lined circular structures are also present, indicating fire places for performing *Yajnas* by Senas (1098-1198).

Chand Kazi Samadhi

Though constructed in the 16th century, this structure has been renovated

Chand Kazi's Samadhi, Marked by a Champak Tree

The Neem Tree under which Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born

several times till the present structure was finalised. Inherently a funerary place, this site consolidates two sacred trees of about 30 feet high with a joint canopy of about 50 m diameter and are grown up intertwined over the grave. The Champak Tree (*Magnolia Indica*) represents Chand Kazi and a Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) represents Lord Chaitanya. Both trees are believed to be 500 years old and deeply revered by Hindus, Muslims and especially by Gaudiya Vaishnavites. Intriguingly, Chand Kazi was a magistrate of Nabadwip during Shri Chaitanya's period, who later turned a devotee of Chaitanya. On his death, Chaitanya constructed a tomb and planted a Champak Tree, which now serves as a sacred grove for people of both the communities.

Nature's Abundance

Bethuaduari Wildlife Sanctuary

Among the 14 wildlife sanctuaries in West Bengal, Bethuaduari is one. Nestled among the verdant farmlands and growing hamlets nearby Bethuaduari Wildlife Sanctuary is situated at Nakashipara Block in the District of Nadia. It came into existence once the afforestation activity was taken up on the degraded land which was a private property. It was handed over to the Forest Department, Government of West Bengal, during early 1950's. The 121 hectare sanctuary is rich in biodiversity and famous for spotted deer. The major floral diversity consists of Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Arjun (*Terminalia arjuna*), Indian Rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo*) and Bamboo (*Bambusoideae*).

Medicinal Plants

From the wetlands of Nadia District as many as 42 species of angiosperms belonging to 26 families and 2 species of pteridophytes were observed which are locally used for various purposes. Of these plants, 30 species have excellent medicinal properties.

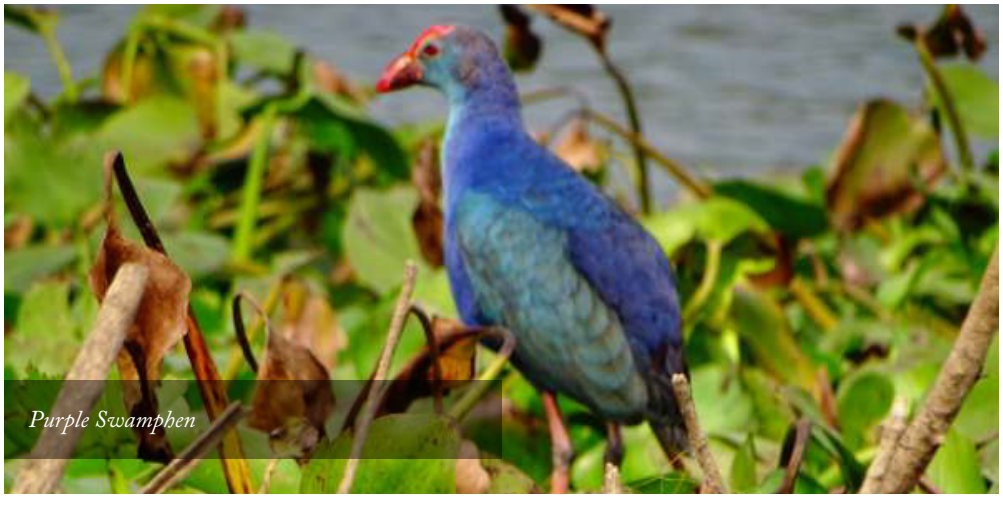
Fauna

At the beginning of the nineteenth century tigers were common in the more sparsely inhabited portions of the district near the Bhagirathi. It is, however, many years since the last of these animals disappeared, and none are now to be found near here, other than in the Sundarbans. Among lesser fauna are foxes, hares and porcupines. Monkeys (*langur*) are numerous and destructive in the towns, especially Krishnanagar, where they cause much damage in gardens, and to the mango crop when it is ripening. Jackals are credited with carrying off about 100 infants yearly,

and many cases of hydrophobia are caused by their bites. Crocodiles are fairly common, especially in the Garai and other rivers in the north of the district, and they occasionally kill human beings. Of game-birds, the Florican used to breed on the field of Plassey, but appears to have deserted the district during recent years. Snipe are very common in the south of the district during the latter part of the rains and the beginning of the cold weather. Various kinds of wild duck and other aquatic birds are found in large numbers in the east and north of the district during the cold weather, and wild geese are common in the ox-bow lakes of Bhagirathi-Hooghly.

Fish abound in most of the rivers and *bil/beels/baors*, and very large catches of Hilsa are made in the Bhagirathi Hooghly during the rainy season, and are exported freely by rail from Damukdia, or Sara, on the opposite bank of the river.

Confluence of Jalangi and Bhagirathi – Hooghly



Purple Swamphen

Banana Plantation Along Eroded Bank of Bhagirathi - Hooghly

CHAPTER 46

HOOGHLY

A Melting Pot of Indian & European Cultures

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Hooghly

West Bengal

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

The district is named after the Hooghly River with its headquarters at Chinsurah town, lies within the Burdwan Division. The name Hooghly is derived probably from the Hogla, a tall reed, which grows in abundance on the riverbanks and in the marshy low lands. It is bounded on the north by Purba and Paschim Bardhaman; on the east by Nadia and North 24 Parganas; on the south by Howrah and on the west by Midnapur and Bankura. River Hooghly forms the eastern boundary of the district.

In shape, the district resembles an irregular parallelogram with a triangular projection on the extreme west, beyond the Dwarakeswar River. The portion lying between the Hooghly and the Dwarakeswar is a flat alluvial plain intersected by a number of sluggish rivers and streams. The monotony of the flat plain is broken by the raised village sites and high river banks and by a sandy ridge, 10 or 12 feet high, east of the Dwarakeswar, which runs close to, and was probably thrown up by the Kana Dwarakeswar River, by artificial river embankments, and by a high embankment from Tribeni to Mahanad. Between the rivers are a number of saucer-shaped depressions, which, according to their level, form extensive marshes or still more extensive stretches of rice fields. These depressions receive the drainage of the surrounding lands, and in the rains discharge their contents by small

The Jubilee Bridge over Hooghly

channels into the larger streams. Such is the general appearance of this tract, but in reality the country slopes gradually from the north and west towards the south and east.

The district is mainly the product of its rivers, and is watered, drained and partially changed by them. Hence, for a correct knowledge of its physiography, as well as of its economic and sanitary conditions, a description of the river system is of importance. Under this are included, first, the large rivers, secondly, the smaller streams, and lastly, the village channels. The large rivers are four in number, the Hooghly forming the eastern boundary, the Damodar separating the Serampore Sub-division from the Arambagh Thana, the Dwarakeswar forming the dividing line between the latter, and the Goghat Thana, and its continuation, the Rupnarayan, forming the southwestern boundary for many miles. The smaller streams, as a rule, flow from north to south and are either the offshoots or tributaries of the big rivers. They are fairly numerous, and form the main drainage channels of the district. River Ganga, in the form of its most important distributary, Bhagirathi-Hooghly covers about 92 km stretch, bordering this district. The Bhagirathi first touches Hooghly a little south of the Kalna of Purba Bardhaman near Balagarh. Thence, it flows southwards as far as Tribeni where it is bifurcated into Jamuna and Saraswati. The river is then jacketed from both sides beyond Tribeni

The portion lying between the Hooghly and the Dwarakeswar is a flat alluvial plain intersected by a number of sluggish rivers and streams

as it coincides with the boundary of Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority. Some of the major municipalities are found along Hooghly River in this district. They are Chuchura (Chinsurah), Chandannagore, Hooghly, Bansberia, Serampore, Konnagar, and Uttarpara.

Re-living *the* Past

From the configuration of the district, a low-lying tract, traversed by numerous rivers with a series of marshes between them, it may be presumed that its earliest inhabitants were tribes of fishermen and boatmen. This supposition is confirmed by the predominance, down to the present day, of fishing castes like the Kaibarttas and the Bagdis. The former, indeed, can be traced to very early times, their name being found in the Manu Smriti, the two great Sanskrit epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and also in the colloquial form of Ketata in Asoka's Pillar Edict V. The Bagdis seem to have been an aboriginal tribe of West Bengal, whose origin is indicated by their non-Sanskritik names. The Kaibarttas predominate in the south, the Bagdis in the north and west; while the Sadgops are also found in strength in the western tracts, where they may have migrated after the Bagdis.

At the dawn of history this part of the country was probably included in the territory held by the Suhmas, a tribe mentioned in juxtaposition with the Angas, Vangas and Pundras in the Mahabharata and also in the Mahabhashya, a grammar text dating back to the second century BCE. In the epic, the Suhmas are said to have been born of the Queen of Bali by the blind Brahman sage Dirghatamas, while according to one of the oldest Jaina scriptures, Subbabhumi, Suhma-land, was a part, apparently of the eastern part, of Lad-

Christmas Decorations at Bandel Church

The French Made 17th Century Entrance to the Strand Promenade Along Hooghly at Chandernagar

ha. There can be no doubt that in the third century BCE the territory of the Suhmas was included in the vast empire of Ashoka which extended over the whole of Bengal as far as the mouth of the Ganga and up to Tamralipti (the modern Tamluk). Several centuries later this tract became absorbed with the rest of Bengal in the Gupta Empire, owing to a successful campaign by Samudragupta in the fourth century. The country remained under Hindu rule for some time longer, escaping the raid made on Nadia by Bakhtyar Khilji in 1199 CE. However, the northern part of the district had passed into the hands of the conquerors, for Zafar Khan's Mosque at Tribeni bears that date, and his *madrasa* is dated a few years later. Tribeni, and afterwards Satgaon (Sanskrit for Saptagram) was the headquarters of the local Muhammadan governors and the importance of the latter place was recognized by it being made a mint-town: the earliest existing coin minted at Satgaon is dated 1329 CE. Saptagram (colloquially called Satgaon) was a major port, the chief city and sometimes capital of southern Bengal, in ancient and medieval times. The word Saptagram means seven villages, namely, Basudebpur, Bansberi, Khamarpara (Nityanandapur), Krishnapur, Debanandapur (Sambachora) and Tirisbigha (Baladghati). According to Binoy Ghosh, Tamralipta, the ancient port, started declining from the 8th century, owing to river silting, and Saptagram possibly started gaining in importance as a port from the

The Bagdis seem to have been an aboriginal tribe of West Bengal, whose origin is indicated by their non-Sanskritik names

The Bandel Basilica, 1599

9th - 10th century. Saptagram Port, along with its business centre, had become important in the pre-Muslim era, during the rule of the Palas and Senas. Traveller Ibn Battuta has mentioned about the prosperity of Saptagram in his memoirs. Saptagram used to be an important business port during that time on the world map. Saptagram also finds mention in the travel memoirs of, Caeser Frederick, a Venetian traveller, Tome Pires, a Portuguese traveller, Ralph Fitch, an English traveller and many more. The Portuguese also settled in Saptagram during the 16th century when Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah was ruling Bengal. The Portuguese called Saptagram as Porto Pequeno (little haven) and they converted it into a flourishing port.

In the time of the Delhi Emperor Muhammad Shah Tughlak (1324-51), Bengal was divided into three sub-provinces with head-quarters at Lakhnauti, Satgaon and Sunargaon, with Satgaon being placed under Izz-ud-din Yahya Azam-ul-Mulk. Subsequently, when the Sultans of Bengal had gained independence, the three sub-provinces were reunited under Sikandar Shah (1358-1390); but Satgaon continued to be the seat of a local Governor and a mint-town.

By the end of the 16th century, Hooghly was a flourishing port with the lion's share of its trade in the hands of the Portuguese. Their merchants had extensive trading relations with the Malabar Coast, Southeast Asia and China. From China, amongst other goods, they imported textile and worked silk in-

cluding brocades, velvets, and taffetas. Another lucrative part of their trade was in commodities forbidden by the Portuguese Crown—cloves, nutmeg and mace from the Molucca Islands and Banda, camphor from Borneo, cinnamon from Ceylon and pepper from Malabar. The Portuguese from Hooghly also exported a large number of commodities, of which rice was the most important. The vast scale of the Portuguese trade from Hooghly can be gauged from the fact that they annually paid 10,000 *tankas* to the Mughal government. Notably, they also engaged in the notorious but highly profitable slave trade with their counterparts in the eastern delta as well as the Moghs (Arakanese). In 1599, the Augustinians in Hooghly built the Convent of Sam Nicoleu de Tolentino, attached to the Church of our Lady Rosary. Thus, by the mid-seventeenth century, Jesuit missionary John Cabral described Hooghly as the richest and the most flourishing trading port of Bengal. It was burnt in the sack of Hooghly by the Moors in 1632, but the keystone with the date 1599 was preserved and built into the gate of the new church erected by John Comes de Soto in 1661. It is dedicated to Nossa Senhora di Rosario and contains a monastery once occupied by Augustinian friars, the last of whom died in 1869.

Among other European powers that came to Hooghly were the Dutch, the Danes, the British and the French. Dutch traders centred their activities in the town Chuchura or Chinsurah which is south of Hooghly. Chandannagar became the base of the French and the city remained under their control from 1816 to 1950. Similarly, the Danes established a settlement in Serampore (1755). All these towns are on the west bank of the Hooghly River and served as ports. Among these European powers, the British ultimately came to dominate.

Events *of* Interest

Jagadhatri Puja

Perhaps, one of the most spectacular festivals of Bengal after Durga Puja is Jagadhatri Puja of Hooghly (Chandannagar). The festival assumes a different dimension in Chandannagar owing to its collaborative conception between the French and Bengalis. The most remarkable feature is its procession, the second largest in the world, with its magnificent lighting. *Jagadhatri* (Bearer of the World) is an aspect of the Hindu goddess Parvati, who is particularly worshipped in West Bengal and Odisha. Her worship and rituals are directly derived from *Tantra* where she is a symbol of *sattva*, beside Durga and Kali, respectively symbolized with *Rajas* and *Tamas*. According to the Puranas, Jagadhatri is the incarnation of Siddhidhatri. She is also said to combine the attributes of Sri Tripura Sundari and Maa Durga. In Bengal, her *puja* is celebrated as a return of the devi, especially in Chandannagar (Hooghly) and Krishnanagar. The oldest temple of Jagadhatri is in Somra (Balagrh, Hooghly). It is known as Mahavidya Temple. Besides, in every block and municipality of Hooghly, there are Jagatdhatri Pujas which are more than 100 years old. Some of the major Jagatdhatri Pujas of Hooghly are Oldest Baroyari, Old Pujas (almost 300) of Chandannagar, Adi Haldarpara Puja, Lakshmiganj Choumatha Puja, Khalisani Sarbojonin, Mankundu Sarbojonin, and Gondalpara Sarbojonin.

The vast scale of the Portuguese trade from Hooghly can be gauged from the fact that they annually paid 10,000 tankas to the Mughal government

Kartick Puja *of* Bansberia

Kartick has, since time immemorial, been perceived as a symbol of unity, serving as a bridge connecting Shaivism, Buddhism and Dravidian theology. Bansberia is believed to be one of the seven villages that constituted Saptagram, the flourishing port-town in early medieval Bengal. One constituency that patronised Saptagram is thought to be of sailors from Tamil Nadu who were traditional worshippers of Kartick. Another contention is that the tradition in Bansberia, which coincides with the onset of the Raas Festival, may have

17th Century French Church at Chinsurah

begun under the influence of the festivities in Katwa, in neighbouring Burdwan. There are several types of idols found in Bansberia, particularly Sahagunge. Huge *pandal*s are prepared where Kartick and other deities are also worshipped. It is a huge colourful event.

Rathayatra *of* Hooghly

Two of the largest Rathayatra Festivals of Bengal takes place in the Hooghly District. They include:

Mahesh, Serampur

The present *Ratha* or the chariot was constructed under the patronage of Krishnaram Basu by the Martin Burn Company in 1885. The cost of the construction was two million rupees. The *Ratha* is a *Nabaratna* Temple having nine *shikharas*. The *ratha* has a steel framework with wooden scaffolding. It is fitted with twelve iron wheels each measuring twelve inches in circumference. The *ratha* is four storied, measuring 50 feet in height and 125 tonnes in weight. Two copper horses are attached to the front.

Snanyatra

The Snanayatra is held on the full moon day preceding the Rathayatra. On the day of Snanyatra, the idols of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra are bathed in copious quantities of milk and Ganga water. It is believed that the idols suffer from fever due to the cold waters. So, three physicians, one each from Arambag, Goghat and

Ghatal are summoned to treat the deities. They offer a liquid mixture as the medicine, which are then administered on the idols. Gradually their fever lapses and they regain normal health. Unlike the idols in Puri's Jagannath Temple which are changed every twelve years, the same idols prepared by the founder Kamalakar Pipilai are taken out here, till date. However, two days after the Snan-ayatra and just two weeks before the Rathayatra, the *Angaraga* ceremony is held. This is a three-day ceremony where the idols are repainted using herbal pigments behind closed doors. The artist covers his face and hair while painting the idols and has only one vegetarian meal a day, for three days. He does not charge any fee for the services.

The Rathayatras of Gupti-pura, Telinipara-Bhadreshwar and Uttarpara are historic and spectacular.

Vel Vel of Bandel

This festival is truly a confluence of culture, with a perfect fusion of Thai-pusam, Chaitra Navratri and Sheetala Pujo. Vel Vel in Bandel near Kolkata is different with flavours from Tamil and Bengali community coming together forming a unique experience. Heading southwards from the Bandel Station, a narrow road will be seen on the right hand side which directly leads you to the Madrasi Community (Tamil Quarter) where about 150-175 Tamil families live. History says that once, the Portuguese settled on the bank of the Bay of Bengal, a place called São Tomé de Meliapor (near Madras). Gradually they started developing the region with their prosperity. Some of the Tamil people got attracted by their progressive development and convinced them to trade with them sailing across various places, namely Nagapattnam and Pipli (Odisha). In course of the journey, due to some technical failure, they landed at Bandel while going to Chittagong. They started liking the place and in 1599 they established a Friary, rather a Rest House to use it as the centre to halt. In later years, they built the Bandel Church, which is the oldest Roman Catholic Church in West Bengal.

Rituals of Vel Vel

Vel is a divine javelin (spear) associated with Murugan, a Hindu war God also known as Vel Murugan. Spears used by ancient Tamils in warfare were also commonly referred to by this name. According to Hindu mythology, Goddess Parvati presented the *Vel* to her son Murugan as an embodiment of her *shakti*, or power, in order to vanquish the evil *asura* Soorapadman. The festival is quite popular in Sri Lanka, but here, the festival is held to honour Goddess Sitala.

The Mahesh Ratha is four storied, measuring 50 feet in height and 125 tonnes in weight. Two copper horses are attached to the front

Ganga Puja, Tribeni

Tribeni is a locality in Bansberia Municipality of Hooghly District. It is an old holy place, the sanctity of

which has been recognized for many centuries and has been mentioned in Pavanaduta, a Sanskrit text of the last quarter of the 12th century. Tribeni is believed to get its name from the convergence of three rivers, Kunti, Ganga and Saraswati. Every day, Ganga Puja is performed in the Ghat area. Many people take ritual bath in the river here.

At one time Tribeni was a famous Sanskrit centre where many *tols* and *chatuspathi*s (schools of learning) were found. It was also a popular Ayurvedic Centre too. Many scholars and pundits including Jagannath Tarkapancharatna lived here.

ART *at the* HEART

Printing

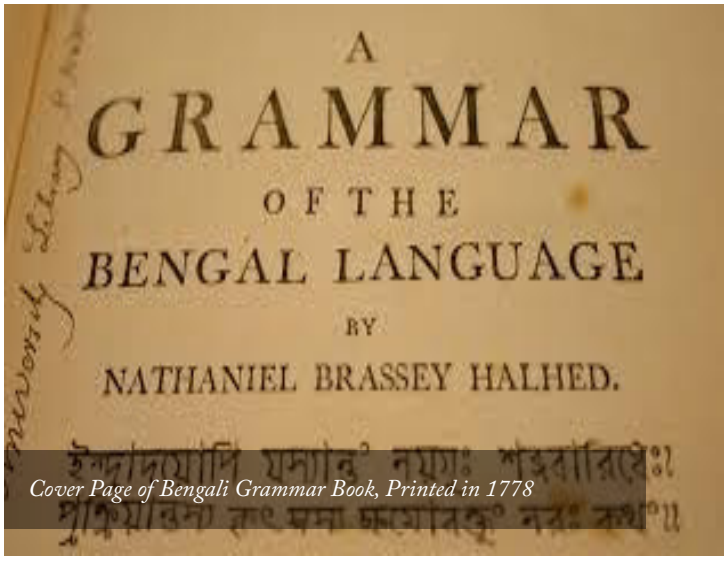
In 1800, William Carey established a Mission Press in Serampore for the initial purpose of publishing scripture translations, and in May 1800, the first leaf of his Bengali New Testament was published. In 1817, W. H. Pearce, who had trained at The Clarendon Press, Oxford, came to Serampore and associated himself with William Ward, the Serampore printer and colleague of William Carey and Joshua Marshman. Pearce had come to India as a Baptist Missionary, and he remained here until his death in 1840. In 1818, the Baptist Mission Press opened in Calcutta, as Pearce sought to replicate Ward's work in Serampore. After fifteen years of dual operation, the two presses joined together in a common purpose in 1837. Currently, the former site of the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta is the headquarters for both Hindi and English language newspapers, Amrita Bazaar Patrika.

Newspapers in the Indian languages first appeared from the Serampore Mission Press in 1818. Also

The Exotic Handwoven Dhaniakali Saree

in 1818, Carey and his colleagues began publication of the 'Friend of India', an English newspaper, that continued until 1875. Eventually, 'Friend of India' was incorporated in 1897 into 'Statesman and Friend of India', a daily newspaper in India.

Hooghly Printing Company is a subsidiary of Andrew Yule, now a Central Public Sector Enterprise.



Cover Page of Bengali Grammar Book, Printed in 1778

Demand for Locally Made Boats is High

It came into being in 1922. Hooghly Printing not only printed the Constitution but was also responsible for supplying the parchment paper on which it was printed. The first few copies were printed at Dehradun as these were to be the best copies. The rest were printed at Hooghly Printing Company.

Silk Printing

There are hundreds of silk printing workshops at Talpukur, Tarapukur of Serampur Municipality, Chatra Mannapaa, Naoga, Moradan, Boubazar of Baidyabati Municipality and Sheoraphully, Rajyadharpur and Piyarapur Panchayat involving more than ten thousand people. Silk Block Printing art is not traditional to eastern India and was introduced to West Bengal in the 1940s. Highly skilled local craftsmen quickly mastered the textile art form. Today, Serampore City in West Bengal continues to be prominent in the production of block printed silk sarees and fabrics.

In 1818, the Baptist Mission Press opened in Calcutta, as Pearce sought to replicate Ward's work in Serampore

Chinsurah Imambada

Boat Makers of Balagarh

Balagarh, on the Hooghly, is the heart of Bengal's indigenous boat manufacture. The centre where the boat makers and workshops still uphold a centuries' old tradition is centred around Sripur Market. The craft is at least 500 years old, with the boat makers of Sripur getting a mention in the writings of Abul Fazal (1551-1602).

Wood Carving

There are many old temples on the Hooghly where we find beautifully carved wood panels and doors. Chandimandap of Mitra Mustafi family of Sripur-Balagarh, deserves special mention. The spectacularly intricate work in the wooden panels shows the mastery over wood carving at about 300 years ago.

Clay Work

All along the Bhagirathi-Hooghly there are clay workshops, where idols or pottery are prepared. The clay for making the idols comes from Canning, South 24 Parganas. Various types of lamps are prepared during Kalipuja. During the Poush Sangkranti Fair, near Nistarini Kali Temple, very special dolls are prepared. They are said to be *Rani Putul* or Queen Dolls. The idols are prepared depending on different *pujas.*

Weaving *at* Dhaniakhali

Bengal has always been famous for

its textiles and the British frequently exploited the handloom weavers to make them weave the best of Muslins and cotton handlooms to take back to Europe. Dhaniakhali Saree has a GI (Geographical Indicator) tag and traditionally has been in Kora or natural grey with either red or black plain border. The dyed yarn was first introduced in 1942. Dhaniakhali Sarees nowadays are produced in Haripal, Rajbalhat Rasidpur, Dwarhata, Ramnagar, Gurap and Antpur of Hooghly.

Weaving *at* Begumpur

Begumpur is a small town whose economy depends on textiles and is also famous for *dhotis*. The handwoven Begampuri cotton sarees are known for being loosely woven, light-weight and translucent, and are extremely comfortable to drape.

Shola Work of Sundarus

Though *Shola* work is more famous in Murshidabad, Nadia or Purba Bardhaman, there is a *Shola* hub at Sundarus. The dolls for Raas Fair are mostly created at Sundarus. Since the Raas Utsav is mostly celebrated in the wild, many animals are created out of this milky white medium.

Bamboo & Cane Baskets *of* Guptipara

Guptipara of Balagarh Block specialises in Bamboo basket making. This is a family oriented craft where all the members participate. The most important items are baskets, used for storing fish, rice husking, fruits and vegetables.

Bamboo and Cane Basket Making at Guptpara

Gastronomic Delights

Bandel Cheese

Bandel Cheese is an Asian cheese that originated in the erstwhile Portuguese colony of Bandel in Eastern India. It was introduced by the Portuguese and was made by the Mog (Burmese) under their supervision. It is made by separating the curd from whey with lemon juice. It is then moulded and drained in small baskets and smoked. Bandel Cheese is known for its dry, crumbly and smoky flavour. Primarily utilising a procedure that is at least 500 years old, Bandel Cheese originally was a fresh cheese made of cow milk curdled with lemon juice, and was then preserved in saltwater to lengthen the shelf life of this otherwise fresh cheese. However, it took the Portuguese some time to realize the fact that these did not last very long on their own, and so, the little round balls would be smoked to give them some flavour and increase their shelf life too, so that they could be carried during long sea voyages.

Surya Kumar Modak & Jalbhora

Another legendary sweet of Hooghly is the mouth-watering Jalbhara Sandesh. *Jalbhara* literally means filled with water and it is exactly so. It is a sweet made from *Chenna* and

sugar which has rose water in its core. It is a marvellous sweet because the water inside it remains as it is for a couple of days without drying. It was first created by Late Surya Kumar Modak about a century ago.

Gutke Sandesh

It is a historic and legendary sweet shop in Serampore. There are several myths and legends associated with this shop. The myth goes that once Sri Sri Radhaballav Jiu (the famous 800 year old deity of Ballabhpur or Serampore) wished to have *Gutke* (a special type of sweet Sandesh made by this shop owner Sri Mahesh Chandra Dutta). In the disguise of a little boy Sri Sri Radhaballav Jiu came to the shop owner, asked for Gutke Sandesh. Receiving the Sandesh the little boy ate them quickly, but on being asked for money by the shop owner, the little boy admitted that he had none. Mahesh Chandra did not allow the boy to go away without paying up. The boy then asked Mahesh Chandra to keep a golden bangle which he wore on his hands and promised that his father would pay the money. The shop owner eventually let him go. On that morning the main priest of Sri Sri Radhaballav Jiu was shocked to see that the one of the golden bangle pair of Sri Sri Radhaballav Jiu idol was missing. Informed of this sad incident Mahesh Chandra came to the temple and showed the bangle to the priest. And surprisingly found that the bangle the boy had kept as security was the same. From that very day the shop is very much revered by the devotees and followers of Sri Krishna.

Gupto Sandesh of Guptipara and Tilkut of Konnagur are other specialities.

Portuguese Influence

From the late 15th century, European ships from various countries began to touch the shores of India in order to establish mercantile relations with Indians. The Portuguese were the first to set their foot on the Indian subcontinent, gradually followed by the Dutch, French, Danes and the British.

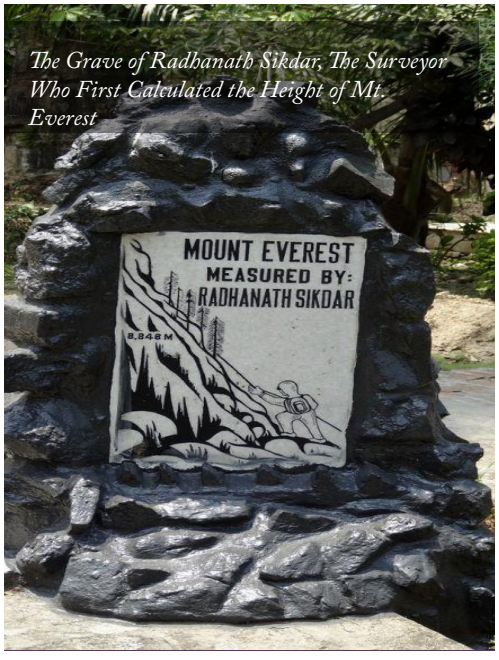
The Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to arrive, also brought along with them some new vegetables and food items such as potato, chili pepper, okra, tomato, cauliflower, cabbage, bread, cheese, jelly and biscuits. But notably, those new vegetables and food items were not so popular until the British became the administrators of Bengal and promoted those things for mass consumption.

People who Fascinate

The Great Trio of Serampur: Joshua Marshman, William Carey, William Ward

The above can best be described as the architects of the Serampore Renaissance. The beginning of the 19th century can be considered the most significant period in the history of Serampore, with the arrival of four English missionaries Joshua Marshman, Hannah Marshman, William Carey, and William Ward. Although they came chiefly for the purpose of preaching Christianity, they dedicated themselves to the service of ailing and distressed people in and around the town, spreading education, social reform, and social reconstruction. They established more than a hundred schools in the region. Hannah Marshman established the first Girls' School at Serampore, which received much public approval. Carey made an outstanding contribution by founding the Serampore Mission Press in 1800, where the wooden Bengali types made by Panchanan Karmakar were installed. Perhaps the crowning work of Carey and his two associates was the establishment of the Serampore College in 1818, which acts both as a university through the Senate of Serampore College (University) and as an individual college. It was also the first college in Asia to award a degree.

During the Poush Sangkranti Fair, near Nistarini Kali Temple, very special dolls are prepared. They are said to be Rani Putul or Queen Dolls



The Grave of Radhanath Sikdar, The Surveyor Who First Calculated the Height of Mt. Everest

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

(1772 – 1833)

He was an Indian reformer who was one of the founders of the Brahmo Sabha, the precursor of the Brahmo Samaj, a social-religious reform movement in the Indian subcontinent. His influence was apparent in the fields of politics, public administration, education and religion. He was known for his efforts to abolish the practices of *sati* and child marriage. Roy is considered to be the Father of the Bengal Renaissance by many historians. Ram Mohan Roy's impact on modern Indian history was his revival of the pure and ethical principles of the Vedanta School of Philosophy as found in the Upanishads. He preached the union with God, made early translations of Vedic scriptures into English, co-founded the Calcutta Unitarian Society and founded the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj played a major role in reforming and modernizing Indian society. He successfully campaigned against *Sati*, the practice of burning widows. He sought to integrate Western culture with the best features of his own country's traditions. He established a number of schools to popularize a modern system (effectively replacing Sanskrit based education with English based education) of education in India. He promoted a rational, ethical, non-authoritarian, this-worldly, and socially-reformed Hinduism. His writings also sparked interest among British and American Unitarians.

Haji Muhammad Mohsin

He was a prominent Bengali Muslim philanthropist. His most notable contribution was to establish the Hooghly Mohsin College and the Hooghly Imambara. He also played a significant role during the Great Bengal Famine of 1770 by helping thousands of victims. He bequeathed this fortune for charity and created a *Waqf* or Trust in 1806, with his entire wealth of 1,56,000 *taka*. One-third of his fortune was to be donated for education and religious programmes, four-ninths for pensions to the elderly and disabled, and the remaining two-ninths for the expenses of the two trustees. The magnificent Hooghly Imambara was built by him.

Jagannath Tarka Panchanan

(1695 – 1806)

He was a legendary Sanskrit scholar and *pundit* who was born in Tribeni in 1695. He was the son of Rudradeva Bhattacharji, a poor Brahmin of Tribeni, Hooghly District.

Ashapurna Devi

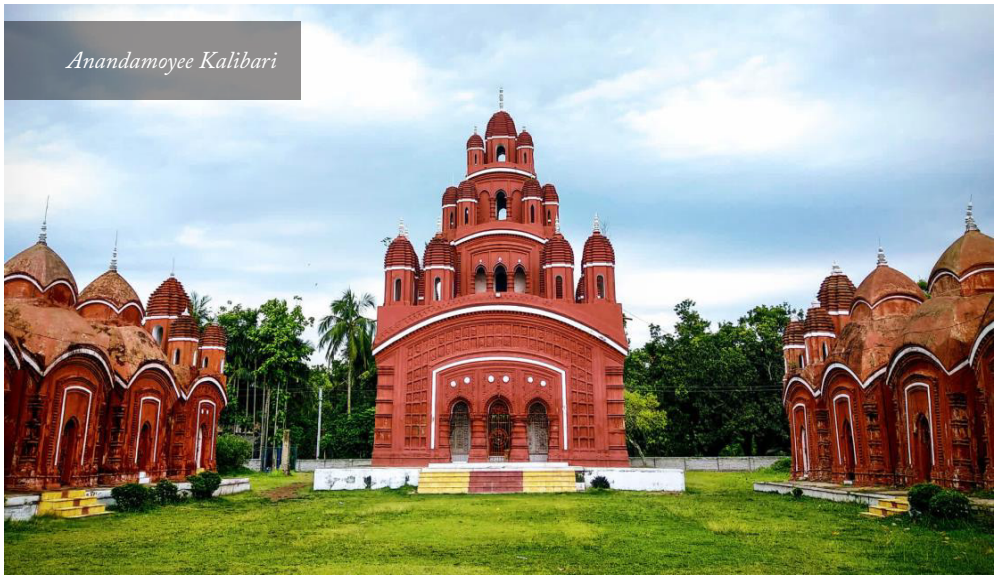
(1909 – 1995)

Ashapurna Devi also known as Ashapoorna Devi or Ashapurna Debi, was a prominent Indian novelist and poet in Bengali. In 1976, she was awarded the Jnanpith Award and Padmashri by the Government of India.

Radhanath Sikdar

(1813 – 1870)

Radhanath Sikdar was an Indian mathematician who is best known for calculating the height of Mount Everest in 1852. George Everest retired in 1843 but his successor, Colonel Andrew Scott Waugh, named the peak after the man who initiated the survey. The height, 8,848 metres, was officially announced in 1856. He was equally famous for social service. and played a leading role in passing of the Widow Remarriage Act, Prohibition of Child Marriage and Polygamy. His role in spreading women education has been remembered and acknowledged.



Anandamoyee Kalibari

Sridhar Das: Chandannagar's Master Illuminator

It was Sridhar Das who made Chandannagar's Jagadhatri Puja world famous, got numerous awards for his outstanding lighting for various *Pujas,* and also represented India on a global platform. What makes his achievements even more remarkable was that his many wonders were made possible with zero use of advanced electrical mechanisms. By 1969, he was experimenting with running naked lights through the middle of a pond for another Jagadhatri Puja celebration — while ensuring the water wasn't electrified. The current big names in the field, Babu Pal, Sukumar Biswas, Dipendu Biswas, Pintu Das, were once employed and trained by Das.

Monuments *that* Matter

Brindavan Chandra Mandir/ Brindavan Chandra's Math

Situated in Balagarh, it hosts the fourth oldest *Ratha Yatra* in India. Once, Bengal Nawab Alivardi Khan was informed of a plot of land that had not paid tax for a long time. The owner turned out to be one Brindaban Chandra who Alivardi Khan later found was no one else but Lord Krishna! Guilty and ashamed, he cancelled all dues and gave permission to build the temple of Brindavan Chandra. It houses idols of Lord Jaganath, Balarama and Subhadra. The temple front beholds some terracotta carvings. The *Ratha Yatra* (Chariot Festival) is the most celebrated festival here. Idols are carried in *rath* (chariot) to *Masir Badi* (aunt's house),

The Portuguese were the first to set their foot on the Indian subcontinent, gradually followed by the Dutch, French, Danes and the British

Gopal Temple at Burrabazar, Guptipara, on this day. For seven days the idols are worshiped in this temple. After that the idols are brought back to the Brindavan Chandra Mandir. This part of the festival is called Ultorath.

Dolmancha, Sripur Temple Complex

The two-storey Dol Mancha Temple in Balagarh hosts the Dol Festival each year. It is crowned by a decorative railing, 12 columns and nine arches. There is a Shiva Temple, Chandi Mandap and the Rashmancha at a stone's throw from the temple.

Zafar Khan Ghazi Mosque & Dargah

Adjacent to Ganga and its tributary Saraswati in Chinsurah, the mosque represents the multi-domed oblong type developed by the Muslims in Bengal where the number of domes on the roof equals the number of entrances in the east wall multiplied by those on either side. The Dargah is to the east of the complex and consists of

Zafar Khan Mosque and Dargah

a rectangular plan with two enclosures. It is the earliest surviving example of the brick-and-stone style introduced by the Muslims in Bengal.

Bandel Basilica

Bandel comes from the Bengali word *Bandar*, meaning port. One of the oldest churches of India, it is also known as Basilica of the Holy Rosary. It was built in 1599 CE to commemorate the settlement of Portuguese in Bengal. The church is dedicated to Mary, mother of Jesus Christ. She is also known as Our Lady of the Rosary. Built in the classic European style, it has three altars, several tombstones, an organ, and a shrine to Mary.

Hangseswari Temple

Hangseswari Temple is a *ratna* temple located in the town of Bansberia. The presiding deity of the temple is Hangseswari, a form of Maa Adi Parashakti Jagatjanani Dakshina Kali. In December, 1799, Raja Nrisinhadeb Roy Mahasay, laid the foundation stone of this temple. But after completion of the second storey in 1802, the founder died leaving this temple incomplete. His second wife Rani Sankari completed the rest of the work in 1814. The temple is known for its unique *ratna* architecture. The temple complex has another temple — Ananta Basudeba Temple — besides the main temple. Also, nearby is the Swanbhaba Kali Temple built by Raja Nrisinha Deb Roy Mahasay in 1788. The Hangseswari temple has a distinctive architecture different from the usual pattern present in this area, consisting 13 *minars* or *ratnas*, each built as a blooming lotus bud.

Laldighi, Chandannagar

The rectangular pond of Lal Dighi of Chandannagar was dug just like the Lal Dighi of Kolkata to ensure drinking water supply for the local residents. Obtaining permission from the then Nawab of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan, the French had set up a colony for trade at Chandannagar in 1673. In 1688, it became a permanent French settlement called by them as Chandernagore.

Chandernagore Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Its construction started in 1875 and was completed in 1884 at the instance of Rev. M. Barthet, assisted by his brother Joachim. Built in the French architectural style, the plan of the

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was born in a Bengali Brahmin family in Debanandapur, a small village in Hooghly. He wrote his famous book Devdas in Bhagalpur, that is said to be his own story, while he visited Jogsar, to meet Chandramukhi

Situated in Balagarh, it hosts the fourth oldest Ratha Yatra in India. Once, Bengal Nawab Alivardi Khan was informed of a plot of land that had not paid tax for a long time

church is based on the Latin Cross Plan. It is an imposing double storied building with a two tiered façade supported by a row of coupled pillars.

Denmark Tavern

Previously used as a tavern and hotel by European visitors, a part of the structure was later occupied by Serampore Emergency Force Line of West Bengal Police Department and hence called the Serampore Police Line. After restoration, the place is being used as a restaurant with a few rooms as a hotel. Made in the European style of Villa Architecture, it is a two-storeyed building with ground-floor portico and front veranda on the first floor facing the river Hooghly. Brick cupola over the staircase lends a special character to the front facade of the building.

Nature's Abundance

There are no forests in the district, barring Sabujdwip, a *char* near the confluence of Behula and Hooghly. Besides, patches of scrub jungle occur in Thana Goghat, where plants characteristic of dry uplands make their appearance, such as species of Gmelina, Wendlandia, Stipa, Fragus and Evolious, which are not found, or occur only as planted species, in the rice plain. The vegetation is, on the whole, however, somewhat sparse, and lacks both the large trees of the uplands and the luxuriant undergrowth of the lowlands. The

Dupleix Palace, Now Known as The French Institute, Where French is Still Taught

rest of the Arambagh subdivision is criss - crossed by rivers and creeks to permit extensive cultivation, and has the usual aquatic plants and marsh weeds common to alluvial lands. The tract between the Damodar and the Hooghly contains the plants generally found in Lower Bengal, both cultivated and wild. First, there are reeds, sedges and aquatic plants in the marshes and swampy rice fields; next, weeds, shrubs and smaller plants in the fields and commons a little higher up; lastly, surrounding the village itself, a belt of bamboos, coconuts, palms, mangoes, figs, jackfruit and other trees. The river banks, where not occupied by houses, ghats or roads, are lined with bamboos, figs, tamarisks and date-palms with thick undergrowth. The *chars*, being usually sandy, have very few trees, but where covered with silt, grow excellent rabi crops, and if slightly raised, rice crops. Inland, the tanks and stagnant pools are covered with lotuses, lilies, both large and small, and other aquatic varieties. Generally speaking, the most noticeable botanical feature of the district is the luxuriant growth of plant life natural to a soil of great natural fertility with an abundant rainfall.

Stavorinus, writing in about 1769-70, says that "tigers are very numerous in the woods, and often sally out into the inhabited places; there are likewise a vast number of wild buffaloes in the woods." Both tigers and wild buffaloes have long since disappeared, the last occasion on which a tiger is reported to have been seen being in 1830 among the ruins of Satgaon. Monkeys abound all over the district. Wild hogs are common in some parts, and do a good deal of damage to crops in the Hooghly sub-division. Jackals are numerous, and other common mammals are the Musk-Rat, Civet Cat, and Mongoose, and occur in some parts, especially around Dhaniakhali. Deer have long since been exterminated. Both the ordinary small bat and the flying fox are frequent. The Gangetic tortoise (called *Shmiik*) is common.

Even during the few centuries for which records are available, there have been many great changes in the courses of the rivers in this riverain

Dutch Graveyard, Chinsurah

Crabs in the Kestopur Macher Mela

district. In the river Hooghly, the north-eastern portion of its course has been specially affected. Here, several *chars* have formed, and the channel has shifted eastwards and become more and more tortuous.

Displaying a Large Fish in Keshtopur Macher Mela

Kestopur Macher Mela, Debanandapur

This fish fair is also called as Adisaptagram macher mela of krishnapur macher mela. Kestopur fish fair is one of the largest and oldest fish fairs in West Bengal. In 2021 Adisaptagram fish fair celebrated its 514th successive year. In this fair one can find various types of edible fishes like B*hetki, Bhola, Magur, Koi, Kalbos, Maurala, Hilsa, Ar, Bagar, Shankar, Topse, Pabda, Shawl, Shoal, Boal, Ban, Aila, Rupchanda, Bamboo, Fasha, Kachanki, Kazri* and *Gurjali*.

Sabujdweep ,a Riverine Island, Being Considered for Tourism Activities

Collared Owlet, Sabujdweep

Vegetable Transportation Through Kunti River

Confluence of Behula and Hooghly River

CHAPTER 47

North 24 Parganas

The Land of Vande Mataram

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
North 24 Parganas

Where *on the* Ganga?

According to Ptolemy's Geography, written in the 2nd century CE, the ancient land of Gangaridai was stretched between the rivers Bhagirathi-Hooghly (Lower Ganges) and Padma-Meghna. The modern-day 24 Parganas was the southern and the south-eastern territory of that legendary kingdom.

Covering an area of 4094 sq km, North 24 Parganas District is one of the largest districts of West Bengal, bounded by Bangladesh in east, Hooghly district in west, Nadia in north and Kolkata in south respectively. The district is divided into 5 Sub-Divisions: Barrackpore , Barasat, Bongaon, Bashirhat and Bidhannagar which is further subdivided into 22 Blocks. The area also falls under The Kolkata Metropolitan Area. It is a conurbation of cities, towns and adjoining rural areas spread over nearly 100 kilometres along both banks of the River Hooghly in the southern part of the state of West Bengal. The Kolkata Metropolitan Area is the eighth largest urban agglomeration in the world and third largest in India, after Mumbai and Delhi. Moreover, it is the largest and the only metropolitan area in eastern India.

Re-living *the* Past

Jetty and Walkway extending into Bhagirathi - Hooghly River at Panihati

Archaeological excavations at Berachampa Village prove that though the area was not directly attached to the rule of the Guptas, yet it could not shun their cultural influence. Hieun Tsang (c. 629-685) visited 30 Buddhist *Viharas* and 100 Hindu Temples in India and some of these were in the Greater 24 Parganas region. The district was not a part of Shashanka's unified Bengal Empire known as Gaur, but it is assumed that the district which was the south-west frontier territory of ancient Bengal, was under the rule of Dharmapala (estimated c. 770-810). The Pala rule was not quite strong in this part, as no excavation uncovered any of Buddhist Pala antiquities, but many Hindu Sena sculptures.

In the middle of the 16th century, Portuguese pirates began to invade and plunder many of the waterways and prosperous human settlements in the lower delta region. People left these places out of the fear of getting murdered, raped, or captured to be sold as slaves. The Basirhat sub-division of North 24 Parganas suffered most from these torments. Shrihari (Shridhar), was an influential officer in the service of Daud Khan Karrani. After the fall of Daud, he fled with the government treasure in his custody. He then set up a kingdom for himself in the marshy land to the extreme south of Khulna district (1574) and assumed the title of Maharaja. Pratapaditya succeeded to the kingship in 1574. The Baharistan, and the Travel Diary of Abdul Latif and the contemporary European writers, all testify to the personal ability of Pratapaditya, his political pre-eminence and material resources. His territories covered the greater part of what is now included in the Greater Jessore, Khulna and Barisal Districts. He established his capital at Dhumghat, a strategic position at the confluence of the Jamuna and Ichhamati before it was shifted to Ishwaripur.

Maharaja Pratapaditya soon became one of the 12 feudal lords of Bengal who not only declared their sovereignty from the Mughal Empire in the ruling of Jessore, Khulna, Barisal and Greater 24 Parganas, but also fought and resisted the Portuguese in the early years of the 17th century. He was finally defeated by the Mughals and Pratapaditya lost both the battles of Salka and Magrahat. His fate was sealed and he was compelled to tender submission to Islam Khan at Dhaka. His kingdom was annexed. He probably died at Benares on his way to Delhi from Dhaka, as a prisoner of war to the Mughals. After his death, Bhavanand Majumdar, who had been in the service of Pratapaditya, was given the throne by Raja Man Singh.

The territory of Greater 24 Parganas were under the Satgaon (ancient Saptagram, now in Hoogly District) administration during the Mughal era and later it was included in Hooghly Chakla (district under post-Mughal Nawabi rule) during the rule of Murshid Quli Khan. In 1757, after the Battle of Plassey, Nawab Mir Jafar conferred the *Zamindari* of 24 Parganas and *Jangli-mahals* (small administrative units) upon the British East India Company.

Events *of* Interest

Durga Puja Festival

Goddess Durga, known to Hindus as the destroyer of evil, is characterized by her ten arms carrying various weapons, as well as her vehicle – the lion. Also known as Bhavani, Amba, Chandrika, Gauri, Parvati, Mahishasuramardini, Durga is the Mother Goddess and the Protector of the Righteous, to devotees. In Bengal, Durga Puja became a social celebration rather than a religious celebration. In North 24 Parganas, traditionally, Durga Puja was much restricted to the traditional Hindu families but has increasingly opened up with the popularisation of community or S*arbojanin Puja*. So, the unique feature of this Durga Puja or Durgotsav is a festivity that may be enjoyed by all irrespective of caste and religion all over Bengal. The first majestic worship of goddess Durga is thought to have been in the late 1500s. Folklore says that the landlords of Dinajpur and Malda initiated the first Durga Puja in Bengal. Another legend states that Raja Kangshanarayan of Taherpur in Nadia District organised the first autumn Durga Puja in Bengal in 1606. The family of Sabarna Ray Chaudhury has been celebrating Durga Puja since 1610 in their ancestral home at Barisha, Kolkata. It is possibly the oldest organised festival in the Kolkata region. Panchanan Gangopadhyay (Panchu Saktikhan) of the family acquired the Khan title from the Mughal Emperor Humayun in the sixteenth century, for his bravery as a cavalry officer in charge of Pathan soldiers. Around the middle of that century he constructed a palace at a place which came to be known as Haveli Sahar or Halisahar. It was from Halisahar that the family spread far and wide, including, to Uttarpara, Birati, Barisha and Kheput. However, at present the Sabarna family of Halisahar is almost non-existent.

Major Durga Pujas of North 24 Parganas include Kantalpara Thakur Bari and Nawabgunj, Ichapur Mondalbari.

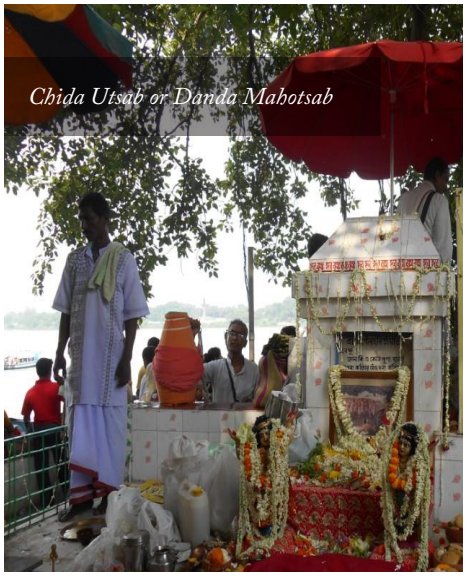
The territory of Greater 24 Parganas were under the Satgaon administration during the Mughal era and later it was included in Hooghly Chakla during the rule of Murshid Quli Khan

Kalipuja Festival

Kali Puja is the most important festival of the region particularly in Halisahar. Kali Puja or Shyama Puja started in Bengal during the 18th century, by King Krishna Chandra of Krishnanagar. This festival increased in the community in the 19th century, with Krishanachandra's grandson Ishwarchandra. There is a belief that Krishnanada Agamayavahish, a famous Tantric scholar had once dreamt of Goddess Kali the goddess associated with death and darkness, is believed to have instructed Agamavagisha to worship her in a form that incorporated in her forms, feminine domesticity too. Agamayavahish is credited for worshiping a certain image of Kali in the region. The *zamindars* of later centuries supported the tradition and turned them into flamboyant projects to showcase wealth and power. The important Kali Puja's are Kali Puja in Ramprasad Vita, Halisahar, Shyam Sundar Kali Puja , Naihati, Baroma Kali Puja Festival, Kali Puja in Shyamnagar, Mulajore Temple, Kali Puja in Annapurna Temple, Barrackpore and Dakshina Kali Puja in Dakhineswar. Situated on the eastern bank of the Hooghly River, the presiding deity of the temple is Bhavatarini, an aspect of Kali, who is a form of Adi Shakti. The temple was built in 1855 by Rani Rashmoni, a philanthropist and a devotee of Kali. The temple is famous for its association with Ramakrishna and Ma Sarada Devi, mystics of 19th century Bengal.

Gajan/Charak Festival

Gajan is another very important festival which is associated with lord Shiva, Neel and Dharmaraj. It is a festival



Chida Utsab or Danda Mahotsab

of hardship mostly celebrated people as devotees called *Sanyasi*. The word Gajan in Bengali comes from the word *Garjan* or the roars the *Sanyasis* make during the festival. However, Gajan is a festival in which all classes of people participate to show their respect to god. Gajan in this district, like all districts of Bengal, spans a week by the end *Chaitra* month of Bengali calendar and ends with Charak Puja before the Bengali new year (called Poila Boisakh). Devotion, sacrifice and pain show the extreme respect to lord Shiva during this festival.

Neel Shashti

Neel Shashti is celebrated a day before the Charak when Bengali housewives observe a day of fasting called *Uposh*. However, the form of Charak Mela has changed its nature. The artisans of the nearby villages almost disappeared in the Charak Mela to display their hand made toys and other crafts. Instead, plastic made toys are much popular in the *mela*. The nature of festival follows the recent trend of fairs in Bengal.

Chida Utsab

Perhaps the oldest , biggest and most renowned festival is the Danda Mahotsab or Chida Utsab. This festival is related to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Nityananda Mahaprabhu, having an immense religious value for the Vaishnavs. The festival is organised in the Month of *Jyestha* on S*hukla Trayodashi Tithi* or June Month every year. This festival is held at the river bank of the Ganga at Mahotsob Ghat. Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa used to participate in this festival with his disciples and *Bhaktas* which included Rakhal Chandra, Girish Chandra Ghosh, Narendra Nath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda), Mahendra Nath Dutta and others.

Christmas *in* Barrackpore

The first British Barracks or Cantonment was built in the town of Barrackpore in 1772. After the British crown assumed direct control of India, the sprawling Government House and the Government Estate were built in Barrackpore to provide the viceroy with a suburban residence 15 miles (24 km) outside of Calcutta. No wonder that this place has number of churches from the yesteryears and Christmas is celebrated with much vibrancy and gaiety. St. Bartholomew's Cathedral, a CNI Protestant Church, was built in 1831. This garrison church is one of the most important churches where Christmas is celebrated in a grand way.

ART *at the* HEART

Clay Pottery

Bhar (Clay Pots) are widely prepared all along the banks of Bhagirathi-Hooghly River. Kumorpara , Gouripur in Naihati Municipality have a significant clay pot making hub. The major ingredient used for pot making is *Belemati* (clay with sand) and *Atamati* (sticky clay collected from paddy fields).The products are sold in the local markets usually in the tea and sweet shops. In the early days, the hand operated wheels or *chak* were used for making the pots but now electric wheels are used which results in higher production. Other than hammer to soften up the clay, no other instruments are used for pot making. These artisans are said to be as the descendants of Vishwakarma, the god of crafts. These group of potters never run their wheel in the month of *Boisakh* following Bengali calendar (April) as it is the month of marriage of Lord Shiva and Parvati.

Musical Instruments

Haridas Ghosh Road of Naihati has a very old Musical Instrument Manufacturing Workshop specializing in creation of Harmonium. The workshop is run by the father and son duo Dwijendra Nath Biswas and Dipak Biswas. The most widely used free-reed aero-

Bhar (Clay Pots) are widely prepared all along the banks of Bhagirathi-Hooghly River. Kumorpara , Gouripur in Naihati Municipality have a significant clay pot making hub

phone in India is the harmonium and has been imported from the West. This musical instrument was brought to India in late 19th century by the Western traders or missionaries. In India, Shruti Harmonium was created by Vidyadhar Oke. Shruti-Harmonium enables the creation of any *Raga* with all the notes perfectly consonant with a *Tanpura*. No foreign instrument, however, has caused such a commotion as the harmonium and none is used so extensively, be it in classical, light, film or folk music.

There is another musical instrument workshop in Naihati only mostly specializing in percussion instruments like *Tabla, Dhol, Khol,* and *Mada*l. *Tabla* in Indian music acts as a *Sabhya Badya Jantra*. On the other hand, *Khol, Dhol* and *Nal* belong to the *Mangalik* group of musical instruments like *Sitar* and *Beena* are significant for devotional music. *Tabla*, made from black Sirish wood and *Baya,* is made of baked clay. Then the top is covered up by the skin of goat. The tools used are chisels, hammer, drill machine, screw.

Yemaha Musical Industries in North 24 Parganas is one of the leading businesses in the Guitar making industry. They are famous as Guitar Dealers, Electric Guitar Manufacturers, Guitar Manufacturers, Guitar String Manufacturers, Bass Guitar Manufacturers, Acoustic Guitar Manufacturers and much more.

Roy Musical Instruments, Kowgacchi , Shyamnagar , North 24 Parganas is another important Guitar manufacturer and dealer from the Row Music Shop at Kowgachi, Shyamnagar. It produces a huge number of Guitars and mostly exports to Kolkata.

Bhar (Caly Pots) Making in Progress

Kantha Shilpa

Kantha is a form of embroidery often practiced by rural women. The traditional form of Kantha embroidery was done with soft *dhotis* and *saris*, with a simple running stitch along the edges. Depending on the use of the finished product they were known as Lepkantha or Sujni Kantha. This design clearly indicates Islamic decorative patterns in Kantha. This indigenous embroidery is known as Bunoner Kaaj.

Crafting Conches, Sankharis *of* Barrackpore

Raw conch shells are produced by a species of sea snails, *Turbinella pyrum*, which are found in the Gulf of Mannar and the Indian Ocean coastline. White conch has wide representation in Indian art and iconography. The *Panchajanya Sankha* is associated with Lord Vishnu. Along with Vishnu's *chakra (Sudarshana)*, the *Panchajanya* is depicted outside Vishnu Temples across India. The *Sankha* is also held by various *avatars* of Vishnu, like Matsya, Kurma, Varaha and Vamana (universally), and other important Hindu deities like Lakshmi, Surya, Indra, Kartikeya and Durga (with regional variations). The *Sankha* is also associated with Gautama Buddha,

A Harmonium Maker at Work

Kantha Work under Process

hence held sacred in Buddhism. The right-turning white conch is one of the *Ashtamangalas*, the eight auspicious symbols (also sacred in Hinduism and Jainism) in Tibetan Buddhism. In Buddhism, the conch's piercing sound is perceived to remove ignorance and awaken the inner consciousness from slumber. In Jainism, the conch is the symbol of Neminatha, the twenty-second *Tirthankara*. Till the state merged with India in 1949, the erstwhile Kingdom of Travancore (in modern Kerala) had the *Sankha* represented on their official flag.

On the discovery of Harappan sites from the 1920s, archaeologists found ample evidence of conch shell craft in the Indus Valley Civilisation. The smooth, shiny surface of conches gives them a porcelain-like quality, and the hard material is ideal for carving. The conches used in religious rituals only involve drilling a small hole through the apex. These conches can then be blown like a trumpet producing a deep, sonorous sound, the *Shankhnaad*

Boat Making

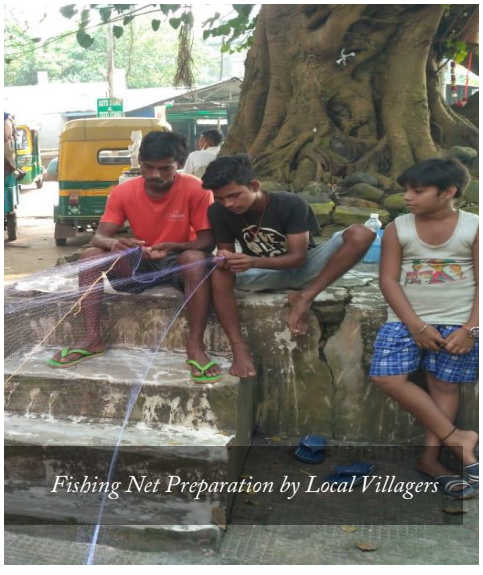
The tradition of woodworking goes back to antiquity. Generally, the wood-carvers, boat-builders and carpenters, constituted different categories of wood workers in Bengal till the mid-nineteenth century. The wood-carvers were mainly art workers, while the last two categories belonged to the artisan class. All these categories catered to the needs of a distinct clientele. Bengal had a magnificent past in the art of wood-carving.

A community named Aghore, who were specialized in boat making, used to live here. Earlier this place was known as Agrapalli, from where the name has been changed into Agarpara. Agarpara Union was officially established on 23 July, 1867. Sen Estate and Sen family had been the recorded oldest inhabitants of Agarpara. Also, Ghosh family of Tarapukur, Parbat family of East Station Road and Majumdar family of North Station Road are the three oldest living families in this town. This craft is a 500 years old art and mention of which, especially Balagarh Boat Making Hub, is made in the Ain-i-Akbari.

Sodepur Khadi Pratisthan

The Sodepur Khadi Partisthan has a special place in the life of Mahatma Gandhi and Indian Freedom Struggle. Sodepur Khadi Ashram, was described

> ***The traditional form of Kantha embroidery was done with soft dhotis and saris, with a simple running stitch along the edges***



Fishing Net Preparation by Local Villagers

by Gandhiji as his second home and he stayed here, whenever he came to Calcutta.

Net Making

There are 20 houses of Mahato families in Khardah area where they carry on fishing as their livelihood. The communities prepare their fishing nets also. Their ancestors came here from Paschim Medinipur as labour in the adjoining paper industry. Since the industry got shut down, they now make nets and go fishing.

Gastronomic Delights

Sukto

Sukto is a vegetable stew prepared with the *Posto* (Poppy seed) paste. It consists of an array of vegetables. Bitter gourd is the main ingredient of this dish and the other vegetables in this recipe are pumpkin, plantain, sweet potato, ridge gourd, drumsticks, eggplant and raw papaya.

Jhinge-Aloo Posto (Poppy Seed)

Poppy is a unique Bengali ingredient which is immensely popular in almost all districts in West Bengal and in Odisha. In this recipe, Ridge Gourd and potatoes are cooked in Poppy seed paste, green Chillies and Nigella seeds. It is mostly accompanied with steamed rice.

Dumurer Dalna

Dumurer Dalna is a unique vegetarian dish popular during lunch in the district. This is made with local figs (*dumur*), potatoes, ginger and cumin paste, sugar, turmeric and *garam masala*.

Echorer Dalna

Echor is also known as *Gach Patha* in Bengal, meaning tree goat. Echor is actually cooked in two ways. One way is by using the same spices as one would use to cook mutton and curry, and this tastes like meat. So, vegetarians who want to enjoy the taste of mutton without actually having it can have this curry. The second is a purely vegetarian method, without garlic and onion using cumin, ginger, turmeric and *garam masala*. This second recipe is popular in Ghati Brahmin family cuisine as a part of Bamun Barir Ranna.

Mochar Ghonto

Mochar Ghonto is a traditional Bengali preparation, where banana flowers are cooked along with potato and aromatic spices. Mochar Ghonto is a dry curry recipe and is often served along with steaming hot rice and *ghee*. Bengali Niramish Thorer Ghonto is a delicacy in lunch with rice. This Bengali recipe of Thor Ghonto is Niramish or completely vegetarian.

Thorh

Thorh is banana stem, a highly nutritious food. *Thorh* is sold as the cylindrical, white part of the stem of a banana plant in all local markets.

Kalai Dal & Aluposto

Kalai Dal and Aluposto are the most delicious combination of dishes with rice, generally in the time of summer. *Kalai* is a type of pulse, cooked with ginger, snuffs, chilly and little asafoetida. Aluposto is made with potato and poppy seeds' paste, in mustard oil.

Dhokar Dalna

Dhokar Dalna is a lovely Bengali dish. It has fried *chana dal* cakes, marinated along with potato cubes dipped in a thick gravy of cumin seeds, asafoetida, and bay Leaf along with ginger and red chilli paste.

People who Fascinate

Haraprasad Shastri

(1853 – 1931)

Also known as Hara Prasad Bhattacharya, he was an Indian academician, Sanskrit scholar, archivist and historian of Bengali literature. He is most known for discovering the Charyapada, the earliest known examples of Bengali literature. Hara Prasad Shastri was born to a family that hailed from Naihati in North 24 Parganas. Some of his notable works were: Balmikir jai, Meghdoot Byakshya, Beneyer Meye (The Merchant's Daughter, a novel), Kancanmala (novel), Sachitra Ramayan, Prachin Banglar Gourab, and Bouddha Dharma. His English works include Magadhan Literature, Sanskrit Culture in Modern India, and Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal. He also discovered an old palm-leaf manuscript of Skanda Purana in a Kathmandu library in Nepal, written in Gupta script.

Harinath Dey

(1877- 1911)

He was an Indian historian, scholar and a polyglot, who later became the first Indian librarian of the National Library of India (then Imperial Library) from 1907 to 1911. In a life span of thirty-four years, he learned 34 languages. His works, 88 volumes on literature, linguistics and Hinduism, are now part of the National Library of India, known as the Harinath Dey Collection.

Sadhok Ramprasad Sen

(1723 – 1775)

He was a Shakta poet and saint of eighteenth century Bengal. His *bhakti* poems, known as Ramprasadi, are still popular in Bengal—they are usually addressed to the Hindu goddess Kali and written in Bengali. Stories of Ramprasad's life typically include legends and myths mixed with biographical details. Ramprasad is credited with creating a new compositional form that combined the Bengali folk style of Baul Music with classical melodies and *kirtan*. The new style took root in Bengali culture with many poet-composers combining folk and *raga*-based melodies, mixing every common style of music from classical to semi-classical and folk. His songs are sung today, with a popular collection - Ramprasadi Sangit (Songs of Ramprasad), available at Shakta temples and *pithas* in Bengal.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhya

(1838 – 1894)

Bankim was an Indian novelist, poet and journalist. He is the composer of the immortal song Vande Mataram, originally a Sanskrit *stotra*, personifying India as mother goddess and inspiring activists during the Indian Independence Movement. Chattopadhyay wrote thirteen novels and many serious, serio-comic, satirical, scientific and critical treatises in Bengali. Chattopadhyay was born in the village Kanthalpara in the town of North 24 Parganas, Naihati, in an orthodox Bengali Brahmin family, the youngest of three brothers, to Yadav Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Durgadebi. He went on to become a Deputy Magistrate, retiring from government service in 1891. His years at work were replete with incidents that brought him into conflict with the ruling British. He was, however, made a Companion in the Order of the Indian Empire in 1894.

Mochar Ghonto is a traditional Bengali preparation, where banana flowers are cooked along with potato and aromatic spices

Keshub Chandra Sen

(1838 – 1884)

He was a Hindu philosopher and social reformer who attempted to incorporate Christian theology within the framework of Hindu thought.

Sir Surendranath Banerjee

(1848 – 1925)

"A pilgrim of freedom battle. As Ashok and Akbar dreamt, the Indian National Congress achieved through Surendranath," is how he was described by Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose. A patriot, scholar and orator.

Rani Rashmoni Ghat

Mahatma Gandhi said, "He shall ever be remembered as one of the makers of modern India". He was one of the earliest Indian political leaders during the British Raj. He founded the Indian National Association, through which he led two sessions of the Indian National Conference in 1883 and 1885, along with Anandamohan Bose. Banerjee later became a senior leader of the Indian National Congress. Surendranath welcomed Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms, unlike Congress, and with many liberal leaders he left Congress and founded a new organisation named Indian National Liberation Federation in 1919. He was one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress. The house of Surendranath at Monirampur of Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas, has been converted into the Mahadevananda Mahavidyalaya and Netaji Subhas Open University.

MONUMENTS *that* MATTER

Barrackpore

Barrackpore came up in 1765 with two bazaars named Sadar and Ardali Bazaar were set up in 1798. When Lord Wellesley was appointed as Governor-General of India, he was fascinated by the beauty of Barrackpore. He built many palatial buildings and elegant gardens here. A serpentine lake was to be built at his bidding. A bus driven by three horses was introduced from Barrackpore to Esplanade on November 22, 1830.

Rani Rashmoni Ghat

The original place where Rani Rashmoni was born is now under water of Bhagirathi-Hooghly. At present this Rashmoni Ghat along the temples denotes the birth place of Rani Rashmoni, the founder of the famous Dakhineswar Temple.

Sreemat Swami Nigamananda Swaraswati Ashram Ghat

Assam Bongeeo Saraswat Math is the headquarters of Sreemat Swami Nigamananda Swaraswati Maharaj sect. Currently, headed by Sreemat Swami Gananda Saraswati Maharaj. Swami Nigamananda Paramahansa is a *yogi, guru* and mystic, well known in Eastern India. He is associated with the shakti cult and viewed as a perfect spiritual master of *tantra, gyan, yoga prem* and *bhakti*. The *ghat* is dedicated to the organization.

Gandhi Ghat

This was the first structure to be built as a memorial to the Father of the Nation. An obelisk in the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, a lush green garden dotted with 120 varieties of roses, exquisite plants and trees, a

Barrackpore Railway Station

Gandhi Ghat, Barrackpore

picturesque sunset and an exciting riverfront, the Gandhi Ghat attracts many to Barrackpore, around 30 km north from the heart of the city.

Mangal Pandey Park

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 sparked out from Barrackpore when Mangal Pandey, a *sepoy* revolted against the British atrocities. A park is named Shahid Mangal Pandey Maha Udyan in the memory of Mangal Pandey where he attacked British officers and was hanged, at Barrackpore. The ghat adjoining this park is called as the Mangal Pandey Ghat.

Dakhineswar Kali Mandir

The renowned Kali Temple is situated at Dakhineshwar on the eastern bank of River Hooghly. The presiding deity of the temple is Bhavatarini, an aspect of Kali. The temple was built by Rani Rashmoni, a philanthropist and a devotee of Kali, in 1855. The temple is famous for its association with Ramakrishna Paramhansa, mystic of 19th century Bengal. The temple compound, apart from the nine-spire main temple, contains a large courtyard surrounding the temple, with rooms along the boundary walls. There are twelve shrines dedicated to Shiva-Kali's companion, along the riverfront, a temple to Radhe-Krishna, a bathing *ghat* on the River, and a shrine dedicated to Rani Rashmoni. The chamber in the north western corner just beyond the last of the Shiva Temples, is where Ramkrishna spent a considerable part of his life.

Dakhineshwar Kali Temple, Built in 1855 by Rani Rashmoni

Nature's Abundance

Between 1798-1805, Marquess Wellesley took over the Commander-in-Chief's residence, he decided to make improvements to Barrackpore. He created a picturesque garden on the banks of the Ganges in Barrackpore spreading across 1006 *bighas* of land. This garden is today, called Laat Bagan or Mangal Pandey Park. Right

A pilgrim of freedom battle. As Ashok and Akbar dreamt, the Indian National Congress achieved through Surendranath," is how he was described by Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose

St. Berthalomew Church, Barrackpore

next to this garden, he built a gigantic house which resembled no less than a castle. Later, this house was named Barrackpore Government House. Lord Wellesley also felt the need of making a detailed description of the animals in Asia. He landscaped the gardens and added an aviary, a menagerie and a theatre. He started working on the first Natural Research Centre in Asia, the National Heritage of India. Barrackpore Zoo was built to keep these animals and birds. The London Zoo was built in 1828. Barrackpore Zoo was built even before that. Unfortunately, Barrackpore has no traces of this historical zoo created by Wellesley.

The Deltaic Region in West Bengal is a distinct entity from rest of the riparian tracts. It is geographically one of the most dynamic natural regions. There is a great influence of the Bhagirathi Hooghly, in the eastern part to develop the deltaic zone of the river Ganga with the sedimentation process. The river flows through this deltaic tract in more or less stable manner. Natural levee deposit, older and younger flood plains, palaeo-channels in older flood plains are some of the common geomorphic features in this tract. South of this zone lies the truly active zone of the delta comprising the uninhabited reserve forest areas of Sundarbans. Here the land building process is active through siltation and as a result, the peripheral limits of the islands are advancing towards the water-front.

The entire eastern stretch has numerous Sacred Trees and groves. Trees like Banyan, *Neem , Peepal, Kath Champa, Aakondo, Fani Monsha, Tulsi, Sirish, Seora, Bel* trees and shrubs are treated as sacred. They are mostly found within 250 m from the river and are associated with various deities. However, the most sacred tree is the Great Banyan Tree of Panihati Mahatsabtala Ghat where Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed and did Danda Chira Utsab with Nityananda. Raghab Goswami, Shri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and many other personalities came to this spot. It is said that this tree is about 800 years old.

The charismatic Gangetic Dolphin, *Platanista gangetica*, is distributed in the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna and Karnaphuli–Sangu River Systems of India, Bangladesh and Nepal. However, their habitat is severely stressed due to increased pollution, decreased water flow and shrinking fish populations in the Ganga. According to Ravi Kant Sinha, also known as India's Dolphin Man, several habitats of the Gangetic River dolphin have shrunk in the last few decades and many more will follow in coming years due to climate change.

The River Shark used to be found in the Hooghly waters. This powerful creature would grow up to a length of 8 ft. The last individual was found in 2016, leading to a concern that this species might have become extinct.

Exotic Tree at Laat Bhawan

Full Bloom Krishnachura in Mangal Pandey Ghat

Jamuna River, a Tributary of Bhagirathi – Hooghly

Logs used to Check Bank Erosion at Kamarhati

Lesser Whistling Ducks, Mathura Beel

Mathura Beel

CHAPTER 48

KOLKATA
First Capital of Modern India

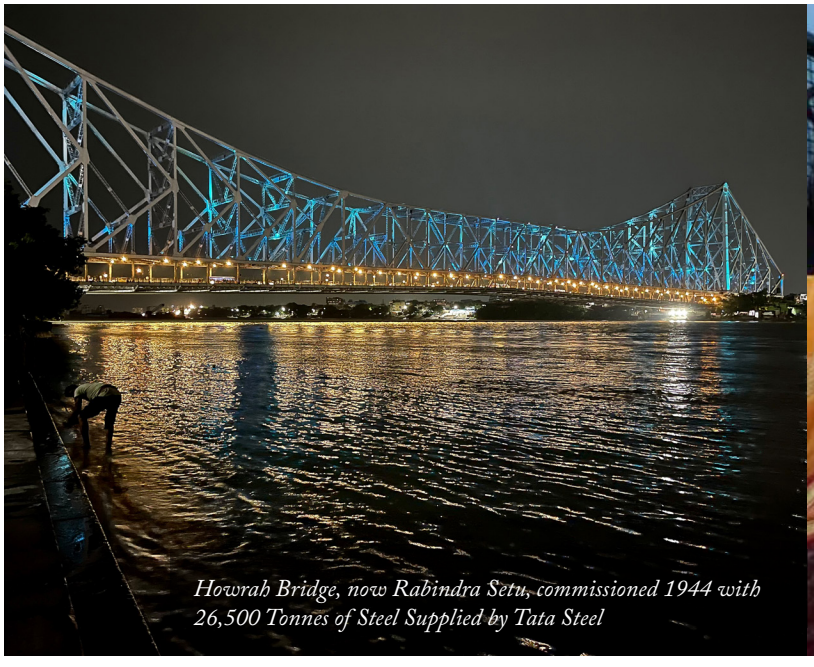
Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Kolkata

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Kolkata is about 130 km north of the Bay of Bengal. It is a part of Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) often termed as a Greater Kolkata. The city of Kolkata is bounded by River Hooghly in the western and south-western part, South 24 Parganas District in the southern part, North 24 Parganas District in the eastern and northern part. The city is the gateway to eastern and northern India. The original area covering three villages namely Sutanuti, Gobindapur, Kolkata granted for the British settlement was only 6.8 sq km. By the middle of the 18th century additional villages were included and total area was increased to 20 sq km. The town was then divided into 18 wards. In the nineteenth century there was further expansion and the total area became 53 sq km. By the end of 20th Century, the municipal area was about 200 sq km.

In the sixteenth century, port of Satgaon or Saptagram on the western side of Hooghly River Bank, the centre of old Bengal, went into decline due to caprices of the river. The Seths, Basaks, Sheels and Dattas, pioneers of trade of Bengal moved downstream of Hooghly and settled on the east bank of Hooghly River. In the late seventeenth century, the three villages namely Sutanuti, Kalikata and Gobindapur on the Eastern Bank of Hooghly River formed part of the



Howrah Bridge, now Rabindra Setu, commissioned 1944 with 26,500 Tonnes of Steel Supplied by Tata Steel

The Kali Idol at Kalighat Temple

original holding of the East India Company and formed the core of the future city of Calcutta, now Kolkata.

Kolkata is amongst the richest of Indian cities in terms of heritage.

Re-living *the* Past

Job Charnock, an agent of the East India Company established an English yarn factory at Sutanuti on 24th August, 1690. This date is considered as the foundation day of Kolkata. The three original villages were part of an imperial *jagir*, i.e. an estate of the Mughal Emperor, whose *Zamindari* Rights were held by the Sabarna Roy Choudhury family of Barisa-Behala, in the southern suburbs of modern Kolkata. In 1698, East India Company acquired the *Zamindari* Rights from Sabarna Choudhury at Rs.1,300 for 5,076 *bighas* and 18.75 *cottahs* and paid regular rent to the Mughals for these three villages till 1757. When the British formed their headquarters, the new Fort William in Gobindapur, with loot from the Battle of Plassey in 1757, they displaced the native traders from Gobindapur, who were compensated for with more lands in Sutanuti, northward of Gobindapur. Job Charnock was convinced of the commercial and tactical advantages of this area. Job Charnock chose Kolkata as a trading centre to get the advantage of its suitable location for a safe and commodious harbour for the large sea-going vessels of those days.

The trading centre of Kolkata has now become an enormous market town. The basic structure of Kolkata's land use was laid out during imperial rule when Kolkata became a major port city of the British Empire passing through various phases of trading, administrative and military roles. In 1794, the boundaries of Kolkata were defined and underwent revision till 1889. Kolkata city was defined in the early days as the area under the original jurisdiction of Kolkata High Court bounded by the Hooghly River on the west, the Bagbazar Canal on the north and Maratha Ditch (now Circular Road) to east and on south Lower Circular Road (now known as Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road) to Khidderpore Bridge and Adiganga

Armenian Ghat (1870)

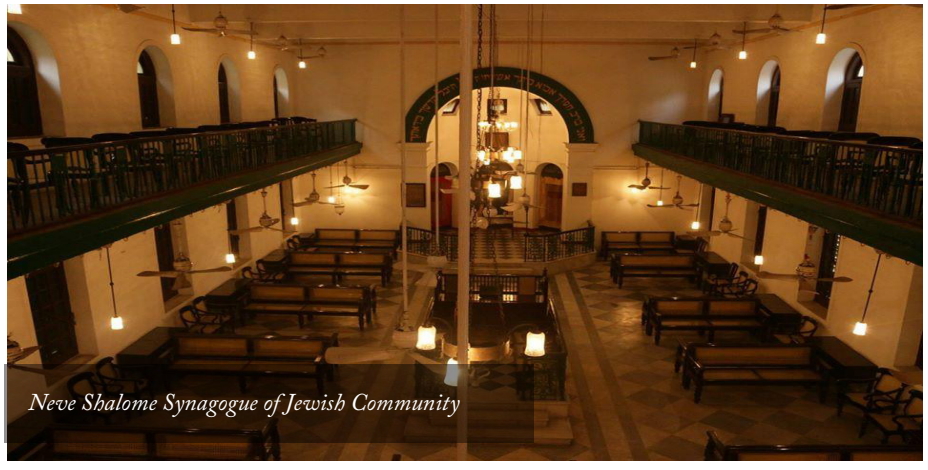
Immersion of Durga Idol at Babu Ghat

(Tolly Nulla) to the river Hooghly including the Fort and Colly Bazar (Hastings). In 1889, the boundaries were redefined leading to an extension of the area from 2,022 hectares to 4,836 hectares, adding in that process parts of Entally, Ballygunge, Bhawanipur and Tollygunge to the city. In 1924, the municipal township was extended to 7887 hectares to include Kashipur-Chitpur, Manicktala, Garden Reach and New Dock Extension areas in the city. The next extension occurred in 1953 when the Tollygunge municipal area was added to Kolkata and thus Kolkata became 9560 hectares excluding the fort, port and canals. As horizontal land space was so limited, vertical growth soon followed increasing the density of population. In 1984, three municipalities - Jadhavpur (formed in 1981), South Suburban (Behala) and Garden Reach were added to Kolkata and the Kolkata municipal area was divided into 141 wards.

The earliest mention of Kalikata is found in the poem Manasa-Mangal of the Bengali poet Bipradas Piplai in the year 1495 as a village on the bank of the Hooghly and in Ain-i-Akbari (c. 1590)

The earliest mention of Kalikata is found in the poem Manasa-Mangal of the Bengali poet Bipradas Piplai in the year 1495 as a village on the bank of the Hooghly and in Ain-i-Akbari (c. 1590), the form Kalkata itself, figures as a variant of a place name on Raja Todar Mal's rent–roll: but there are other variants, and in any case name refers to a *Mahal* (region or district), not a village or town. Going back to antiquity, the name has been derived from Kol-ka-hata – the territory or the settlement of the Kols, certain Pre-Dravidian tribes. But there is no record of Kols ever having inhabited lower Bengal, and the very name Kol seems to be of late origin. A favoured explanation of one time was that the place had been marked by a *Kata*, warehouse and kiln, for *Kali (Chun)* or unslaked lime made by burning crustacean shells. But others have doubted the extent, antiquity or indeed existence of such a trade here and the explanation is now seldom advanced. It is also suggested that in order to compete with cloth exported by the Portuguese from Calicut (hence Calico), the English stamped Kalikat on their own exports from Bengal, giving rise to the name. *Khal*, in Bengali as in North Indian languages is a canal or ditch, *Kata* means cut or excavated. This etymology has sometimes been advanced with respect to the Maratha Ditch; but that was dug long after the city's foundation.

Here is a short timeline for the evolution of Kolkata:



Neve Shalome Synagogue of Jewish Community

1495 - The name Kalikata was mentioned in the Manasa-Mangal of the Bengali poet Bipradas Piplai.
1537 - Four families of Bysacks and a Seth family settled down near Adi Ganga to trade with Portuguese in Betor. They named the place on the name of their family deity – Govinda Jyu, as Govindapur.
1556-1605 - The name Kalikatta was mentioned in the rent-roll of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. According to Ain-e-Akbari, Bengal *Subah* was divided into 15 *Sarkars* and again the *Sarkars* were divided into 689 *Mahals*. Satgaon *Sarkar* has the name Kalkatta mentioned as the 35th *Mahal*. Together with 36th and 37th *Mahal*, Kalkatta *Mahal* used to pay Rs. 2,34,015 as tax.
1600 - The East India Company was founded. At first the company was known as The Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies. It was founded by a Royal Charter, signed by Queen Elizabeth I, on 31st December, 1600.
1690 - The Company built trading centres in Calcutta. There was a great demand for all kinds of gorgeous Indian textiles in Europe. Indian craftsmen produced many beautiful textiles for the Company: cottons, silks, muslins and embroidered quilts. While these workers suffered the effects of famine, war and poverty, the Company grew rich on the profits of the textile trade.
1717 - Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar granted the East India Company freedom of trade in return for a yearly payment of 3,000 Rupees; this arrangement gave a great impetus to the growth of Calcutta.
1742 - When the Marathas from the southwest began incursions against the Mughals in the western districts of Bengal in 1742, the English obtained permission from Ali Vardi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, to dig an entrenchment in the northern and eastern part of the town to form a moat on the land side. This came to be known as the Maratha Ditch. Although it was not completed to the southern end of the settlement, it marked the city's eastern boundary.
1756 - The *nawab's* successor, Siraj-ud-Daula captured the fort and sacked the town.
1757- Battle of Plassey. The British government was concerned about the way the Company is governing its Indian territories, and decides to curb its power. Warren Hastings is appointed as the first governor-general of India.
1772 - Calcutta became the capital of British India, when the first governor-general, Warren Hastings, transferred all important offices to the city from Murshidabad, the provincial Mughal capital.
1813 - The East India Company's monopoly of Indian trade ended by British Parliament.
1814 - The Lottery Committee was constituted to finance public improvement by means of lotteries, and between 1814 and 1836, it took some effective measures to improve conditions.
1833 - The end of the East India Company's trading days. During the East India Company's life, about 4,600 ship voyages were made from London.
1841 -The municipal corporation was established.
1858 - The company was finally abolished in 1858 after a rebellion in the Bengal Army.

Durga Puja Pandals Vary From the Simple to the Ornate

Compared to earlier settlers, the British community from the days of Warren Hastings increasingly included men and women of curiosity, knowledge and taste

Mythological Links

The name Kalikatta is most commonly derived from the name of the Goddess Kali of Kalighat. It would be simplistic to derive it directly from Kalighat, as the two names occur side by side in early texts. But again many variants have been suggested, such as *Kali-Kota* (home or abode of Kali), Kalighatta, or *Kalikshestra* (the field or terrain of Kali). When the body of the Goddess Durga or Sati was dismembered by Vishnu's discus (*Sudarshan Chakra*), the toes of her right foot are said to have fallen beside the old course of the Bhagirathi or Hooghly River (the old or Adi Ganga). The place became one of the 51 *peethas* of the Goddess. Kalighat, is inseparable from the life of Kolkata and some think, directly or indirectly the source of the city's name. The manifestation of the Goddess here is known as Dakhinakali; her consort Shiva is Nakuleswar; Vishnu in the form of Krishna, dwells under the appellation of Shyam Rai in an adjacent temple. The association of these three deities makes Kalighat a unique meeting point for both Shakta and Vaishnav pilgrims, for ascetics as well as householders. No one knows from when this deity is worshipped. Brahma himself is said to have picked up the Goddess's toes and face beside a small pond to the east of the temple, the Kalikunda. However, the temple was constructed much later in the year 1809.

Art *at the* Heart

Visual Arts *in* Kolkata

Kolkata, as the nerve centre of Britain's Indian empire, became also the central hub of artistic activity in modernizing India. It was to this city, inevitably, that artists migrated, when the courtly ateliers of the northern states were gradually disbanded.\ Migrant rural artists also came in and learnt the new techniques for painting in oils and groups of rural artisans drifted in, in search of employment. Those having skills to contribute to the new industry of printing designs and images were hired by survey offices. There was space for all. Between the second half of the 18th century and the end of 19th century, visual arts in Kolkata flourished in both paintings and graphics. The interaction between the artistic techniques and approaches of the East and West influenced and modified the works of the Indian artists in varying degrees and initiated them into new forms of graphic art.

The visual arts flourished in the broad categories of Company Drawings, Kalighat Pats or Paintings, Bengal Oils, and two types of print making – Woodcuts and Lithographs.

Company Drawings

Company Painting has been used by Indian Art Historians to denote a special kind of 18th -19th century Indian paintings done by Indian artists for British patrons. Company Drawings began in South India in the second half of 18th century. Within a few years, they spread to different parts of India including Kolkata, the erstwhile Calcutta. Compared to earlier settlers, the British community from the days of Warren Hastings increasingly included men and women of curiosity, knowledge and taste. These people not only took a keen interest in their own way of life in India, their homes, servants, pets, modes of transport etc. but also in scenes and features of Indian life; costumes, crafts, public characters, social customs and manners, religious festivals, urban and rural life, buildings and monuments , flora and fauna. Indian artists, the so called Company painters, were commissioned for drawings and paintings on all these subjects.

The importance of Company Paintings lies in the fact that they gave us a graphic representation of British life in India and at the same time they record vividly the life of Indians in that bygone age, which would otherwise have gone undepicted by traditional Indian artists. It also marks the first hesitant step towards the development of modern Western Style of painting in India. There are about 2750 Company Drawings which is the largest and most comprehensive collection in the world.

Kalighat Paintings

From around 1809, when the present Kali temple was built, Kalighat began to draw more and more pilgrims from all over Bengal and India. Hence it became a thriving centre of trade. Many *patuas*, the hereditary scroll painters from different parts of lower Bengal immigrated to Kalighat to make paintings, icons and coloured toys which pilgrims bought as auspicious souvenirs. It is interesting to note that the last lot of Kalighat Pats – a cache of about 150 – to surface in India in decades, came from South India. Like all schools of painting that grew around famous temples like Thanjavur or Nathdwara, Kalighat Patuas began with religious and epic themes. Jatra, Khemta, Kobiwala, Vaishnava Padavali, Kirtan, Panchali which were all a part of the 19th century cultural life in Calcutta, and from which the Kalighat artists drew their inspiration, became the subject matter of the paintings.

Puranas

Paintings of Kali, Subramanya, Saraswathi, Lakshmi, Dasha Mahavidyas, Bhavatharini, Ganesha Janani, Kamale Kamini, Bhagiratha and the descent of Ganges, Hari Hara, Siva *Panchanan* (Shiva depicted with 5 heads), Mahishasura Mardhini, Gaur Nitai, Satyavan Savithri, Dashavatar have collectively made the artists and the common people come closer to the divine forms and also has explored religious experiences at that time. The skin tone varies for these, depending on the *Guna* (innate nature) of *Sattva, Rajo* and *Tamas*.

1816 saw the first illustrated Bengali Book embellished with Woodcuts, published by Ganga Kishor Bhattacharya and printed by Ferris and Company

The late artist Jamini Roy is among some of the most acclaimed painters who have been influenced by the distinctive style. One can imagine Jamini Roy (1887-1972) looking at Kalighat paintings and taking inspiration from them. Some 17 years later, Abanindranath Tagore's (1871-1951) junior and a student of the Government School of Art, Roy managed to stay true to the folk artist in him. His paintings were based on the folk or rural theme and the influence of the Kalighat Paintings is apparent. His paintings, like the Kalighat paintings, do not precisely depict human form. The way he drew eyes on his paintings have been described as floating eyes. It is a feature by which one can recognize Jamini's work.

Kalighat Patachitra

Along the bank of Adi Ganga, there still exists a *para* (locality) adjoining Kalighat, called Patuapara or Potopara. It is a traditional potters' quarter in

Grafitti Represents Kolkata Life in the Bengal School

Mexican Artist Frida Kahlo, Depicted as Durga By Bhaskar Chitrakar

Southern Kolkata. Most workshops in the area are small and chock-a-block, forcing artisans to push their idols out in the open. Around 900 works are made at the Kalighat Patuapara every year. Amongst the artists, there are few *Chitrakars* families(*Chitrakar* is the occupational title taken by the artists to do away with their religious and social identity) who are the descendants of the original Kalighat Patachitra artists. The modern Kalighat Patachitra or the neo-Kalighat paintings also depict the life of Kolkata. They have some quirky, fun element attached with the generally mundane lifestyles. One of the painters, Bhaskar Chitrakar became very exemplary with his Baboo-Bibi series of Kalighat Patachitra. He also recreated the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo's face as Durga and named it as Kali Kahlo.

Bengali Oil Paintings

In the 1850's alongside the Kalighat pats, the foreign art of oil painting on canvas was slowly and silently taking root. Unknown local painters started painting large canvases in oil – of Gods and Goddesses as well as scenes from the Ramayana , Mahabharata , Puranas , Krishnalila and so on. These oils, sometimes overenthusiastically described as Dutch Bengal or French Bengal, are remarkable for their draughtsmanship and mastery over handling of the new medium of oil.

Old Calcutta Wood Cuts

1816 saw the first illustrated Bengali Book embellished with Woodcuts, published by Ganga Kishor Bhattacharya and printed by Ferris and Company. The artist was Ramchandra Ray. The illustrations were in Bengali folk style. This opened a new form of art – Calcutta woodcuts which became closely associated with Bat-tala literature and Kalighat Pats.

Starting in the late 1770s, Battala near Chitpore Road or Rabindra Sarani (oldest road of Kolkata) in North Kolkata saw a thriving business in the production of ephemera — pamphlets, novellas,

satires, erotica, textbooks, and so on — that were popular with the masses, especially the poorer and lower middle-class sections of Bengali society. In the mid-1800s Battala culture began to signify all things popular, cheap, and often indecent, which made it the focus of disciplining or civilizing actions from both the British administration and the highly educated Bengali upper-class bhadralok. The 1800s saw a massive change in how information was circulated in Bengali society, triggered by the introduction of the printing press and the development of a distinct print culture. Battala illustrations were woodcut engravings of folksy themes, often bold and vivid, with strong outlines filled in with watercolours. These illustrations made printed matter even more enticing for larger sections of the society. Some of the prominent wood cut artists are Benimadhab Bhattacharya, Bir Chandra Dutta , Madhabchandra Das, Nrityalal Dutta (ND) , Panchanan Karmakar, and Ramdhan Swarnakar. Battala woodcuts, in combination with other popular art forms of colonial Calcutta, create a rich, visual narrative whose archival value is often ignored. Few woodcut prints survive and the woodcut blocks themselves are now a rare find in the age of offset printing. While Kalighat pat is considered the epitome of the evolution of Bengali art forms under the colonial rule, Battala woodcuts are an equally valuable source of information about contemporaneous Bengali society. But with the advent of shiny coloured oleographs and photographs, they were driven out of existence.

Lithographs

The art of lithography, invented by Alois Senefelder in 1798, reached Calcutta in 1822.The first lithographic press, Shura Pathuria Press was launched in 1829. It generally printed images of Gods and Goddesses as well as maps and charts. But lithographs with real regional flavour were initiated only after 1876 when Annadaprasad Bagchi, trained at Government Arts College opened the Calcutta Art Studio at Bowbazaar. It was however in 1878 , some 2 years before Ravi Verma's Lithographic Press at Girgaum, Mumbai, that the Calcutta Art Studio started the art of Chromolithography in India. Various other lithographic presses were also set up - Kansaripara, Shankaritola and Chorbagan Art Studios, P. C. Biswas and Co. and others. Apart from the inevitable deities, these studios also produced portraits. But Arya Chitralaya, run by Chandicharan Ghosh of Shimla Street produced a series of didactic lithographs, accompanied by long poetic texts to propagate Hindu values and morals.

Oleographs

The story of the Bengal School of Art begins in the 1900s, peaks in the 1920s only to slacken momentum in the 1930s. It is also a story of courage in the face of colonialism and capitalism. The non-violent protests of politicians were given a beautiful silent voice by art from the Bengal School of Art. Be it Abanindranath Tagore's Arabian Night Series, Gaganendranath Tagore's Reform Screams Caricatures, Rabindranath's and Sunayani Devi's Primitive Art, Nandalal Bose's Haripura Posters, Benode Bihari Mukherjee's murals or Ram Kinkar Baij's sculptures - all were born out of the need to express the story of India - who its people really were, what it's art was all about. None of these luminaries took to western classical art; instead they forged their own way, made their own art. What's more, the world loved it.

Post-Independence Art

The most cohesively radical change in the art scene of Bengal started to take place however in the early forties of the last century, when all of India was ravaged by violent social upheavals -

Among the Calcutta Painters, the works of Jogen Chowdhury, Rabin Mandal, Gopal Sanyal and others also reflect the artist's deep emotional engagement with the social reality

Clay Ganesha Idols Being Made at Kumartoli

The Alpona Motif during Durga Puja is a Holy Template

war, famine and widespread political and sectarian violence. The wounds of this period were incisively etched in the drawings of Zainul Abedin, the linocuts of Chittaprasad and most obsessively in the woodcuts and all the following works of Somenath Hore. In various media and with continuously renewing experimentation, Hore continued in a truly modern manner to give fresh expression to his experiential vision.

The same socio-cultural factors led to the birth of the Calcutta Group - formed in 1943 with founder artists like Rathin Mitra, Paritosh Sen, Sunil Madhav Sen, Gopal Ghosh, Subho Tagore, Nirode Majumdar and Prodosh Dasgupta. The next decade was, in fact, dominated by the vitality and variety of the artists of the Calcutta Group, who started evolving their own distinctive idioms, styles and perspectives. The Calcutta painters emerged later, with dynamic young talents like Nikhil Biswas, Bijon Chowdhury and Prakash Karmakar as three of its founder members. Their works reflect in their distortion of lines and visualization, their profound involvement in the social and psychological tensions of the time. Among the Calcutta Painters, the works of Jogen Chowdhury, Rabin Mandal, Gopal Sanyal and others also reflect the artist's deep emotional engagement with the social reality.

Society *of* Contemporary Artists

Then in 1960, the Society of Contemporary Artists was formed in Calcutta. The luminous names of the following two decades, Amitabh Banerjee, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Dharmanarayan Dasgupta, Ganesh Haloi, Ganesh Pyne, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Manu Parekh, Sanat Kar, Somenath Hore, Sunil Das , Suhas Roy, Shyamal Dutta Ray, and others who formed or became later a part of this group, produced works which were their own deeply personalized interpretations of contemporary reality. The form of their self-expression crystallized in a diversity of themes, techniques and idioms. In art they avoided sorting out problems by emulating any stylistic brands whether western or indigenous, contemporary or traditional, just as in life they found no easy way out by embracing a single track political ideology.

One such Battala in so-called native quarters of colonial Calcutta, however, would go on to lend its name to a once-thriving print industry that is now remembered as the Battala print industry or simply, Battala

Kolkata Street Art

The wall has always been the most widely used medium for communication and can be dated back to the prehistoric times. The act of scribbling, scratching or spraying anything illicitly upon a wall or any other visible public place is the dictionary meaning of graffiti. The concept of wall graffiti is not new to Kolkata. Political graffiti and limericks are an integral part of poll campaign in Bengal and during election times they dominate the city-walls. Even in this age of digitization, it has not lost its charm among the urbanites.

Alpona

A traditional art form, Alpona refers to the ritual of finger-painting beautiful motifs mainly with a paste of rice flour on auspicious occasions in West Bengal. The etymology of the word is the Sanskrit *alimpana* which means to plaster or to coat with. Considered to be a folk art in Bengal, it is believed that these beautiful motifs keep homes, neighbourhoods and villages safe and prosperous. In Bengal, Alpona is traditionally made using a paste of uncooked rice kernel of paddy called *aatop chaal* in water, diluted to a thick consistency. A cotton ball is then dipped in the mixture and used to draw the various geometrical designs and motifs of flowers, animals, birds, trees and humans. Being made of rice paste, they are mostly white in colour but with changing times the women have included colours in them and some even use fabric colours to make them last long.

Printing

The earliest printing presses of colonial Calcutta emerged in the 1770s, owned by European printmakers. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed published his 'A Grammar of the Bengal Language', the first printed book to have been published with a Bengali typeface in 1778, in a printing press in Hooghly, the erstwhile Portuguese town across the river from Calcutta. The Bengali typeface, the first of its kind, was developed by Charles Wilkins (also a founding member of the Asiatic Society) and Panchanan Karmakar. Graham Shaw (1981) has documented the presence of as many as 40 professional and amateur printmakers in Calcutta by 1800 who were associated with 17-odd printing presses. They had, in the years of their existence, published more than 300 books—which included a few Bengali books as well—although there were no printing presses dedicated solely to the publication of Bengali-language books. These presses were mostly located in the area around the Great Tank or Lal Dighi near Fort William. All printing presses but one employed Indian workers, who did not know English language, but nonetheless worked by matching the letters of type by observing their shapes. History has not recorded the names of these early Indian printmakers—unlike that of the pioneer Panchanan Karmakar, who would go on to develop more typefaces, including the first Nagari typeface to be developed in India in 1803. The earliest Indian-owned printing press in Calcutta was also established—in Khidderpore, owned by one Baburam for publishing Sanskrit books. However, it is the area around Battala that would see the proliferation of Indian-owned printing presses—Reverend Long would go on to identify 46 such printing presses in his 1857–58 survey. It is, without question, that these anonymous printers' work in these long-forgotten printing presses would pave the way for the thriving native-owned print industry at Battala.

Bat-tala – A Living Museum *of* Kolkata Printing

The Banyan Tree (*bat* in Bengali; *Ficus benghalensis*), it is said, derives its name from the Indian *baniya* or merchant, by the way of Portuguese and English travellers who witnessed Indian merchants resting, praying, or conducting business under the shade of the said tree. Henry Yule and Arthur

The Dhakeswari Devi Mandir of Kumortuli signifies a strong connection of the potters to the Dhakeshwari Devi Mandir of Dhaka (Bangladesh)

A Typical Patterned Saree Print Block

Coke Burnell's Hobson-Jobson takes note of accounts of the tree dating all the way back to 1622. The ubiquitous Banyan Tree has historically lent its name to countless Battalas in Bengal (the suffix, *tala*, might refer to the space underneath, or might refer to the entire neighbourhood), spaces meant for gathering and rest, for worship and for business. One such Battala in so-called native quarters of colonial Calcutta, however, would go on to lend its name to a once-thriving print industry that is now remembered as the Battala print industry or simply, Battala. There is no surviving Banyan Tree in the present day Chitpur-Garanhata area of Kolkata, no signboard that marks the site of the eponymous Banyan Tree. Historians and researchers have, over the years, attempted to track down the location of the Battala, with multiple opinions of the possible location of the same. What remains with us are anecdotes about a Bandha Battala' (*bandha*, as in paved), under which gathered book merchants with their pile of cheaply-printed chapbooks (*choti boi*, in local parlance) and their buyers, very often hawkers who would source the books and sell them across the city and beyond. The print industry that grew around this Battala, however, left its mark in contemporary history, despite being deemed a source of lowly and obscene "street literature" as Reverend James Long, the first chronicler of Battala, would call it.

The earliest known Battala press was established in 1816—the Bengali Press, owned by Harachandra Ray. Bishwambhar Deb's printing press was also established around the same time, though very little is known of the publisher himself. Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya, who would go on to publish the first illustrated Bengali book, 'Annadamangal' (1816), with Ferris and Company Press, worked as a compositor for the Serampore Mission Press and honed his craft at the behest of the missionaries there.

Stamp Printing

In the age of digital technology when polymer can make rubber stamps in the blink of an eye, Chitpur Road hosts some stamp shops that are still carrying forward the old technique. The classic character of wooden stamps lay in its unique letter-press types. This unique lettering is still being used in rubber stamping. The small shops along the road are a hidden treasure trove for old unique and quirky stamps. Shri Baidyanath Aash, owner of one of these shops has a beautiful collection of old wood blocks of stamps.

Saree Printing

Kolkata's Saree printing tradition goes back a long way, in time, but is slowly fading. About twenty years ago, there were two clusters of Saree Hand Block Printing - along Bidhan Sarani, near Hatibagan in North Kolkata and the other on Rashbehari Avenue near Gariahat Market in South Kolkata. But now there are only few shops left. As Swarup Das, manager of the printing shop Artex says, "the demand for hand block printing is going down and we are getting stiff competition from Digital Prints." Still they block print

on silk, with patterns from kalamkari, bandhani and miler chhapa or mill printed, and more. One can also design one's own masterpiece, select the prints and let the skilled workers do the rest. The finished product is available in about a month and a half.

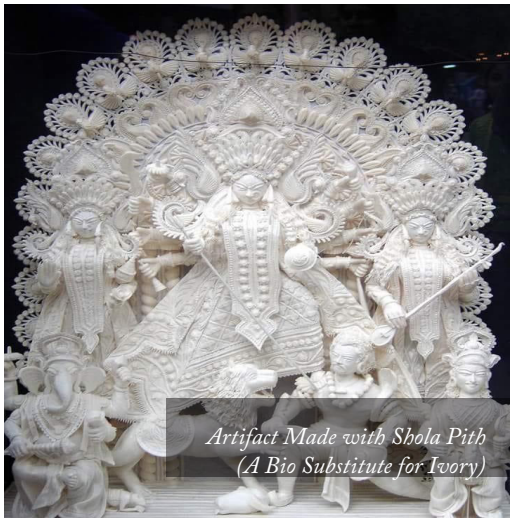
Clay Art & Sculpture of Kolkata

The smell of wet clay from Ganga and other rivers, the dry crackling of straw beneath your feet, the criss-cross patterns of bamboo spread out within the narrow confines of a ramshackle, eight-by-eight studio blend seamlessly to create the traditional homes of the artisans where Goddess Durga takes birth. The place is called Kumortuli. The potter community of Kolkata, the *kumors* as they are colloquially known, are more than what the name suggests. They are artists. Tangible images of deities that form the crux of Hindu worship, find shape in the hands of these artisans, who, with sheer dedication to the craft, have kept the tradition alive for generations. It is a fascinating experience to observe clay, straw, bamboo and other ingredients are transformed into tactile human forms which are then infused with divinity through different rituals. Durga Puja, on the other hand, is not only the major religious festival of Bengal but has also evolved into a cultural extravaganza.

Sola plant grows in the marshy waterlogged areas of West Bengal, Assam and in the eastern marshy Gangetic plains

The Dhakeswari Devi Mandir of Kumortuli signifies a strong connection of the potters to the Dhakeshwari Devi Mandir of Dhaka (Bangladesh). It is said that these potters or clay modelling artists mainly came from Krishnanagar, Nadia, and they are the descendants of immigrants from Dhaka, and Natore of Bangladesh. During Maharaja Krishnachandra's rule in Nadia, the practice of idol worship grew, which in turn called for potters and craftsmen from Dhaka.

At present there are more than 450 workshops owned by several families of master sculptors who, for generations, have been creating idols and models for museums and galleries in Kumortuli. There are studios of renowned master sculptors in Kumortuli like Gopeswar Pal, Mohan Bansi, Rudra Pal, Sanatan Rudra Pal, and Ramesh Pal. The G. Pal and Sons studio at Kumortuli might seem to be just another atelier, but for many idol makers in this town, it is a reminiscence of legendary artist Gopeswar Pal, whom they remember as one of the most acclaimed artists of all times. During the festival of Durga Puja the entire hub brightens up as the demand for their work shoots up. It is estimated that each year, the kumhars create more than 4,000 sets of Durga idols with their family members, and many of them are shipped abroad as well.



Artifact Made with Shola Pith (A Bio Substitute for Ivory)

Clay Cups or Bhar, Tolly's Nullah

Handmade cups made of clay (Ganga mati) are known as *Bhars*. From times immemorial the sweet, milky tea of Kolkata streets are served in these eco-friendly containers. Tea drinkers here, swear by the superiority of the clay cup. The clay gives the tea a rich and earthy flavour. It brings a ceremonial end to each cup of tea as well. When the tea is finished, the *bhar* are customarily thrown and crushed to pieces on the ground. The *bhar*, like small pieces of disposable art, are bearers of the age-old Bengali tradition of clay-pot making. Each cup is made by hand, from clay dug out of the Ganga River.

Japanese Buddhist Temple

Fusion of Hindu and Chinese Culture

Shola Pith Work, Herbal Ivory

Shola (*Sola pith*) or the Indian cork, is a milky-white sponge-wood which is carved into delicate and beautiful objects of art. *Sola* plant grows in the marshy waterlogged areas of West Bengal, Assam and in the eastern marshy Gangetic plains. Artisans use it to make artefacts for decoration, especially the traditional ornate headgear of bridegrooms in Bengal. The finest of this craftsmanship can be seen on the statues of gods and goddesses during festivals, especially the massive decorative backdrop used for the Durga Puja. The people engaged as *sholapith* craftsmen are known as *Malakars*, or garland makers. The craft is mainly practised in the districts of Burdwan, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia and Hooghly. But in Kolkata also, the idol makers of Kumortuli who traditionally produced clay idols have taken to making idols of *shola pith* and fibreglass. The ornaments of Devi Durga – D*aker Saaj*, are created by the artists and craftsman of Kumortuli.

It was in the late 19th century Nagendra N. Mondal learnt the art from European violin makers and started his own business at Lalbazar

Metal Work - Jewellery

There are about 12 lakh goldsmiths in West Bengal and in Kolkata their number is 80,000. There are some clusters in Kolkata where there are innumerable shops (jewellery) selling their creations like in Bow Bazaar, Bhawanipur and Gariahat, Shyambazaar etc. But most of them have their workshops in different area like in Garanhata-Chitpur, Hatkhola, Shovabazaar Area, Bowbazaar, Sinthee, Burrabazar or in Kalighat area. Among them Garanhata is the oldest. Traditionally in Bengal, gold and silver jewellery were made by the people of a particular caste Swarnakars or more colloquially *Shyakra*.

Wood Art

The history of woodcarving in Bengal - comprising both what is now known as West Bengal and Bangladesh - and thus in India greater, seems to be very old. From times immemorial, the artists and craftsmen of this region have always adored wood, as a plastic

Kolkata has a tradition for making musical instruments and there are some hubs where we still find a series of workshops making musical instruments

medium for carving. Perhaps the oldest exhibit of wooden sculpture (*Neem* – Margosa) in Kolkata is the Durga Idol (Chitteswari Devi) of Chitpur area. Later on, the use of wood can be found in the Jaganath idols of Jaganath Temple of Burra Bazaar. 19th century Kolkata saw a wide use of decorated wood carvings on the doors, windows or side panels in the palatial mansions of old North Kolkata Houses like in Pathuriaghata, Jorasanko, Burrabazar or in the administrative core area of Dalhousie Square. In 1940's, Abanindranath Thakur gave a new dimension to wood art. He made a series of sculptures using driftwood or discarded and abandoned tree roots, as well as branches, and named them as Katum Kutum. *Katum* means structure or form and *kutum* means relatives. Following his art, Katum Kutum became a genre of wood art which many of today's Kolkata artists pursue.

Musical Instruments

Kolkata has a tradition for making musical instruments and there are some hubs where we still find a series of workshops making musical instruments.

In Jorasanko, Chitpur Road,the area which was once famous as Tablapatty, has a tradition of more than 100 years of making Indian classical instruments. This dwindling craft is continued in only five shops in this stretch of the road. They specialise in making percussion instruments such as *Tabla, Dhol, Sri Khol, Nal.* They also make harmoniums on special request. Flute, dancing bells, *Dafli, Khanjani* and *Khartals* are available as well. Kolkata has remained one of the prime spots for manufacturing *tablas* in India over the years. Made from lighter wood than those of its counterparts made in Mumbai, Delhi, or Varanasi, Kolkata *tablas* are considered to be both easier to play and produce a better sound. *Tablas* from the City of Joy have thinner heads, and are made from lighter woods—contributing to their sweeter, fuller sounds.

Harmoniums to Ukuleles, Lal Bazaar area around Bentinck Street (now B B Ganguly Street) is full of music shops that supply world-class instruments. The shops have been around for generations and have supplied instruments to everyone from beginners to internationally-renowned artists like violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

D. Ghosh and Sons was founded in 1875 by Dwarkanath Ghosh at Lower Chitpur Road in Kolkata, mainly dealing in piano tuning and repairing of musical instruments. Subsequently, it was renamed as Dawrkin, a name that was coined by composer and writer, Upendrakishore Ray, combining the names of the founder and that of Thomas Dawkins, London, an instruments' manufacturer from where the company imported musical instruments early on.

The moment one steps into Hemen & Co., a small shop located at the corner of Rash Behari Avenue, the dust and noise of the main road settles down into a serene silence. The charming quiet of the run-down shop is periodically interrupted by the tuning of a *sitar* or the strumming of a *tanpura*. Despite its dilapidated exteriors, a single peek inside reveals a treasure trove of musical instruments. One cuts through the rows of *sitars* hanging from the ceiling, dusty wooden shelves stacked with violins and harmoniums, and crosses the walls covered with *sarods* and guitars, to reach the end table where Ratan Kumar Sen sits meditatively working on a beautiful *sitar*. Behind him, a wall covered with framed photographs over the peeling paint depicts the glorious past of Kolkata's iconic musical instrument shop, Hemen and Co.

This 72-year-old shop which was frequented by celebrated musicians like Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Ud. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, Begum Parveen Sultana and even Pt. Ravi Shankar, bears testimony to the musical brilliance of the yonder years. Not just in India, Hemen and Co. was known for its outstanding craftsmanship even outside the country. Legends like Yehudi Menuhin, Jethro Tull's

Ganga Ghats Decorated with Oil Lamps on Deep Deepawali

Ian Anderson, and George Harrison, the lead guitarist of The Beatles, have walked through these doors, seeking to experience their handcrafted instruments.

Amongst the toughest musical instruments to play and to prepare is a Violin. For centuries, the Violin has been called the devil's own instrument. The reasons being its melancholic sound and its unknown origin. It was in the late 19th century Nagendra N. Mondal learnt the art from European violin makers and started his own business at Lalbazar. His grandson, Krishna, aka Keshto Da, inherited the craft from his father and has been making violins since the 60s. Panchu Gopal, too, started his career as a 13-year-old in N. N. Mondal's shop in the late 60s, but went on to start his own business in the 90s. Over the years, the duo has crafted and repaired violins of not only Indian musicians like V. G. Jog, Madan Seth and Basudev Chatterjee but also international violinists.

The Braganza & Company, a 78 year old heritage music shop is an institution of Kolkata situated in Marquis Street of Park Street area is a pilgrimage for every musician breathing some melody in the city of rhythms. The place is nevertheless moist with the nostalgia of a culture much celebrated in Kolkata. The founders of the shop were Francis Braganza and Thomas Braganza.

Perfume *(Attar)* Making

Even at the best of times, Rabindra Sarani and adjacent Colootola are not the most poetic of places. But the area was one of the last homes of the old, leisurely Awadhi culture, with a whiff of the old world lingering over its *attar* shops. That smell, too, is changing. To keep up with the times, *attarwallahs* have started experimenting with chemical perfumes and blended *attars*. Most recently, they are creating their own versions of aqua perfumes in imitation of brands like Davidoff Cool Water. A walk up and down Rabindra Sarani and Colootola reveals only two or three *attar* shops. The number of shops has declined over the years. At Haji Khuda Bukhsh Nabi Bukhsh *attar* shop in Colootola, which has been there since 1824, the new creation Hiyati has the same fragrance as any aqua deo or perfume.

Lac Bangles

Rajasthani traditional style beautifully designed Lac Bangles are still traditionally prepared by the Muslim Marwari Community of Burrabazar. In the narrow alleys of Banstolla Street of Burrabazar there are a series of shops where *lacca* bangles are prepared and sold. The process of making lac bangles is as flexible as its maintenance.

Gastronomic Delights

Bengal has been famous for its food and cuisine ever since the dawn of civilization. Extraordinarily fertile agricultural land and production of paddy are a gift of the Ganga. At the same time, the rivers of Bengal are an inexhaustible resource of different varieties of fish. That is why, since ancient times, rice and fish emerged as the staple food for every Bengali. Apart from fish and rice, Bengal has had a rich tradition of many vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, and most of these, such as *dal* (lentil soup), *posto* (vegetables made with poppy seeds), fish curry, and mutton curry, are consumed with rice. Conventionally, Bengali dishes are divided into four types, such as *charbya* (food which is to be chewed, like rice, fish, etc.),

choshya (food which is to be sucked, liquids like *ambal, tak* etc.), *lehya* (food which is to be licked, like *chutney*) and *peya* (drinks, like milk). Even the sequence of eating foods is also prescribed in the sacred texts of Bengal, for example, Brihaddharma Purana, compiled within the territory of Bengal, prescribed that boiled rice and *ghee* should be consumed first, followed by spinach and rest of the vegetables, and the meal should end with milk and boiled rice.

Fish

There more than 100 varieties of fish dishes prepared across Bengal, however the combination of fish curry and rice is the staple diet here. The fish eating Bengalis are very particular about buying the fish and there are some famous markets (*bazaars*) for buying fish. Some of these places are Manicktala Fish Market and Gariahat Fist Market. Wide varieties of fish like *Mourala, Puti, Bele, Bata, Koi, Singhi, Magur, Papda, Ilish, Bhetki,* Pomfret, and *Parse* are available.

Sweets

A large number of sweets, both fried and made of posset or cottage cheese (chhana), entered Bengali cuisine. Till the 16th century, Bengalis could not be termed connoisseurs of sweets as they were satisfied with simple *Dudh-chire* (milk and flattened rice), *Dudh-lau* (milk and gourd) and Monda. Many attribute the sudden development of the sweets' industry in Bengal to the Portuguese. It is impossible to think of Bengali food without sweets made of cottage cheese; Rossogolla, Sandesh and Chumchum are inseparable parts of Bengali culture. Cottage cheese made in Portugal is almost identical with the Bengali version of cheese (*chhena*), so some credit may be given to the Portuguese for the legendary sweets of Bengal. The Portuguese introduced three types of cheese in Bengal: Cottage Cheese, Bandel Cheese and Dhakai Paneer.

Some of the great delicacies of Kolkata are Rosogolla, Sandesh, Mishti Doi, Pantua, Ledikeni and Lyngcha, and the sweets made out of *Nolen Gur*.

North Western Indian Sweets

The sweets of Marwar, Sheherwali Jains and Uttar Pradesh also acquire a special flavour in Kolkata. There is an entire world of Gond ka Laddoo, Ghaal ka Laddoo, Mohanthaal, Ghevar, Sheera, Satpura and so much more. Non-Bengali sweets were made of *khoya* or thickened dried milk and dried fruits and nuts. Besides that, because of North Western Indian influence, the ingredients are often pulse based (*besan*). There is an entire cluster of Ladoo makers in the Burra Bazaar area of Kolkata, the traditional Marwari hub of Kolkata. There are series of shops making and selling various kinds of ladoos, specially Motichur ka Ladoo and Jalebis.

Bakery

In 1660, the famous French traveller Francois Bernier, describing his visit to Bengal, mentioned that in Bengal the supply of inexpensive biscuits to the crews of European ships was very common. This indicates that the small-scale production of biscuits had already started in Bengal during the 17th century. In 1841, at Old Court Street, Calcutta, a hotel-cum-bakery was established by David Wilson, named Auckland Hotel, which changed its name several times like from Wilsons Hotel, then The Great Eastern Hotel, the Grand Great Eastern Hotel to finally being rechristened as The Lalit Great Eastern. The other prestigious bakeries of Kolkata include Flurys, Nahoum, Saldannah and the Cookie Jar Bakery.

In 1887, Girish Chandra Mondal set up a *tandoor* in Central Calcutta for making *deshi* biscuits. After five years he was joined by his neighbour, N. N. Gupta, and this firm was known as V.S. Brothers. After a few years the factory shifted to Dum Dum. In 1897, this factory came up

Some of the great delicacies of Kolkata are Rosogolla, Sandesh, Mishti Doi, Pantua, Ledikeni and Lyngcha, and the sweets made out of Nolen Gur

with a new name, Gupta and Company, and a new brand, the Hindu Biscuits. The company primarily manufactured western style biscuits, but because of the brand name, during the Swadeshi movement the company received considerable impetus. During World War I, it changed its name to Britannia Biscuits Co. Till date it is one of the most dominant biscuit brands in India.

Brahmo Samaj and Young Bengal Movement helped much in popularising the inclusion of bakery items in Kolkata's food culture. The educated, enlightened Bengali middle class not only imbibed the new taste of these items but very often used these items as emblems of liberation and freedom from caste barriers and traditional taboos.

Club, Cafe & Cabin Culture *of* Kolkata

A residual feature of colonial culture that still remains embedded in the very DNA of the city is that of the club culture. These clubs originally began as places of British refuge and entertainment for the officials who visited the city. Today, they stand as testimonies of the cultural past of the city. These clubs were the birthplace of a unique cuisine often infused with European and Mughal elements. Many of the cooks or Bawarchis of these clubs were *Mogs* (Portuguese) or Muslims. Some of these are Bengal Club-33 B, Chowringhee Road, Calcutta Club-241, A.J.C. Bose Road, Tolly Club-120, Deshapran Sasmal Road, Tollygunge, Calcutta Cricket and Football Club (CC & FC)- 19/1, Gurusaday Road, Ballygunge, and The Saturday Club–7 on Wood Street, Near Park Street.

The old school cabin restaurants of Kolkata are the remnants of old lifestyle instilled at the heart of Kolkata. They serve food with a history that can be traced back to Kolkata's colonial days, a plate showing the influence of what the British brought. Breadcrumbs and deep frying process successfully set the example of East meets West. The Chop–Cutlet culture of the Bengalis is a delicious improvisation of their British counterparts. The Chop or Cutlet, usually made of mutton or chicken (or vegetables to suit the vegetarian palate) is marinated in subtle herbs and spices, and then crumb fried. The fish roll is a delicacy of Bengal patronized by Maharajas. These distinctive chop cutlets are essentially served in Cabin Restaurants of Kolkata. Amongst the Cabin Restaurants that survived the mad rush of modern development is the College Street Coffee House with regular visitors in the past such as Satyajit Ray, Amartya Sen, Mrinal Sen and Aparna Sen. Others are Basanta Cabin, Niranjan Agar, Allen Kitchen, Mitra Café, Café located near the Hazra Crossing, Anadi Cabin, Dilkhusa Cabin, Malancha etc.

People who Fascinate

If one were to write about personalities of Kolkata alone, several such volumes would be needed. In fact, even a mere list would fill several pages. However, here is a representative description of some of these personalities, that have contributed to Kolkata's growth as a fascinating district.

Rammohan Roy

The maker of modern India. He worked against outdated orthodox practices in Indian society and established a number of educational institutions. Through the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Charles Metcalfe removed all the restrictions imposed on the Press in 1835.

Dwarakanath Thakur

Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), one of the first Indian industrialists and entrepreneurs, was the founder of the Jorasanko branch of the Tagore family, and is notable for making substantial contributions to the Bengal Renaissance.

David Hare

David Hare, a Scottish gentleman, dedicated his entire life to the cause of education.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio & his Young Bengal Movement

The Young Bengal was a group of Bengali free thinkers emerging from Hindu College, Calcutta. They were also known as Derozians,

after their firebrand teacher at Hindu College, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. Some of the stalwarts of Young Bengal Movement were Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay, Rashik Krishna Mallik, Dakhinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghose, Madhab Chandra Mallik, Ramtanu Lahiri, Maheshchandra Ghose, Sibchandra Deb, Harachandra Ghose, Radhanath Sikdar, Govindachandra Basak, Amritalal Mitra and others.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was one of the pillars of Bengal renaissance who managed to continue the social reform movement that was started by Raja Rammohan Roy in the early 1800s.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 – 1873) was a popular 19th century Bengali poet and dramatist, known for his famous work 'Meghnad Badh'.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, (1838 – 1894) was an Indian novelist, poet and journalist. Chattopadhyay is widely regarded as a key figure in literary renaissance of Bengal as well as the Indian subcontinent.

Shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, (1836 – 1886) was a mystic, philosopher, saint and considered as an *avatar* by many in 19th century Bengal. Shri Ramakrishna experienced spiritual ecstasies from a young age, and was influenced by several religious traditions, including devotion towards Goddess Kali, *Tantra (shakta)*, Vaishnava (*bhakti*), and Advaita Vedanta.

Keshub Chandra Sen

Keshub Chandra Sen (1838 – 1884) was a philosopher and social reformer in the Bengal Presidency of British India.

Girish Chandra Ghosh

Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844 – 1912) was a Bengali musician, poet, hair designer, playwright, novelist, theatre director and actor. He was largely responsible for the golden age of Bengali theatre. He can be referred to as the Father of Bengali Theatre.

Sir Surendranath Bannerjee

Surendranath Bannerjee (1848 – 1925) was one of the earliest Indian political leaders during the British Raj. He founded the Indian National Association, through which he led two sessions of the Indian National Conference in 1883 and 1885, along with Anandamohan Bose. He was one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress.

Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose

J. C. Bose (1858 – 1937) was a polymath, physicist, biologist, biophysicist, botanist and archaeologist, and an early writer of science fiction in British India. He pioneered the investigation of radio and microwave optics, made significant contributions to plant science, and laid the foundations of experimental science in the Indian subcontinent.

Brahmo Samaj and Young Bengal Movement helped much in popularising the inclusion of bakery items in Kolkata's food culture

Rabindranath Thakur

Rabindranath Tagore (1861 - 1941) was a poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter who introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of early 20th century India. In 1913 he became the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature for his book 'Geetanjali'.

Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy

P.C. Roy (1861 – 1944) was a chemist, educationist, historian, industrialist and philanthropist. A leading Bengali nationalist, he established the first Indian research school in Chemistry and is regarded as the father of Chemical Science in India. Prafulla Ray retired becoming professor emeritus in 1936, aged 75.

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was as one of the pillars of Bengal renaissance who managed to continue the social reform movement that was started by Raja Rammohan Roy in the early 1800s

Baba Allauddin Khan

Allauddin Khan (1862 – 1972) was a *Sarod* player and multi-instrumentalist, composer and one of the most notable music teachers of the 20th century in Indian classical music. Khan became court musician for the Maharaja of Maihar. Here he laid the foundation of a modern Maihar Gharana. Khan was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1958 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1971, India's third and second highest civilian honours, and prior to that in 1954, the Sangeet Natak Akademi awarded him with its highest honour, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship for lifetime contribution to Indian music.

Swami Vivekananda & Ramakrishna Mission

Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902), was the chief disciple of the 19th century Indian mystic Ramakrishna. He was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and is credited with raising interfaith awareness, bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion during the late 19th century. In India, Vivekananda is regarded as a patriotic saint, and his birthday is celebrated as National Youth Day.

Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee

Ashutosh Mukherjee (1864 – 1924) was a prolific Bengali educator, jurist, barrister and mathematician. He was the first student to be awarded a dual degree (MA in Mathematics and Physics) from Calcutta University. The second Indian Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta for four consecutive two-year terms (1906–1914) and a fifth two-year term (1921–23), Mukherjee was responsible for the foundation of the Bengal Technical Institute in 1906 and the College of Science of the Calcutta University in 1914. Mukherjee also played a vital role in the founding of the University College of Law, popularly known as Hazra Law College.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar

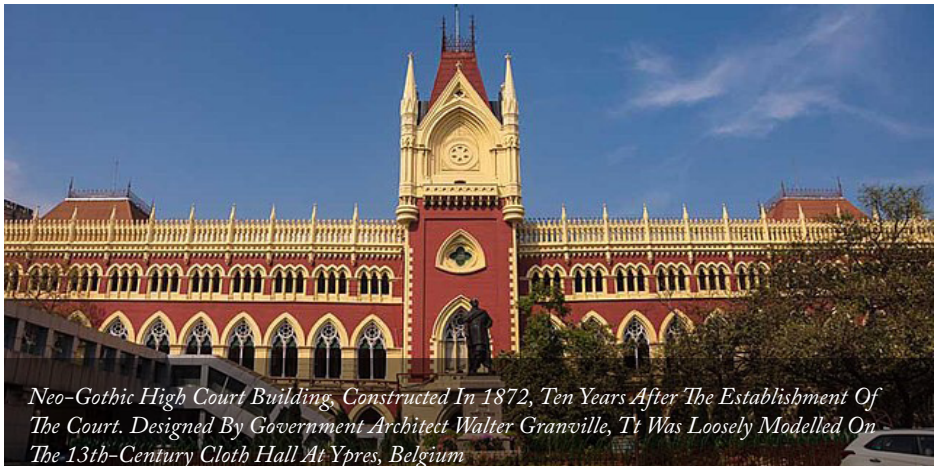
Jadunath Sarkar (1870 – 1958) was a prominent Indian historian especially of the Mughals. In 1923, he became an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society of London. In August 1926, he was appointed as the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University. In 1928, he joined as Sir W. Meyer Lecturer in Madras University.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950) was an Indian philosopher, *yogi,* guru, poet, and nationalist. He joined the Indian movement for independence from British rule, for a while was one of its influential leaders and then became a spiritual reformer, introducing his visions on human progress and spiritual evolution. His main literary works are 'The Life Divine', which deals with theoretical aspects of Integral Yoga; 'Synthesis of Yoga', which deals with practical guidance to Integral Yoga; and 'Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol', an epic poem.

Jamini Roy

Jamini Roy (1887 – 1972) was an Indian painter. He was honoured with the state award of Padma Bhushan in 1955. He was one of the most famous pupils of Abanindranath Tagore, whose artistic originality and contribution to the emergence



Neo-Gothic High Court Building, Constructed In 1872, Ten Years After The Establishment Of The Court. Designed By Government Architect Walter Granville, It Was Loosely Modelled On The 13th-Century Cloth Hall At Ypres, Belgium

of modern art in India remains unquestionable.

C.V. Raman

Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman (1888 – 1970) was an Indian physicist who made ground-breaking discoveries in the field of light scattering. With his student K. S. Krishnan, he discovered that when light traverses through a transparent material, some of the deflected light change wavelength and amplitude. This phenomenon was a new type of scattering of light and was subsequently known as the Raman Effect. His works earned him the 1930 Nobel Prize in Physics and was the first Indian or Asian or non-white person to receive Nobel Prize in any branch of science.

Subhash Chandra Bose

Subhash Bose (1897 – 1945) was an Indian nationalist whose defiant patriotism made him a hero in India. His attempts during World War II, to rid India of British rule, forced him to leave India. He established the Indian National Army.

Kazi Nazrul Islam

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899 – 1976) was a Bengali poet, writer and musician who was later recognized as the national poet of Bangladesh. Popularly known as Nazrul, he produced a large body of poetry and music with themes that included religious devotion and rebellion against oppression. Nazrul's activism for political and social justice earned him the title of Rebel Poet.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901 – 1953) was an Indian politician, barrister and academician, who served as the Minister for Industry and Supplies in Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet. After falling out with Nehru, Mukherjee quit the Union Government on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. With the help of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, he founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the predecessor to the Bharatiya Janata Party, in 1951.

Hemanta Mukherjee

Also known as Hemant Kumar (1920 – 1989) was an Indian music director and singer who sang in Bengali, Hindi and other Indian languages. He was a great exponent of Rabindra Sangeet. He won two National Awards for the category, best male playback singer.

Ravi Shankar

Pandit Ravi Shankar (1920 – 2012), was a Sitar maestro, though an Indian musician and a composer of Hindustani Classical Music, he had a global footprint. He composed for some memorable films too. He received the Bharat Ratna for his contribution to music.

Satyajit Ray

Satyajit Ray (1921 – 1992) an Indian

Rabindranath Tagore was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of early 20th century India

filmmaker, screenwriter, music composer, graphic artist, lyricist and author, widely regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers of all time. The Government of India honoured him with the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award, in 1992 and he also received an Oscar for life time contribution to Cinema.

Amartya Sen

Amartya Sen, born in 1933 is an economist and philosopher. He is currently Thomas W. Lamont University Professor, and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998 and Bharat Ratna in 1999 for his work in welfare economics.

Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee

Abhijit Banerjee, born in 1961, is an Indian-American economist who is currently the Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Banerjee shared the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences with his wife, Esther Duflo, and Michael Kremer for their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty.

Mother Teresa

Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (1910 – 1997), commonly known as Mother Teresa and honoured in the Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, was an Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun and missionary. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

Dakhineshwar Temple Built in 1855 by Rani Rashmoni

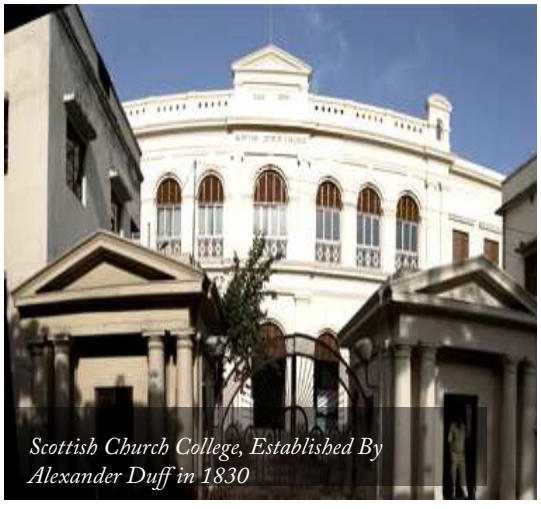
Monuments *that* Matter

A vast historical city like Kolkata has immense built heritage which cannot be covered in this volume. The heritage includes :

- Colonial buildings such as Fort William, residences, offices, headquarters of management agencies and many others
- Richly built residential buildings of the powerful zamindars
- Schools and instituional buildings.
- Several temples like Belur Math and Kalibari, mosques, Armenian Church
- Matiabruz - the warren of buildings which constitute the exile place of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh
- and countless others of which only a few have been covered here

Dakhineshwar Kali Mandir

The Kalighat Temple is a *Shakti Peetha* ensconced in a web of myths. In 1809, Sabarna Roy Choudhury, the *Zamindar* (landowner) of the region, built the temple complex that stands today in the bustling south Kolkata neighbourhood. They offered 595 *bighas* of land to the temple deity so that worship and service could be continued smoothly. It is believed by some scholars that



Scottish Church College, Established By Alexander Duff in 1830

the name Calcutta was derived from Kalighat. Historically, traders halted at Kalighat to pay patronage to the goddess. The temple was initially on the banks of Hooghly. The river, over a period of time, has moved away from the temple. The temple is now on the banks of a small canal called Adi Ganga, connecting to Hooghly. The present Dakshina Kali idol of touchstone was created in 1570 CE by two saints, Brahmananda Giri and Atmaram Giri based on the idol of Mata Bhuvaneshwari, the *Kuladevi* of Sabarna Roy Choudhury family. Every year, hundreds of thousands of devotees visit the Kalighat Kali Temple to offer their prayers. The same temple attained the status of a *Shakti Peetha* and was revamped more than two centuries ago.

The Kalighat Kali Temple is *Aatchala* of Bengal Temple Architecture. Inside this structure resides the idol of the famed Kalighat Kali whose protruded tongue and four hands are made of pure gold. This structure is accompanied by the *nat mandir,* a dancing hall. A Śhiva temple is situated to the north-east of the main shrine and a Radha-Krishna temple is located to its east.

Hastings House

Warren Hastings, an Englishman, was the first Governor of the Presidency of Fort William, the head of the Supreme Council of Bengal, and thus, the first de facto Governor-General of India from 1774 to 1785. Warren Hastings House is one of the legacies of early colonial rule in India. It is where he took his last breath.

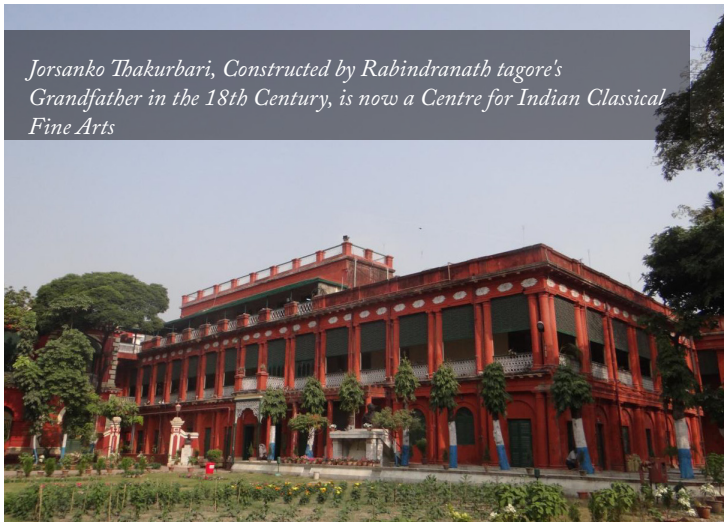
In 1954, the house was converted into a college named as Institute of Education for Women, where several M. Ed. courses are being offered exclusively for women. The institution is affiliated to the University of Calcutta.

With European style of architecture, the building has a square plan with living rooms in the ground floor and a huge gallery on the upper floor which is accessible to other halls. The two storeyed building has a centrally located projected portico as the entrance, that extends up to the first floor level. The portico is supported over ionic columns and the top having a distinct parapet. The frontal four columns has louvers from the upper slab to mid length of the columns. The overall façade is, however, simple with full height rectangular fenestrations that are louvered. The roof is lined by a surrounding ornate parapet.

Victoria Memorial

Located on 1 Queen's Way, the Victoria Memorial House was envisaged by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India, as a memorial to Queen Victoria (1819-1901), to be designed with a gallery inside. Curzon's writings bring forth that it was a part of his imperial duty to put into execution a "Great Imperial memorial worthy of Queen Victoria and worthy of India." The Memorial is situated on 64 acres of land with the building covering 338 ft by 228 ft. The architect was Sir William Emerson with Vincent Esch as executive architect. The building was constructed by Martin Burn and Co. Lord Curzon was said to be fascinated with the white Makrana marble used in Taj Mahal and so the material was procured from the same quarry. The foundation stone was laid on 4th January, 1906, but the building was formally opened to the public in 1921.

Built on an 'H' plan with a large circular hall at the centre, longer axis slightly tilted in NW-SE direction, it is a double storeyed symmetrical monument with four sprawling wings crowned with a *chhatri*, each at the terminal ends and a much raised central dome over a colonnaded drum. Emerson's choice of white Makrana marble façade was a deliberate reference to the Taj Mahal. A large statue of Queen Victoria stands at its centre and the great dome above is topped by a 3.5 ton gilded bronze Angel of Victory, modelled by Lindsey Clark and cast in Edinburgh by George Mancini. This rotates in the wind and is known locally as the fairy.



Jorsanko Thakurbari, Constructed by Rabindranath tagore's Grandfather in the 18th Century, is now a Centre for Indian Classical Fine Arts

The Presidency College, Established in 1817, is the Oldest College in Asia, Founded by Raja Rammohan Roy Amongst Others

Indian Museum

Founded in 1814, at the cradle of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, at its present building at 1 Park Street, Indian Museum is the earliest and the largest multipurpose Museum not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in the Asia Pacific region of the world. In 1839, the Asiatic Society appealed to the Government to erect a public museum in Calcutta and shifted most of its collection to the Indian Museum when it's new building was erected in 1866 about 100 m north of the Society. It was first known as the Asiatic Society Museum, then the Imperial Museum and finally the Indian Museum. Designed by government architect Walter Granville (1819-1874), Indian Museum started with two galleries, and then expanded to multi-disciplinary display viz. Art, Archaeology, Anthropology, Zoology, Geology, and Botany. The precinct has a large water-body called Jhinjheri Talao. The Museum office, was originally the Sudder Diwani Adalat that functioned from 1772 to 1857.

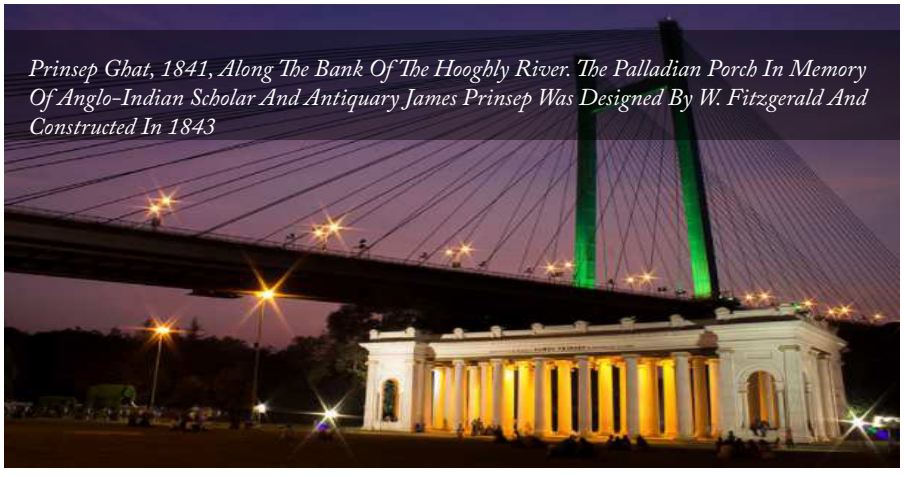
Currently under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, this is a three storeyed building with two lofty lower storeys and a smaller second floor. Two prominent projections punctuate the road-facing west façade. Tall arched openings and windows flanked by fluted twin Corinthian columns accentuate the two sides. The museum is popularly known as Bharatiya Jadughar.

Eden Gardens

The Eden Gardens Stadium was established in 1864. Adjacent to the stadium is the Eden Gardens, one of the oldest parks in Kolkata, designed in 1841 and hence the stadium is named after it. Historically, Babu Rajchandra Das, the then *zamindar* of Kolkata, had gifted this garden to Viceroy Lord Auckland Eden and his sister Emily Eden after they helped him, saving his 3rd daughter from a fatal disease. Since then onwards the garden's name was changed from Mar Bagan to Eden Gardens. The cricket grounds were built between Babughat and Fort William.

Nam Soon Church

The Chinese settlements in Calcutta date back to the late eighteenth century when a Chinese trader, Tong Achew settled near present day Budge Budge. The then Governor General Warren Hastings offered him land to set up a sugar mill and thus the settlement grew with the mill workers. But Achew died soon after and his mill was abandoned. The Chinese settlement moved to the centre of Calcutta, where they settled in Tiretta Bazar. Eventually many Chinese temples were erected around Tiretta Bazaar, out of which Nam Soon Church was built in 1820.



Prinsep Ghat, 1841, Along The Bank Of The Hooghly River. The Palladian Porch In Memory Of Anglo-Indian Scholar And Antiquary James Prinsep Was Designed By W. Fitzgerald And Constructed In 1843

This Chinese temple acts as an oasis of peace in this most chaotic area of Kolkata. The temple houses the idol of Kwan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of war, mercy and love.

Constructed in Chinese style of architecture, the building's single storey simple structure is raised above a high plinth and approached by a flight of stairs. The temple room is preceded by a veranda. The interiors are spacious with a beautiful roof hanging above the sanctum. At the end, there is an altar at the centre which houses the idol of Kwan Yin. Nam Soon Church is the oldest among five other churches namely, Toong On Church, Gee Hing Church, Sea Voi Yune Leong Futh Church, Choonghee Dong Thien Haue Church present in the area.

This area is known as Chinatown, with a preponderance of Bengali speaking Chinese people.

Writers' Building

The Writers' Building was designed by Thomas Lyon for the East India Company in 1777. The Company wanted to consolidate its trading operations in India and centralize its financial operations. As the British mercantile interests in India grew and the East India Company defeated the Nawabs of Bengal, Writers' Building was repurposed as the Company's headquarters. It served as the seat of government of the Bengal Presidency and later the province of Bengal. From its conception, the building became the focal administrative and business hub of the city emerging around it.

Three Bengali revolutionaries namely, Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta and Dinesh Gupta disguised themselves as Westerners to get inside the Writers' Building and shot a colonel, who brutally oppressed Indian prisoners. Hence, the place where Writers' building is situated was christened as BBD Bagh. Constructed in neoclassical architectural style, the building is 400 ft long and with a built-up area of 55,000 sq ft. The most iconic part of the facade is the 128 ft-long veranda with Ionic columns, each 32 ft high, on the first and second floors of the four storeyed building. The corner is splayed with curved walls and crowned by a dome.

The River Still Acts As A Means Of Transporting Commoditie

Parsi Fire Temple

Initially, Calcutta housed two *Agni Mandirs*, one at Ezra Street and one on Metcalfe Lane. First one is abandoned. The present fire temple of Anjuman Atash Adran was established in 1912 by Ervad Dhunjeebhoy Byramjee Mehta and operates to this day. Anjuman Atash Adran Temple is located on the Metcalfe Street (popularly called the Bandook Gali) in the Boubazar area of Central Calcutta (Kolkata). The Parsis are fire worshipers and the holy flame eternally burns in the Parsi Fire Temple. Zoroastrians gather here on their new year day in August and for other festivals. It is a two storied building with arches on pillars with decorative stained glasses with Zoroastrian motifs at the arches over doors and windows.

Nakhoda Mosque

Nakhoda Mosque was built under the benefaction of a dweller of Kutch, Abdar Rahim Osman in the year 1926. The mosque was built, based on the imitation of the mausoleum of Mughal Emperor Akbar at Sikandra, Agra, by Kutchi Memon Jamat, a small community of Sunni Muslims from Kutch. Abdur Rahim Osman was a shipping prince. Thus, the mosque was named *Nakhoda*, meaning Mariner. The grand entrance of the mosque has been built taking inspiration from the Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri. The roof has three domes and two minarets which are 151 feet high each. There are 25 smaller minarets which range from 100-117 feet in height. The façade has been cladded and curved with bright red granite stones from Tolepur and endowed with arched fenestrations and *jali* work.

The Writers' Building, now the Chief Minister's Secretariat, was Built in 1777 for the Junior Clerks of the East India Company

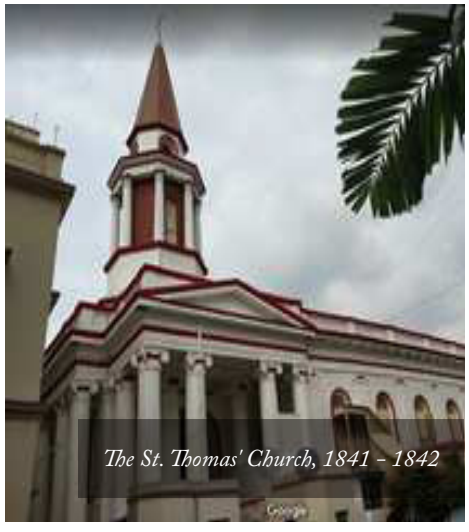
Prinsep Ghat

Designed by W. Fitzgerald, the construction of this monument was completed in 1843 in memory of Sir James Prinsep (1799 -1840). Prinsep was an eminent scholar, orientalist and antiquarian. It was at this *ghat* that British Governor Generals, Commanders-in-Chief, Judges and Bishops set their foot in Calcutta, as long as the arrival route was from sea. The memorial pavilion is now located about 100 m inland from the riverbank as the river has shifted westwards.

Built in Palladian style, adjacent to River Ganga, with Fort William on the east and the new Hooghly Bridge, also known as Vidyasagar Setu, on the immediate south, it is a single storied flat roof pavilion with the longer side having a seven bay colonnade flanked by two semi-open walled enclosures at both ends. The openings in these enclosures are arched and supported by secondary columns. The interior is a hypostyle hall and the shorter side has a grand central opening. The fluted circular columns have ionic capitals. The architrave is mostly simple with a few horizontal mouldings. It replaced Chandpal Ghat as the main VIP entry point to the city. In 1905, Prince of Wales (later King George V) and in 1911, the British royal entourage used the Prinsep Ghat jetty for disembarkation.

Jorasanko Thakur Bari

Jorasanko Thakurbari was constructed



The St. Thomas' Church, 1841 - 1842

by Rabindranath Tagore's grandfather in the 18th century. It got its name from the two Shankar or Shiva temples, called Jora Shankar, which can be found near the house. There is also another folklore that says it came from two bamboo (*jora)* or wooden bridges that spanned a stream nearby. It is the house in which the great poet Rabindranath Tagore was born. He spent most of his childhood here and also died on 7th August, 1941 in this house. The building has an influence of colonial architecture style mixed with Bengal's traditional Thakur Dalan.

Jorasanko Thakurbari was converted into a centre for Indian Classical Fine Arts. It also has a splendid museum, known as the Rabindra Bharati Museum, that was established in 1961. The collection of Tagore's creations makes this museum one of the most popular tourist attractions for people from India, and abroad. Rabindra Bharati University, started from this house and was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru, then PM of India, on Tagore's Birth Centenary, 8th May 1962. But now the University has been shifted to a new Campus on BT Road.

GTS Tower

The Great Trigonometric Survey Tower (GTS Tower) was built in 1831 for the Great Trigonometric Survey conducted by George Everest, the then Superintendent of the great Trigonometrical Survey project and Surveyor General in charge of all topographical and revenue surveys carried out by Survey of India.

This 75 feet tall masonry tower rises from a square base and tapers to a platform at the very top. The black English lettering painted on it reads: GTS Tower.

Old Silver Mint

This was the third Mint built by East India Company. The first one known as Alinagar-Calcutta Mint was built at the site where General Post office stands today. The second Calcutta Mint was located just opposite to the western entrance of St. John's Church. During the early days, the East India Company had no right to mint its own coins and therefore, had no other way but to send its gold and silver reserves to the Murshibabad Mint of the Nawab, where the metals were converted to coins. The Company used to take delivery of the coins, after paying the standard duties and the mint charges. But when Lord Clive recaptured the Fort by defeating Siraj-ud-Daula on 2nd January 1757, Siraj-ud-Daula was forced to agree to give the said right to East India Company on the 7th day of February, 1757. He agreed to allow them to establish their own mint and issue silver and gold coins (known as *Siccas* and *Ashrafis* or

The Marsh Mongoose, a Common Wetland Dweller

Mohurs) struck on the standard of the Murshidabad Mint. These coins were valid for circulation throughout the regions covered under the jurisdiction of the Nawab, namely Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, without incurring any additional expenses.

Built between 1824-1829, the imposing frontage of the building resembled the Temple of Athena at Athens in Greece, popularly known as the Parthenon. With grand steps and Doric columns, it is a fine example of Greco-Roman architecture.

An annexe building, known as the Copper Mint, was built to the north of the Silver Mint in 1860 for the exclusive production of copper coins which began operation in April, 1865. History says that, there was a time when approximately 3,00,000 to 6,00,000 silver coins were manufactured here daily. This mint was the first in Asia to successfully process pure nickel for coinage purposes. Silver coins were minted here till 1952 and, thereafter, it functioned as a silver refinery.

Nature's Abundance

The species of trees and shrubs seen in Kolkata today have come through a succession of elimination and addition. Earlier reports indicate that Kolkata along with other contiguous marshy areas sheltered a host of mangrove species along with some estuarine sedges and grasses. As many as 276 species of flowering trees

The Critically Endangered Fishing Cat

were found here till 1944. However, at present only 5% of Kolkata's urbanscape is dedicated to greenery. Because of immense land pressure and pollution, there is a constant threat to the flora and fauna of the city. There are some 667 different species of plants in Kolkata including, 96 medicinal plants, 161 species of herbs, 205 species of shrubs, 229 flowering species, 68 climbers.

When Kolkata, as a city, was born, more than three hundred years ago, the entire area was dominated by the type of ecosystem that still persists in the mangrove forests of Sundarbans. In course of time, with human settlements, the introduced floral species have completely replaced indigenous mangrove forests. Yet it is amazing to find how a variety of wildlife, although in limited number has worked out their own niche and has survived in parks, orchards, wide expanse of the Maidan, Tollygunge Golf Club, Raj Bhawan, Rabindra Sarovar and parts of East Kolkata Wetlands falling within Kolkata Municipal limits. Today, the mangrove forests seem far away. Natural trees and forests have been completely replaced by man-made orchards, and even these are being swallowed up by the concrete jungle.

The East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) was notified as Ramsar site in 2002. It is a complex of natural and human-made wetlands, covering an area of about 125 sq km. The wetlands include salt marshes, agricultural fields, sewage farms and settling ponds. The wetlands are also used to treat Kolkata's sewage, and the nutrients contained in the wastewater sustain fish farms and agriculture, while providing habitat to a variety of flora and fauna species.

Rabindra Sarovar, Subhash Sarovar and the lake of Alipore Zoo are the major wetlands along with some other smaller and larger waterbodies with adjoining areas, the bank and shallow areas along Hooghly River and major drainage canals with their wooded banks. The most important wetland mammals

are carnivores. Of special significance is the marsh mongoose. The Fishing Cat has been pushed to the brink of extinction. The jackal has fared better, being adaptable and partly commensal with man. Otters, surprisingly, survive in isolated patches despite being ruthlessly hunted for their skin.

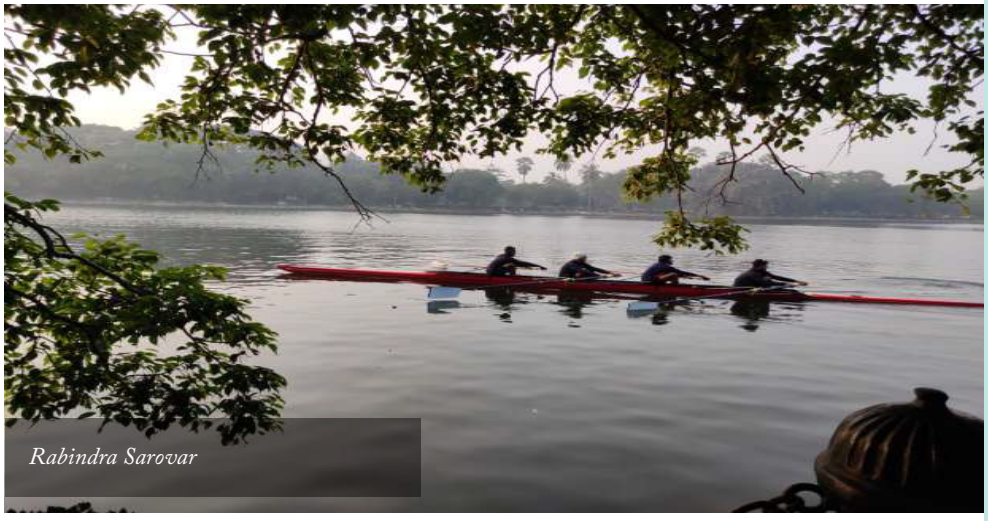
The wetlands still harbour common resident species of birds, including the Little Cormorant, Little Grave, Waterhen, Moorhen, Bronze Winged Jacana, Red Wattled Lapwing, various ducks, herons, and great cormorants, Brahminy Kites etc. More localized residents include the Purple Heron, Night Heron, Purple Moorhen, Whiskered Tern, and Weaver Bird. But these can be spectacularly outnumbered in winter by flocks of migratory birds including

Confluence of Adi Ganga and Hooghly River

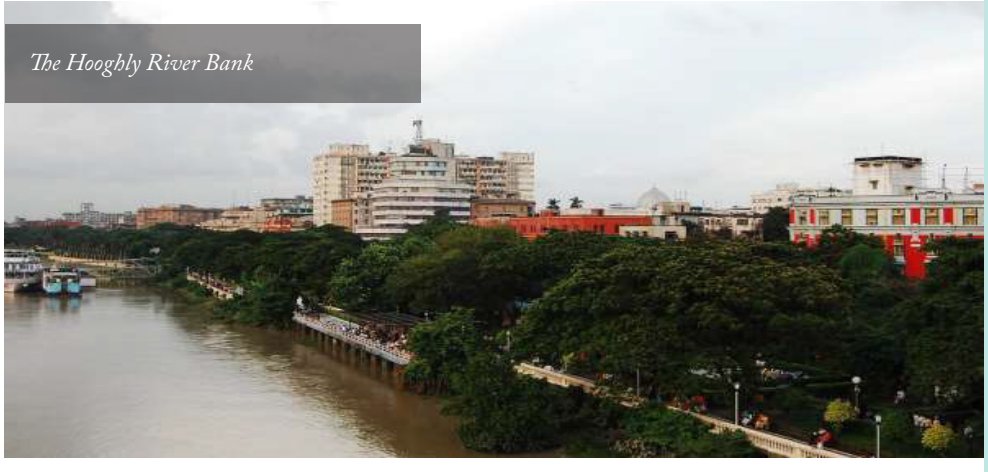
East Kolkata Wetlands, 125 sq km in Spread, are a Complex of Natural and Man Made Wetlands Forming a Highly Productive Ecosystem Providing Habitat to a Variety of Flora and Fauna

Lesser Whistling Teal, Comb Duck, Cotton Geese, Teals and others. The best known haunt of these waterfowl, the large lake inside the Alipore Zoo, attracts alarmingly few migrants today. Kolkata City is hardly a habitat for wild mammals, except for small rodents like, the Indian Mole Rat or insectivores like the House Shrew. But the adaptable jackal still survives in the bigger tracks of greenery like the Maidan, Rabindra Sarovar or Tollygunge Golf links, resting by day and emerging at night to feed on the refuse dumps. Two species of Mongoose are also common in some localities, and the common Palm Civet or Toddy Cat survives here and there among old houses and ancient trees.

The River Shark used to be found in the Hooghly waters. This powerful creature would grow up to a length of 8 ft. The last individual was found in 2016, leading to a concern that this species might have become extinct.



Rabindra Sarovar



The Hooghly River Bank

Hilsa - A Popular Catch

Traditional Fishing in Bheris at East Kolkata Wetlands

CHAPTER 49

HOWRAH

From Clay Dolls to Heavy Industry

Legend

Ganga River
Ganga Basin
Howrah
Hooghly River
State Boundary
Tributaries
District Boundary

WHERE *on the* GANGA?

Howrah district is one of the highly urbanized areas of West Bengal. Howrah is the second smallest district after Kolkata. It has rich heritage in the form of the great Bengali kingdom of Bhurshut. The district is named after its headquarters, the city of Howrah.

The Howrah district lies between 22°48' N and 22°12' N latitude and between 88°23' E and 87°50' E longitude. The district is bounded by the Hooghly River, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas districts on the east, on the north by the Hooghly district, and on the south by Purba Medinipur district. On the west Howrah district is bordered by the Ghatal sub-division of Midnapore West district, and partly by the Arambagh sub-division of Hooghly district to the north-west, and the Tamluk sub-division of Purba Medinipur district to the southwest. Boundaries of the district are naturally determined by Rupnarayan River on west and south-west, and by Bhagirathi-Hooghly River on east and southeast, whose confluence lies on the south of the district marked by Fort Mornington at Gadiara. On north side, the boundary is an artificial one except for Bally Canal on north-east and Damodar River on north-west.

River Ganga in the form of its most important distributary, Bhagirathi–Hooghly covers about 69 km stretch bordering this district. The

Howrah Station, Built in 1854, at Night

Bhot Bagan, One of the Oldest Places in Howrah

district is divided into four Blocks: Sankrail, Panchla, Bally-Jagacha, Uluberia I and II and Shyampur I.

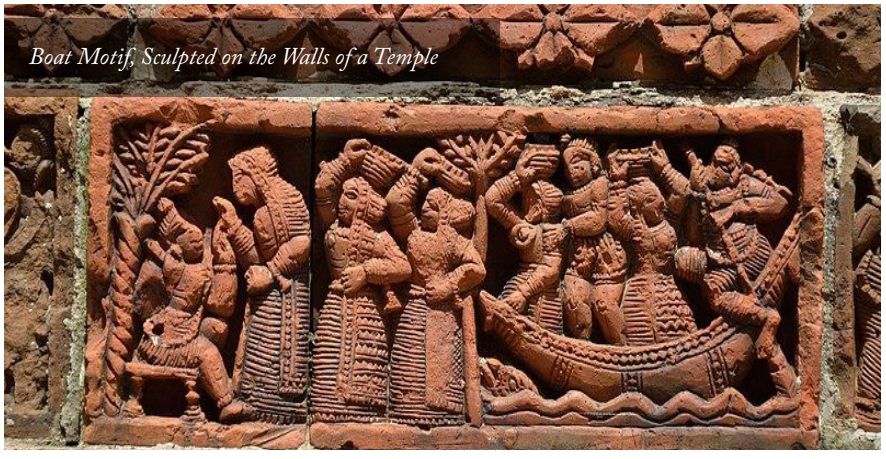
Bhagirathi-Hooghly receives the tributaries of Saraswati, Damodar and Rupnarayan in Howrah district. The dense urbanized settlement with industries has number of canals outfalling into the river. Numerous watercourses or creeks called *Khals*, which run dry or very shallow in the hot weather, are found here. The characteristic feature of this riverine landscape is the levee formations along all the rivers in between which there are extensive swamps (*jheels*) or depression (*jalas*), forming vast sheets of water during the rains.

Re-living *the* Past

The history of Howrah, prior to the advent of European merchant adventurers, is practically unknown. It may, however, be assumed that it was inhabited long before the Christian era, for adjoining it to the south lay Tamralipti (Tamluk), a famous seaport of Eastern India. It may also be inferred from the nature of the country, a low-lying fan land bounded by great waterways, that its earliest inhabitants belonged for the most part to fishing and boating tribes. Even now Kaibarttas, the great Bengali group of fishermen and boatmen, form nearly a third of the total population of the district. At the dawn of history, it probably formed part of the territory of either the Suhmas or Tamraliptas, and eventually became attached to Tamralipti, which is mentioned as a separate kingdom up to the time of Hiuen Tsang, until the close of the first half of the seventh century CE. On the decline of Tamluk, the region probably passed

Some of the major municipalities are found along Hooghly River in this district. They are Bally-Jagacha, Howrah, Sankrail, Uluberia and the adjoining populated blocks of Shyampur

The Bengali poem of Bipradasa, dated 1495 CE, describes the voyage of a merchant called Chand Saudagar from Burdwan to the sea



Boat Motif, Sculpted on the Walls of a Temple

under the rule of the more powerful Suhmas, or, as they were called later, the Radhas.

Towards the end of the 13th century, the Islamic invaders took possession of Satgaon and in all probability extended their conquest southwards as far as the mouth of the Damodar. The rule of the Muslims probably began in the time of Husain Shah (circa 1494-1520), who consolidated his power over Bengal and Bihar, and whose generals invaded Assam, Orissa and Chittagong. A generation later, the district appears to have been overrun by the Oriyas, for their last Hindu king, Makundadeva Hari Chandan, was apparently in possession of the country as far north as Tribeni, where a broad flight of steps leading down to the Ganga is said to have been constructed under his orders. His hold over the country was soon lost, for, in 1568, the army of the Bengal Sultan, Sulaiman Karrani, drove him out, and conquered the whole country as far as the Chilka Lake. During his reign, a part of Howrah district, with the adjoining areas was grouped into a new kingdom, called Sulaimanabad, after him.

After the defeat and death of Sulaiman's son in 1576 CE, Bengal formally became a part of Akbar's Empire. In 1582, Todar Mal drew up his famous rent-roll, which so far as the *subah* of Bengal was concerned, merely accepted the state of things as they existed during Afghan rule from the reign of Sher Shah to that of Sulaiman Karrani. A few local details of the district at this early period of its history may be gathered from an old Bengali poem and from the old maps of Gastaldi and De Barros. The Bengali poem of Bipradasa, dated 1495 CE, describes the voyage of a merchant called Chand Saudagar from Burdwan to the sea. Pirates infested the estuary of the Hooghly, but gradually became more daring, and sailed higher up. To check their raids, apparently about 1666, a fort on the west bank known as Tanna Fort was built. In December, 1686, the rupture with the Viceroy Shaista Khan led to the retreat of the British from Hooghly under Job Charnock, the founder of Kolkata. A settlement was reached and six years later the settlement was threatened by the rebellion of Subha Singh. The insurgents laid siege to Fort Tanna, but the British, at the request of the *Faujdar* of Hooghly, sent an armed vessel to assist the garrison, and the insurgents were compelled to retreat.

In 1741-42 CE, the Maratha cavalry under Bhaskar Pandit swept over Western Bengal, and forced Ali Vardi Khan to retire from Burdwan to Katwa. The whole tract from Akbarnagar (Rajmahal) to Midnapore and Jaleswar came under the possession of Marathas. The Marathas overran the lands on the western side of the river and are said to have seized the Tanna Fort. The war continued till 1751, and the land suffered frequently from the incursions of the Maratha Cavalry, and also from bands of dacoits.

The district was formalised in the 19th century.

Belur Ras Bari is owned by one of the richest families of Kolkata, whose show of wealth during Durgotsav was legendary

Events *of* Interest

Pir Mela

The influence of *Pirs* appears to have been fairly widespread in the district in the past. Many fairs and festivals are celebrated in different places of Howrah in the memory of the departed *Pirs*. The fair at *Astana* (House) of Pir Gayesuddin in Gayespur Village of Domjur is famous in the district. Another fair is organised at Amta Bandar in the memory of local *Pir Saheb* for a day in January. The Manik Pirer Mela takes place in January at Manikpur and Brahminpara in Jagatballavpur. Sufrisahi Mela at Sudanandabati in Panchla is held in January and February. Pir Mela at Jangalbilas in Uluberia is organised in January. The *astana* of Pir Saheb of Kalyanpur in Amta is famous in the entire neighbourhood. Another *astana* of renowned Pir of Amragori in Amta is celebrated.

Tongue Piercing During Charak Puja

Ram Puja *of* Ramrajatala

Ramrajatala is a neighbourhood in Howrah City of Howrah District in the Indian state of West Bengal. The name of the area comes from the presence of a temple dedicated to Lord Rama and three months' long worship is undertaken by the people of the locality every year at the temple. This tradition of worship of Lord Rama has been continuing for about 3 centuries.

Different Hand Pressed Putuls of Kulgachia

Charak and Gajan Festival

Throughout the agricultural communities of riverine Bengal, Charak and Gajan festivals are most popular. Charak Puja (also known as Cadak, and Nil Puja) is a folk festival in honour of Lord Shiva. The festival celebrates the union of Shiva and Parvati. This is a celebration of fertility and Howrah district like others in the region has embraced it. There are many areas where Gajan is celebrated with great fervour.

Ras Utsav of Belur Ras Bari

Belur Ras Bari is owned by one of the richest families of Kolkata, whose show of wealth during Durgotsav was legendary. The riverside property was owned by one Purna Chandra Dawn, son of the famous Shiv Krishna Dawn, after whom a road in north Kolkata is named. The property was taken in the

Howrah Bridge, Commissioned in 1944, is a Suspended Cantilever Bridge, an Engineering Marvel of Its Time

mid-19th century and soon a massive nine-pinnacle temple in typical Bengal School style was built in 1890. It is dedicated to Radharaman Jew, the family deity of the Dawns, and is still worshipped in this temple.

Besides these Festivals, several Durga Pujas from the region are legendary, that are several centuries' old. Some of them are Ramram Ghosh Bari Durga Puja, Khosmara Village, Roy Bari and Ghosal Bari Durga Puja, Patihaal of Ballavpur, 400 year old Narit Gazipur Durga Puja of Amta II Block, Abhaya Durga of Shibpur Pal Bari and Durga Puja at Belur Math.

Kali and Sitala Ma Pujas also abound in the district.

Ghetu Puja

This is another very old ritual of Howrah District. Ghetu Puja is being observed on Ghetu Sankranti in rural Bengal. It is a traditional festival of rural areas. In the morning and evening, children come to every household with lanterns, incense sticks and *Ghetu* flowers to sing the songs of Ghetu. They collect small amounts of money from the household.

Art *at the* Heart

Rani Putul

Clay Pressed Queen Dolls are the pride of this district which is primarily known as the industrial hub of Bengal. The structure of these dolls might have a resemblance with Shashti Putul or Shashti Dolls. The artisans have been able to hold on to the legacy of their forefathers and still craft these queen dolls in present times. These artisans make these structures in a two faced mould and fire them. The queen dolls are primarily made up of burnt clay. The modern day artists often apply a coat of paint or glitter to add lustre to these dolls. Some of them are also offered a coat of red paint with mica. Their legs are covered by long *ghagras* which make the appearance seem royal. Queen dolls stand out in terms of style or pattern in the wide category of Bengals's dolls.

Wheeled Dolls *of* Jagatballavpur

The wheeled dolls of Jagatballavpur are also special. Prabir Pal is a veteran potter who is involved in making these clay items.

Doll village *of* Kulgachia, Chandipur

Kulgachia is a nondescript potters' village located in the Chandipur Village near Bagnan. Named as Potuapara, almost all the family members are involved in making clay items. But most interesting amongst them are the clay dolls. Swapan Pal with his wife Alpana Pal and his sisters Chabi Pal and Arati Pal make mainly two types of dolls, *Bou Putul* (bridegroom doll) and *Tepa Putul* (pressed doll). Puspa Pal of

Women are also Involved in the Process of Tress Making

Gyan Basu, a local trader of Uluberia, developed a new business of making shuttle cocks from the feathers of ducks and the corks of the bottles

Metal Bands of Gaza

Patihal is a very famous clay artist who prepares dolls, *palki* and boats.

Tressmakers *of* Parbatipur, Domjur

Post Partition, much of the jute industry went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Facing shortage of raw material, artificial jute hair was in demand across the state during Durga Puja. Sensing a market, Ekhlakh Chacha convinced the villagers to work with him. Having no other industry, the villagers agreed, and soon *puja* organisers began to flock here to buy artificial hair. Now around 50–60 families are engaged in making artificial hair, providing employment to over 900 villagers. Before the pandemic, artificial hair was supplied for an estimated 30,000 idols during Durga Puja Festival and other festivals like Kali Puja, Jagadhatri Puja, Lakshmi Puja and Saraswati Puja.

Ornamental Wooden Dolls *of* Santragach

Samar Ghosh of Santragachi is specialised in making ornamental wooden dolls . He is making these dolls for the last forty years. Bride-Bridegroom, Brahman-Brahmani and Dhak Player are mostly prepared by him. Each doll is 4 to 7 inches in height.

Metal Band/Noa Craft

Gaza is an obscure village where Noa, a kind of bangle widely used by the women, is produced. There is substantial demand in the market since outside the borders of Bengal, many states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, U.P. and others looking for this item during their local festivals.

Shola Craft *of* Uluberia

Shola pith, also known as *Sholar Kaj* is a dried milky-white spongy plant matter derived from a tall perennial plant that can be pressed and shaped into delicate objects of art. It is harvested from waterlogged marshy areas, hence easily available for production. Households use this as a symbol of sanctity at religious events and also as decorative items. There are two types

Brishkashtyas of Amta

of *shola* - *Kath shola*, a harder version, and *Bhatua Shola*, which is soft and light. A premium quality *pith* comes in pure white colour that does not possess nodes and has soft barks while coming to the pith.

Weaving *of* Uluberia

In this part of the land, Tant (hand weaving) is a very old tradition. Though at present the tradition of hand weaving is facing serious competition from mechanised weaving industry, but still in some areas of the district like in Gaja Singti, Shibpur, Peyarapur, Rampur, Khempur, there are few houses where it continues to be practised. Once in these villages almost 3000 weaver houses were found, making *gamcha* (cotton towel),

mosquito net, and *dhoti*. In the Gaja Village, the weavers organised themselves into Gaja Weavers Samiti.

Brishakasthya

In the districts of Hooghly and 24 Parganas there is a tradition of using Brishakasthya during funerals. They are the pieces of highly decorated wood logs used for tying bulls. It is a very old practise of offering bulls during the *shraadha*. The ritual is said to be as *Brishatswargya*. All these Brishyakasthya are sculpted with tiger head or elephant head or Radha Krishna idols. Big fans made out of palm leaves are prepared to decorate these logs. In all the Brishakasthya, details of the deceased person are mentioned.

Polo Ball Making

Deulpur is the only village in Bengal where Polo Ball is made out of bamboo. In 1862, when first polo club was created at Calcutta, Deulpur became important. In the early times, wooden ball was mostly used for polo game. Bipin Bihari Bag created first polo ball out of bamboos and after so many years, these bamboo balls are used in many countries where polo is played. Bamboo tree roots are used for making the balls.

Shuttle-Cock Making

The Second World War saw the influx of British soldiers in Bengal. One of their camps was in the present Uluberia Hospital Ground. The officers used to play badminton. Gyan Basu, a local trader of Uluberia, developed a new business of making shuttle-cocks from the feathers of local ducks and cork of the bottles. At present, Uluberia shuttle cock industry is the only supplier of hand-made shuttle-cocks in all of India.

Gastronomic Delights

Pantua *of* Amta

Pantua is a traditional Bengali dessert made of deep-fried balls of semolina, *chhena*, milk, *ghee* and sugar syrup. Pantuas range in colour from pale brown to nearly black, depending on how long they are fried. Rose water, cardamom or other flavourings are sometimes added to the sweet. Pantua is very similar to the cheese-based fried sweet Ledikeni. The distinctive feature of Ledikeni is its molten sugar syrup of lightly flavoured cardamom powder. Amta's famous Pantua has gained fame in foreign lands beyond the borders of the country.

Oil Fritters

Oil fritters are a common snack. However, Kolkata and Howrah are particularly famous for a variety of fritters ranging from Brinjal to Potato, Onion, Pumpkin Flower, Duck Eggs, Fish and even Mutton.

People who Fascinate

Suniti Kumar Chatterji

Bhashacharya Acharya Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890 – 1977) was an Indian linguist, educationist and litterateur. He was a recipient of the second-highest Indian civilian honour of Padma Vibhushan. Suniti Kumar accompanied Rabindranath Tagore to Malaya, Siam, Sumatra, Java, and Bali, where he delivered lectures on Indian art and culture. He was Chairman of the West Bengal Legislative Council (1952–58) and President (1969) of the Sahitya Akademi.

Kanan Devi, as the first lady of the Bengali screen, received many honours for her contribution to Indian cinema

Mani Shankar Mukherjee

Shankar is a writer in the Bengali language and was Sheriff of Kolkata in 2019. He grew up in Howrah

District of West Bengal. Shankar is the son of Avaya Mukherjee known as Gouri Mukherjee. He has been awarded with Sahitya Akademi Award on 18th March 2021 for his outstanding metronomic creation of 'Eka Eka Ekashi'.

Purnendu Patri

He was a poet, writer, editor, artist, illustrator, and film director. He was best known for his poems and stories, particularly for his poetry collection 'Kathopokathan' in Bengali, and for his experimentation with book cover design. Patri was the director and screenwriter for the 1972 film 'Strir Patra. This was awarded the Rajat Kamal for Best Feature Film in Bengali, at the 20th National Film Awards. The film also received the Award for Best Direction at the Tashkent Film Festival. His other films include Swapnoniye, Malancha, Chhenra Tamsuk, and Chhotobakulpurerjatri. He started a research project on Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 'Bankim Jug' (The Era of Bankim); unfortunately, only the first of five volumes were published before his death.

Kanan Devi

Kanan Devi (1916 – 1992) was an Indian actress and singer. She was among the early singing stars of Indian cinema, and is credited popularly as the first star of Bengali cinema. Kanan Devi, as the first lady of the Bengali screen, received many honours for her contribution to Indian cinema including an honorary degree from Vishwabharati, the Padmashri in 1968 and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 1976.

Sachin Nag

Sachin Nag was an Indian swimmer. He competed in the mens' 100 m freestyle at the 1948 Summer Olympics. He also competed in water polo at the 1948 and 1952 Summer Olympics. He scored four goals on behalf of India. He won the first gold medal for India in the 1951 Asian Games in Delhi in the mens' 100 metre freestyle swimming.

Monuments *that* Matter

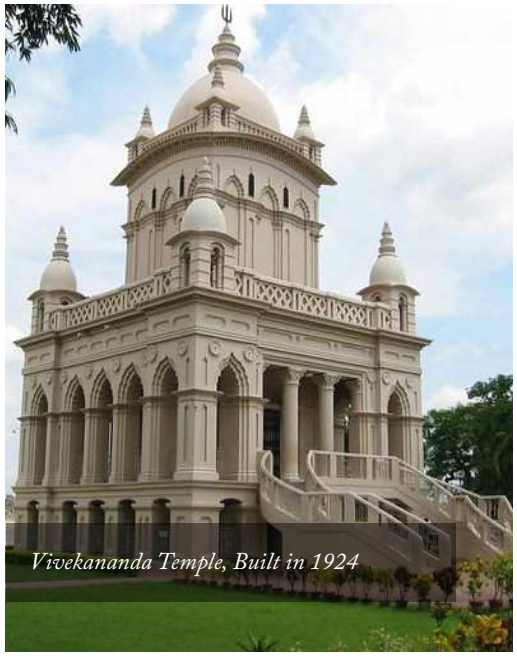
Belur Rashbhari Complex

Built in 1890 by Purnachandra Daw, the complex belongs to the well-known Daw (or Dawn) family of north Kolkata. It is popularly known as Rashbari because of the three-day *Ras* festival usually held in November. The Rashbari Complex became the most accessible hub for religious gatherings during the 19th century. The temple complex also had several *bighas* of land which is now being utilised for providing heritage homestay thereby converting Belur Rasbari into Rasbari Garden House. It is built in traditional Bengal Terracotta Temple style and colonial bungalows with neoclassical elements. Each of the temples are square and symmetrical in plan with opening on the river side (east).

Belur Math Complex

Belur Math is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and was built in 1938. This temple is the heart of the Ramakrishna Movement. It is notable for its architecture that fuses Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist art motifs as a symbol of

Ramakrishna Temple, Belur Math Complex, Built in 1890



Vivekananda Temple, Built in 1924

unity of all religions. The site is associated with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda and Sarada Devi. The site for this temple was specifically chosen by Swami Vivekananda. There is a continuous flow of spaces from *Nat Mandira* (Congregational Hall) to *Garbha Mandira* (Sanctum Sanctorum) with a circumambulatory path around the *Garbha Mandira.* The central main entrance is defined by the horse–shoe arch supported on the double pilaster at each end, which is the symbol of scriptures as used in the Sanchi Stupa Gate. It has decorative brackets, intricately carved column capitals, *jharokhas*, fluted domes, lattice work statuettes of nine planets carved by Sri Nandalal Bose. It is a composite structure in brick masonary with buff sandstone cladding, white and black marble stones for flooring.

The complex also has the Swami Vivekananda Temple built in 1924. The temple stands on the spot where Swami Vivekananda's mortal remains were cremated in 1902. Beside the temple stands a *Bel (Bilva)* tree in the place of the original *Bel* tree under which Swami Vivekananda used to sit and near which, according to his wish, his body was cremated. Swamiji's temple is a two-storeyed structure: upstairs there is a shrine with a marble image of Om in Bengali and on the ground floor is Swamiji's shrine with a marble relief of Swamiji. The building is approached by two curvilinear flight of stairs inspired from the design at the Villa d' Este in Italy, which was famous for its sweeping and curved stairs. Symbolically, the apex of Swamiji's temple is adorned with a nine foot *trishula*, a trident, which is the symbol of Lord Shiva.

Howrah Dock Ghat

Built in 1850's, the *ghat* was an important access point for the Hooghly Dock in the north and the Salt Golah in the south. It is a simple infrastructural facility that is square in plan and has a steel structure.

Howrah Bridge

Commissioned in 1943, Howrah Bridge is an engineering marvel of the British colonial period. The third-longest cantilever bridge at the time of its construction, the Howrah Bridge is currently the sixth longest bridge of its type in the world. It is a suspension type balanced cantilever bridge, with a central span 1,500 feet (460 m) between centres of main towers and a suspended span of 564 feet (172 m). It has a trussed, steel structure.

Belur Math is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and was built in 1938

Howrah Station

Built in 1854, Howrah Railway Station is the oldest and the largest railway complex in India. The station was owned by the East Indian Railway (EIR) formed in January 1854 by merging the East India Railway Company and the Great Western Bengal Railway Company (GWBRC) into one. It is made in a British colonial neo-classical style. Tunnels below the station open out on the Hooghly *ghats* enabling citizens to access the river.

Chintamoni Ghat/ Ramkrishnapur Ghat

Built in 1898, this *ghat* was established by Chintamani Dey. Swami Vivekananda worshipped Sri Ramakrishna here. Swami Vivekananda came here by boat along with

Howrah Dock Ghat

Roxburgh House at Indian Botanic Garden

his disciples in 1898 and visited the homes of Sri Nabagopal Ghosh, at Ramkrishnapur, chanting the name of Sri Ramakrishna. After *puja*, he gladly donated his *Pagri* (Turban) to the wife of Nabagopal Babu. Till now it is kept under their custody with great care.
It is built in British colonial style. It has a single-storied pavilion structure supported on cast iron columns and covered with a pitched roof. It is made of cast iron, brick, corrugated sheet and has decorative cast iron work.

Bishop's College, Shibpur

It was built between 1852 – 1890.
The site for the college campus was earlier a part of the Botanical Garden. Bishop's College was consists of halls, dormitories and a chapel constructed in the Gothic architectural style with brick and stone.

Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden Complex

It was started in 1787. The gardens were originally founded in 1786 by Colonel Kyd, containing about 12,000 living plants and over two and half million dried plant specimens in the herbarium collected from all over the world. This is the oldest of all the Botanical Gardens in India. It was from these gardens that the tea now grown in Assam and Darjeeling was first developed. Trees of the rarest kinds, from Nepal, Brazil, Penang, Java and Sumatra can be found here. There are towering Mahogany Trees, an avenue of Cuban Palms and an Orchid House. Mango and Tamarind trees shade the grassy lawns.

The gardens contain several colonial buildings, prominent of which is Roxburgh House which was built in 1794 by William Roxburgh, the first superintendent between 1793-1814. Although initially it served as Roxburgh's residence, he subsequently constructed a plant house and the library in the dilapidated house opposite it. Roxburgh was a pioneer in Botanical Studies in India and wrote 'Flora Indica', once the bible for botanists studying Indian flora. The colonnaded porch area creates a defining feature for the building, the openings are spanned by segmental arches. It is adorned with circular stairwells on corners, circular columns with Corinthian style capitals, venetian style louvered windows.

The garden also has a great Banyan Tree. The Great Banyan Tree is believed to be at least 250 years old, and has been referenced in many travel books, going back to at least the nineteenth century. Early travel writers found it to be noteworthy due to its large size and its unusually high number of prop-roots. It has survived two great cyclones in 1864 and 1867, when some of its main branches were broken. With its large number of aerial roots, which grow from the branches and run vertically to the ground, it is

said to appear more like a dense forest than as an individual tree. The area occupied by the tree is about 18,918 square metres (about 1.89 hectares or 4.67 acres). The present crown of the tree has a circumference of 486 m and the highest branch rises to 24.5 m; it has at present 3772 aerial roots reaching down to the ground as a prop root.

Fort Mornington Point, Shyampur

It is located on the confluence of rivers Damodar, Rupnarayan and Hooghly. It is a point in the extreme south of the district at the junction of the Rupnarayan with the Hooghly. On this point there formerly stood a fort, said to have been built by Lord Clive, which sank into the river owing to the erosion of the bank. Located as it was, at the confluence of three rivers, Fort Mornington Point was probably built to control river traffic, possibly to threaten Dutch and French interests in the area. On October 16th, 1942, a massive cyclone struck Bengal, and the resultant flooding caused heavy damage to the fort.

Nature's Abundance

Being a riverine tract, the area has been formed by the deposition of sediments brought down by the Ganga and the east flowing rivers like Rupnarayan and Mundeswari. Since centuries, the whole of Howrah has been part of the rice swamp of Central Bengal. There is very little that could possibly be termed genuine forest in the whole of this area.

The species of trees, which are dominant in the Hooghly and Rupnarayan Doab area vary to a considerable extent. The upper parts of the river channels of this tract or the levees abound in Palm (*Palm hucifer*), Coconut (*Cocos hucifer)*, Bamboo (*Bambusa arundinaceae*), Babul (*Acacia arabica*) and Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*). The levees meet together near the confluence of the Rupnarayan and Hooghly Rivers.

Fish

A total of 48 species of fishes belonging to 15 families have been recorded. Of these, only two species of estuarine fishes Apocryptes bato and Ophiocara porocepha have been encountered in floodplain wetlands of Khanakul under Hooghly district. Almost all the major carps and a number of exotic species are grown in ponds in various combinations. This process of composite fish farming usually yields relatively higher production even though very little attention is paid to supplementary feeding and management of most of these ponds. As the yield of water is much more than that of the same acreage of land, the enterprising youngsters and local bodies are taking much interest in pisciculture practices in these two districts.

Garchumuk Deer Park

Garchumuk is located in the District of Howrah at the confluence of River Hooghly and River Damodar, enhancing the scenic beauty of the location. The spot, offering the spectacular view of the Ganga is gradually emerging as a popular tourist destination ideal for a weekend tour. A man made forest was created within the said area earlier by Howrah Forestry Division under Social Forestry Scheme of Forest Directorate. Considering its scenic beauty as well as suitability for wild animals, a Deer Park was established, which is the main attraction for tourists and the local people.

Dankuni Wetlands

Dankuni Wetlands are dotted with ponds interspersed with stretches of reed beds or hogla vegetation. The wetlands are rich in biodiversity. They are home to winter migrants like the Bluethroat, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Siberian Ruby Throat, Yellow Breasted Bunting (whose sighting is very rare) and even the IUCN-Red-Listed vulnerable Ferruginous Pochard. Residential species like Avadavats, Jacanas, Moorhens, Herons and Munias nest here. High avian concentration has made these wetlands a popular destination for birders of Kolkata. A total of 54 species of birds, either as wetland dependants or as wetland associates, including both resident and migratory species, belonging to 14 families have been recorded in these two districts.

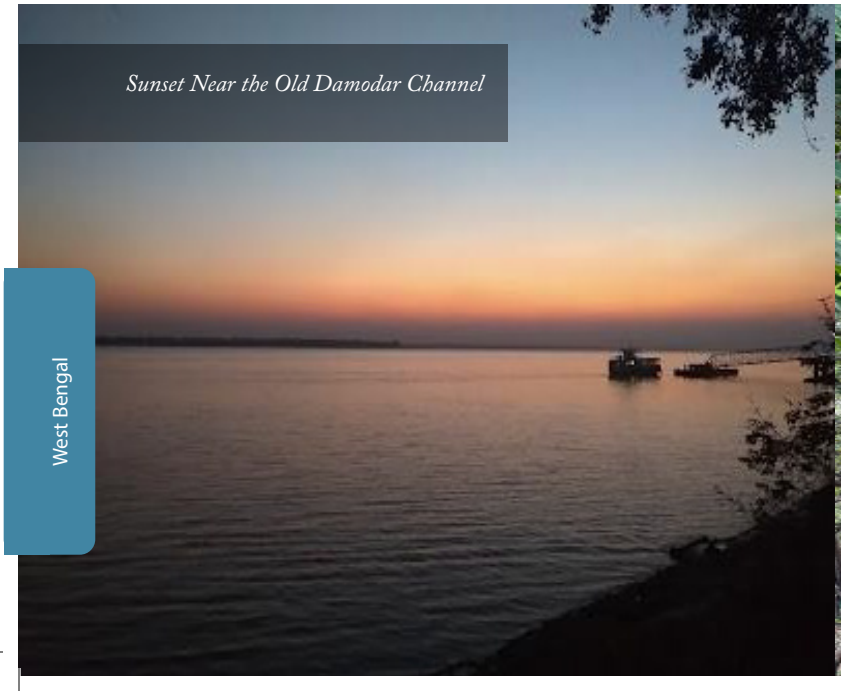
Fishing Cats *of* Amta Wetlands

The fishing cat or the state animal of West Bengal is a greyish coloured cat

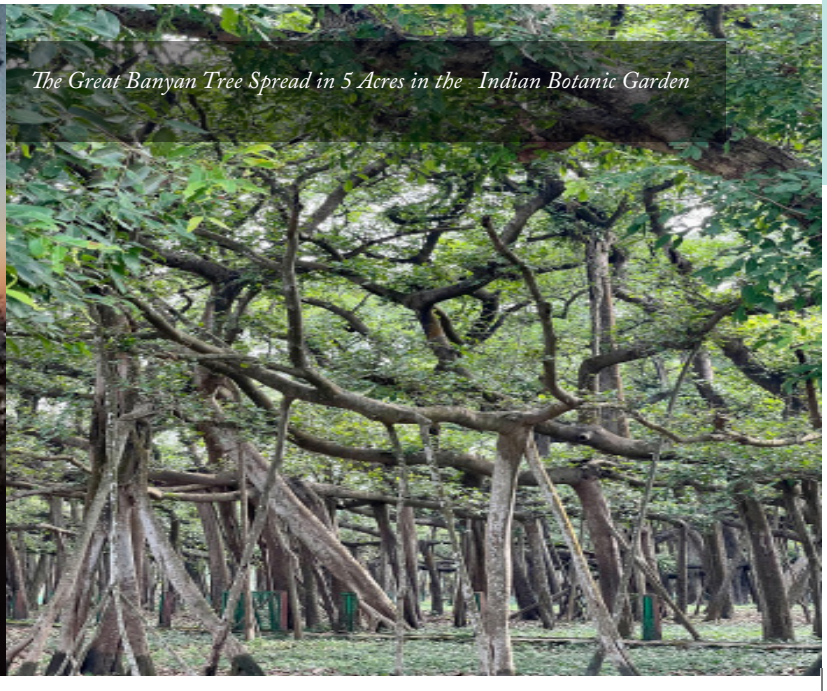
covered with black spots. Black lines run from the top of its forehead and run to the back of its neck and break into dotted lines on the back of its body. The tail is short and is dotted with spots that look like rings from a distance. It has small ears and the back of the ears are totally black with a white spot. The cat has very coarse hair, unlike our domestic cats whose hair feels soft to the touch. The thicker bristles most likely can shake water off faster and keep the cat dry. The male fishing cat has a larger body size than the female cat. The cat has short legs and looks thick like a barrel. Its toes are connected with small webbing that allows it to swim well and also grip slippery fish.

Spotted Deer at Garchumuk Deer Park

A Sacred Banyan Tree at Ramkrishnapur Ghat



Sunset Near the Old Damodar Channel



The Great Banyan Tree Spread in 5 Acres in the Indian Botanic Garden

South 24 Parganas

Of Tigers, Bon Bibi & a Chinese Temple

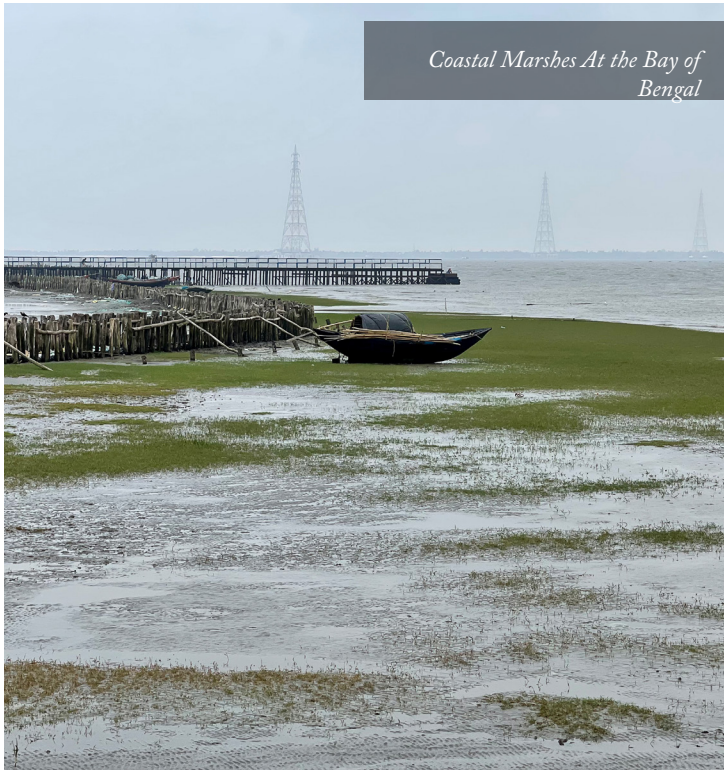
Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
South 24 Parganas

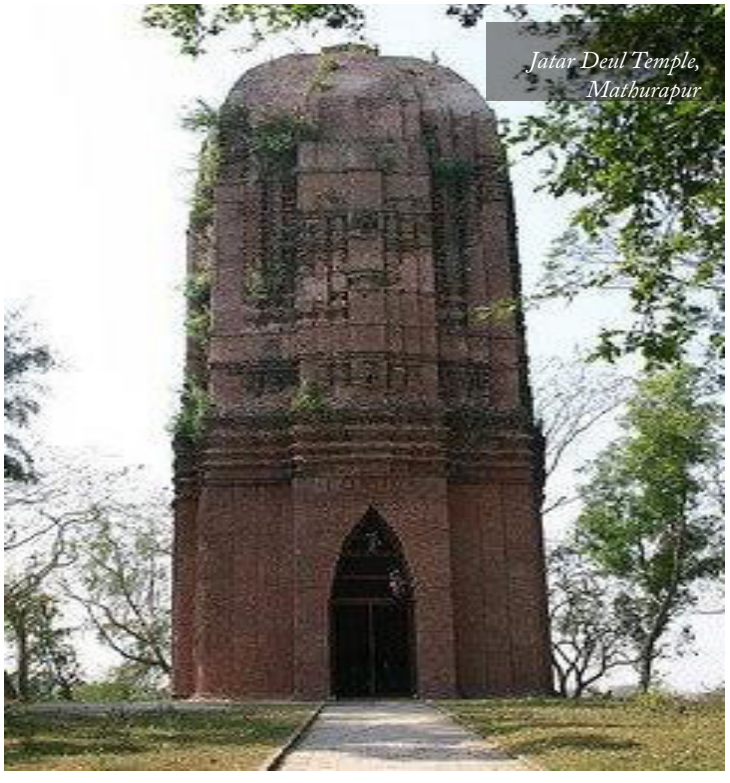
Where *on the* Ganga?

South 24 Parganas, spread over an area of 9,960 km^2 is bounded to its due south by the Bay of Bengal, by Bangladesh across the Raimangal and Kalindi Rivers to its east, by Kolkata and North 24 Parganas Districts to its north-west and north-east respectively and by the districts of Howrah and East Medinipur across the Bhagirathi River to its west. Spreading over an area of 8165 sq km with a population of 81.5 lakhs in 2011, the district of South 24 Parganas covers almost 9 per cent of the total landmass of the state of West Bengal. The present district of South 24 Parganas came into existence on 1st of March, 1986. It then comprised of two sub divisions - Alipore and Diamond Harbour and of 30 blocks. Presently there are five sub divisions including Alipore, Baruipur, Canning, Diamond Harbour and Kakdwip, and 29 blocks and 7 Municipalities.

South 24-Parganas District, mostly belongs to the active deltaic part of the vast Ganga Delta formed mainly of enormous thickness of sediments deposited by the two river systems, the Ganga, and the Brahmaputra. This lower Ganga Basin is underlaid by a thick layer of unconsolidated sediments mainly of the Quaternary age. It exhibits the process of land making in an unfinished state, and presents the last stage in the flow of the great river – River Ganga, the stage when it emerges through a



Coastal Marshes At the Bay of Bengal



Jatar Deul Temple, Mathurapur

region of half land, half water, almost imperceptibly, into the sea. It has been described as a sort of submerged land, broken up by swamps, intersected by a thousand river channels and maritime backwaters, but gradually dotted with clearings and patches of rice land. The continued deposition of silt, producing fertile alluvial soil, has made this region one of the most fertile and thickly populated regions in the world. Most inhabitants depend on agriculture. The region is rich in biodiversity, particularly in aquatic biodiversity and mangroves found in the swampy forests of the Sundarbans. This particular unique biodiversity has been declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Re-living *the* Past

The outline of the history of the 24 Parganas in West Bengal remains, to a large extent, shrouded in mystery. At the beginning of the 20th century, the popular belief was that before the British colonial powers cleared the forest and created a settlement here for a group of Adivasis who were brought from the mainland, the area was uninhabited.

During the rule of the Pala Dynasty 1000 years earlier, the Sunderbans had developed into an advanced civilisation. The 100' high Deul Temple in the middle of the forest in Jata Village and other artefacts discovered there are proof of this. At

The outline of the history of the 24 Parganas in West Bengal remains, to a large extent, shrouded in mystery

some time during the subsequent rule of the Senas, this civilisation was destroyed due to a natural calamity and soon the area was covered with trees and forests.

Towards the end of the 1950s, four implements belonging to the stone age were recovered from the dry bed of the Adi Ganga at Hariharpur, near Baruipur; this is the only such extant evidence of dwellers from the Stone Age in this region. Later, a few miles north of Diamond Harbour, in Deulpotay, situated on the banks of the river Hooghly, tools from the late Stone Age were found. It may thus be inferred that early man belonging to the Stone Age had settled here on the banks of the river. Though in modern times the waters of the Ganga and Bhagirathi flow through this region, earlier the river Saraswati flowed along its banks. At the beginning of this civilisation Jainism and Buddhism were the predominant religions; later Tantric Buddhism, the Nath Sect, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity made inroads in this region. Thus, we find in the Sunderbans an amazing confluence of divergent cultures, giving rise to a rich folk heritage which is peculiar to the region. Similarly we find an influx of various cultures and traditions, starting from the Stone Age, in towns along the river Hooghly.

Greek writers, from the first century B.C. onward, mentioned the people of this region, often referred to as the Gangaridae, Gangaridai, and Gangaridi. According to Ptolemy, the famous second century geographer, the country near the mouth of the Ganges was occupied by the Gangaridi. He also mentioned that they were different from the people of the territory of Tamralipta, called Tamalites. This city was situated on the confluence of the Ganga with the sea. Through this port, according to 'The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea', a travelogue written by an anonymous Greek sailor of the first century, record that a considerable amount of trade used to be carried out in betel, spikenard, pearl and muslin. In this profitable foreign trade, gold coins were used as the medium of exchange. The city might have been located in the present Sagar Island, or at Chandraketugarh of Deganga (Deganga means *dwi* or *dwitya* Ganga, second mouth of Ganga) which presently is

Crossing the River under a Rainbow

Dhani Grass Stabilizes Mud Flat at Sagar Island

The Bawali Temple Complex

in the district of North 24 Parganas. Another possible place is Atghara near Baruipur, situated on the east bank of the old course of the Bhagirathi, called Adiganga.

From the ancient times till the sixteenth century at least, there were many *janapadas* which emerged on the banks of old Bhagirathi channel. Kalighat, Boral, Rajpur, Mahinagar, Baruipur, Bahadu, Joynagar, Majilpur, Chatrabhog were some among them. Bipradasa Pipalai's 'Manasavijaya', composed in A.D. 1495, provides us with a list of names of some important settlements of this region. Chandsadagar, a merchant character of Manasavijaya, reached Baruipur, from Kalighat, through the old Bhagirathi channel. From there he proceeded towards Chatrabhog, and then traveling through Hatigarh Pargana reached the open sea. Chaitanyadeva (1486-1534), according to his contemporary biographies, also went through this route. In his journey towards Puri, through the Bhagirathi Channel, he halted at the village of Atisara, near Baruipur. His last stoppage in 24 Parganas was at Chatrabhog, now a village within the jurisdiction of Mathurapur Police Station. Chatrabhog seems to have been an important river-port on the old Bhagirathi Channel. The *zamindar* of Chatrabhog helped Chaitanyadeva in his onward journey to Orissa. Chaitanya's journey along the east bank of Bhagirathi, and this kind of association with the influential landlords, boosted the spread of Gaudiya Vaishnava Bhakti Movement, at least on the riparian tracts of the 24 Parganas District.

A retrogressive process might have been started from the middle of the sixteenth century onward. These hitherto burgeoning centres of northern Sundarban areas and the Bhagirathi-Hooghly received setbacks. There were two reasons. The first was the rampant activities of the Portuguese freebooters and others. The second was geographic, the eastward trend of the Ganges dramatically intensified after the late sixteenth century, and hence it gradually abandoned the old Bhagirathi channel, presently known as Adiganga. So long as the river flowed smoothly, the life of the surrounding areas also flowed. When the river became moribund, the thriving centres of life were affected by the diseases associated with the stagnant water.

In 1538, the Portuguese had obtained from Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud, the permission to build a settlement in Santgaon on the confluence of the river Saraswati and Bhagirathi-Hooghly. From this time onwards, the Portuguese slowly but steadily became masters of the waters of these riparian tracts. They had a secondary naval station at Tardaha on the confluence of Bidyadhari in South 24-Parganas. In this period Bengal's political geography was dominated by

Chaitanya's journey along the east bank of Bhagirathi, and this kind of association with the influential landlords boosted the spread of Gaudiya Vaishnava Bhakti Movement

the so-called B*aaro Bhuniyas* (twelve landed chiefs). The Portuguese free-booters became the allies of these independent Bhuniyas against the Mughals and in return got freedom of action in this lower part of Bengal. They went on with their business of piracy with impunity. For nearly a century or so this region remained under the effective control of the Portuguese pirates and free-booters. As a consequence, the hitherto populated centres of this region of Bengal got depopulated and jungles of the Sundarbans extended.

The present district of South 24-Parganas was within the kingdom of Pratapaditya (1590-1612), one of the most powerful Bhuniyas of Bengal. In 1612, he was defeated by the Mughal army. The Mughals established a *faujdari* at Jessore and the present district of South 24-Parganas came under this jurisdiction. Now, the Mughal *Subedars* of Bengal turned their attention towards the problems created by the Portuguese. The Mughals ransacked Hooghly in 1632.

The arms of the Mughal Emperor or of the Nawab of Bengal did not effectively reach these areas. Besides the Portuguese, there were Magh or Arakanese pirates operating in the same areas. They would come all of a sudden and swoop down on a river side mart on a market day and looted the merchandise brought for sale. This lawlessness, uncertainties and insecurities became the part of everyday life of the people living in this area throughout the seventeenth and for the better part of the eighteenth centuries. Then the English appeared. The 24-Parganas were one of the earliest places of their colonial subjugation. The treaty of 1757 between Mir Jafar and the East India Company ceded to the Company the *Zamindari* rights of 24 Parganas. The British colonial rule continued uninterrupted till India's independence in 1947. The district of South 24 Parganas came into existence on March 1, 1986. Prior to that date, it was a part of undivided 24 Parganas.

The Idols of Kapil Muni along with Ganga and Raja Sagar

Focused on Maa Ganga, there are many pujas performed in Gangasagar of Sagar Island

The Idols of Bon Bibi and Dakhin Rai, the Guardian Deities of the Sunderbans

Mythological Links

Sab tirath baar, baar, Gangasagar ek baar…

The second most popular mela after Kumbh Mela is the Ganga Sagar Mela. It is India's biggest fair held in Sagardwip, West Bengal, and witnesses a large number of pilgrims pouring in. Celebrated with great vigour and enthusiasm, the festival has a cultural and spiritual significance where pilgrims take a dip in the holy waters of Ganga to purify their souls. Held during the winters, the Mela is an annual gathering of pilgrims which sees a number of rituals, lit lamps and chanting in and around Sagardwip, the confluence of River Ganga with Bay of Bengal.

Kapil Muni was the son of Kardam Muni and Devahooti. When, having fathered nine daughters, Kardam Muni was preparing to leave for the forest to practice austerities, Brahma admonished him, asked him to stay, prophesying that he would soon have a son, who would have attributes of Lord Vishnu. Then Kardam Muni had a son, he was named Kapil. After the birth of Kapil, Kardam Muni went to the forest for austerities. Kapil Muni stayed with his mother, attained divine powers and preached Sankhya Yog to her. Devahooti attained *Moksha* thereafter.

Once Kapil Muni was meditating in his hermitage, when the 60,000 sons of King Sagar came there in search of their father's sacrificial horse. They found it tied to a tree nearby, so they assumed that Kapil Muni had stolen it. They began to accuse him. Kapil Muni's meditation was disturbed, and the moment he opened his eyes and looked at them, they were all burnt to ashes. Actually, Indra had stolen King Sagar's horses and hid it in Kapil Muni's *ashram*. Then King Sagar sent his grandson Anshuman to search for his 60,000 sons and the sacrificial horse. He followed the footsteps of his uncle and appeared at Kapil Muni's Ashram. He saw a heap of ashes near the hermitage and understood the course of events. He greeted him, and asked how his uncles could gain salvation. Kapil Muni proposed to him to bring the Ganga to earth and organize the cremation rituals, so that his divine water could release them of all sins. Anshuman tried but could not succeed.

Bonbibi & Dakkhin Rai

Humans and ferocious animals have lived together in the Sundarbans for centuries. Their faith unites the villagers of Sundarbans against all these dangers.

This faith is reposed in a goddess, Bonbibi. When animals attack, they do not differentiate between Hindus and Muslims. That is why people of both the communities worship Bonbibi here. She is called the patron goddess of the Sundarbans. She teaches them not to exploit the forest beyond need.

It is believed that Bonbibi was born in a Muslim family. When she went to Mecca for *Haj*, she obtained divine power. At that time, the deep

dark jungle, known for its dangerous man-eating tigers, was ruled by a tyrant named Dakshin Rai (the Lord of South). He was the one responsible for human sacrifices to tigers. Bonbibi defeated Dakshin Rai. Then he begged for forgiveness and promised that he would prevent tigers from attacking humans. Since then, Bonbibi became the ruler of Sundarbans. Dakshin Rai is believed to have fled into the jungles. He now takes the form of a tiger and attacks people. Dakshin Rai, known as the supreme lord of tigers, is widely worshipped throughout the whole of the Sundarbans in both parts of Bengal even today. He is usually seated upon a tiger and is often accompanied by his brother or companion Kalu Rai. Dakshin Rai is worshipped not only as the god of tigers but also as a divine curer. In the Sundarbans, where death can come quickly, its inhabitants have worshipped Bonbibi and Dakshin Rai for centuries to seek protection from the dangers of the forests.

The name Bonbibi literally means lady of the forest. Since the appellation *bibi* is used by Muslim women as an all-purpose surname, that makes it a unique name for a Bengali goddess. Daughter of a sufi *fakir,* Bonbibi is the great adversary of Dakkhin Rai. Rai is a *zamindar* who takes the form of a tiger to prey on the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. Allah chooses Bonbibi to end Dakkhin Rai's tyranny – a task accomplished after a trip to Mecca and Medina. The Bibi, however, decides not to kill Rai and instead makes him promise that he will not harm anyone who worships her. In Bokkhali, and even in Gangasagar, Bono Bibi is translating into Bono Devi.

The Idol of Maa Ganga at the Beach

Events *of* Interest

Ganga Puja

Focused on Maa Ganga, there are many *pujas* performed in Gangasagar of Sagar Island. Dashahara Ganga Puja, which is also known as Ganga Dussehra, Gangavataran or Jeth Ka Dussehra in other parts of India is celebrated. It is believed that Mother Ganga descended on the earth on this day, to rid the souls of King Bhagirath's forefathers of a curse. According to the Hindu solar-lunar calendar this falls on the tenth day of the *Shukla Paksha* (waxing Moon) of the *Jyestha* month is fixed for this holy day. From the month of *Jyestha* (May-June), the heat of summer reaches the upper Himalayas and ice and snows start melting opening up the mountains to pilgrims.

This festival is different from Ganga Jayanti which is celebrated to mark her rebirth. Ganga Dussehra is celebrated over ten days, the last day being most important. In the evening, lamps or *diyas* are released into the river and offer a wonderful sight. Incidentally, many Bengalis make it a point to bathe in the Ganga on this day. What most Hindus do not know is that in the ancient post-Christian era, there were intense rivalries among the cults—between Shaivas, Vaishnavas, Shaktas. The Bhagavata Purana states that Vishnu's Vamana *avatar* pressed the nail of his big toe to make a hole from which sprung the divine Brahma-water, the Causal Ocean, which then flowed to the Universe as the River Ganga. Ganga is also thus known as *Vishnupadi*, and thus the monopoly of Shiva is contested.

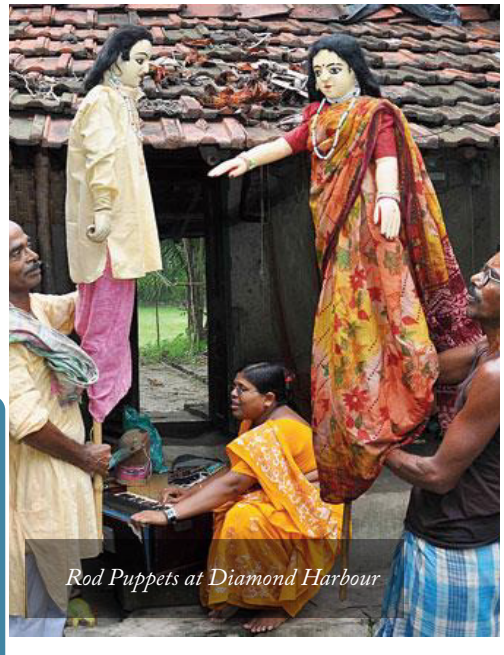
Both Hindus and Muslims believe that Bonbibi was sent from heaven to the earth for their protection

The most popular legend is that Shiva ultimately brought the mighty waters to the earth through his locks of hair.

Ganga Jayanti

The festival falls in the month of *Vaisakh* and is celebrated on *Saptami Tithi*. Ganga Saptami is also observed as Ganga Jayanti or Ganga Puja. This is considered as one of the important festivals in the Hindu calendar. According to belief, devotees chant the Ganga Saptami Mantra while taking a holy dip in the river.

Om Namo Gangayai Vishwarupini Narayani Namo Namah.
Gange ch Yamune chav Godavari Saraswati.
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri Jale Asmin Sannidhim Kuru.
Ganga Vari Manohari Murariacharanchayut.
Tripurarishiraschari Papahari Punatu Ma...
Ganga Gangeti Yo Bruyat, Yozhanam Shatarapi. Muchyte sarvapapebhyo, Vishnuloke se gachti.



Rod Puppets at Diamond Harbour

Makar Sankranti & Gangasagar Mela

Gangasagar Fair is the second biggest congregation of pilgrims after the Kumbha Mela. The Gangasagar Mela is observed annually and only on Sagardwip (Sagar Island). Every year during Makar Sankranti, pilgrims from all over the country come to take a holy dip at the confluence of the river Ganga and Bay of Bengal, followed by offering prayers at the Kapil Muni Temple. This temple is associated with legendary tales and is highly revered among devotees.

Handcrafted Straw Hats are Quite Popular

ART *at the* HEART

Jadunath Haldar Putul Natch Opera

The antiquity of Indian puppetry is an established fact and it has been long been one of the primary forms of traditional entertainment. Folk puppetry in West Bengal is called *Putul Naach*. *Putul* is a word that describes both a doll and a puppet in Bengal while *naach* means dance. There are references to puppetry in the medieval folk ballads of undivided Bengal. Traditional forms of puppetry found in West Bengal are Rod (*Dang*), Glove (*Beni or Bene*) and string (*Taar or Suto*). Both Rod and Glove Puppets are indigenous to Bengal. In fact, South 24 Parganas is the original home of the Rod Puppets. In Khagrakona Village of Khordo Panchayat of Diamond Harbour II Block, we find the Jadunath Haldar Putul Natch Opera. It is the oldest active rod puppet group in West Bengal and performs stories from the epics and Puranas,

An Ingenious Method of Boat Making Through Thermocol Waste

Panchatantra animal stories, and works on social issues. This group has performed at Festival of India, USSR, and national festivals in India.

Bamboo Flower Making

According to Gautam Barik of Paschim Para, Ashurali Village, their family is creating Bamboo Flowers for over fourteen generations. They generally prepare Baskets (*Jhuri*) , Flower Basket, *Kulo* (A flat plate with a flat roof of a Kulo or *Koola*, which is open to a side), fan etc. The raw materials for the baskets come from East and West Medinipur, Howrah etc. The finished products are sold in the tourist spots of Digha, Contai and also in the markets of Moyna , Kanthi, Tamluk of East Midnapur. All the family members are associated in making of Bamboo crafts.

Palm/Palmyra Leaf Fans/ Hats and Sun Flowers

Parulia Gram Panchayat, Chandnagar Village. Almost 50 families of this village are engaged in this type of craft. Parulia and Abdalpur Village produce this craft.

Jari Work

Women are engaged in doing this Chumki-Jari embroidery work from Mathpara, Nungi, Thakurpukur Maheshtala Block. Due to its location near Kolkata, these women get orders from the boutique owners of major markets.

Date Palm Leaf Patti making, Namkhana Block

Women are mostly involved in making Patti Making. There are few households in Nadabhanga Village of Namkhana Block where these pattis or mats are made.

Gastronomic Delights

Petai Parota

(Crispy Indian smashed Flat Bread & Ghugni/Chickpeas)

A very common food item of South 24 Parganas is the Petai Parota and Ghugni. In almost every small eating joint, sweet shops one can find this combination of food. Petai Parota has unique style of preparing. It is beaten or mashed (Petai) and served as per its weight. Other than this *paratha*, people generally do not prefer to have *Rotis* or chappatis in their meal. In both lunch and dinner rice is favoured.

Chinese Community Temple : The Idols of Dharti Mata and Dharti Pita

Monitor Lizard in the Delta

House of Renowned Scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose (1858 - 1937)

Fried Fish *of* Bakkhali & Moushuni Islands

All along the beach areas of Bakkhali, Frasergunj, Henry Island and Moushuni Island, there is a practice of selling fried fish to the tourists. Fresh fish like Pomfrets, Catfish, *Bhetki* and even Crabs and Tiger prawns are displayed in trays near the tourist belts. They are marinated with dry *masala* and deep fried before serving.

Dried Fish *or* Shutki

Shutki - a Bengali word that connotes dried-up or anorexic - stands for dried fish or shrimp, and it is inextricably associated with the overpowering smell that emanates when being cooked. Dried fish has a strong flavour and an overpowering smell, which makes it an acquired taste. While smaller fish such as prawn/shrimp and anchovy are sun dried, the process is different for fleshier fish such as king fish. Traditionally, cleaned fish would be rubbed with salt, packed in palm leaf baskets and hung to dehydrate; now machines do this job. Dried Fish or *Shutki* is also consumed in Sagar Block, Namkhana and Kakdwip. There are varieties of Shutki preparation like Loitta Shutki with dried Bombay Duck and Bottle Gourd or Shutki Chingri/Shrimp Bhorta with mashed vegetables like Eggplant, Potatoes, Pumpkins, Okra or *Shutki Paturi* or *Shutki Maach* Bata (Chutney).

Joynagarer Moya

Joynagar and Bohoru of South 24 Parganas is the birth place of one of the most famous sweetmeat of Bengal, that is Moya. The entire Bengal market gets flooded with this special winter delicacy. Joynagarer Moa was given a GI tag in 2015. Jaynagarer Moa is made with *Nolen Gur* (jaggery made from date palm tree extract with exquisite taste and aroma), *Kanakchur khoi* (a form of

Collection of Sap From Date Tree to make Nolen Gur

popped rice made from a special variety of aromatic rice), *Gawa Ghee* (a type of clarified butter made from cow's milk), *Elaichi* (cardamom), and *Posto* (poppy seed). Both *Nolen Gur* and Kanakchur rice are winter products (available around November to January) and hence Jaynagarer Moa is available during this period only.

Rice Beer *or* Handia

Handia is a traditional drink, contains 9-10% alcohol. Indigenous people regard it as both a food and an intoxicant. It is made from boiling parboiled rice and yeast (*bakhar*), derived from ground roots gathered in the forest. Fermentation takes 2½ -3 days; the filtered drink resembles weak cream-coloured buttermilk.

People who Fascinate

Tong Achew *&* *the* Chinese Gods Khuda, Khudi

In the late 18th century a Chinese tea trader by the name of Tong Achew landed on the banks of Hooghly, somewhere near present day Budge-Budge. The then Governor General, Warren Hastings, granted land to Achew to set up a sugar-cane plantation and sugar factory. According to records of British East India Company, Achew was granted 650 *bighas* of land about 6 miles south of Budge-Budge for an annual rent of Rs 45. It is said that when Tong Achew came here, he brought two idols with him. These idols are still worshipped in the Chinese Temple near Chinaman Tala of Budge Budge. The temple houses the male and female deity of *Khuda* and *Khudi*. Although distinctively Chinese in appearance their head gear are predominantly Islamic. The Chinese however refer to these as Tudigong/Thu Tai Kung (*Khuda as Dharti Pita*) and Tudiphow/Thu Tai Phow (*Khudi as Dharti Mata*). Tudigong is revered as the Lord of the Soil and the Ground, while Tudiphow is his consort. In the main temple compound, one can also find a large table which during Chinese New Year festivities is filled with offerings like whole roasted pigs, fruits, alcohol, etc. Families coming from Kolkata bring them as offerings.

All year Achipur remains a quiet, sleepy village, transforming into a fairground in the weeks following the Chinese New Year. This is when thousands of Chinese descend on the village, to pay their respects to Tai Pak Kung, as Achew is known to the Chinese community, which roughly translates to the biggest grandfather or godfather. Many Chinese who have migrated out of Kolkata, visit the city from as far away as Canada and the United States for this annual pilgrimage. At Achew's Tomb, symbolic paper money is burned and incense sticks are offered. At the temple, incense sticks burn continuously, filling the sanctum sanctorum with white smoke. In front of the sanctum, offerings of food and wine are made. These often include roasted suckling pigs as well as whole fish and chicken along with Chinese wine.

Swami Ishtananda, Rakhal Maharaj

Swami Ishtananda was a monk with Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He was born in the village of Bilaspur, near Contai or Kanthi town, in the district of East Medinipur. His parents named him Rakhal. In his college days he joined the freedom movement and even participated in the Non-Cooperation movement, called by Gandhiji. As a young monk, Swami Ishtananda, was sent to Sagar Dweep, to look after the activities of the Ramakrishna Ashram and also to look for land to expand the Ashram and its activities. When he came to Sagar, few people lived there. Life

was very difficult. The backwaters were infested with crocodiles and attacks from Royal Bengal tigers were frequent. These difficulties did not deter Swami Ishtananda. Soon he became popular amongst the few local people who resided in Sagar. They called the monk Rakhal Maharaj. He befriended the people of Manasadeep and started a small school which was the first school in Sagardweep.

Andrew Frazer & Frazerganj

On the Western edge of Sundarban lies the three Beach Resort of Frazerganj, Bakkhali and Henry's Island. The history of Frazerganj dates back a century ago when Andrew Frazer the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (1903 - 1908) fell in love with a small stretch of beach at the Western edge of Sundarban, at the village of Narayanitala. He built a bungalow, complete with coconut grove, which became a talking point of English men in Calcutta.

Tilman Henckell

Collector of Jessor, Tilman Henckell was the pioneer of reclamation in the Sunderbans during his tenure of 1781–1790. He played an active role in clearing the dense jungle of mangroves and made utmost efforts for the welfare of the Molungees who were responsible for salt preparation.

William Dampier, Alexander Hodges

William Dampier was Commissioner and Alexander Hodges was the Surveyor of the Sundarbans Commission. During the early months of 1829, Dampier defined and Hodges surveyed the boundary of the Sundarban Forest. Dampier-Hodges line is an imaginary line drawn in 1829-1830 to mark the northern boundary of Sundarban Delta. It passes through 24 Parganas South and North Districts of West Bengal.

Tomas Bata

Batanagar is situated in the neighbour-

Henry's Island Beach, Sunderbans

Komagata Maru Shaheed Gunj Commemmorates the Deadly Incident of 1914

The Bawali Rajbadi

hood of Maheshtala of the South 24 Parganas. Batanagar was established to start the first shoe factory in India by Czechoslovak industrialist Tomas Bata. The Bata brand was established on 24th August 1894 in Zlin, then in Austria-Hungary (now in Czech Republic). The company first established itself in India in 1931 by renting a building to start an experimental shoe production plant in Konnagar with 75 Czechoslovak experts. Gradually, this space became a sprawling footwear industrial hub.

It is said that when Tong Achew came here, he brought two idols with him. These idols are still worshipped in the Chinese Temple near Chinaman Tala of Budge Budge

Monuments *that* Matter

Budge Budge Ferry Ghat

Swami Vivekananda landed at Budge Budge Ferry Ghat in 1897 when he returned from his Chicago visit. The anniversary is still celebrated on 19th February with great zeal. The old railway station from where he boarded the train to Calcutta is decorated with flowers on this day. The waiting room where he rested for a while is preserved.

Budge Budge was also the site where the ship Komagata Maru was allowed to land following its return

Temple of the Chinese Community at Achipur

Banki, a Traditional Method of Fish Net Making using Bamboo Framework

from Vancouver. The ship was chartered by a group of Sikhs to challenge the exclusion laws enacted by Canada to restrict Indian immigration. Upon entry into the harbour, the ship was stopped by a British gunboat, and the passengers were placed under guard. The government of the British Raj saw the men on the Komagata Maru not only as self-confessed lawbreakers, but also as dangerous political agitators. When the ship docked at Budge Budge, the police went to arrest Baba Gurdit Singh and others. He resisted arrest, a friend of his assaulted a policeman and a general riot ensued. Shots were fired and nineteen of the passengers were killed. Some escaped, but the remainder were arrested and imprisoned or sent to their villages and kept under arrest for the duration of the First World War. This incident became known as the Budge Budge Riot.

Achipur Ferry Ghat

Achipur, a hamlet on the banks of the Hooghly, is just like any other Bengal village. But 300 years ago, this village, 30 km from Taratala, bustled with activity and was dominated by the Chinese. This was the first Chinese settlement in the country. On every Chinese New Year's Day and for the rest of that month, Achipur turns into a mini Chinatown. Thousands gather at the Chinese temple here, especially on Sundays, to celebrate the new year. Recently the members of Kolkata's Chinese community have decided to restore the temple. The place offers a grand view of the river. A walk along the bank of the river lined with Banyan Trees is quite fulfilling.

Nature's Abundance

South 24-Parganas District, being located in the deltaic plain of the Bengal Basin is apparently a monotonous flat plain with elevations ranging between 3 to 5 m above mean sea level. There are also several pockets of raised grounds with elevations of 6 to 8 m above msl. The region gently slopes towards the east and southeast.

Extensive mudflats backed by mangrove swamps are frequently found in the east and south-eastern parts bordering the estuarine rivers and creeks. Mudflats are also found along Fraserganj Coast and the Hooghly Estuary. Marshes are much localised in nature. In the littoral tract of South 24-Parganas, sand banks are not very extensive in nature. In the south-western part, particularly at Frazerganj-Bakkhali area, dunes are formed along the coastline in single alignment. Patches of isolated beaches are also found in different islands as in Sagar and Jambudwip (Long Island).

In terms of zoological geography South 24 Parganas is unique among all other districts of West Bengal as well as India. Here, in this district three great bio-cycles of ocean, fresh water and land inteface. The succession from ocean to land and to fresh water through estuaries is the most fascinating field for ecologists. The gradient from salt water to brackish water to entirely fresh water fluctuates back and forth with the tides. Species of marine organisms

extend towards fresh water as far as permitted by their tolerance of reduced salinity: and the species of fresh water are just the reverse. Thus, the intermediate zone of brackish water under the salt marshes is one of the most fertile areas of the world.

Pollution due to industrial wastes and also change in salinity in the estuarine parts has caused many changes in the biota. Such disturbances have wiped out some of the old species, such as the lesser One Horned Rhinoceros, which were once common in this area. As a rule, the food chain has got impacted and species, depending on particular vegetation, have been forced to change their foraging areas.

A 200 year Old Lighthouse, Set up by The East India Company

The deltaic area forms part of the Sundarbans Biospehere Reserve and is overwhelmingly rich in faunal biodiversity. The Sundarban forest lies in the vast delta on the Bay of Bengal formed by the great confluence of the Ganges, Hooghly, Padma, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers across southern Bangladesh. Sundarbans is the largest marshy forest in the world. Sundarbans in Bangla language means beautiful forest. There are hundreds of islands in the Sundarbans spread over ten thousand square kilometres. The dense forest spread over the marshy area has a wide variety of animals. However, the Sundarbans are most famous for the Royal Bengal Tiger. While the Royal Bengal Tiger is the top predator, other species abound.

The Marine Invertebrates are Sea Fir (*Obelia sp.*), Sea Anemone, Hermit Crab (*Diogenus sp.*), Nudibranch (nudibranchs), Jellyfish (*Acromitus sp.*), Telescope Shell (*Telecopium telescopium*), Feathered Starfish (*Astropecten euryacanthus*), Mantis Shrimp (*Squilla nepa*), Ghost Crab (*Ocypoda sp.*), Sweeming Crab (*Matuta victor*), Yellow Fiddler Crab (*Uca triangularis*), and Red Fiddler Crab (*Uca rosea*).

The numerous fin fishes in estuaries of Sundarbans include 120 species. There are abundant occurrences of Tiger Shark, Dog Shark and 22 species of Prawn in the Sundarbans river waters. Some of these are a*Air, Bamli, Ban (M. talanboroider), Ban (Pisodonephis hijala), Ban (Mastocembelus armetus), Tola-ban (Muraenesox cinereus), Bele (Sillago Sihama), Bhangan (M lade), Bhetki (hates calcarifer),* and *Kai-bhola (Pomadasys maculatus).*

Amongst the Turtle, Tortoise, Terrapin population, Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Olive Ridley Turtle *(Lepidochelys olivacea)*, River Terrapin (*Batagur baska*), Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Narrow Headed Soft-shell Turtle (*Chitra indica*), Painted Roofed Turtle (*Kachuga kachuga*), and Spotted Pond Turtle (*Geoclemois hamiltonii*) abound.

Reptiles include Water Monitor, Marsh Crocodiles, Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodylus prosus*), Chameleon (*Chamaeleon zeylanicus*), Tokay (*Gekko gecko*), House Gecko (*Hemidactylus flaviviridis*), Grey House Gecko (*Hemidactylus brookii*), and Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*). Among snakes, King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), Indian Cobra (*Naja naja*), Manacled Cobra, Russels Viper (*Daboia russelli*), Banded Krait (*Bungariis fasciatus*), Wolf Snake (*Lycodon aulicus*), Gosap and Green Viper are common.

Two major hotspots for birds, Sagar and Henry Island, makes them excellent bird-watching sites. Many species have been recorded here and include birds like Amur Falcon, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlin, Sanderling and Great-crested Terns along with common species of Gulls and Terns.

Mangroves Along Chemaguri Creek

Red Crab at Henry Island

A Cobra in the Creeks of Sundarbans

Riparian Vegetation Along Pujali Village

Churial Khal Lock Gate

Boats at Low Tide in Ganga Sagar Creek

Fish Landing Centre at Namkhana

Auction at Fish Collection Centre

Tiger Prawns for Sale

Mangroves in Henry Island

Dry Fish Farming

A Ferry Ghat at Budge Budge

CHAPTER 51

Purba Medinipur

Where Ganga meets the Bay of Bengal

Legend

Ganga River
Hooghly River
Tributaries
Ganga Basin
State Boundary
District Boundary
Purba Medinipur

West Bengal

Where *on the* Ganga?

Covering an area of 4736 sq km, Purba Medinipur (East Medinipur) is one of the southernmost districts of West Bengal, bounded by Hooghly River and South 24 Parganas in east, Paschim Medinipur in west, Howrah in north, Odisha in southwest and Bay of Bengal in the south. The district is divided into 4 Sub-Divisions – Tamluk , Haldia , Egra and Contai.

Tamralipta, the port in ancient India, is believed by scholars to have been around modern-day Tamluk. It is mentioned in the writings of Ptolemy (150 AD), the Greco-Egyptian writer, as well as Fahien and Hiuen Tsang, Chinese monks and travellers. It was the main port used by Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor. Due to excessive siltation, the port lost its importance around 8th century CE.

Purba Medinipur district is part of the lower Indo-Gangetic Plain and Eastern coastal plains. The vast expanse of land is formed of alluvium and is composed of younger and coastal alluvials. The elevation of the district is within 10 meters above the mean sea level. The district has a long coastline of 65.5 km along its southern and south eastern boundary. At Geokhali, at Mahisadal Block, River Hooghly is joined by one of its largest tributaries – River Rupnarayan after which the combined stream flows into Bay of Bengal. At the confluence of the river Bhagirathi-Hooghly and the

As the Ganga Merges with the Bay

Bay of Bengal, Hijili Island emerged from the estuarine surroundings approximately around 1400-1500 CE. Later, the island got covered with mangroves and gradually became the abode of fishermen. Characteristically, Khejuri-Hijli was formed with ordinary alluvium of the Gangetic Delta. The area is inclined to the South East direction with gentle undulating surface created by the waving rolls of the Bay of Bengal. Since long past it had a great locational importance because it was situated between the great historical port Kolkata and Piplipattanam (A port near Subarnarekha river mouth). At the time of emergence of this land, it was intersected by Cowcolly River, a tidal creek, and the two islands namely Khejuri and Hijili were formed. After the decline of Cowcolly River the said islands were merged and the total area is called Khejuri.

Khejuri was a famous port till 18th century. Till the first half of the 19th century it was known to the British as Kedgeree. The British established their control over the area in 1765 and by 1780 had established a port and factory there. A lighthouse was built in 1810 at Dariapur, a village about five miles south of Khejuri near the mouth of the Rasulpur River. Kapalkundala Temple, a site made famous by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel, is situated. Sagar Light House is located 13 miles away across the river on Sagar Island.

River Ganga opens up into the Bay of Bengal here through its main distributary channel Bhagirathi-Hooghly. The rivers of the district were formerly distributaries of the Ganga but the main channel of that river has long since been deflected to the east, and their connection with it has been closed or silted up, hence, ceasing to be effective effluent channels. Three major rivers open up in Hooghly River here, adding water to the drainage system. They are Rupnarayan River, forming the northern boundary, Haldi River and Roosulpur River.

Re-living *the* Past

Purba Medinipur's headquarter Tamluk has a rich and distinguished historical legacy and derives its name from the Sanskrit word *tamra lipta*, meaning Full of Copper. According to local folklore the name Tamralipta came from the King Tamradhwaja (which means The King with Copper Flag/Symbol) of the Mayuradhwaja Dynasty. Possibly with a huge resource of copper and the fortune it generated, these names, Tamralipta and Raja Tamradhawja have come into being. Interestingly, King Bijay, a contemporary of Lord Buddha, travelled from the Tamralipta Fort to Sri Lanka in the 5th century BCE and had named the country Tamraparni, which can still be found in historic texts.

This ancient port city and kingdom was bounded by the Bay of Bengal in the south, river Rupnarayan (the joint flow of the river Dwarkeshwar and the river Shilawati or Shilai) in the east and Subarnarekha in the west. The Bay of Bengal and these rivers along with their numerous branches created a suitable place for human habitation that prospered in agriculture as well as maritime trade because of the riverine navigational system fostering commerce, culture and early contacts with the people of the wider world. Archaeological remains show continuous settlement from about 3rd century BCE. In the Mahabharata (*Bhishma Parba/ Nabam Adhyay*) while describing the names of the holiest rivers and kingdoms of India, Sanjay took the name of Tamralipta to Emperor Dhritarastra. Tamluk was also known as Bibhas (mythological name in religious texts) and Madhya Desh (as the Middle State of Utkal/Kalinga and Banga). According to Jain sources, Tamralipti was the capital of the kingdom of Vanga and long known as a seaport. Located 42 km from the industrial hub of Haldia and 80 km from Kolkata, it is today famous for its thousand-year-old Bargabhima Temple which is one of the 51 *Shakti Peeths* according to Hindu Mythology.

The district of Medinipur had no boundary during the start of the British rule. The British changed the boundaries of Medinipur several times during the period 1760-1805 CE. The year 1772 saw East India Company constituting a Revenue Committee for facilitation of revenue-collection. East Midnapore (or Purba Medinipur) is one of the 18 administrative districts of West Bengal as well as the southernmost district of Medinipur division – one of the five administrative divisions of the State with its headquarters located at Tamluk. The district was carved out of the erstwhile Medinipur District on January 1, 2002. Purba Medinipur saw many political movements during the British Raj. A parallel government named the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar was formed during the Quit India Movement in Tamluk.

Rupnarayan River Before the Confluence with Hooghly

Mythological Links

The legend surrounding the origin of the name Tamralipta can be traced

Ancient Tamluk Rajbari (Earlier Known as Tamralipti, A Famed Port Hosting the South-East Asia Trade)

back to some early Vaishnava religious texts: Once, when Lord Krishna was playing *Maharaas* in Braj at Vrindavan, Surya Dev (Sun God) rose from the east and accidentally saw Lord Krishna engaged in *Leela* with Sri Radhika and the *Gopis*. Embarrassed, Surya Dev blushed with a reddish copper glow or *Tamra* shade and hid (*lipta*) himself in the Bay of Bengal. The place where Surya Dev returned to hide himself is what came to be known as Tamralipta.

Mahisadal Rath Yatra

Events *of* Interest

Mahisadal Ratha Yatra

The territory of Mahisadal is an important area on the banks of the river Hooghly where evidence of its antiquity can be found. It is here that the Rupnarayan, a major tributary of the Ganga in West Bengal, meets the

River Hooghly.

The 75 feet high *rath* of Mahishdal is said to be the highest wooden *rath* (chariot) in the world. Mahishadal Rath Yatra was started by Rani Janaki Devi in 1776, the chariot has undergone several changes but its main structure have remained the same for the last 240 years. Originally a 17 pinnacled structure, it was reduced to 13 pinnacles in 1860 with the lower four floors being replaced with wooden statues of men holding flags. The five storied wooden chariot towers to a height of 75 feet and measures 28 feet by 28 feet at the base. The walls of the chariot are brightly painted and decorated with statues. The gigantic chariot runs on 36 wheels.

The inauguration of the *mela* is marked by gun shot and the gun shots continues throughout the entire rath yatra.

Bheem Puja *of* Khejuri

There is a close association of Bheema with that of Medinipur. According to the epic Mahabharata, Bhim used to be the strongest person and one of the brothers among the Pandavas, who won the war with the Kaurava clan. At the end, Bhim killed Duryodhan. The villagers celebrate this auspicious event as a festival now. They think that their beloved Bhim will save them from all the evils and enemies and they attend the fair to offer a *puja*. Soft gambling adds colour to the Bhim Mela.

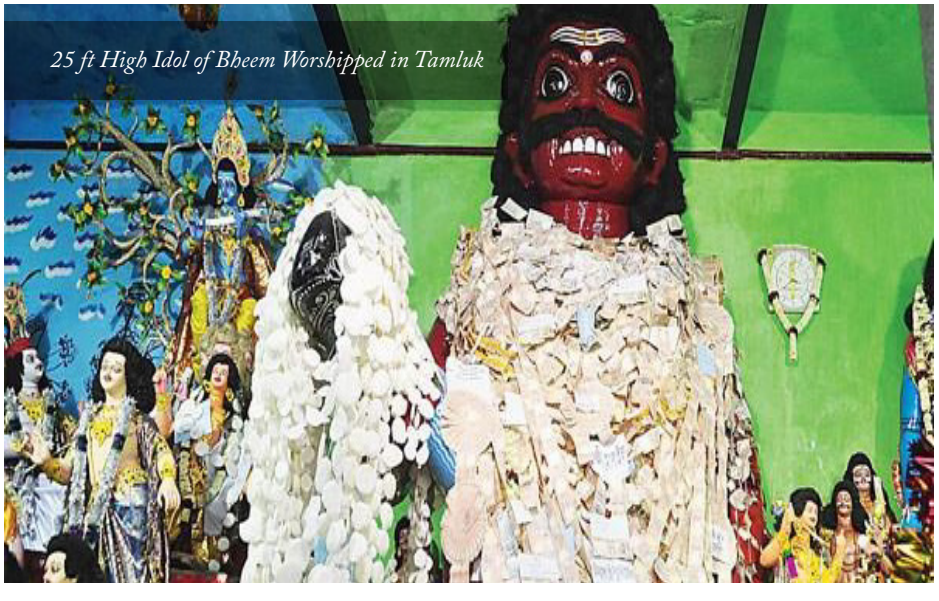
Pata Mela *at* Bhimeswari Temple & Kapalkundala Puja *by* Nabakumar

At the time of the Mughal dominion in Bengal, Bhim Sen Mahapatra, Taj Khan's *Dewan*, established the Bhimeswari Shiva Mandir at Mehdinagar. However, this temple no longer exists as it was submerged in the river around 1970-80. The Shiva *lingam* though, was preserved in a neighbouring village. A new temple was later erected at the spot where the old temple was situated. The worship of Ganga and the fair or *mela* that was instituted in the temple precincts about 500 years ago continues to flourish. Hundreds of people throng the fair during Poush Sankranti. Locals call this fair the Patamela. Many devotees also visit the mela for the Nabakumar Kapalkundala Puja.

When Taj Khan heard of his predicament, he advised Hari Sau to prepare a lavish feast and invite all the villagers to partake of it. But no one turned up. Taj Khan then arrived at Sau's house with a tiger

Bhimeswari Pata Mela *in* Khejuri

The worship of the Goddess Ganga that was instituted in the temple precincts about 500 years ago continues



25 ft High Idol of Bheem Worshipped in Tamluk

till date.

Hari Sau used to come from Kulapara in Patashpur to Hijli to sell oil. One day he was unable to sell any and grew anxious as to what he would give his daughter to eat. His wife was dead and his daughter was his sole responsibility. He remembered the tales he had heard of Taj Khan, the local ruler's generosity and decided to tell him of his troubles. The kily Taj Khan was moved by his plight and bought all his oil. When Hari Sau narrated the incident to his daughter, she wanted to meet their benefactor. She was exquisitely beautiful and when Taj Khan saw her he was enamoured of her beauty and proposed to marry her. Hari Sau was reluctant to give his consent to this marriage as he feared that he would be declared an outcast by the Hindus for giving his daughter's hand in marriage to a man belonging to a different faith. Taj Khan assured him that that would not happen. However, when Hari Sau returned home after the wedding, his worst fears came true and he was ostracised by his relatives, neighbours and the entire community. Everyone shunned him and no one would even accept a glass of water from him. When Taj Khan heard of his predicament, he advised Hari Sau to prepare a lavish feast and invite all the villagers to partake of it. But no one turned up. Taj Khan then arrived at Sau's house with a tiger. Some accounts say that he came in the guise of a tiger- and fearing for their lives the villagers all gathered to eat at Hari Sau's house. From that moment no one ever alluded to Hari Sau's betrayal of his faith and creed. After his death Taj Khan's tomb was venerated by both Hindus and Muslims.

The goddess Chandi is referred to as Jai Chandi in this temple. Special prayers are offered here for 4 days, during Durga Puja

On the first Saturday of *Chaitra*, a cultural programme is organised to commemorate the *Pir* and because of the large crowds that attend, it is repeated again on the last Saturday of the month. Hindus and Muslims from near and far gather there, on what has come to be regarded as auspicious days. People from both communities offer prayers, make a wish and stalls are also set up adding to the festive atmospheres.

Festival *at the* Chandi Temple in Khejuri

There is an ancient Chandi Temple in Khejuri where the goddess Chandi is referred to as Jai Chandi in this temple. Special prayers are offered here for 4 days, during Durga Puja. The reciting of Sri Sat Chandi accompanies the rituals. Songs from the Chandi Mangal are sung throughout the period by a nine member troupe of local artistes. There is a rendition of special Mashaal Jhanka songs on Navami. There are two large lakes in front of the temple, one of which is known as Halim Shah Lake. The other is a large lotus pond or *Padma Pukur* which was once connected to the river Ganga. It is believed that this temple was established by Dhanapati Saudagar. In front of the temple there is a very old *Kadamb* Tree and people believe that a thick gold chain used to be tied around its trunk. When ships approached, this chain was used to tow them to Halim Shah and Padmapukur. The ships would anchor there for a while before resuming their long voyage.

Ganga Puja *at* Khejuri

While there are references to the worship of the Ganga having taken place 500 years ago at Bhimeswari in Mehdinagar, this *Puja* was initiated in Khejuri only 250 years ago by the local fishing community.

It is carried out in 3 districts of Khejuri Mehdinagar, Wasim Chowk and Thanabera by three fishing communities. Commencing on *Maghi Purnima*, this *Puja* and the *mela*, continue for five days. Cultural programmes like *Kabigaan* and *Jatra* are held every day.

Neelkumari

When the East India Company assumed charge of East Midnapore in 1765, Khejuri lost its cultural significance in the region. Once when the *zamindar* of Bhupati Chowk, belong-

Special Laxmi pots Prepared in Khejuri

Sashti Putul

ing to the Bera family, was clearing the forest on the western part of Khejuri, he discovered the folk goddess Neelkumari, along with her sisters, Shwetakumari and Ghritakumari. He established a temple dedicated to them under a *Gabh* Tree.

Neelkumari is worshipped with a bowl of *Payesh* or Rice Pudding and she is invoked as the Goddess Chandi. Sri Sat Chandi is recited during the 4-day *puja* that commences on Dol Purnima and a *mela* is also organised at that time. During *Maghi Purnima* there is an even bigger festival when the Goddess is worshipped for 15 days and the customary *mela* or fair set up for the people who gather there.

When menfolk go fishing, the women of the household stop combing their hair, applying *sindoor* and even oil. Once the boats return safely to harbour, the women go back to their usual routine.

The fisherfolk are engaged in performing various *Pujas* - Vishwakarma, Manasa (to safeguard against sea snakes), Sitala and Lakshmi Puja. The Ganga Puja appropriately remains their main festival. On Dol Purnima, Gwala Puja is performed.

Birth Anniversary *of the* Blessed Virgin Mary & Christmas

Mirpur, in Bengal's East Midnapore district, is unlike any other village in the state. Many of its residents are of Portuguese descent. Legend has it that in the 17th century, a handful of Portuguese soldiers arrived here to fight the Borgees (a nomadic tribe of plunderers) and never went back. The village has 140 Christian families, 90 of them Catholic, the rest Protestant. So in the two weeks before Christmas, Mirpur bustles with activity. Preparations are on in full swing to usher in the Yuletide spirit. The two cathedrals in the village – the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of North India – are decorated for Christmas. Mirpur has another equally important annual festival – the birth anniversary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on September 8.

Art *at the* Heart

Terracotta Craft

Sashti Putul or *Tepa* or Pressed Doll is living archaeological evidence of an ancient civilization. Tepa Putul is a terracotta sculpture mostly used as a toy doll or show piece. In Bengali language, *Tepa* means pressing and *Putul* means Doll. So the name, Tepa Putul indicates

Patachitra Depicting 'Behula Lakhinder' Story

Handmade Grass Craft (Commonly Known as Chatai)

that it is very ancient and has a simple making process where the dolls are made by simply pressing the raw clay using fingers. The bride and the groom, the mother and child are some of the most popular among them. The eyes are made by making holes on the faces with the help of sticks. The incomplete hands on both sides of the body make these dolls stand out.

Tepa putul is made by potters and *Patua* artists across Bengal along with the members of their families. These hand-crafted dolls are found in Nandigram, Kumarmari, Nanakar Chowk and Gobindapur Villages, in areas where the potter and *potua* (or scroll-maker) communities live. Being symbolic of the goddess Sashti, these dolls are hence known as Sashti Putul.

When menfolk go fishing, the women of the household stop combing their hair, applying sindoor and even oil. Once the boats return safely to harbour, the women go back to their usual routine

Khejuri Coastal Area Used for Making Sea Salt

Terracotta Pots

In Khejuri, about 25 families mainly of Bera title are engaged in making terracotta pots, pitchers, lamps, sweet curd pots (*bhars*), *lakshmishora* and vessels (Red and Black). They make number of pots specially meant for particular *pujas*, rituals and also for domestic purposes. The fresh clay is collected from the river banks and then cleaned out by the women folk. Different pots and vessels are made on the *Chaak* (Wheel). Mostly men are involved in making these pots. Two types of natural colours are used - Black and Red. During *Baisakh* Month (Bengali Calendar), *Amavasya* (New Moon) and *Purnima* (Full Moon), the kilns are not fired.

Patachitra

Patachitra, an ancient folk art of Bengal, is appreciated by art lovers all over the world for its effortless style of drawings, colours, lines and space usage. The world Pata derived from the Sanskrit word *Patta* means cloth. The painters are called *Patuas*. Patuas do not just paint, they also sing as they unfurl the painting scroll to show it to the audience. These songs are known as *Pater Gaan*. The songs are of wide variety, ranging from traditional mythological tales and tribal rituals to stories based on modern Indian history and contemporary issues like protecting forests and preventing spread of HIV/AIDS. Patuas generally use natural colours, which they procure from various trees, leaves, flowers and clays. Patachitra has been mentioned in Puranas, epics, ancient literature and historical descriptions. The style of painting is similar to the cave paintings of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Ajanta. Patuas and Chitrakars have been referred to in literary works dating back to more than 2500 years. Buddhist kings and monks made extensive use of scroll paintings to preach Buddhism and during this time Patachitra probably spread to Bali, Java, Sri-Lanka, Malaysia and Tibet.

Grass Craft

In Kalicharanpur Village of Nandigram, villagers are involved in making different craft items out of *Jun* Grass. These grasses are available in the local river banks and wetland areas. The grasses are collected and then dried. Then they are cut into sizes and stitched together to form mats. The mats are used for making Baskets of different types.

Hogla is another very versatile raw-material used for making different utility as well as decorative products. In the villages adjoining Rupnarayan and Hooghly River of Mahisadal Block, there are many families involved in making Hogla Mats. The raw materials are brought from local river banks and also from Howrah District. The dried Hogla are cut in similar sizes and then stitched together. Both men and women are involved in making the Hogla Mats for the preparation of temporary shelters.

Salt Making

In Bengal, during pre-British to British period, the salt manufacturing areas were popularly known as *Jalpai* lands. They used to supply fuel and facilities for manufacturing of salt. They had forest lands from which the people or salt manufacturers, popularly known as *Malangis* used to collect fuel. In addition with the method of evaporation of saline water under the sun shine, the collected salt was *Pungah* or brined salt, there is another method of evaporation using burning woods placing under salt pots. The term Jalpai is derived from *Jalan Pai*, which means a source of fuel in Bengali. The Jalpai or saltlands were exposed to estuary and sea and also to the tide prone rivers and creeks. Thus the saline water used to enter into the Khalaris or saltpans. Purba Medinipur Coastal lowlands were an important salt manufacturing area from the Muslim to British rule. There are still some areas where salt is prepared by using indigenous method like Shyampur Jalpai, Khejuri Block, Kendamari Jalpai in Nandigram, Banbasuberia, Khejuri Block etc.

Gastronomic Delights

Gur Amla

A very common cuisine of Purba Medinipur is Gur Amla which is prepared with jaggery, raw mango powder and Ash Gourd. For tempering *paanch phoron*, five spices like Cummin, Brown Mustard, Fenugreek, Nigella and Fennel are used along with dry red chillies. Rice paste is used for thickening the gravy made up of sugarcane jaggery and Ash Gourd. Generous

A Typical Purba Medinipur Meal

amount of raw mango powder is used to give a tangy flavour.

Gohona Bori/Naksha Bori

Gohona Bari is a dried *dal* dumpling. It is popular in Bengali cuisine. It is a well-known food item in Purba Medinipur. It is also known as Naksha Bori. It is made with black lentil, Poppy seed and various spices. In 2016, IIT Kharagpur applied to get the geographical indication for Gohona Bori. After the Battle of Plassey, the British discovered a market of illegal opium in China. British forced the farmers of the Rarh region of Bengal to cultivate poppy and extorted large amounts of opium from them to send into China. Poppy seeds were dropped after the opiate was extracted. In the past, poppy seeds became the cooking material of Bankura, Birbhum, Bardhaman and Midnapore Districts. Thus the poppy seeds are used in Gohona Bori in Midnapore.

Kaanji Pani

A very popular drink of Purba Medinipur was Kanji Paani, which is losing its significance now. During the summer season there is a very common practice of eating *Panta Bhaat* or fermented rice. It is rice-based dish prepared by soaking rice, generally leftover, in water overnight. Traditionally served in the morning with salt, onion, chilli and Bengali style mashed potatoes or Aloo Sheddho. The water of this fermented rice is kept aside and collected for 4/5 days in a clay or glass pot. This sour water is then mixed with salt and used as a drink by most of the coastal rural households of Purba Medinipur. It is very nutritious and beneficial during summer season. Even pointed gourd is cooked with this water to prepare a special sour curry called Lauker Kanji Tok.

People who Fascinate

Satish Chandra Samanta

Satish Chandra Samanta (1900 – 1983) was an Indian independence movement activist and a member of the Lok Sabha from 1952–77. Satish Chandra Samanta remained a Member of Parliament for more than three decades. He was elected to the 1st Lok Sabha from Tamluk constituency in 1952 and re-elected to the Lok Sabha from the same constituency in 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1971.

Matangini Hazra

Matangini Hazra (1870 – 1942) was an Indian revolutionary who participated in the Indian independence movement. She was shot dead by the British Indian police in front of the Tamluk Police Station (of erstwhile Midnapore District) on 29 September 1942. She was affectionately known as *Gandhi Buri*, Bengali for old lady Gandhi.

Birendranath Sasmal

Birendranath Sasmal (1881 - 1934) was a lawyer and political leader. He was known as *Deshpran* because of his work for the country and for his efforts in the Swadeshi Movement. Birendranath Sasmal was born in Contai, in undivided Midnapore District. A road in South Kolkata (Deshparan Sasmal Road) is named after him.

Jagannath Temple

Suhrawardys *of* Purba Medinipur

The Suhrawardys were of Arab descent having originated from a place called Suhraward in Iraq, from where the family takes its name. Their common ancestor was one Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardy (1145-1235) a famous Sufi saint, who embraced martyrdom by incurring the wrath of the Caliph, on a matter of principle. The eminent Ubaidullah Al Obaidi Suhrawardy (1832-1885), was a learned scholar, educationist, translator and writer. He was born in Midnapore, West Bengal, British India, once the heartland of the Suhrawardys in Bengal. He was proficient in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English. He passed the Final Central Examinations in 1857, from the prestigious Aliya Madrasah in Kolkata. He was appointed as the first superintendent of Dhaka Madrasah in 1874, and remained there till his death. The British Raj bestowed on him the title of *Bahrul Ulm* (Sea of knowledge) in recognition for his great contribution to knowledge, education and society. He was the father of Sir Abdullah Al Mamun and Khujesta Akhtar Banu.

Satyendra Nath Bosu

Satyen Bosu (1882 – 1908) was an Indian nationalist of the Anushilan Samiti. Bosu, while being held in Alipore Jail Hospital as an undertrial in the Alipore Bomb Case, shot dead with the help of Kanhailal Dutta, the main witness Narendranath Goswami, leading to the collapse of the case against prime accused Shri Aurobindo. Bosu gave himself up in the jail premises, and was subsequently put on trial, along with Dutta, found guilty and executed by hanging on 21st November 1908 for the murder of Goswami.

Monuments *that* Matter

Masnad-i-Alla & *Sikandar's Asha* Bari

Asha Bari is actually part of a ship's anchor which is kept in the northern part of Masnad-i-Alla, a holy shrine dedicated to Maslandi, the Pir of Hijli who is a historical figure and noted for his generosity as a ruler and is revered both by the Hindus and the Muslims under a tree. The locals believe that this belonged to Taj Khan's brother, Sikandar. He was very strong and could yield the metal anchor with ease. There is a superstition connected with the Asha Bari that is prevalent even today; it is said that those who can lift this heavy implement and

Phulbagh Palace

An Old Portuguese Church at Mirpur

circumambulate the tree, can hope to attain salvation or *moksha*. This is indicated in the name Asha Bari, *asha* denoting hope and *bari* in the local dialect refers to a heavy tool or stick.

Phulbagh Palace

The residence of the Mahishadal Royal Family, it is a double storeyed compact mansion with central grand entrance way flanked by twin Ionic columns and wide plinth steps to access the elevated ground floor level. Symmetrically designed, the two wings on both sides have double-height fluted columns with angular ionic capital and high pedestals with Rinceaux (garland) designs in plaster. The side walls culminate in octagonal bastion-like rooms topped with raised hemispherical domes & blind windows at the base with triangular pediments supported by large ogee bracket walls on four sides above roof level.

The British forced the farmers of the Rarh region of Bengal to cultivate poppy and extorted large amounts of opium from them to send to China

Jagannath Temple

Temple of Jagannath at Dihi Bahiri was built in 1584 out of a combination of laterite and burnt brick. Bhimsen Mahapatra, an Orissan (Kalinga) king, is believed to have built this temple and handed over its responsibility to his Rajguru Sri Gadadhar Nanda.

The Dargah of Masnad-i-Alla

Rangibasan Palace

Fishermen of Durgachak Still Use Traditional Boats

Sri Sri Madan Gopal Jew Temple

The Sri Sri Madan Gopal Jew Temple is situated inside the Mahishadal Rajbari estate. This temple complex was built by Rani Janaki, widow of *zamindar* Anandalal Upadhyay, in the year 1774 and comprises of two Shiva temples, a Jagannath temple and a Natmandir. There are also two *Nahabatkhanas* (pavilion for playing live music) on the two sides of the entrance of the complex

Nature's Abundance

The Coastal Belt of Midnapore District represents 27% of West Bengal of coastal tract (60 Km) extending along the West Bank of Hooghly Estuary from New Digha and then curving around Junput, Dadanpatrabar, Khejuri and Haldia on the east to the further north east up to Tamluk or even on the bank of Rupnarayan. This beach-dune mudflat system presents different kinds of management challenges including prevention of coastal erosion and development of sustainable tourism with effective control of pollution of the coastal region.

The low-lying swampy land laid out in rice fields consists of flora corresponding to that of southern West Bengal. Towards the south-east and near the river Hooghly the flora resembles that of savannah swamps of the Sundarbans. Hogla (*Typha elephantina Roxb*), Kans (*Saccharum spontaneum*), and Nal Grass (*Phragmites karka*) are the dominant species found in the riparian tract of the study area. Both the grasses are used for making the roofs of rural area. This area was once part of the kingdom called Hijli. This name has been derived from the tree called Hijal Tree/Indian Silk Oak (*Barringtonia acutangula*) which grows in the moist low lying area and bears beautiful red coloured flowers.

The major fish species like *Scatophagus argus, Sillago sihama, Terapon jarbua, Lates calcarifer, Pomadasys argenteus, Oreochromis niloticus, Channa punctata, Channa striata,*

Hogla Grass in the River Floodplain

Open Billed Stork Feeding on Molluscs in a Paddy Field

Sardinella albella, Coilia dussumieri, Setipinna taty, Mugil cephalus, Mystus gulio, Catla catla, Labeo rohita, Cirrhinus mrigala, Systomus sarana, Pethia ticto, and *Hypophthalmicthys molitrix.* are predominant.

In addition to that, some economically important shell fishes are also found in the canal like- *Penaeus monodon, Fenneropenaeus indicus, Metapenaeus monoceros*, and *Scylla serrata.*

Some of the birds found are Lesser Whistling Ducks, Ruddy Shelduck, Grey Heron, Gray-bellied Cuckoo, Blackwinged Cuckooshrike, Common Moorhen, Watercock, Lesser Adjutant, Painted Stork, Striated Heron, Black-headed Ibis, Egret, Great Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Indian Cormorant and Little Cormorant, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Common Redshank, Oriental Pratincole, River Tern, Greater Crested Tern, and Common Tern.

Tropical Cyclones

The destructive action of a tropical cyclone is mostly felt on the right of its track (northern hemisphere) and on the shores that face an advancing system perpendicularly. It is an adverse combination of factors like lowt pressure attained by a storm, local sea level and tidal conditions at the time of its landfall that determines the surge level at a particular locality. Thus, while the storm frequency diagrams and recurrence intervals do provide an approximate guide for frequency of the events, they do not necessarily mean recurrence of similar levels of destruction.

There have been many cyclones, and their intensity is on the increase. One of the most deadliest cyclone, Amphan hit the Bengal Coast with a speed of more than 190 km/hour in May 2020. It was the strongest tropical cyclone to strike the Ganga Delta since Sidr of the 2007 season and the first super cyclonic storm to have formed in the Bay of Bengal since the 1999 Odisha cyclone. It was also the third super cyclone that hit West Bengal since 1582, after 1737 and 1833, as well as being the strongest storm to impact the area. Causing over US $13 billion worth of damage, Amphan is also the costliest cyclone ever recorded in the North Indian Ocean, surpassing the record held by Cyclone Nargis of 2008.

Cyclone Amphan made landfall in the Sagar Island, Shibpur Dhablat Mouza (other coast of Roosulpur River, Khejuri Block, Purba Medinipur) buffeting the region with strong winds and heavy rains. Although the extent of fatalities was less than initially feared, the cyclone's effects were nonetheless widespread and deadly. South Bengal, the epicentre of the cyclone's landfall, saw the most widespread damage from Amphan. The storm was considered the strongest to hit the region in over a decade. This can only underline the importance of protecting the Mangrove Forests.

Purba Medinipur, being on the coastline, is most vulnerable to rising sea levels and river channels here face the brunt of the high tidal flux which renders lands adjacent to the channels inundated and increasingly saline.

A Fishing Unit at Nayachar Island

Nayachar and Ghoramara islands in Hooghly – Google Earth

Low Tide Floodplain with Mudflats and Creek Mouth Sediments

Tilibati Khal at Khejuri, The Boats Float in the High Tide Flux

Aquaculture Ponds at Nandigram- A Source of Livelihood

Devastated Shoreline After Amphan Cyclone

Glossary of Terms Used

A

Acharya - *Acarya - One who teaches by example. Usually refers to a prominent or exemplary spiritual leader*

Akshaya Tritiya - *Akshay Tritiya*

An auspicious day, it falls on the third lunar day of the bright half (Shukla Paksha) of the month of Vaisakha. It is regionally observed as day that brings prosperity by Hindus and Jains

Ashram - *Ashram - A place set up for spiritual development*

Akhada - *Akhara - A monastery like space for spiritual growth for renunciants, a space for learning and practicing traditional martial arts such as wrestling, or sometimes also referred to a space for learning and singing of Baul music*

Atman - *Atma - Self. Can refer to body, mind, or soul, depending on context. Ultimately, it refers to the real self, the soul*

Aum - *Om - The sacred symbol and sound representing the ultimate; the most scared of Hindu words*

Avatar - *Avatara, Avtara - One who descends. Refers to the descent of a deity, most commonly, Vishnu. Sometimes it is translated as incarnation which, although inaccurate, may be the best English word available*

Aviralta - *Aviralta - Continuous flow*

B

Baul - *Traditional itinerant Bhakti singers of Bengal*

Bhagavad Gita - *The Song of the Lord. Spoken by Krishna, this is the most important scripture for most Hindus. Tradition dates it back to 3000 BCE, though most scholars attribute it to the first millennium BCE*

Bhatiyali - *Traditional songs of the boatmen, usually referring to the pain of separation and uniting the soul with the ultimate truth*

Bhakti - *Devotion; love. Devotional form of Hinduism*

Birha - *Viraha - The intense pain of separation, usually sung about by spiritual seekers and boatmen*

D

Dargah - *A cenotaph of A Sufi saint*

Dassehra - *Dussehra, Dassera, Dashara (and others) - Ten days, also referred to as Vijay Dashami. Celebrate the victory of Rama on the tenth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Jyeshtha. As is often the case with Hindu festivals, followers may interpret the festival differently, for example in connection with Durga*

Devi-Devta - *Deities*

Dharma - *Religion or religious duty is the usual translation into English, but literally it means the intrinsic quality of the self or that which sustains one's existence*

Diwali - *Divali, Dipavali, Deepavali - The festival of lights at the end of one year and the beginning of the new year, according to a Hindu calendar*

Durga - *Female deity.*

Dwar - *Dvar, Dvara - A doorway*

E

Ekadasi - *Ekadashi - Eleventh day of the lunar day*

F

Fakir - *Faqir - A Sufi mendicant*

G

Gad - *Gadh - A fast-flowing river in its first course*

Ganga - *The Ganges. Most famous of all sacred rivers of India*

Gangadhara - *Gangadhar - Shiva. The one who controls the river in his dreadlocks*

Gangotri - *The spot considered the source of the river Ganga*

Ghat - *Ghaat - Bank of a river, generally for human interaction with the waters.*

Gotra - *A kinship within which no inbreeding is allowed*

Grihastha - *Gristhi, Grhastha - The second stage of Hindu life; one who belongs to that stage, that is, the householder (grihast)*

Guna - *Quality. Specifically refers to the three qualities of sattva (goodness), rajas (passion) and tamas (ignorance), which permeates and control matter*

Guru - *Spiritual teacher, preceptor, or enlightener*

H

Hari-Hara - *Dichotomy of worshipping Vishnu and Shiva*

Havan - *The basis of many Hindu rituals used at weddings and on other ceremonial occasions; the ceremony or act of worship in which offerings of ghee and grains are made into fire*

Haveli - *A traditional opulent home, usually with an inner courtyard*

Havan kund - *The container, usually square or pyramid-shaped, in which the havan fire is burned*

Holi - *The festival of colours, celebrated in Spring*

Homa - *Term often used interchangeably with havan*

I

Imambada - *Imambara - An Islamic space for congregation*

J

Janmabhoomi - *Place of birth*

Janmashtami - *Janmashtami - The birthday of Krishna, celebrated on the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of Bhadra*

Jhanavi - *Jaanavi - Daughter of King Jahanu. Name given to Ganga*

Jnana - *Gyan - Knowledge*

Jnana-yoga - *Gyan-yoga - The path of knowledge, that aims at liberation*

K

Karma - Karm - *Actions dictated by duty in life*

Kali - *Kaali - Name given to that power of God which delivers justice - often represented by the Goddess Kali (a form of Durga*

Kartik Purnima - *Full moon day of the fifteenth of the lunar month*

Kalpavas - *The practice of staying for long, at least a month, during the Kumbha Mela or other sacred festivals in very frugal conditions, at the site, to gain spiritual merit*

Kirtan - *Songs of praise; corporate devotional singing, usually accompanied by musical instruments*

Krishna - *Usually considered an avatar of Vishnu. One of the most popular of all Hindu deities in contemporary Britain. His teachings are found in the Bhagavad Gita*

Kshatriya - *Khatri - Second of the four varnas of traditional Hindu society, the ruling or warrior class*

L

Lakshmi: *The goddess of fortune*

M

Mahabharata - *The Hindu epic that relates the story of the five Pandava princes. It includes the Bhagavad Gita*

Math - *Muth - A Monastery*

Makara - *Makar - Ganga's vehicle. Half mammal, half aquatic creature, the evolving image is a combination of all animal life that depends on the river as habitat*

Mala - *Maala - Circle of stringed beads of wood or wool used in meditation*

Majlis - *Islamic congregation*

Magh - *Eleventh month of the Hindu calendar corresponding to January-February in the Gregorian*

Mandala - *Mandal - A circle, area, or community/group*

Mandir - *Temple or shrine*

Mata - *Mother. Often associated with Hindu goddesses who represent Shakti, power*

Moksha - *Moksa - Ultimate liberation from the process of transmigration, the continuous cycle of birth and death*

Mundan - *The head tonsuring ceremony. Performed in the first or third year of life*

Murti - *Moorti - Form. The image or deity used as a focus of worship. Idol is a somewhat incomplete description*

N

Navarati - *Navarata: The Nine Nights Festival preceding Dassehra and held in honour of the goddess Durga*

Nawab - *A ruler, usually of Islamic faith*

Nirvana: *The cessation of material existence*

P

Panch Prayag - *The five sacred confluences in the Himalayas*

Pothi - *A manuscript*

Parvati - *The consort of Shiva, also known by other names such as Durga, Devi, etc*

Paush - *Tenth month of the Hindu calendar corresponding with December-January in the Gregorian.*

Pravachan - *A lecture or talk, usually based on the scriptures*

Puja - Pooja - *Worship. General term referring to a variety of practices in the home or Mandir*

Purana - *Ancient. Part of the Smriti scriptures. Contains many of the well-known Hindu stories*

Q

Qabristan - *Kabristan - Burial space for the dead amongst Muslims*

R

Rajma - *Kidney Beans*

Raksha Bandhan - *The festival when woman tie a decorative bracelet on their brothers' wrists*

Ramayana - *Ramayan - The Hindu epic that relates the story of Rama and Sita. Composed by the sage Valmiki thousands of years ago*

Ramlila - *Ramleela - Staging of the epic Ramayana*

Ramnavami - *Ramnavmi - The birthday festival of Rama*

Rishi - *Rsi, risi - A spiritually wise person. More specifically, one of the seven seers who received the divine wisdom*

S

Sadhana - *Sadhan - One's regulated spiritual practices or discipline*

Sadhu - *Saddhu - Holy man, ascetic*

Samagrata - *Completeness. Wholeness*

Samakshata - *Presence. In the presence of*

Sama Veda - T*he Veda of chanting; material mainly from the Rig Veda, arranged for ritual chanting in worship*

Samsara - *Sansara - The world - the place where transmigration (the soul's passage through a series of lives in different species) occurs*

Sasural - *The home of the in-laws*

Sanatan Dharma - T*he eternal or imperishable religion; also known as Vedic Dharma. Adherents often prefer this term to Hinduism since it characterizes their belief in the revealed and universal nature of religion*

Sankranti - *Sankrant - The first day of transit of sun into Capricorn. Usually celebrated as a day of sun worship*

Sannyasa - *The state of renunciation, the fourth stage of life*

Sannyasin - *Samyasin, Samnyasin - A renunciate who, having given up worldly affairs and attachments, has entered the fourth stage of life, often as a mendicant*

Sanskrit - *Sacred language of the Hindu scriptures*

Sheshnag - *Seshnaag - The mythical naag or Cobra snake with multiple heads is the king of snakes. It is serpentine demigod, primordial being of creation, holding all planets on the hood*

Shiva - *Siva (many variants) - A Hindu god. The name means kindly or auspicious*

Shivaratri - *Sivaratri - The annual festival celebrated in February/March in honour of Shiva. Also called Mahashivaratri*

Shraddha - Sraddha - *Ceremony in which Sanctified food is offered to the poor and needy in memory of departed ancestors*

Shri - *Sri - Illustrious. Used as a title of respect, example Shri Krishna. Also, a respectable title for men. The feminine form is Shrimati*

Shruti - *Srti - That which is remembered. Applicable to Hindu scripture other than the Vedas*

Sita - *Seeta - The divine consort of Rama*

Swami - *Svami - Controller. Sometimes, more specifically, Goswami (one who can control his/ her senses). A honorific title applied to a religious teacher or holy person, particularly a sannyasin*

T

Tal - *A waterbody, usually a lake*

Trimurti - *The three deities. Refers to Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who personify and control the three gunas. They represent and control the three functions of creation, preservation, and destruction. This is not the same as the idea of Trinity, which should not be used*

Trishul - *Shiva's Trident*

Tarakashi - *The craft of wire inlay in wood*

Talab - *A pond*

U

Upanayana - *Ceremony when the sacred thread is tied – to mark the start of learning with a guru.*

Urs - *A death celebration of a Sufi saint in a holy place or town, or at dargah dedicated to his memory.*

V

Varanasi - *Banares, Benares, Kashi, Kasi - City of the river Ganges, sacred to Shiva. It is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites and an ancient center of learning*

Vachan - *Word given or spoken*

Varsha Pratipada - *The day of Creation, celebrated as New Year's Day by many Hindus*

Veda - *Knowledge. Specifically refers to the four Vedas, through any teaching which is consistent with the conclusions of these scriptures is also accepted as Vedic*

Vijay Dashmi - *Vijaya Dashami - Another name for Dussehra*

Vishnu - *Visnu - A Hindu god. With Brahma and Shiva forms the Trimurti*

Vrata - *Vratam - Vow. Often included abstention from certain foods*

Y

Yajur Veda - One of the four Vedas, dealing with the knowledge of karma

Yaksha/ Yakshi - *Keepers of ambrosia. The spirit of life that infuses all creatures, usually depicted as human figures amidst nature in temple carvings*

Yama - *Yam - The lord of death. The one who fetches to heaven in the last moments of human life*

Yamuna - *Jamuna, Jumna - A river that originates, like Ganga, in the Himalayas*

Yatra - *Jatra - Pilgrimage. Usually to the most important sacred place in India*

Yoga - Communion: union of the soul with the Supreme, or a process which promotes that relationship. The English word 'yoke' is derived from yoga

Yuga -Age, or extended period, of which there are four

Z

Zamindari - *A system of land ownership based on feudal rights*

Ganga Katha

SAMAKSHATA

ALONG THE HOLY GANGA RIVER

Samakshata is an expression of the *spirit of the Holy Ganga*. The main stem of this sacred river passes through 51 districts, and this book presents a compilation of the built, intangible and natural heritage of each district. Though comprehensive, no one book or series of books can document everything on the banks of this ancient and sacred river. This book, however, could serve as a guide to your own journeys of discovering this source of the spirit of Indian-ness.

नमामि गंगे

INTACH