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BIRBHUM

Directorate of Culture, Department of  
Information and Cultural Affairs

Government of West Bengal

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# Birbhum

## *The Land of Red Soil, Wandering Minstrels and Santiniketan*

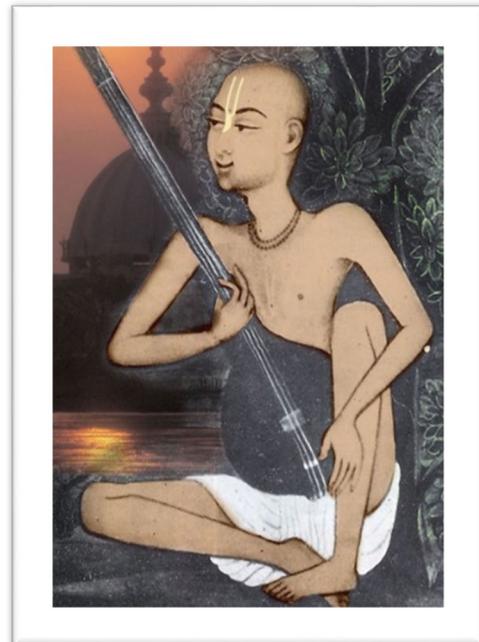
“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high”. These words of Nobel Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore seem to echo, as one enters the land of red soil. From the very soil, to the architecture, to the people, Birbhum embodies Tagore's legacy. But this alone isn't what Birbhum is all about. While the Visva-Bharati University established by Rabindranath Tagore gives Santiniketan its present fame, Birbhum is home to many other renowned personalities as well as festivals, cultural traditions, art forms, and heritage sites.

### *(A) People & Eminent Personalities*

Numerous renowned personalities have taken birth here, from poets to mystics to novelists. Here we have mentioned four such greats.

#### **Jaydev**

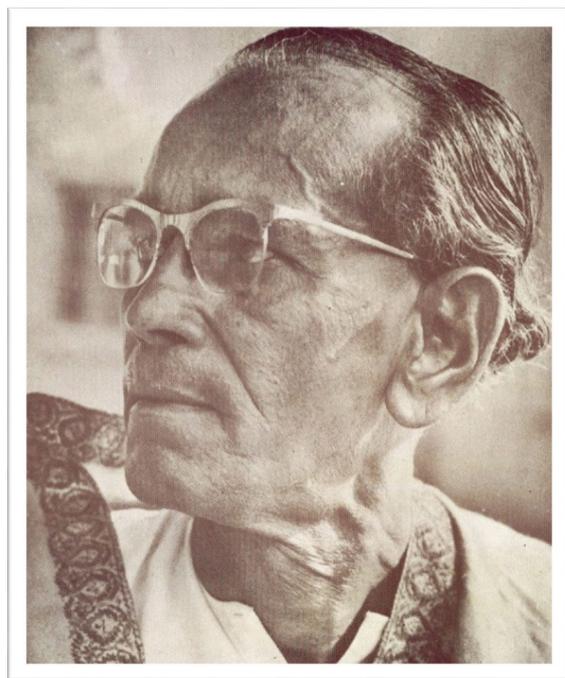
Belonging to the 12th century, Jaydev was a Sanskrit poet renowned for his poem “Gitagovindam” that speaks of the love affair of Radha and Krishna. The poem, which is an allegory of the human soul’s love for the divine, is a source of inspiration for Vaisnavism. The emotional lyricism of the poem is appreciated by audiences across the globe.



Jaydev

## **Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay**

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) was born on 23 July 1898 at Labpur in Birbhum. He passed the Matriculation examination (1916) from Labpur and took admission in IA at St Xavier's College, Calcutta. However, he soon left college and joined the non-cooperation movement (1920). He was imprisoned for one year (1930) for his political activities. He was a member of the West Bengal Bidhan Sabha for eight years and the Rajya Sabha for six years. Tarashankar wrote a variety of genres but was primarily a novelist. His themes include communal riots, war, famine, the political implications of economic inequality, the independence movement, social conditions, the conflict of modernism with traditionalism etc.



Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay

## **Amartya Sen**

World-renowned economist, Amartya Sen was born on 3 November 1933 in Santiniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal. A Nobel Laureate, Sen was crucial in the creation of the United Nations Human Development Index. He is also listed among the 'World's 50 Most Influential People Who Matter' By Times Magazine. Sen's books have been translated into over 30 languages. Currently, Sen is a Professor of Economics and Philosophy at the Harvard University. He has also taught Economics at Oxford as well as at the London School of Economics. He is a recipient of the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour.



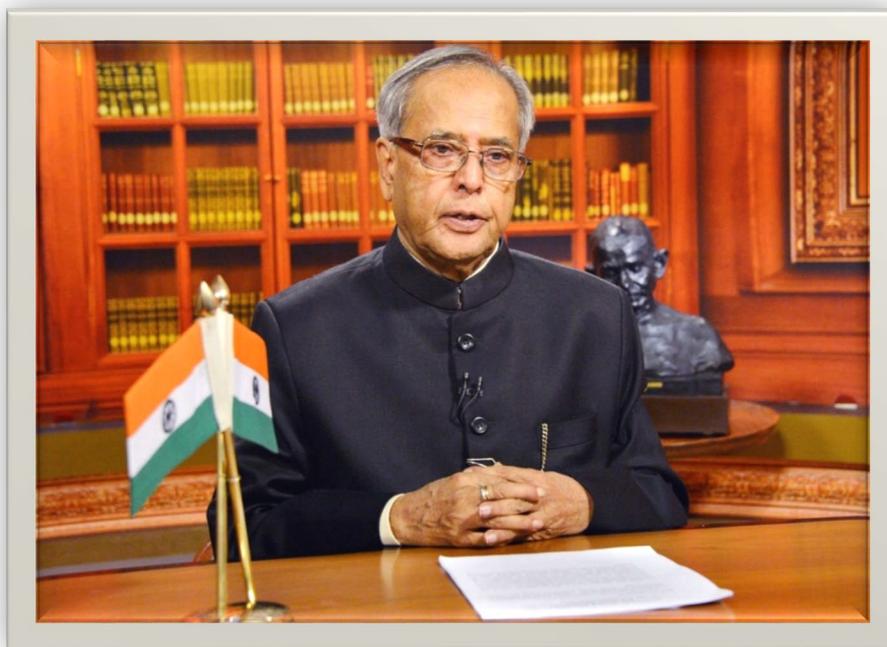
Amartya Sen

## **Pranab Mukherjee**

Shri Pranab Mukherjee assumed office as the 13th President of India on July 25, 2012, crowning a political career of over five decades of exemplary service to the nation in Government as well as Parliament.

A man of humble origins, Shri Mukherjee was born in the small village of Mirati in Birbhum District of West Bengal on December 11, 1935. He has earned the rare distinction of having served India at different times as Foreign, Defence, Commerce and Finance Minister. He was elected to the Upper House of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha) five times from 1969 and twice to the Lower House of the Parliament (Lok Sabha) from 2004. He was a member of the Congress Working Committee, the highest policy making body of the Party for a period of 23 years.

A prolific reader, Shri Mukherjee has authored several books on the Indian Economy and on Nation Building. The many awards and honours conferred on him include India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 2019, by his successor as president, Ram Nath Kovind.



**Pranab Mukherjee**

## (B) *Events and Festivals*

### **Poush Mela**

Poush Mela is one of the important festivals in the Birbhum District. The Mela is celebrated on the 7th Day of the Poush month of Bengali Calendar (23rd December). The fair is an amalgamation of different cultures and traditions. It was started as a tradition of the Tagore family in connection with the adoption of Brahma Dharma but it has later transformed into an international cultural event of Bengal.

Rabindranath Tagore started the mela with the idea of promoting local Artisans and Weavers and even today sale and promotion of Handicrafts and Handloom are an integral part of the fair. At the dawn of 7th Poush, Santiniketan wakes up to the soft music of shehnai. The first to enter the scenario is the “Baitalik” group, who go round the ashrama complex singing songs. It is followed by a prayer-meeting at Chhatimtala.



Then the entire congregation moves on to Uttarayan singing songs. Each day of this

festival is filled with different activities. The Mela is characterized by live performances of Bengali folk music, especially the baul music. It includes folk songs, dances, recitation and tribal song and tribal sports. This fair offers a perfect insight of true heritage of the state.



Poush Mela festivities

## **BasantaUtsab**

Tagore was truly fond of colours and celebrated the joyous festival with much fanfare. On the day of Dol Purnima (Full moon day of Falgun), Basanta Utsav is observed. There is a procession of music and dance in the morning followed by Tagore's music, rhymes and dance by students of different Bhavanas (Departments) of Visva Bharati University. On that day, Boys and girls, dressed in yellow (basanti) color, welcome spring – the season of hope and love, in a very elegant manner. The cultural programme presented by the students is of a superlative aesthetical degree. Beautiful songs appear euphonious to ears and mesmerizing dance performances are a visual retreat. Tapping to the tunes of great music in groups, students as well as the audience welcome the spring season wholeheartedly.



Later in the day, the students as well as the teachers apply abir on each other to mark the festival of colours.

## **Jaydeb Mela**

Kenduli Mela, also known as Baul Mela, is a devotional fair in Birbhum District. The mela is held at Jaydev-Kenduli on the occasion of Makar Sankranti, known for congregation of 'Bauls' or wandering minstrels of Bengal whose songs convey profound philosophical viewpoints of life using simple expressions.



## **Patharchapuri Mela**

Every year, a Fair called "Data Baba Mela" is held in the month of Chaitra of Bengali calendar (March-April) in Patharchapuri Village, Suri, to commemorate the death anniversary of a famous Muslim saint named Hazrat Data Meheboob Shah Wali famously known as "Data-Baba". During this week long fair, lakhs of people gather at the tomb of Data Baba to pay obeisance from different parts of the country.



Data Baba Mela

### *C. Cultural Traditions & Art Forms*

What makes Birbhum rich more than anything are immensely rich cultural traditions and art forms. It is these that make Birbhum one of Bengal's cultural epicentres.

#### **i) Music & Dance**

##### **Baul**

Bauls are religious singers of Bengal, known for their unconventional lifestyle and traditions, and for the freedom and spontaneity of their mystical verses that depicts love, generosity and devotion. Their songs frequently deal with the love between the human being and a personal god, who resides within the individual.

##### **Adivasi Naach**

Adivasi Naach is a traditional dance of the Santhal tribe. It conveys both happy and mournful notes. Female participants in the dance are uniquely dressed in the tribes' traditional attire & carry pitchers of brass upon their heads while dancing. They also use colourful umbrellas, Tirio (Flute), Madal (Tumda), Lagra, Khartal are the musical instruments used in it by both male and females. This dance is distinguished as a socio-cultural feature of this tribe.



Bauls (above) and Adivasi Naach (below)

## **Bhadu**

Bhadugaan is a kind of folk song popular in this part of Bengal. Generally, around 10 to 12 people with Harmonium, Khanjani, Dhol, Ramcoki or Premjuri, sing the songs. Their songs are based on the tale of Bhadu.

Bhadu was a princess whose would be husband was killed by dacoits when he was coming through a forest to marry Bhadu. As she heard the news, Bhadu fainted and eventually died. Her father became very depressed as his one and only daughter was no more, Then, some singers from the village composed songs in remembrance of their dearest princess Bhadrabati to provide relief to their king from depression. The king told them to preach Bhadu's name far and wide. These songs are sung only during the Bengali month of Bhadra.



## **Raibenshe**

This is an Indian folk dance that belongs to the martial arts genre. It is a “Bir Rasa Nritya”, the one which displays courage and valour. Performed only by males,

this dance involves vigorous movements of the body along with the acrobatics of a raibansh (a long bamboo stick), from which its name originated. During the performance, the performers enact the actions of drawing a bow, throwing a spear and waving a sword. The performers wear a brass anklet (nupur) on their right ankle.

This dance is accompanied by dhols (drums) and kanshis (cymbals). Raibenshe was traditionally performed by Bagdi community, who worked as the bodyguards of the zamindars (landlords) in medieval Bengal.



Raibenshe, a popular folk form of Birbhum

## ii) Folklore

### Bahurupi

The Bahurupies are wandering folk performers who portray several hundred characters which are mostly mythological in nature - like Lord Shiva, Lord Krishna Goddess Kali etc. They are street dramatists who assume disguises to entertain rural and urban masses. They wear glittering, eye-catching costumes of mostly Hindu gods and goddesses and adorn their faces with elaborate make-up. They wander from village to village to perform and in return get contributions from the audience. The rhythm of wordings and dialogues catch the attention of the audiences in a blink

of moment. Nowadays, Bahurupies also highlight the socio-cultural scenario of present times in their acting.



Bahurupi performers at a government camp



### Pater Gan

Prevalent in Birbhum, Patua Sangeet or Pater Gan is a cultural tradition related to the art of Bengal Patachitra (a paper-based scroll painting) performed by Patuas (an artisan community). Patachitra art form is known for its intricate details as well as

mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it. The colourful painting, the song of singer with step by step vivid descriptions of the scrolls and the rolling method of pictures presented together creates the condition which mesmerizes the viewers. They are the component of an ancient Bengali narrative art. Patua Sangeet describes the inner meaning and thought of the Patachitra, which gives always social messages and thus both are inherently connected to each other.

iii) **Handicrafts**

**Terracotta**

Terracotta is a form of artistry made out of soil and Adityapur in Birbhum is famous for such forms. Black and brown Terracotta is made by burning the mud at different degree of temperature. For example Black pottery is made by burning the items for four times. No colors or chemicals are used for this purpose.



## **Kantha Stitch**

Simple run stitches at the hand of skilled artists create a magical artwork called, Kantha embroidery. This embroidery was a means of self expression by rural women of Bengal. The origin of Kantha traces its history to a period not less than a thousand years. Its images reach back to even earlier sources, pre- and post- Vedic period. Some symbols such as the tree of life, the swirling cosmos and the sun are taken from the primitive art. The brilliance of the women artists have found expression in lifestyle products like sarees, dress materials, bed and cushion covers etc. Kanthas meant for use as quilts are called lep-kanthas, and those designed as counterpanes are called Sujanikanthas. Kantha stitch embroidery is also used in covers for boxes and mirrors, pillow cases, stoles for women and shawls for men.



## **Batik**

Batik is a technique of wax-resist dyeing applied to whole cloth, or cloth made using this technique. Batik is made either by drawing dots and lines of the resist with a spouted tool called a canting, or by printing the resist with a copper stamp called a cap. The applied wax resists dyes and therefore allows the artisan to colour selectively by soaking the cloth in one colour, removing the wax with boiling water, and repeating if multiple colours are desired.



Batik Work

### **Leather Goods**

Leather Goods are made especially at Amar Kutir, Santiniketan and surrounding areas in Birbhum. These are made using vegetable-tanned leather and hand painted with natural dyes, the bags, pouches, notebooks and other products made in Santiniketan are known for their traditional painting and nature-inspired motifs. Its artistic leather bags are popular in foreign markets and are exported to many countries including Japan and the U.S.A. In 2008, Santiniketan leather goods got a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, a form of certification given to a particular product or good that is unique to a particular region by the Controller General of



Patents, Designs and Trade Marks. All of these are popular across the globe for their cultural touch.

## *D. Historical, Anthropological & Heritage sites*

Besides being a hub of culture and arts, Birbhum is also famous for its heritage architecture. These include homes of renowned personalities, temples and palaces.

### **Dhatri Devata**

The House of noted Bengali novelist Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay is located at Labpur under Bolpur sub-division of Birbhum district. Bandyopadhyay was born in a zamindar family and the 200-year-old house, 'Dhatri Devata', was used for office work of the estates of the zamindari. It has now been converted into a museum dedicated to the novelist. Apart from the room where Bandyopadhyay was born, visitors here also get to see the “Katum-Kutum” (wooden sculptures) prepared by the writer which have been burnished and showcased in the museum along with his daily use items. In 2011, the West Bengal Heritage Commission declared it as a heritage site.

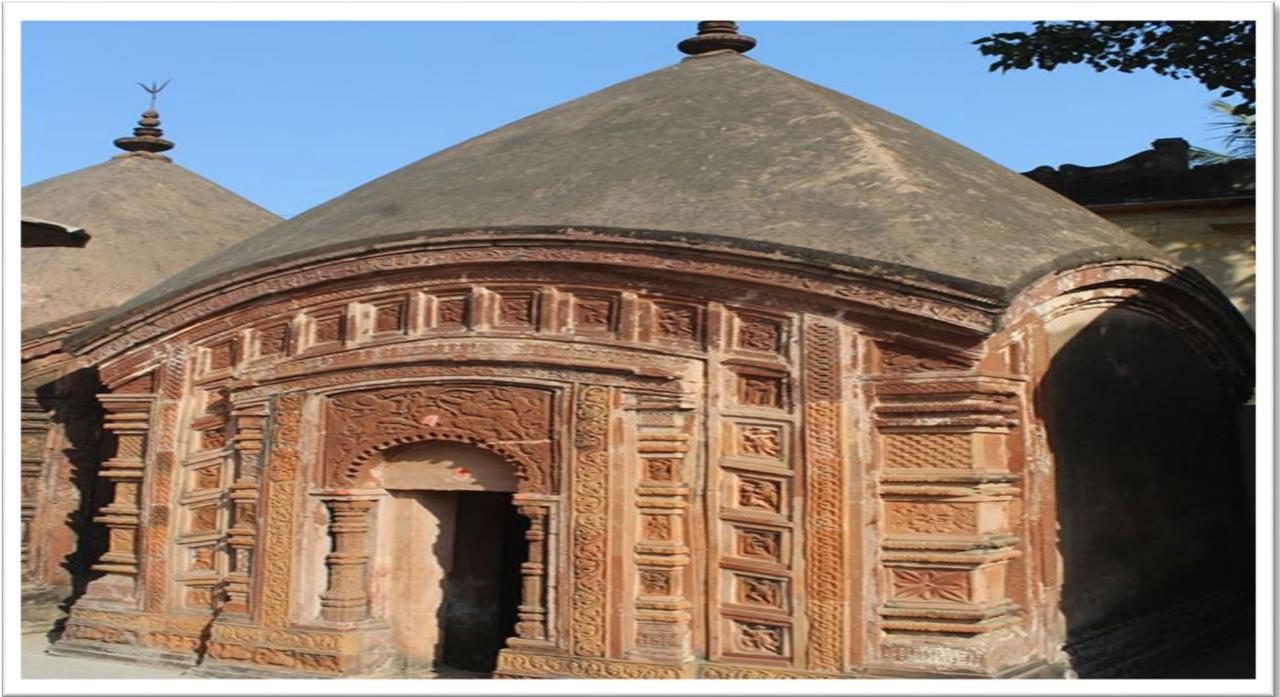
### **Balijuri Khageswar Nath Shiba Mandir**



The Shiva linga in this temple is referred to as ‘bhuinformath’, as it is believed that it had risen from the ground by itself. There is also a small char-chala (four-sided) temple outside of the North-West boundary wall of the main complex. There are five Shiva Lingas in the small temple and it is considered that the Pancha Pandavas had established these during their agyatovasa (exile).

- **Five Chala Temple, Ganpur**

The temple complex was established by the Choudhurys - the local zamindars (landlords) of Ganpur. It is almost contemporary to the Fourteen Shiva Temple complex nearby, which was established by Akineshwar Choudhury whose brother established this Five Chala Temple complex. The temples are ornamented with terracotta arts.



**Barudghar, Hamam, Imamabara in Rajnagar**

Barudghar was originally the arsenal of the Islamic rulers of Rajnagar. In accordance with the structures and nearby arches, it is evident that the Barudghar once stood inside a sturdy fortress-like structure, with six arches.

From the legends along with other pieces of existing historical structures and evidences, it is considered that the thriving regional centre of Rajnagar might have been established by Raja Bir Singha. Later, in 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was occupied by

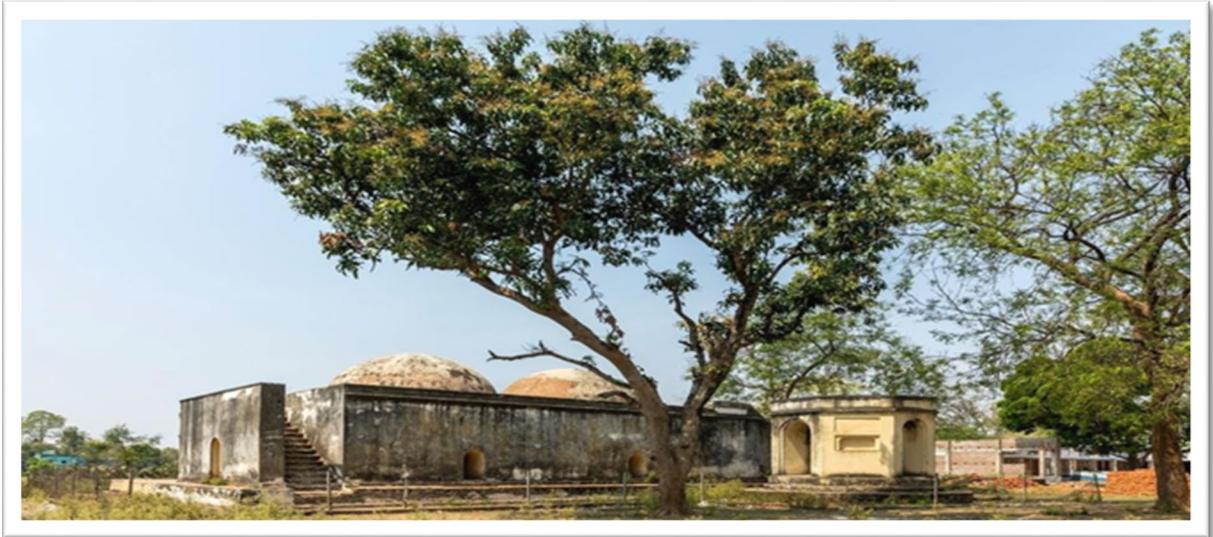


Barudghar

Islamic rulers. Among other historical structures is the Imambara, which has three arches in its central hall. The North and South wings of the structure are double storied and there are arches in the upper storey as well. Islamic style floral designs and traditional religious symbols can be seen in the structure. The designs contain abstract geometrical patterns. Rajnagar also has a hamam (bath house).



Hamam



Imambara

### **Toran**

As per the views of the local people, the structure was originally used as a “Haatishal” with large gateways to allow elephants to pass through them. The structure has three large Islamic arched entrances and geometrical designs made using lime and mortar.



### **Laxmi Janardan Mandir, Surul**

The temple was established by the Sarkars, who were zamindars of Surul. The temple, built by the architects and masons of Ranaghat, was established as a family temple and outsiders were strictly not allowed in the temple to perform pujas.



### **Malleswar Siva Temple, Mallarpur**

The date that is depicted on the main temple shows that it dates back to 1192 AD (1114 Saka era). However, the present structures of the temple seem to be of much later time. There are also several other temples in the complex which were built by people whose wishes were granted by deity Khageshwar Nath.



Malleswar Shiva Temple

**Om Jora Shiv Mandir, Surul**

The temples were established under the patronage of Bakranath Sarkar, one of the younger sons of the Sarkar family. He brought experts from Ranaghat to

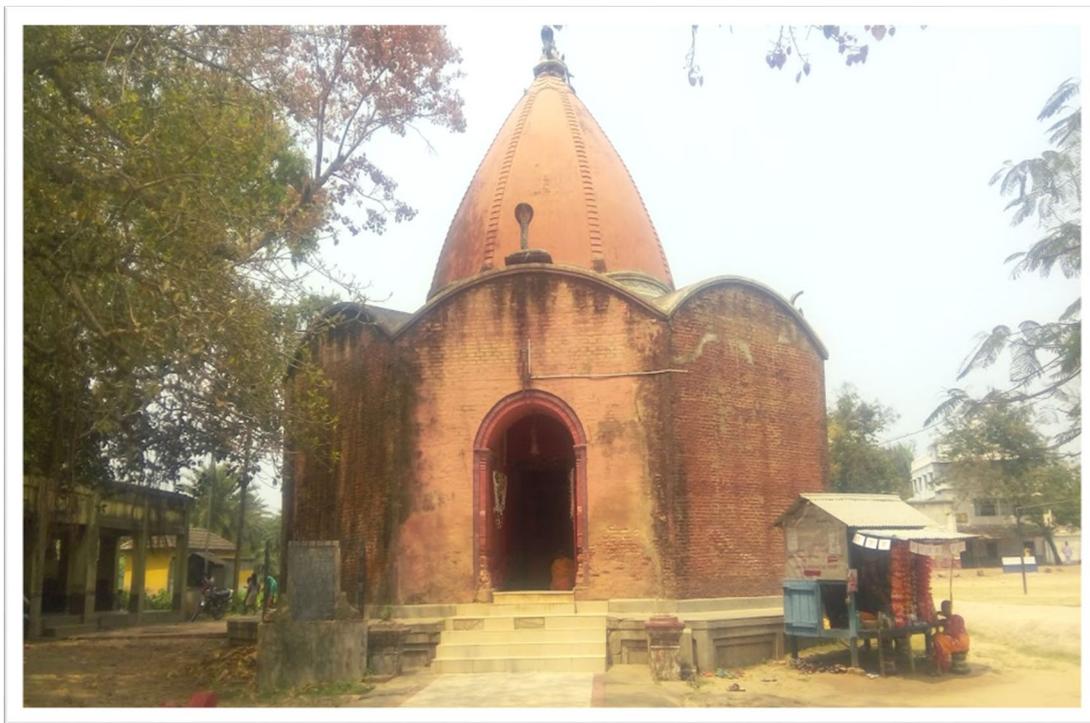


construct the temples, built in Pidha Deula style. The twin temples are situated in the

same complex of the Laxmi Janardan temple, one facing East and the other West.

### **Pancha Mandir, Nanoor**

The temple complex comprises of 4 Shiva temples and one Durga temple. There is a terracotta panel on the entrance of the Pancharatna temple depicting Goddess Durga in Mahishashuramardini form along with Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartik and Ganesha. A pair of Lions made of terracotta arts is there at the entrance of the Pancharatna temple. There are lions also at the entrance of the other three jointed temples. There are terracotta figures of other Hindu deities as well as Dasavatara of Lord Vishnu.



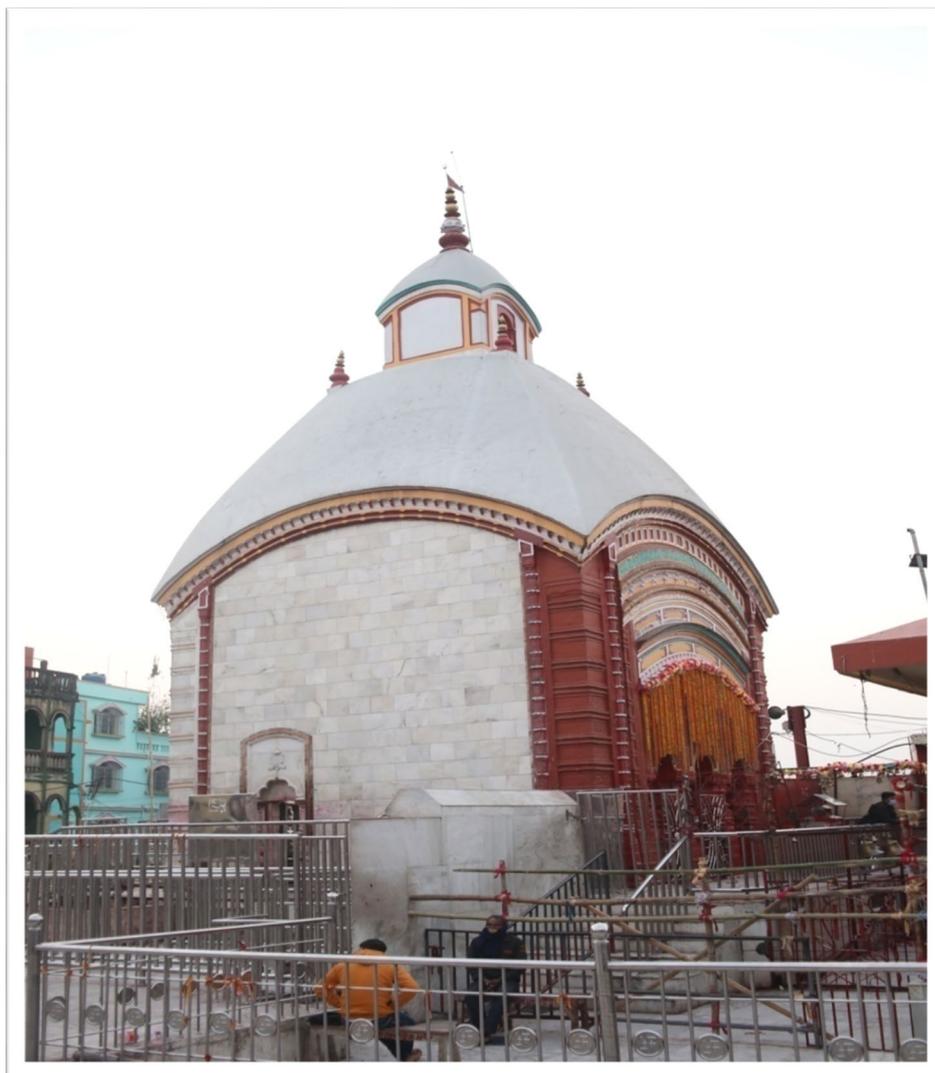
### **Akalipur Kalibari**

This temple was built by Maharaja Nandakumar, who was an eminent courtier in Nawab Alivardi Khan's Court at Murshidabad. The temple boasts of a very rare idol

of Gujjha(secret/hidden) Kali, As per legends, mythological king Jarasandha possessed a secret temple under water and this idol was worshipped by him beyond all eyes. The deity is seated on a coiled serpent which represents Kundalini Shakti or latent spiritual power in human body.

### **Tarapith Temple**

The famous temple of Tarapith, dedicated to Goddess Tara, a Tantric form of the Devi, was built and re-built several times, including by Raja Ram Jeeban Roy (Chaudhury), zamindar of Dheka, Birbhum in 1696 (approximate). The work of building the temple was completed by his son Ram Chandra Roy in 1701. The present temple was constructed in 1818 by one Jagannath Ray. It is known for its Shakti worship, different rituals and Tantric saint Sadhak Bamakhepa who made it his spiritual abode.



### **Bakreshwar Satipith**

Bakreshwar is known as one of the 51 Sati Peethas of India where the forehead and eyebrows of Goddess Sati fell, as per belief. Bakreshwar is famous for its temple which is dedicated to lord Bakranath (Shiva) and goddess Kali. The main temple of Bakreshwar is surrounded by many small shrines which are dedicated to lord Shiva. Bakreshwar is also a place of geological interest with many hot springs.



### **Nandikeswari Satipith**

Nandikeshwari temple, another Sati Peeth, is located in earlier Nandipur village, which is now a part of Sainthia town, Birbhum district. According to scripture and mythology, necklace of Sati fell here. Goddess Shakti is worshipped here as Nandini and Lord Bhairav as Nandikeshwar.



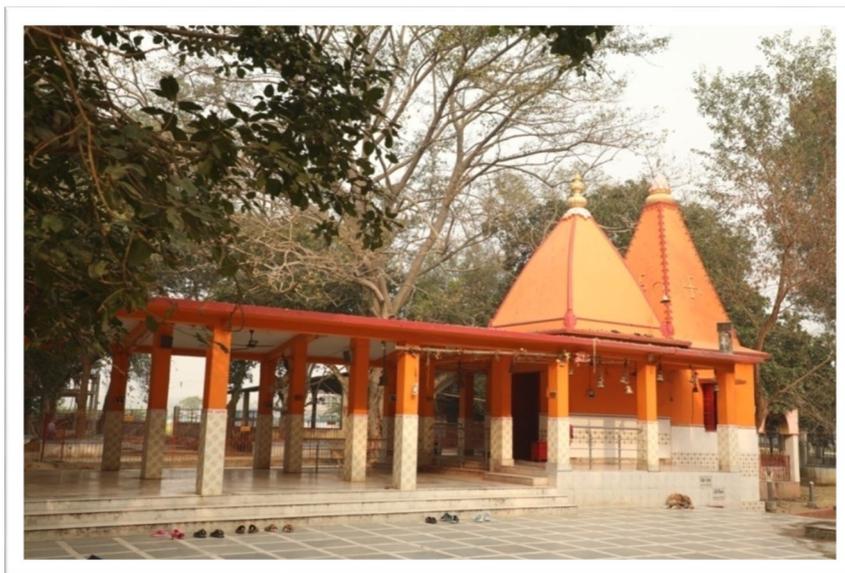
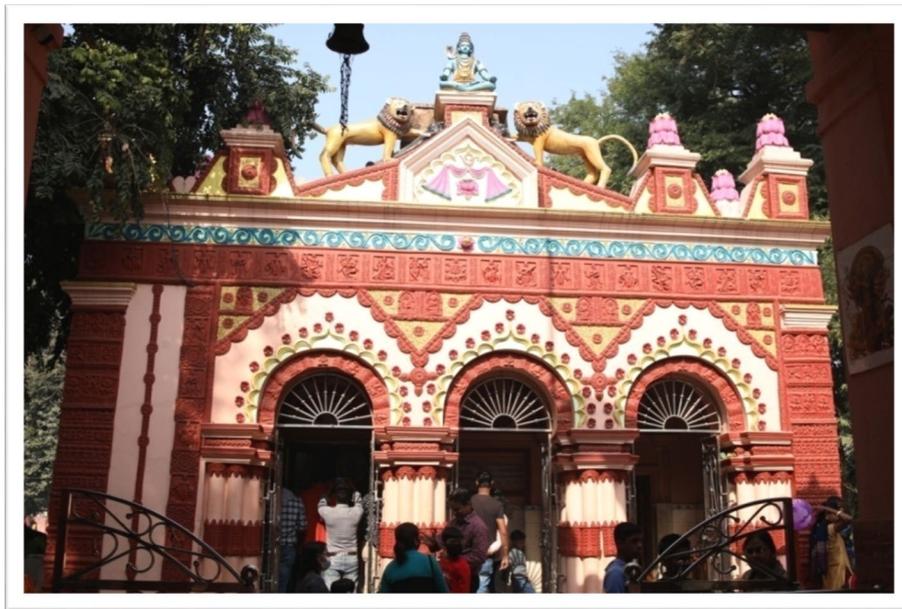
Nandikeshwari temple

### **Fullara Satipeeth**

Labhpur is known to the outside world as the native place of Tarashankar Bandopadhyay. The main attraction of the place is the beautiful temple of Fullara Maata. The myth is that, the lips of Sati fell down at Fullara. The temple is almost 100 years old. Labhpur Fullaratala is famous for the temple of Goddess Fullara and a lake named Daldali.

### **Kankalitala Satipeeth**

Kankalitala is a temple town in Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum district in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is one of the Sati Peethas where the waist (or Kankal in Bengali) of Sati fell which is at present the Kankalitala town.. Goddess Sati is the residing deity of the Kankalitala Temple.



Above: Fullara, Below: Kankalitala

### **Nalateshwari Satipith**

It is believed that Maa Sati's vocal cord fell here. Rani Bhabani, the queen of Natore got a divine order in her dreams that she must build one lakh temples of Goddess Kali. The temple of Nalateshwari was built as an initiative of following that order. The deity, made with silver, is offered the MahaBhog of fish, rice every day.

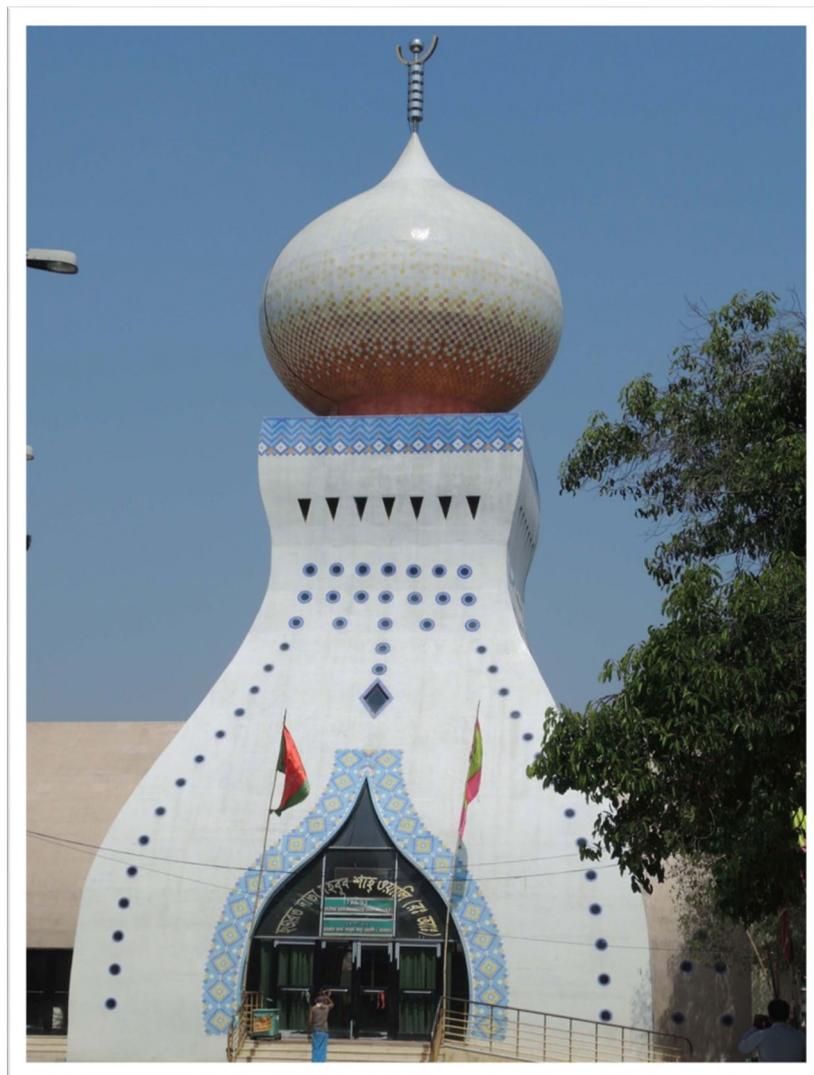


### **Birchandrapur Temple**

It is an enormous temple at the village of Ekachakra. The village is the birthplace of Lord Nityananda (Nitai). The temple preaches the statement of Sri Chaitanya about Nityananda that “without the causeless mercy of Lord Nityananda, one cannot enter into the affairs of Sri Sri Radha and Krishna”.

## **Data Babar Mazar**

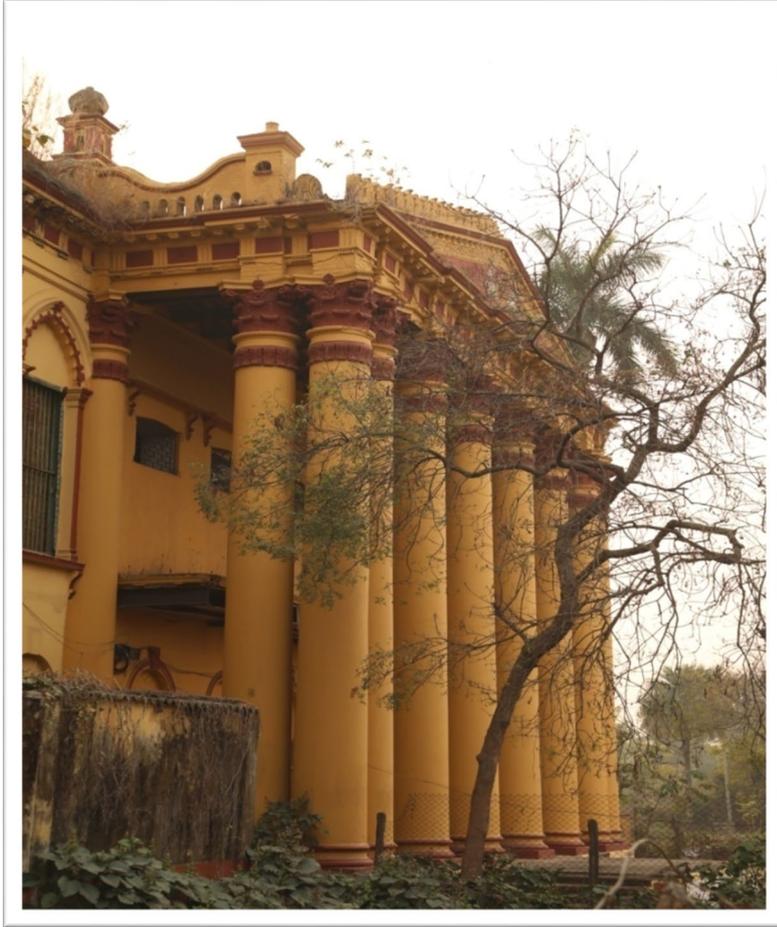
Patharchapur village houses the dargah of the Sufi Saint Hazrat Data Meheboob Shah Wali, famously known as "Data-Baba" who is reported to have died in 1892 A.D. It is said that he was gifted with miraculous power and used to cure dangerous diseases by applying ashes. His tomb in the village is visited by many.



## **Hetampur Rajbari**

Hetampur is a large village in Suri Subdivision of Birbhum District. It is situated near Dubrajpur. The village is famous for the Royal and historical palace

and reputed college. The Rajbari was built in the shape of a castle with 999 doors which have given it the name Hetampur Hajar Duari. Hetampur has also many interesting terracotta temples in various styles of architecture.



Compilation: Aritra Chakrabarti  
District Information and Cultural Officer  
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