

DISTRICT DIGITAL CULTURAL REPOSITORY

An Archive of Cultural Heritage of Bengal

SOUTH 24 PARGANAS

Directorate of Culture
Department of Information and Cultural Affairs
Government of West Bengal

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South 24 Parganas

Stories of Faith and Fauna

Sundarbans, home to the Mangroves and the Royal Bengal Tiger, falls in this district as does Sagar Islands, the confluence of faith, divinity and spiritualism.

A) PEOPLE AND EMINENT PERSONALITIES

Krishna Bose

(26 December 1930 – 22 February 2020)



Krishna Bose (26 December 1930 – 22 February 2020) was an Indian politician, educator, author and social worker. She was a Member of Parliament elected from the Jadavpur constituency in West Bengal as an All India Trinamool Congress candidate.

She taught at City College, Kolkata for 40 years, and thereafter remained its principal for 8 years.

Krishna Bose was born on 26 December 1930 in Dacca to Charu C. Chaudhuri and Chhaya Devi Chaudhurani. Her father specialised in constitutional studies and was one of the DICO, South 24 Parganas

secretaries of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. She married Sisir Kumar Bose, on 9 December 1955 and has two sons, Sumantra Bose, Sugata Bose and a daughter Sarmila Bose.

Sisir Bose is the son of Sarat Chandra Bose, the elder brother of Subhas Chandra Bose. He too fought against the British Raj and was imprisoned in Lahore Fort and Red Fort for his role in Subhas Chandra Bose's escape from Calcutta in 1941 during the Quit India Movement and World War II.

Krishna Bose has a B.A. (Hons.) and an M.A. in English Literature from Calcutta University, Calcutta, West Bengal and the prestigious degree of Sangeet-Visharad from Bhatkhande Music Institute, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

Dr. Malini Bhattacharya

Born : 14 October 1943 (age 78)

Dacca, Bengal Presidency, British India (now Dhaka, Bangladesh)



Dr Malini Bhattacharya is an Indian politician belonging to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). She was elected to the Lok Sabha, lower house of the Parliament of India from Jadavpur, West Bengal. An author, scholar, translator, playwright and activist in the women's movement, she is a retired Professor of English and former Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

Dinesh Das

(16 September 1913 – 13 March 1985)



Dinesh Das was a noted Bengali poet. He was born in his maternal home at Chetla and Alipore, a locality on the bank of Adi Ganga creek. When he was in Class IX, at around 15 years age, he became involved in secret revolutionary Indian independence movement. He also became involved in Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha movement which hampered his formal education. However he passed Matriculation Examination in 1930, and I.A. in 1932 from the South Suburban College (now Asutosh College).

In 1933, he was admitted to B.A. in Scottish Church College. In 1934, first poem "Sraboney" was published in *Desh*. His political thought later shifted to Communist ideals from Gandhism and he went on to write a number of poems on related subjects, including 'Kaste' (Sickle) and *Bhukh Michhil* (Procession of Hunger). He immortalized Kolkata's Clive Street in one of his poems.

Sugata Bose

Born : 7 September 1956 (age 65) Kolkata, India



Sugata Bose (born 7 September 1956) is an Indian historian and politician who has taught and worked in the United States since the mid-1980s. His fields of study are South Asian and Indian Ocean history. Bose taught at Tufts University until 2001, when he accepted the Gardiner Chair of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University. Bose is also the director of the Netaji Research Bureau in Kolkata, India, a research center and archives devoted to the life and work of Bose's great uncle, the Indian nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose. Bose is the author most recently of *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (2011) and *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (2006).

Bose was a Trinamool Congress MP (2014 -2019) at the 16th Lok Sabha, representing the Jadavpur constituency.

Bose has been active in researching, speaking, and publishing on Rabindranath Tagore, contributing to projects across different media. Bose has produced a four-CD set of Tagore's songs written outside of India as *Visva Yatri Rabindranath*, and has lectured widely on Tagore in North America, Europe, and Asia.

B) EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

Gangasagar Mela

The Gangasagar Mela is the biggest festival in the district and indeed, one of the most popular religious fairs, with more than 30 Lakh of pilgrims from across the nation & the world gather every year at Gangasagar to take a dip in the holy water of Ganga river on the day of Makar Sankranti, in the belief that their soul will be purified. The assemblage of Naga Sadhus here gives a unique identity and spirituality to this fair.



Kapil Muni Ashram

Mythology states when King Sagar chose to perform the Ashwamedha yagna for the 100th time. Indra - the King of Gods was jealous of King Sagar's success for which he kidnapped and hid the yagna horse in the hermitage of Kapil Muni (patal) at Sagardwip. The sons of King Sagar condemned Kapil Muni as a thief and attacked him. Kapil Muni in an act of rage turned the 60,000 sons of King Sagar into ashes. It is said that as per the instructions of Kapil Muni, Bhagiratha the grandson of King Sagar, meditated over years to persuade River Ganga to step down from Heaven to Earth to wash the mortal remains of his ancestors. As per the myth, The souls were liberated on the day of "Makar Sankranti", and people take a holy dip beside the Sagar Island on that day, hoping that their wishes will be fulfilled and they will attain moksha..



Bird's Eye View

C) CULTURAL TRADITION AND ART FORMS

Bhatiyali

‘Bhatiyali’ is a form of folk song traditionally sung by boatmen. The long-drawn notes of Bhatiyali ripple through the mystic waters as the boatman navigates with his oar and the lyrics depict the lone journey of the boatman down the vast river. The word Bhatiyali or “Bhati Desher Gaan”, some believe, comes from ‘bhata’ or ebbing tide. But this form has lost popularity among the youth and also undergone a change in lyrical pattern with the use of western musical instruments.



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Bonobibi Pala

Performed mainly in the lower delta of the Sundarbans, This theatrical form worships ‘Bonobibi’, the guardian deity of the forest.

In the structure of long narrative verses, the songs speak of the daily life of the forest dweller, their trials and tribulations, the other omnipresent characters are ‘Dakhin Ray’ and ‘Ghazi Miya’. The sanctity of their worship is maintained through the strict adherence to some sacred rituals before the play.



Dhak

The sound of ‘Dhak’, or the traditional drum, ushers in festivity. Dhak, which is a large wooden barrel covered with hide on both sides, is one of the oldest traditional percussion instruments in Bengal. The drummers are called ‘Dhakis’. They use wooden sticks for drumming. Though the musical instrument is an intrinsic part of Bengal’s culture and tradition, not much improvement has been noticed in the form in the last decade as youngsters today are reluctant to become dhakis.



Gajan

‘Gajan’ are folk songs sung primarily in praise of Lord Shiva but can also be inspired by the stories surrounding other mythology, the puranas and the Epics, with contemporary social issues increasingly finding place among their themes. They are performed during the festival of ‘Charak’ in the month of ‘Chaitra’ and are hence named ‘Chaitegaab’ in some areas.



Jhumur

This song and dance of the indigenous people speaks of their hard life and toil. It was brought in by the tribals from neighbouring states like Jharkhand and is performed by some of the tribes settled here. Men, in 'dhoti' and vest with a 'gamcha' and peacock feathers tied around the head, sing and play the instruments while the women in the group, wearing white saree with a red border, sing and dance.



Mangal Kabya

Mangal Kabya is a collection of Bengali Hindu religious texts composed between 13th and 18th centuries. It consists of narratives about indigenous deities of rural Bengal. Mangal Kabya has evolved over decades to accommodate social narratives.



Mangal Kabya troupe



Puppetry

While puppetry or ‘putul naach’ in Bengal dates back to the 14th century, some artists from Rajasthan are known to have settled in the district more than a century ago and passed on their craft.

The art, which has engaged in it for generations, is living a scattered life in different parts of the district like Diamond Harbour, Kakdwip and Baruipur. The topics range from the Epics and mythological tales to stories on social awareness and government schemes. But the puppeteer’s brand of storytelling through wood, bamboo, rod and string is finding less acceptance among the younger generation even with the government providing the talented with platforms to perform on.



Shree Khol

This percussion instrument was earlier used in 'kirtan' performances but today 'khol' is used in individual format, too. The two-sided drum is made of clay. Its right face is smaller than the left drumhead. 'Kartal', 'Jhomp', 'Flute', 'Mandira' and at times 'Sankh' or conch are some of the accompanying musical instruments with Khol. It has gained popularity as an individual musical instrument over the years and many young people are getting National and International recognition through the performance.



D) HISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL & HERITAGE SITES

Achipur Chinese Temple

Achipur, believed to be the first Chinese settlement in India, is named after its founder, trader Tong Achew. The 300-year-old temple is dedicated to Chinese deities, locally called 'Khude' and 'Khudii'. On Chinese New Year's Day, devotees from Achipur and adjacent areas like Kolkata come to pray here. The traditional ways of Chinese fortune-telling are still practised here.



Baba Baro Kachari

Legend has it that a local man, Shristidhar Kathal, was asked by Lord Shiva in a dream to establish His abode under an 'Ashwattha' tree and eventually it has become a pilgrimage site for people irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Originally called Bhoot Kachari and located at Amtola it is believed to bless newborns with health and long life. Childless couples coming to pray here often bring idols of Gopal (if they want a boy) or Sakhi (if they want a girl) as token offerings..



Bacon Bungalow

One of the most interesting memories stored in the wooden visage of the Bacon Bungalow is the stay for two days of Rabindranath Tagore on 30th and 31st December, 1932. And Kobiguru's visit was only at the behest of Sir Daniel Hamilton, a Scottish businessman whose name is closely associated with the rural welfare of the people of Gosaba. Yet the historical structure had been in dire straits until a recent renovation project was undertaken to preserve this heritage site.



Bacon Bungalow

Bakkhali Beach

The white sand beach is a favourite tourist destination. The view of sunrise and sunset from the beach is breathtaking. Most of the locals here earn their livelihood by selling different types of dried fish. For tourists, the best place to cycling, driving or taking a walk while sipping coconut water



Baruipur Rajbari I

As meticulous protectors of its ancient heritage, the descendants of Raja Rajballav Roychowdhury have kept alive the traditional festivals that the 300-year-old Rajbari has always been witness to.

It was built by the patron on being gifted the large tract, extending till the Sunderbans, by the Nawab of Bengal. The grandeur of the festivals, from Durga Puja to Rath Yatra, is quite a sight for everyone with a chance to experience it. A unique feature is the setting free of two 'neel kantha' birds after immersion of the idol of Durga on Dashami. Their heavenly flight, the family believes, would convey the message of the deity's departure from 'martya' (the Earth) to her husband, Lord Shiva



Baruipur Rajbari II

For a walk through the corridors that hosted some of the most distinguished names in the literary and business world of the time, this palatial building in Baruipur would be an apt destination. Originally owned by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, it was later handed over to the Rowchowdhury zamindars. Literary master of the time, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, is known to be a visitor to the Rajbari and the table that he worked at still finds a place in the building.



Baruipur Rajbari-II

Bipadtarini Temple

Local lores say this temple was built where a local holy man Baba Dulal meditated for three days under a Bel (Bengal Quince) tree when Ma Bipadtarini appeared to him as a beautiful young girl. Thousands gather here in the month of Ashar (mid-June to mid-July) to celebrate Brata-Utsav and Rath Yatra. The temple has different idols of god and goddesses along with Ma Bipadtarini.



Catholic Church

Bishop Linus Nirmal Gomes was ordained as first Bishop of Baruipur Diocese on 1977. Located in the Christian settlement of Baburbagan, this church boasts of a number of fine statues of Jesus, Mother Mary and the Apostles. Major celebrations are held here during Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter and Good Friday.



Chingrikhali Fort

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The fort, or the ruins of it, is testimony to the birth of Diamond Harbour when the British renamed the settlement of Hajipur. While there is a debate on whether it was built by the British or the Portuguese, the structure of strategic importance is known to have seen dominance of Portuguese pirates preceding the era of the Company. It also served as a resting point for the ships. All that now remains of the stronghold, which is believed to be built in the 14th century, are a few bricks designating its past existence.



Frasergaunj Beach

fish varieties like Patia, Rui, Tapia, Vola, Lohora and shrimps are available for choice here.



Frasergaunj Harbour

Inaugurated on April 29, 1995, it is the biggest fishing harbour in the area and the fish caught here is auctioned off to local and other markets.

Ghutiari Sharif

Ghutiari Sharif, near river Vidhyadhari, is the site of the grave of Pir Mobarak Gaji or Gaji Baba. Gaji Baba is known to have got the patronage of Raja Madam Roy, the Hindu king of Raipur, who donated 1306 acres of land to the Pir. Legend has it that in the 17th century, when the region was hit by a severe drought, Gaji Baba performed strenuous meditation that brought rainfall for the villagers but cost him his life. Every year, a month long fair is held here in August to commemorate the holy man's death anniversary that sees people of all religious faiths visit the darga.



Gopinath Jiu Temple premises

Built in 1794, by Manik Chandra Mandal, this nine-domed Navaratna temple also has a 'Ras mancha', a 'Jhulan mancha' and a 'Nat mandir'. Of the seven temples still standing, the Gopinath Jiu temple is the most popular amongst tourists.



Gopinath Jiu temple

Hamilton Bungalow

Sir Daniel Hamilton, the Scottish shipping magnate, was better known to the people of Gosaba for his experiments and projects for uplifting the rural populace. His philanthropic journey in India began when he bought almost 9,000 acres of land in the Gosaba area and was best known for introducing the co-operative system in the Sunderban region. Incidentally, he also built a bungalow here and had an esteemed list of visitors to it, like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, with the aim to give them a glimpse of his modern schemes for rural welfare.



Hataniya Doania Bridge

Constructed on the Hataniya Doania river, this bridge connecting Namkhana and Narayanpur was inaugurated on March 6, 2019. Its opening has reduced the travel time between Kolkata and Bakkhali by at least two-and-a-half hours



Henry Island

The Kiran Beach in Henry Island is a mixture of sand and clay with rows of casuarinas and occasional mangroves to enhance its beauty. About 205 acres of land is under the state fisheries department for pisciculture that grows a variety of fish like bhetki, tangra and pangas along with forest conservation.



Jatar Deul

Built in the 11th century (believed to be by Raja Joychandra) Pala - Sen era, this temple in Raidighi is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It has towering spires in the Odisha-style called 'Deul', alongside walls of intricately designed terracotta bricks. Recent excavations suggest that it was once part of a large temple-complex.



Kapilmuni Temple

Located at Sagar Island Sagardwip, at the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal, this temple is administered by Akhil Bhartiya Shree Pancharam Nandiya Akhara. Every year on Makar Sankranti (January 14) more than half-a-million devotees come here to take a dip in the water and offer prayers. It is dedicated to sage Kapil Muni. It is said that a number of temples were destroyed in natural calamities before the construction of the attractive present temple.

Lord Indra had stolen King Sagar's horse for Yagya and tied it near Kapil Muni's Ashram. So the king sent his 60,000 sons to look for his beloved horse which they found and charged Kapil Muni for the theft. An angered Kapil Muni opened his eyes and turned them to ashes. The king's grandson Bhagiratha then came and found the mound of ash and asked the saint for his uncles' salvation. Kapil Muni then proposed bringing Ganga to the Earth and organise rituals for their redemption. Hence, the beginning of Gangasagar Mela.



Lal Pole



The name refers to the colour of the bridge that had been built in the British era. Lal Pole holds historical importance as the first bridge that enabled a means of connection between the old Diamond Harbour area and the new settlement area. It was also one of the rare steel structures of the time.

Lighthouse (Diamond Harbour)

The station at the lighthouse was established 1898. The 46 feet high tower is located to the north of the Diamond Harbour jetty and still helps ships in navigating at night.



Lighthouse, Diamond Harbour (above) and Kakdwip (below)



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Lighthouse (Kakdwip)

Like the settlers of the region, who are forced to migrate by the changing geography of the water bodies, this lighthouse built first in 1821 was forced by erosion to be relocated twice. The present structure that was erected in 1909, however, just like the area's resilient people, is still fully operational.



LORD CANNING HOUSE

The Canning House could not serve as the administrative building for a port that the last governor general and first viceroy of India had envisioned. Unlike his handling of the mutiny of 1857 and in spite of its strategic location on the banks of river Matla and at its confluence with river Bidyadhari, the port was overrun by the heavy silting in its vicinity and led to its closure soon after. What remained was the building with its Indo-Western style of architecture and was sold off in 1952 by a Port Canning Land Company Ltd agent to J M Ghosh. It was declared a Heritage site by the Govt of West Bengal in 2019.

The reminiscence of the British era is preserved in the things used by Lord Canning.



Lothian Island

This island was declared a wildlife sanctuary in June 1976. Located at the juncture of the Saptamukhi estuary and the Bay of Bengal, the island has 15 types of mangrove plants. Estuarine crocodile. Olive Ridley turtle and jungle feline are among the fauna found in the uninhabited island, which is also a bird watcher's delight.



Mandir Bajar Shiv Mandir

Constructed in the 'Aathchaala'-style and made of terracotta bricks, this temple was built in 1749 by Shri Keshab Roy Chowdhury. Many devotees come here to

offer prayers during Maha Shivratri and also between April 10-15 to celebrate Charak and Gajan.

Mousuni Island

Surrounded by the sea on three sides, the island adjacent to the Sundarban delta in Namkhana block has gained popularity among tourists. Around 40 beach cottages and camps have been constructed on the island for visitors. Recently the island has become the hub of tourists who love pristine beach midst of serinnity.



Muriganga River

Before joining the Bay of Bengal, the Hooghly river bifurcates and passes by Sagar island. The distributary thus created is called the Channel Creek or Muriganga.





Netaji's ancestral House in Kodalia

Declared a Heritage site by the Govt of West Bengal, this ancient house in Subhasgram once used to be the place that a young Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose spent his Puja vacation in. It was built by Netaji's grandfather Haranath Bose and his father Janaki Nath Bose used to bring his family over for the Durga Puja. The fondness for the house stayed on with Netaji even as a young adult and his visits to and stay at his ancestral home continued. One can still imagine his touch on the furniture and belongings that have been preserved in the house.

The courtyard hosted a Durga Puja which served as the occasion for Netaji's visit.

Items used by Netaji can be still seen at the house

Noorpur

At the confluence, where the Rupnarayan and the Ganga curve out the three districts of South 24 Parganas, East Medinipur and Howrah, lies Noorpur. The

serene village overlooks a Port Trust jetty that has been operational since 1881 known as the Hugli Port Station. With the occasional sight of ships en route the Calcutta Port, it gifts an exotic view to the eye. The station is also used as a naval base that determines the navigability of the place by measuring the depth and level of water.



Rajbari Bawali (below)



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RAJBARI BAWALI

Built around 250 years ago, this architectural marvel was witness to the opulence and grandeur of the mandal family, who had been gifted the title by the British. The 3,00,000 acres of land was presented to their ancestor Shoba Ram Rai, a brave army officer from Uttar Pradesh, by the king of Hijli for quelling a revolt of peasants and pirates. The prosperity grew under entrepreneur Haradhan Mondal, who saw his strategically located property flourish in colonial times. But after independence, the Rajbari fell on hard times and could only see its lost glory restored after its present owner Ajay Rewla used expertise from around the globe to replicate its former grandeur and turn the property into a boutique hotel in 2008.

JAL TUNGI

Octagonal dilapidated gazebo, it was once a venue for music and dance performances for royalty.