

Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Meerut District

Intangible Cultural Heritage

2020



Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage



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Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

National Mission for Clean Ganga
(Reg. Society)
Ministry of Jal Shakti
Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation
Government of India




INTACH Indian
National Trust
for Art and
Cultural Heritage

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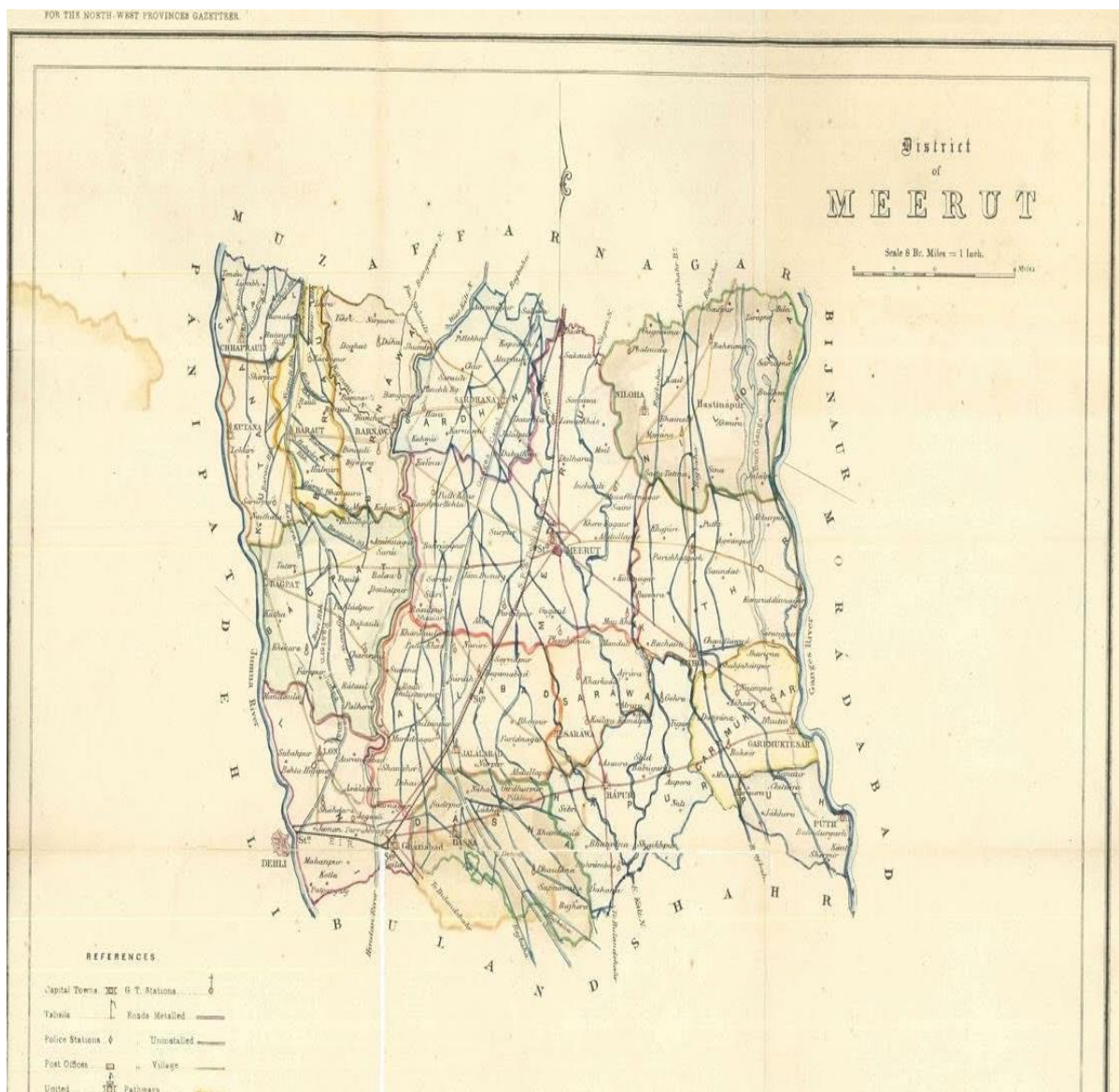
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Cover Image: Tanseer Saifi displays an old book on Meerut's scissors that his great-grandfather published in 1896. It contains details about the processes of all kinds of scissors made in the city, along with their prices at the time. To preserve this information, Tanseer's father has replicated the book. Image source: Devyani Nighoskar, *Firstpost*

Back Cover Image: Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple, Hastinapur. Image source: ICH Division, INTACH

Introduction

Meerut city reflects a wide scope of blended culture, customs and artistic expressions, which despite the changing times, have very old roots. The origin of Meerut can be traced back to 273 B.C, and it has experienced constant change ranging from the antiquated period of the Mahabharata, the Ashokan times, the Gurjaras, and lastly, the British occupation in Meerut and rest of India.



Map of the District of Meerut. Lithographed at the Surveyor General's Office, Calcutta. July 1875.
From an original supplied by E.T. Atkinson Esquire in charge of the N.W.P Gazetteer.
Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com>



Meerut Junction. Image source: <https://askgif.com>

In the present day, Meerut's local population is represented by the Jat, Rajput, Tyagi, and Gujjar communities among others, each of whom has retained their cultural identity and thereby contributing abundantly to its rich cultural heritage and practices. With the extensive mix of cultures and traditions all blended in the modern vibrancy of the city, culture is what embodies the present-day life of Meerut.

Etymology and History

Meerut is situated between the holy rivers Ganga and Yamuna doab. It is a busy trade centre of western Uttar Pradesh. Due to its geographical importance, the fertile Ganga-Yamuna doab has been an important centre of human activities since the very early times of the Vedic Civilisation.

Meerut probably derives its name from the word '*Maya Rashtra*', meaning the country of Maya, who was the architect of the asuras (the demons) as per Hindu mythology. His daughter Mandodari was the wife of Ravana, the antagonist of the first epic, *Ramayana*. In the *Mahabharata*, the Kauravas had

their capital in Hastinapur, which is situated in present-day Meerut district, and is a site for archaeological excavation.

Meerut also contains a Harappan settlement known as Alamgirpur, believed to be the easternmost settlement of the Harappan Civilisation. Meerut had been a centre of Buddhism during the period of the third Mauryan emperor, Ashoka (r. 273-232 BCE), and remains of Buddhist structures were found near the Jama Masjid in the city.

Fragments of the 6th Ashokan Pillar, which contains his edicts, were originally found in Meerut; they now find place in the British Museum.

The Ashoka Pillar, at Delhi Ridge, next to the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital, near Delhi University, was carried to Delhi from Meerut by Firoz Shah Tughluq (r. 1351–1388 CE). The pillar was damaged by an explosion in 1713, but it was eventually restored to its former glory in 1867.



Image source: <https://www.google.com/pinterest.com>

In the 11th century, the south-west part of Meerut was ruled by Har Dat, the Dor Rajput Raja of Bulandshahr, who built a fort within this complex which became well known for its strength and was even mentioned in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari*. Har Dat was later defeated by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni in 1018. A prominent local landmark, the Jama Masjid, is said to have been constructed by Mahmud's Vizier. Shortly after Sultan Mahmud's victory in capturing the city, a local Hindu Raja wrested control of Meerut from his hands. A part of this Raja's fortifications, which he constructed for the city's defence, survived until recent times.

The first big invasion on the city occurred in 1192, from Mohammad Ghori, when his general, Qutb-ud-din Aibak, attacked the city. A much worse fortune lay ahead for the district, which came with the invasion of Timur in 1398, during which the Rajputs offered a tough resistance at the Fort of Loni, where he fought the Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad Tughlaq.

Qutb-ud-din Aibak marched from Kohram, and the following lines are mentioned in the *Taj-ul-Maasir* of Hasan Nizami where Meerut Fort is described thus:

'and when he arrived at Meerut, which is one of the celebrated forts of the country of Hind, for the strength of its foundations and superstructure, and its ditch which was as broad as the ocean and fathomless, an army joined him, sent by the dependant chiefs of the country.'

Meerut: A Gazetteer, 1904 (277).

Eventually, they were all defeated by Timur, who went on to attack Delhi, where he again massacred the local population. Timur returned to attack Meerut, now ruled by an Afghan chief, Ilias, and took the city in just two days, leading to widespread devastation before he departed to the north once again. The city then came under the rule of the Mughal Empire and experienced an age of relative peace and tranquillity. During the rule of the third Mughal Emperor, Akbar (r. 1556–1605), a mint for copper coins was established here.

During the decline of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb, the city effectively came under the control of local rulers, the Saiyids of Muzaffarnagar in the north, the Jats in the south-east, and the Gurjars along the Ganges and in the south-west. The city saw Sikh and Maratha invasions in the 18th century, with short periods of battles involving the Jats and the Rohillas.

Walter Reinhardt, an English soldier, established himself at Sardhana and some parts of the district came under his rule. Upon his death, they came into the hands of Begum Samru. During this time, the southern part of the district had remained under Maratha rule.

In 1803, with the fall of Delhi, Daulat Rao Scindia of the Marathas abandoned the territory to the British, and the city was designated as the headquarters of the eponymous district in 1818.

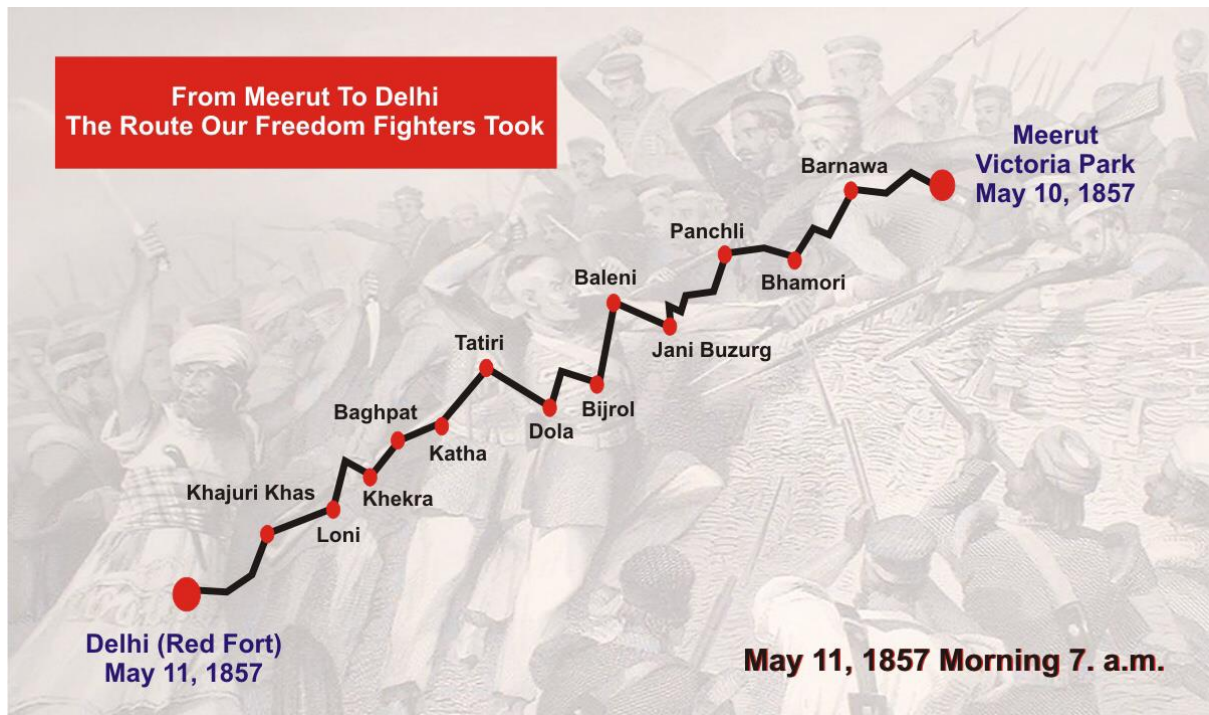
Mutiny in Meerut, 1857



Indian Postal Stamp, 1857 Mutiny. Image source: istampgallery.com

Meerut is most popularly associated with being the first region in the country which sparked the Mutiny of 1857 against the British East India Company. The famous slogan "Dilli Chalo" ("Let's march

to Delhi!") was first raised here. Meerut Cantonment was the place where the rebellion began when Hindu and Muslim soldiers were given rifle cartridges rumoured to have a coating made of animal fat.



The March to Delhi that shook the British Empire, 159 Years Ago
Image Source: <https://sabrangindia.in>

The European cantonment was separated from the 'native lines'. Close by were Sadar Bazar and Lal Kurti Bazar, the latter named after the red uniforms worn by Company soldiers.

On 24 April 1857, Meerut's commander, Colonel Carmichael Smyth, marched 90 Indian sepoy of the Bengal Cavalry, hired mostly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. He ordered them to fire the new Enfield cartridges: 85 refused. The cartridges were covered with paper that had to be torn off. Muslims believed that the paper was greased with pig fat and the Hindus believed that it was coated with cow fat. All 85 were stripped of their uniforms, shackled and imprisoned for ten years. These rebels were from the 3rd Cavalry; they owned their horses and belonged to the upper-caste. On Sunday, 10 May 1857, Kotwal Dhan Singh Gurjar opened the gates of the prison. These soldiers, along with other imprisoned soldiers escaped prison and declared themselves free, revolted, attacked and killed several of the British officials to take the city in their control.

The Revolt of 1857 is also called the Sepoy Mutiny or India's First War of Independence. It was started on 10 May 1857 at Meerut, as a mutiny of sepoy of the British East India Company's army.

It was a prolonged period of armed uprising as well as rebellions in Northern and Central India against the British occupation of that part of the subcontinent. It began as a revolt of the sepoys of the British East India Company's army but eventually secured the participation of the masses.

The revolt is known by several names:

*The Sepoy Mutiny (by the British historians), the Indian Mutiny, the Great Rebellion (by the Indian historians), the Revolt of 1857, the Indian Insurrection, and the First War of Independence (by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar)*¹.

Karl Marx in New-York Daily Tribune, July 15, 1857: "Of the troops sent to the rescue of Meerut, where order had been re-established, six companies of native sappers and miners, who arrived on the 15th of May, murdered their commanding officer, Major Frazer, and made at once for the open country, pursued by troops of horse artillery and several of the 6th dragoon guards. Fifty or sixty of the mutineers were shot, but the rest contrived to escape to Delhi."

The revolt spread over the entire area from the neighbourhood of Patna to the borders of Rajasthan. The main centres of revolt in these regions were Kanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Jhansi, Gwalior, and Arrah in Bihar.

¹ <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/list-of-important-leaders-associated-with-the-revolt-of-1857-1466160043-1>

This marked the beginning of a widespread revolt across northern India as these soldiers marched towards Delhi. 10th May is still celebrated as a local holiday in Meerut.



Kambob gate, a testimony of the revolt of 1857. Image source: <https://www.oldpostcards4sale.co.uk>

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 organising an Indian-Railways strike. This case garnered attention in England, inspiring the 1932 play titled, *Meerut Prisoners*, which was performed by a Manchester 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 India was formally liberated from British control, was held at Victoria Park in Meerut on 26 November 1946. It was in this session that the Constitution-making committee was created.

Meerut, much like the rest of the country, also suffered from communal riots in 1984 (Hindu-Sikh Riots), 1982 (Hindu-Muslim Riots). In May 1987, personnel of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) allegedly shot dead 42 Muslims; the trial of the case is still pending (Hashimpura Massacre).

ILLUSTRATED TIMES

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THE INDIAN NEWS.

AFTER an anxious perusal of many different accounts, the public is beginning to realise the full force of the news from India. It is of a nature at least as serious as was apprehended. In fact, we cannot but think that the public was trifled with when the first information of a mutiny came. We were told that it was a mere outburst—a casual flash of fire—a spasm, and so forth; whereas if anything is now clear about it, it is that its causes are profoundly deep, and its spread extensive. Indeed, we advise our readers at once to give up trying to account for it by one or other little item of complaint—as a greased cartridge here, feelings of caste there, and so on. By this method people used once to explain the French Revolution: the writers had done it; or the excesses of the Regency; or the corruptions of the church; or financial difficulty—till now we see that it was a vast sum-total of a score of causes all exploding together, and growing transcendent by rapidity of motion. We believe that the Indian mutiny points to the fact that there is something radically and extensively wrong in our whole governing system there. Nay, it is now coming out that the Bengal army has been for years in an unsatisfactory state. Long ago, it seems, Government was warned of the necessity of having more European troops. But Company and Government both were falsely secure; hence the present want of preparation, and the present state of panic.

By the last accounts, the mutiny was in reality in a state of progression. Among the various rumours flying about, that was almost the only definite fact. Nobody could tell (and when we remember the distances, the want of communication, and the interruption of all ordinary routine, it is not wonderful) the exact state of matters; but the general fact was clear. Thirty-two regiments had mutinied, and bands of disloyal soldiers were scattering themselves over the country. Nor was the hope entertained of the sound state of certain places found to be firm. Rebellion broke out furiously at Lucknow, after people believed that it had blown over. Two regiments proved un-

sound at Agra, and parts of them proceeded to Delhi. Against such unsatisfactory facts it would be well to have some very strong set-off.

Yet the only set-off must be looked for in the success of our arms outside Delhi. That is the salient point of last mail. Twenty-six guns were captured, and the rebels driven from the hills into the town. But surely, all things considered, this is no great triumph. The news expected by the sanguine was that Delhi had fallen; and we find the mutineers fighting a pitched battle outside the walls; itself a proof that they are far less contemptible than we supposed. The details of the proceedings inside the town are shocking indeed. Europeans were dragged from places of refuge, and butchered like sheep and cattle. We are informed, indeed, that the people, as distinct from the army, holds aloof from the revolt; but at Delhi, at all events, whenever the soldiery had finished the work of murder, the rabble showed themselves quite ready for plunder and fire. The *hate* which such proceedings disclose, as existing in the minds of the natives, is one of the most melancholy symptoms of the time.

The Indian authorities seem to have met the crisis with a reasonable amount of spirit, but, except in the case of scattered individuals here and there, we find no great governing genius shown. Sir Henry Lawrence behaved with the right promptitude at Lucknow; and we have good accounts of the steps taken in the Panjab. The delay, however, in surrounding Delhi is scarcely to be explained even by the sudden and altogether unexpected death of General Anson. Wherever the mutineers were overcome, terrible measures of punishment were resorted to, and we may be quite sure that no other course is safe or possible.

At home this news has excited, as was natural and proper, no little solicitude. Government seems fully awake to the nature of the crisis. The appointment of Sir Colin Campbell, and that brave officer's promptness in setting out, have delighted everybody. Fourteen thousand men were under orders, or embarking, before the last mail; and, as we gather from Lord Palmerston, a further force is to be sent

out. In such a matter everything depends on the moral impression we can produce in India by showing our *home resources*. A few successful mutinies, a temporary period of independence, by accustoming the Bengalee soldier to a sense of success, would frightfully weaken our *prestige* as a nation born to conquer and command. Let us remember that these sepoy, trained under our discipline, and seasoned in our wars on the frontiers, are no fit objects of that contempt which some Europeans freely lavish on everything "native." Of two of the disbanded regiments, Lord Ellenborough could feel it his duty on Monday to speak as follows:—

"The 16th was one of the finest regiments in the Indian army. It carried upon its colours almost as many records of actions fought and victories gained, as any regiment in her Majesty's service. Bravely with her Majesty's 40th regiment, it served during the whole of Sir William Nott's operations . . . and it equalled it in courage and devotion. The 26th was with Sir George Pollock at Peshawar."

And then Lord Ellenborough adds the following significant words:—

"It must have been a long-continued course of mismanagement—a course of misconduct which he could not comprehend—to have so changed the very nature of the soldiers who composed those regiments."

It would indeed be ill-timed, with 26,000 men disaffected, the rainy season coming on, and the Government of India threatened with disorganisation, to make it the prime object of interest what error, have led to such a state of things. We shall have enough to do in re-establishing a status in which reforms shall be practicable. But foreseeing that when once the danger is over, everything gone by will stand a good chance of being forgotten, we are anxious to keep our readers awake to the fact that this mutiny is no causeless *emule*, but the direct expression of a bad social and administrative system. On no other supposition can it be explained. If foreign intrigue has in any way contributed to it, must not that influence have had grounds to work upon? If the constitution of the army is bad, who made it so? If the natives naturally dread and respect us, what has shaken that traditional feeling? Turn it how we will, we have good grounds

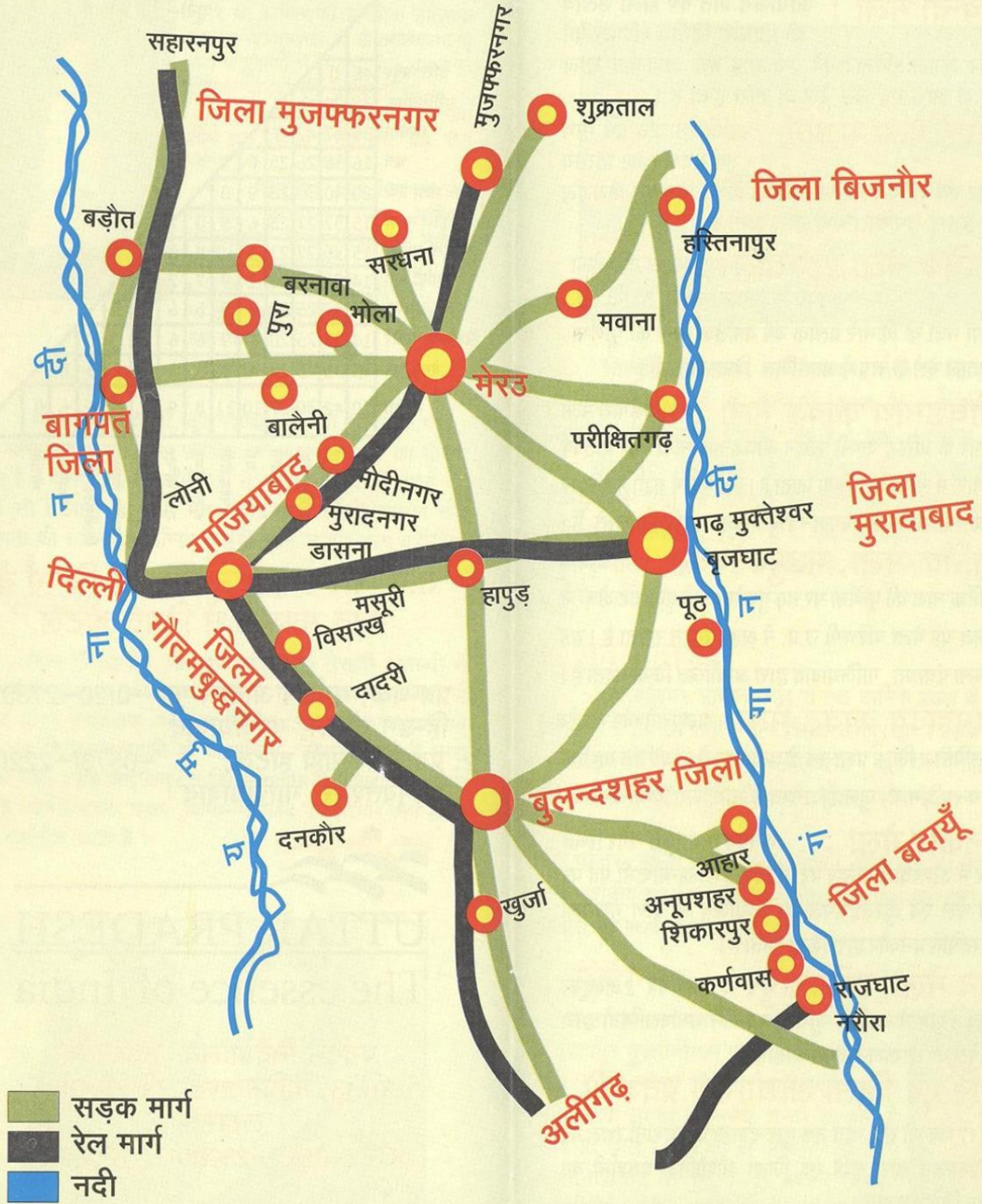


THE DEATH OF COLONEL FINN ON THE PARADE GROUND AT MEERUT.

The news of the great uprising having erupted in Meerut in the *Illustrated Times*, London, 1857

Cultural Places in Meerut

मानचित्र : मेरठ मण्डल पर्यटन परिक्षेत्र



The city comprises many historical and cultural heritage sites. There are many beautiful gardens, monuments with great architecture and holy places in the city which are major tourist attractions here. A few of such places are:



[Augarnath Temple](#)

The **Augarnath Temple** in Meerut is devoted to Lord Shiva. The temple has historical importance as the first War of Independence in India was also witnessed here. The actual date or year of the construction of the temple is not known but it is believed that the Shiva Linga in the temple appeared on its own, which is treated as a miracle of God and therefore attracts hundreds of devotees. This temple is also known as Kali Paltan Mandir. The temple has great significance as the first War of Indian Independence, the Revolt of 1857, started here. The temple has a memorial, built in honour of the martyrs of the Revolt of 1857. In the past few decades, several changes have been made to the temple. In 1968, a new temple was constructed and the old architecture was replaced. In 1987, a new hexagonal hall was also constructed, and in 2001, a *Kalash* (pitcher) made with 4.5 kg of gold was installed at the spire. According to local priests, the great Maratha rulers used to worship here and seek blessings before proceeding with their victory processions.

St John's Church located in Meerut was built between 1818-1822. It is the oldest church in North India and was built during the British colonial period. It is considered 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.



St John's Garrison Church, Meerut. Image source: <http://meerutup.tripod.com>



St John's Garrison Church. Image source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Gandhi Bagh, known locally as **The company gardens**, is located on Mall Road in Meerut. It was built before independence but was recently renamed. It has lush greenery with a wide range of flora within its premises. There is a musical fountain which runs every evening. Earlier, there were many entrances to the garden, and no entry fees were imposed, but now only one entrance is open for the public, with nominal entry charges. The Cantonment Board of Meerut maintains the Gandhi Bagh which is at present one of the attractions of the city, for amusement and recreational activities.



Entrance to Gandhi Bagh, Meerut. Image source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

The **Suraj Kund Park** is maintained by the Municipal Corporation of Meerut (Nagar Nigam). The green ambience of this place is a major attraction for visitors. There is ample flora within. It offers many recreational and amusement activities for tourists and visitors. The place is associated with the Mahabharata; it is believed that King Karna devoted his *kawach* and *kundal* (divine armour) to the Sun God at this place. Every year, a fair is organised during Dussehra, which is celebrated with full zeal and enthusiasm.



Suraj Kund Park. Image source: <https://www.inspirock.com>

The Mughal mausoleum known as **Shahpeer Sahab ki Dargah** was built in 1628 by Nur Jahan, a popular Mughal Empress. It was built in honour of a local Muslim, Hazrat Shahpeer. According to the beliefs of the people, Shahpeer was 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. The tomb has beautiful and intricate Nakshi work and there is no roof on the tomb. This tomb has been listed as a national heritage monument by the Archaeological Survey of India. A local jaghirdar, Rajaji, is believed to have constructed the Shahpeer Gate for the mausoleum in 1829.

The **Digambar Jain Temple** is one of the oldest temples in Meerut and dates back hundreds of years. There are seven altars with seven splendid spires within its courtyard. The first altar is known as the altar of 'Tikhal Wale Baba' and is believed to be built by the Gods of Heaven. Thousands of devotees visit this temple to get their prayers fulfilled and offer their prayers to 'Tikhal Wale Baba'. There are around 720 idols of 24 Teerthankaras.



Digambar Jain Temple, Meerut

Shahid Smarak is devoted to the martyrs of India during the first war of freedom of India 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. The museum has two galleries that display the portraits of freedom fighters and their struggle during the revolt of 1857.



Shahid Smarak, Meerut. Image Source:
<https://www.tourmyindia.com>

The **Shahi Eidgah** was built by the eighth Sultan of Delhi, Nasir Ud din Mahmud, a son of Iltutmish. A religious as well as a historical site in Meerut, the Shahi Eidgah is a 600-year-old mosque. Erected by the youngest son of Iltutmish (the eighth king of the Delhi Sultanate), the Shahi Eidgah is located at a distance of a kilometre from downtown of the city. The term 'Eidgah' derives from South Asian Islamic culture which refers to an open-air enclosure for Eid Salah (prayer offers on the morning of Eid al-Fitr). It is one of the largest mosques in Meerut and is recognised for its exquisite architecture. The walls of this stunning mosque boast some beautiful paintings. The carvings on the walls of the Eidgah reflect the craftsmanship of the bygone era. Shahi Eidgah is one of the few tourist places in Meerut that has been given the status of 'heritage site of national importance'.



Shahi Eidgah. Image Source: <https://www.tourmyindia.com>

Parikshitgarh is also known as the 'Qila Parikshitgarh' and is named after the King of Hastinapur, Parikshit. It is said that this fort was built by King Parikshit who was the grandson of Arjuna. It is also believed that it was restored in the eighteenth century by Nain Singh, a Gurjar king. During 1916, silver coins from the times of Shah Alam II were found in the fort.



Parikshitgarh. Image source: <https://www.tourmyindia.com>

The **Sardhana Church** built by Begum Samru was granted the status of Minor Basilica in 1961 by Pope John 23rd. The grandeur of the church contributes greatly to this. Only historical and grand churches get this status. Due to the miraculous picture of the Mother of Grace here, the tradition of special prayers and a fair every year started in this church.



Begum Samru

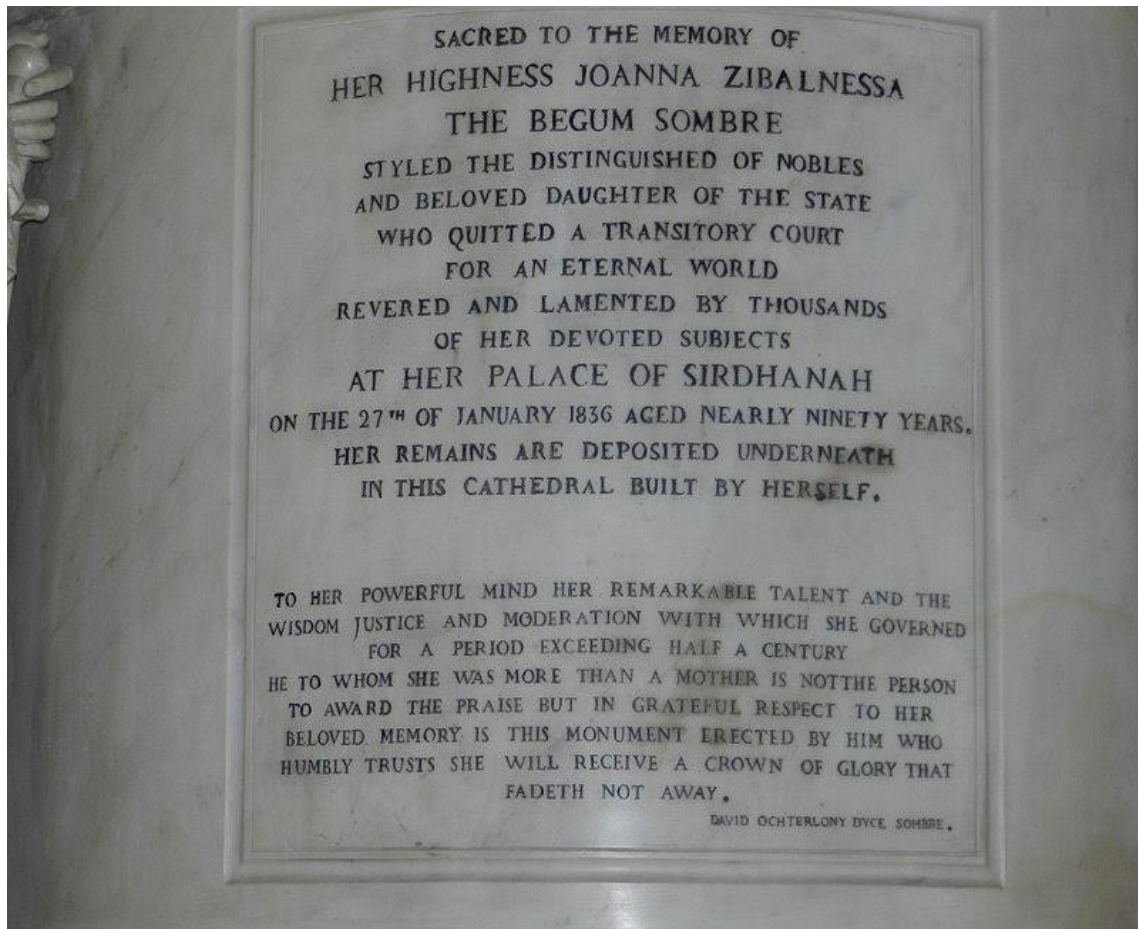
Image source: <https://scroll.in/article/920157/begum-samru-the-18th-century-dancer-who-grew-to-rule-a-principality-and-rescue-the-mughal-emperor>

Gavin, a British tourist who visited Meerut in 2014, writes, "In the UK, Meerut is popular as the place from where the 1857 mutiny originated. At that time, the place was a big military establishment and there are quite a few people who can trace their roots to the city as they had ancestors living here during the British rule. I was travelling from Delhi and took a detour to Meerut because I wanted to see the monuments and remnants from the British past."



The Sardhana Church. Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

The church was constructed in 1822 on the behest of Begum Samru, who is regarded as the only Roman Catholic ruler throughout the history of India. She enlisted the services of an Italian architect, Anthony Reghelini, for the building. The church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and cost around 400,000 Rupees to construct. The altar and its surrounds are made of marble set with coloured stones, like the Taj Mahal. Much of the rest of the interior is also in marble, and every aspect displays very highest craftsmanship.



Inscription on the Statue of Begum Samru at the Basilica of Our Lady Of Graces,
Sardhana

Mahabharata Sites in Western Uttar Pradesh

Parikshitgarh, Meerut District

The town is built on an ancient mound which has never been surveyed, but would surely be of the same vintage as the nearby mounds of Hastinapur. A famous pond in Parikshitgarh is Gandhar Tal. It is said that the mother of the Kauravas, Gandhari, used to visit here, hence the name. The Gandhari Tal at present has a brick 'ghat' all around it with an old temple in one corner. Though this old Shiva Temple has been renovated to quite some extent in the past few years, its original structure can still be made out.



Statue of Gandhari, Parikshitgarh. Image source: <https://www.veethi.com>

Ashram of Shringi Rishi, Parikshitgarh

The place has historical reference in Mahabharata, and the legend associated with this is related to Maharaja Parikshit's death as he was cursed by Shringi Rishi.



Ashram of Shringi Rishi

Image source: <https://in.pinterest.com>

Mawana

According to one legend, a loyal servant of the Kauravas by the name of Mana had established a village here. It was one of the gates of Hastinapur and its ancient name was Muhana Gate which later changed to Mawana.

Baghpat

In the Udyog Parv², it is said that this was one of the five towns that the Pandavas visited in the Mahabharata, four of these are given by the names Vraksthal, Varnavrat, Makandi and Asandi, the name of the fifth town isn't referenced, but is believed to be this.

Shukratal, Muzaffarnagar District

This is an ancient centre of pilgrimage on the banks of the river Ganga in Muzaffarnagar district. Here, on a hilltop, a Banyan tree called Brahmachari Butt is to be found. It is said that under this Banyan tree Shukadev, after removing the curse on Maharaja Parikshit II, recited the Shrimad Bhagwatam to him for seven days.



Shukratal. Image source: <https://www.hindi.nyoooz.com>

² The *Udyoga Parva* (**Sanskrit**: उद्योग पर्वः), or *the Book of Effort*, is the fifth of eighteen books of the Indian Epic [Mahabharata](#).^[1] Udyoga Parva traditionally has 10 sub-books and 199 chapters. After the [Pandavas](#) complete their exile, they ask Kuru brothers to let them return to their kingdom according to the terms of exile. The Kurus refuse. As war discussion begins on both sides, Sanjaya meets with Pandavas and [Krishna](#) in an effort to avoid war. This meeting is covered in Sanjaya-yana book of *Udyoga Parva*.

Hastinapur: Land of Archaeology and Mythology

In Sanskrit, Hastinapur means 'the City of Elephants' from 'hastina' (elephant) and 'puram' (city). Its antiquity is said to go back to the time of the Mahabharata. There is also some speculation that the city was named after King Hasti. Hastinapur is known by different names, like Gajapuram, Nagapura, Asandivata, Brahmasthalam, Shanti Nagaram and Kunjarpuram, in various old texts.

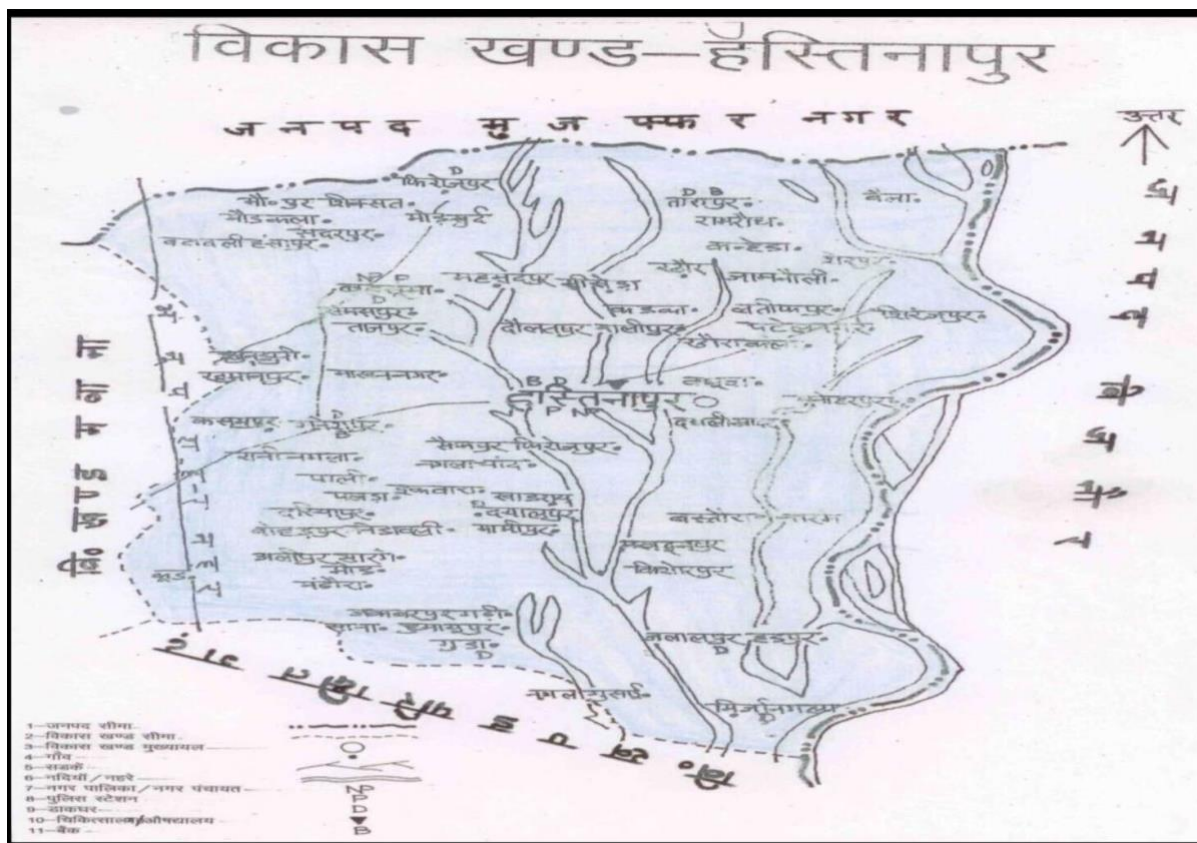
The city has a rich history which goes as far back as the time of the Harappan Civilization. Archaeological excavations were conducted at 'Vidura-ka-Tila', a collection of several mounds named after Vidura, in 1950–52, a site 37 km (23 miles) north-east of Meerut. It was concluded to be the remains of the ancient city of Hastinapur, the capital of the Kauravas and the Pandavas of Mahabharata, which was washed away by the Ganga floods.

The name is found in some of the most ancient religious scriptures of India and even today continues to reverberate in millions of Indian homes through its association with all the great religions that originated within the Indian Subcontinent.

Hastinapur, in the ancient past, was the capital of the kingdom of the Kurus. Being a great city of political power as well as a centre for trade, it was fought for by many kings and dynasties, out of these the most famous being the epic battle of Mahabharata.

Hastinapur is also one of the most revered Jain Pilgrimage centres in the country. The great Buddha had also visited Hastinapur, as per ancient Buddhist records, and Bhai Dharam Singh, one of the Panj Pyaras of the Great Guru Gobind Singh, hailed from Hastinapur.

Hastinapur is divided into two parts, one being Hastinapur Kaurwan and other Hastinapur Pandwan. There are many antiquities/spots found in Hastinapur which are either of Mahabharata fame or their names are related to Mahabharata personages, such as Pandureshwar Mahadev Mandir, Draupadi Ghat, Karna Mandir/Karna Ghat, Budhi Ganga and Pandav Tila/ Uta Khera Tila.



Hastinapur. Image source: www.meerut.nic.in

The mound of Hastinapur was scientifically excavated for the first time by the famous archaeologist Dr. B.B. Lal between 1950 and 1952. His report holds a lot of relevance even to this day. According to Dr. B.B Lal in his excavation report, there were many mounds spread along the length of the modern course of the Ganga at Hastinapur.

As per the text, *History and Culture of Uttar Pradesh (Vol -II)*, a summary of the archaeological report of Hastinapur is mentioned (Pgs 104-105):

- ❖ This is the Ochre Coloured Pottery, corresponding to Mature Harappan, does not appear to be very extensive here but relatively a small settlement was found.
- ❖ In the second level, the famous PGW (Painted Grey Ware) and this level corresponds to the Epic period of Mahabharata. Other objects especially of copper were also found. And in this phase city remained uninhabited for next two hundred years or so.
- ❖ About 600 BC the city appears to have been again inhabited and a new city arose which is characterised archeologically with the presence of a Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). This new city was quite well developed and this can be inferred from presence of brick-lined wells.

- ❖ Hastinapur was then repopulated and the city remained inhabited for the next 400 years or so. Remains of Shunga and Kushana period also found. A lot of terracotta pieces were found and it is believed that city was a great centre of art and culture at this time.
- ❖ In the 11th century AD, new habitation appeared in Hastinapur but this was small and for a period of 200 years. During the time of Shahjahan in the 17th Century, attempts were made to revive the city but these were unsuccessful.

Sacred Complex in Hastinapur

Karna Ghat Mandir

The Karna Temple is located near the Pandeshwar Temple on an old ravine along the bank of the Ganga. The original shivlinga inside the Karna Temple is believed to have been established by Karna, one of the prominent figures in the Mahabharata.



Karna Temple, Hastinapur

It is believed that 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 its course moved away.

Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple

The Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple is dedicated to Shiva. This temple is believed to be the place where the Kauravas and Pandavas received their education in the Vedas and Puranas. A temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali and many Hindu ashramas are also present on a hillock between the ruins. Legend has it that in the Mahabharata period, Pandu's eldest son Yudhishtira, had established the shivalinga at the Pandureshwar Mahadev temple before the war of Mahabharata and prayed to Shiva for blessings.



Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple, Hastinapur



Premises of Pandureshwar Mahadev Temple



Shivlinga at Pandureshwar Temple



Defaced statues at Pandureshwar Temple

All above images source: INTACH ICH team visit to site

Jayanti Mata Shakti Peeth



[Jayanti Mata Shakti Peeth, Hastinapur](#)

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. Now it is believed through various scriptures and mythologies, that the references mention the sacrifice of Mother Sati at her father Raja Daksha's house. This was said to have happened thousands of years before the Mahabharata period, during the Dwapar Yug.

Even in the wake of these findings, it isn't definite that there has been any Shakti Peeth in Hastinapur. If we consider the local material present on the Jayanti Mata Shakti Peeth at Ulta Khera Tila, this Shakti Peeth is believed to be very ancient.

Hastinapur Jain Temples



Ashtapad Teertha, Hastinapur

Hastinapur has been an important Jain Pilgrimage centre for hundreds of years. In ancient sources of literature, Hastinapur had a prominent place as a centre of learning and religious activities. 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.

Hastinapur is thus a sacred place for Jain devotees. A number of masterpieces of architecture and centres of great faith of the Jain religion are the Jambudweep Jain Temple, Shwetambar Jain Temple, Prachin Digambar Jain Temple, Astapad Jain Temple and Shri Kailash Parvat Jain Temple. The Sumeru Parvat and Lotus Temple in Jambudweep Jain Temple premises makes the complex quite grandiose. Built under the blessings of Gyanmati Mataji in 1972, the official name of the tirtha is the *Digambar*

Jain Institute of Cosmographic Research (Digambar Jain Trilok Shodh Sansthan) and its main attraction is the building constructed as a model of Jambudvipa, which is the dvipa ('island' or 'continent') of the terrestrial world, as envisioned in the cosmologies of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which is the realm where ordinary human beings live.

Burhi Ganga / Old Ganga

The Ganga is considered sacred in this region, and the only evidence of the channels of the Burhi Ganga here is a dried river bed. A few decades ago, even up to the late 1990s, the dry bed was full of marshes and wetlands. This Burhi Ganga was home to many exotic bird species.

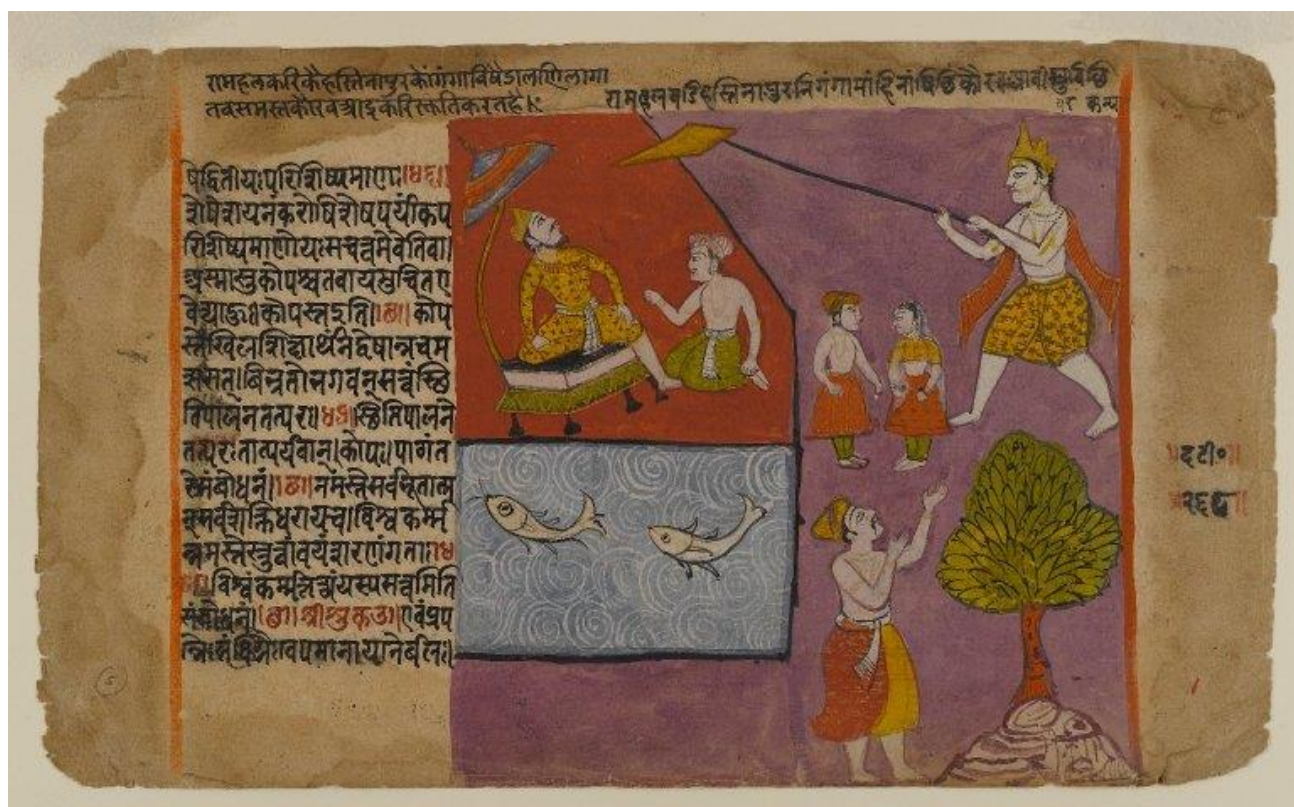


Image showing Balarama pulling Hastinapur toward the Ganga; a page from a *Bhagavata Dasamskanda series*

According to the *Meerut: A Gazetteer, 1904* (17), "The Burhiganga, which forms so marked a feature of the Khadir, is a sluggish, irregular stream, which in many places rather resembles a chain of swamps than a river. It enters the district from Muzaffarnagar at the village of Firozpur and flows southwards into pargana Garhmukteshwar, when it joins the Ganges. Its distance from the high bank which separates the khadir from the uplands ranges from a few yards to a quarter of a mile. Its depth varies

considerably in the hot weather when it is quite dry in places, but it always holds water in some of its larger swamps, which are generally marshy, reed-covered jhils, with patches of open water. Opposite Hastinapur, a series of jhils form with the Burhiganga a large island after the rains.

As the condition of river is marshy and swamps this stream of Burhiganga is of no use. But local residents come there for some rituals performances as it part of main Ganga.”

Taimur during his movements through the Ganga-Yamuna Doab says in his memoir that he settled at Firozpur village on the banks of the Ganga, which may in fact be this channel/stream. The Burhi Ganga enters the district of Meerut from Muzaffarnagar at Firozpur and passes on to Garhmukteshwar where it joins the Ganga.

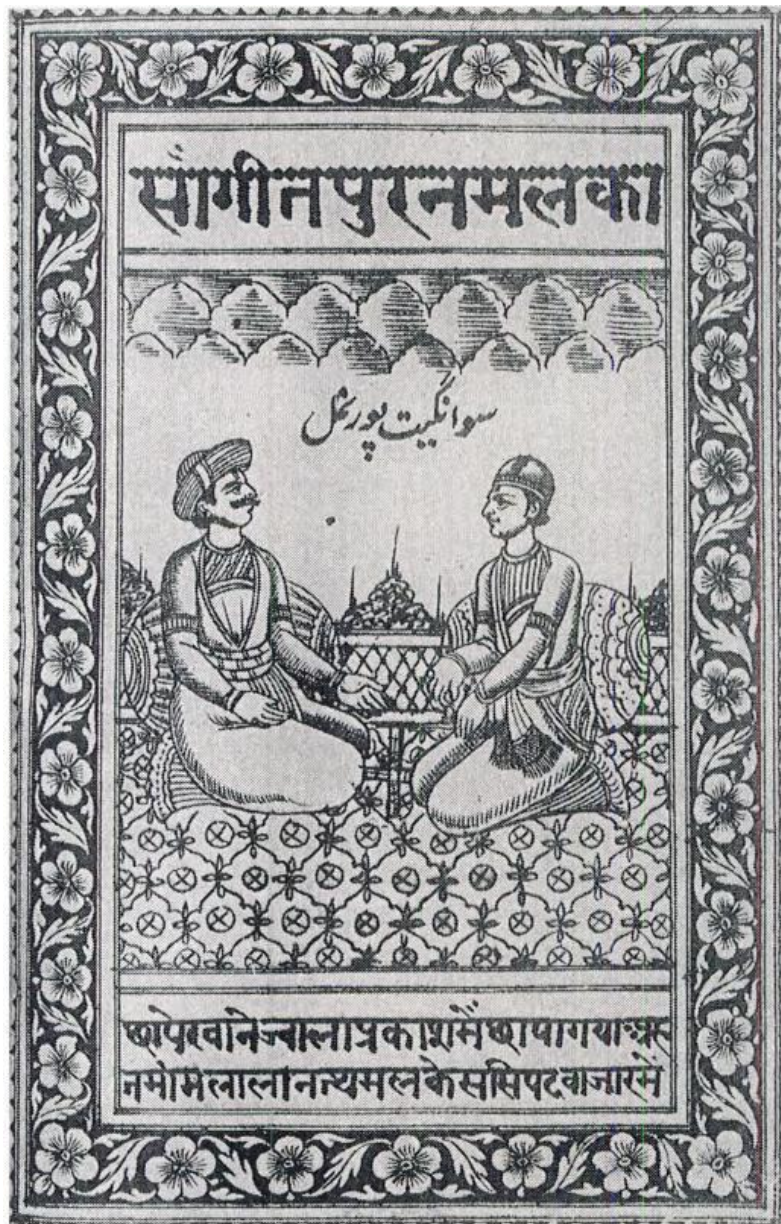
The upper Ganga flood-plain is an elongated fluvial tract, stretching along both banks. Unlike adjoining old alluvium, the flood-plain has a more varied physical history and a different mode of human leaving. The Ganga's oscillating nature and its frequent high floods have lent dynamism to the natural and cultural landscape of the tract. The present form and trend of its regime are only a stage in its long and chequered history. The Burhiganga (literally, 'Old Ganga') falls into it in numerous channels. The Ganga's recession was noticed by Taimur Long who invaded the region in 1398–1399 AD and mentioned in his memoir. Now a chain of swamps, the Burhiganga entered Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh from Muzaffarnagar, near Firozpur village and flowed southward to Garh Mukteswar where it joined the Ganga. According to the Mahabharata, Hastinapur, the capital of Kauravas, stood on the bank of the Ganga but no trace of it is seen now. It might have been washed away by the river in the beginning of the Kali Yuga (a Hindu Puranic aeon, corresponding to the Iron Age) over 3000 years ago, i.e., around 1000 BC. Taimur in his memoir mentioned Firozpur town as being on the right bank of the Ganga. Firozpur village near Ramraj on the right bank of the Burhiganga corresponds with Timur's Firozpur. If it is true, eastward recession of the Ganga from its old bed took place by about 10 km after 1400 AD. Over the ages, its course oscillated along the Burhiganga axis till about 1400 AD, after which it began to move eastward to its present course, past Daranagar village.

Image source: Extract from *The Ganga: Water Use in the Indian Subcontinent* by Pranab Kumar Parua

CULTURAL AND OTHER INDUSTRIES IN DISTRICT MEERUT

Printing Industry of Meerut

The printing industry of Meerut has an old history, and books were being printed here in the 1800s. Even today Meerut is one of the foremost centres of printing enterprise in India.



One of the first books to be published from Meerut

Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Other Industries

Meerut is famous as an industrial city. It is also known for handloom work and the scissors industry from earlier times. Being in the proximity of Delhi, it is ideal for industries like textiles, transformers, sugar, distilleries, chemicals, engineering, paper, sports goods and jewellery.

It is the largest suppliers of sports goods, being the largest Indian cricket goods manufacturer and exporter. The Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Corporation (UPSIDC) has already established two industrial estates in Meerut, namely Partapur and Uddyogpuram. The Mohakampur Industrial Area is a private initiative.

Nipro Glass from Japan has set up a large glass plant here for medical use. According to the new industrial policy of the government of India, the District Industries Centre (DIC) was established in 1979 in Meerut district to speed up industrial development. The main objective of the DIC is to provide all the services under a single roof. A general manager, who is assisted by seven managers-in-charge and other employees in various functions, heads each DIC. There are 55 units in the district that come under large and medium scale industries, with an investment of Rs. 330.22 crore, and which employ 28922 people.

These are located in the areas like Delhi Road, Kankarkhera, Sadar Bazar, Modipuram, Daurala, Mawana, Partapur and Baghpat Road. These industries produce alcohol, straw boards, transformers, tyre-tubes, cotton yarn, sugar, chemicals, milk products, paper etc. Besides the above, 21702 small scale units are working at Meerut with an investment of Rs. 435.15 crore, employing 108285 people.

These industries are producing electrical equipment, flour, suji, eatable items, sports goods, electronic items, engineering items etc. Further, in these industries of Meerut district, some expert hands are also engaged in the work of Scissors, Hasthkargha, Range and Chaplain, Musical Instruments etc.

Scissor Industry



The cottage industry that used to manufacture around two lakh pieces a month, has declined to almost 40% of its size now. Image source: Sunil Sharma/HT Photo

A high-quality handmade instrument from the micro, small scale and medium ventures of Meerut, the scissor has been chosen for a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

These scissors are made from scrap metal pieces by a network in Meerut, which is "the main scissor group in India" and which has been making the item for over three centuries, Karamjeet Singh Saluja, Deputy Director, Intellectual Property Rights, Federation of Indian Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises (FISME), IP Facilitation Centre, told columnists while participating in an IPR awareness programme here. Mr Saluja said the GI tag was given to products based on certain information submitted to the Geographical Indication Registry, Chennai: proof of origin, the GI map, the statement of the case and the history of the product.

Sharif Ahmad, vice-president, Meerut Scissors Manufacturers Special Purpose Vehicle, and a seventh-generation craftsman, told *The Hindu*, "The GI tag will make a difference to us. No one else will be able to copy our scissors or misuse the made-in-Meerut tag our handmade scissors offer..." The tag would enable the crafters to make scissors of standard sizes and high quality, he said. At present, the size

varies, from six inches to 14 inches, and the scissors are sold at a price ranging from Rs.20 to Rs. 500. Known for their sharpness, the scissors are used at home and by industrial garment manufacturers. They can be repaired, unlike other scissors that are thrown out after use. In the local idiom, the phrase '*Dada le, potaa barpe*' (a product bought by the grandfather, but which continues to be used by his grandson), underscores their quality.

Meerut scissors are particularly used for garment making and other domestic uses. 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. Unlike most other scissors, Meerut scissors can be repaired and reused many times.

Meerut was once known for the sharpness, strength and durability of scissors that were produced in Kainchi Bazaar, and the craftsmen attribute this to their meticulous handwork. Meerut-based historian Amit Pathak believes that the craft emerged during the Mughal period. "Whether it is the wood carving of Saharanpur or the bead making in Moradabad, almost all major towns of this region had mastered some kind of art in the Mughal era to add to the economy. The British too encouraged the trade by placing good transport systems in place. Since then, the art of scissor making has been passed on through generations," he explains.

Meerut has 250 small-scale scissors-making units, employing 70,000 people directly and indirectly. Both the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments have helped the industry in the past. While men make scissors, women do the tasks that require handwork and packing of the products. They are sent only to the domestic markets, but the makers used to earlier find it tough to meet the demand at home.

However, according to a *Firstpost* report, in recent times, Kainchi Bazaar, which houses close to 600 units and employs approximately 70,000 craftsmen, and which was once the pride of Meerut, has seen a decline. Since the profit made by the businesses here is now negligible, the newest generation is not being encouraged to take up the profession.

"I am the third generation in my family to be employed in the business," says 35-year-old Shamiuddeen Rehman of Famous Scissors. "Every pair of scissors passes through almost 22 pairs of

hands, each person an expert in a different process that includes cutting, sharpening, welding, polishing and more,” says craftsman Mohammad Furqan. To explain further, he holds up a blade and places it on the flames ablaze in the furnace and then dips it in water. “This is to strengthen and sharpen its edges,” he adds.



One pair of scissors takes at least one week to make and passes through 22 pairs of hands. Image source: Devyani Nighoskar, *Firstpost*

For centuries, Meerut’s scissors’ legacy and heritage travelled across the country. However, for the last few years, Kainchi Bazaar has been facing problems and poor working conditions. These mini-factories see frequent power cuts and have no ventilation. Many craftsmen here sustain cuts and injuries on a daily basis. Some who work on grinder machines breathe in iron dust particles and suffer from respiratory issues.

According to the *Firstpost* coverage, Mohammad Saad, 68, of Sheikh Scissors has seen the business change over time, “The business is in losses for the last decade. This is due to competition with Chinese scissors.” Several other craftsmen echo his sentiments. “Chinese scissors have plastic bodies that are flimsy and have no durability. But unlike ours, they are cheap,” asserts 45-year-old Mohammad Asif. Meerut’s scissors are priced anywhere between Rs 200 and Rs 1000, depending on their size.

Meerut’s scissors were labelled with the GI (geographical indication) tag in 2013 but craftsmen feel this has not done much to increase demand. And the government aid has been dwindling, according to them. The craftsmen have also been unable to take any loans as micro/small-scale enterprises.

Musical Instruments

A small, nondescript neighbourhood in Meerut provides 95% of brass instruments to wedding bands across the country—from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. However, this decades-old business has been on a downward trend as almost half of the 100 units that were operating in Meerut's Jali Kothi neighbourhood have closed down in recent years and those still around rue a lack of government aid in preserving the industry along with dwindling demand from a changing business.



Sabir Ali, a brass instrument maker, poses at his shop in Meerut. Caption and Image source: Hindustan Times

Of a city known more for its sports goods and publishing industry, not many know that 95% of wind instruments, trumpets, euphoniums, cornets and clarinets used by wedding bands are made in Meerut. The country's best brass bands come here to source their instruments, in the belief that these are the top quality.



Nadir Ali & Co. Image source: [Hindustan Times](#)



Jal Kothi area. Image source: [Hindustan Times](#)

According to an HT article, “Nadir Ali & Co. began as a wedding band in 1885 when Nadir Ali, a bandleader in the British Army raised his own company with his cousin Imam Buksh and began making instruments in 1911. ‘As our popularity grew and bands flocked to Meerut to buy instruments, some of our former employees saw an opportunity. They quit their jobs to start their small factories,’ says Aftab Ahmad, Buksh’s great-grandson.

By the 1950s, the Jali Kothi neighbourhood had become a musical instruments manufacturing hub. Its busy main street, where rickshaws, cars and carts honk and jostle for space is lined with music shops, their fronts festooned with drums and a range of gleaming trumpets and euphoniums.”



A worker gives finishing touches to a trumpet. Caption and Image source: Hindustan Times

Aftab Ahmad, considered a living encyclopaedia on wind instruments, and credited with many innovations in the industry, is now retired and the business is run by his family members. From apprenticing at the Zildjian factory in Turkey to Dineley Rehearsals Studios on Baker Street, he has travelled the world to learn new technology, processes, and machinery.

In a demonstration for the newspaper coverage, Noor Alam tests a freshly minted trumpet at Nadir Ali & Co. Not happy with the pitch, he changes position and blows harder, playing a popular Kishore Kumar tune. “We don’t have a testing laboratory here but I can instantly recognize a false note,” the instrument tester says.



Noor Alam testing a trumpet. Image source: Hindustan Times



Image source: Hindustan Times

“While Nadir Ali & Co. is known for trumpets and euphoniums, other manufacturers such as Bashir Bhai and Sabir Ali in Jali Kothi are known for sousaphones. Sabir Ali, 55, who has been making the instrument for 40 years in a small workshop, says creating instruments out of metal sheets, rods and tubes may look like a mechanical process, but is more of an ‘art’.

However, this decades-old industry has been dwindling with almost half of the 100 units that operated in the area closing down in recent years. ‘Bands from Punjab and Haryana have almost stopped buying from us. A lot of bands use Casio and synthesizers during the marriage processions instead,’ says Ali. The 40-odd traders in Jali Kothi who sell and export instruments have similar tales to tell.

In an attempt to prevent the ongoing decline, many traders are now trying to survive by selling on e-marketplaces to customers abroad. ‘On the one hand, the government talks about skill development and start-up India, on the other, it is allowing the music instrument industry here to die a slow death,’ said Md Rahman, 24, an MBA who runs Rose Band Co.”

The Nadir Ali and Co. factory is housed in a heritage building with a magnificent fort-like facade which has seen plenty of glory in the past. It was a mecca for people with a passion for music. Naushad, Dilip Kumar, Saira Banu, BR Chopra, and Muzaffar Ali all are said to have visited the factory, according to Farhat Masud, a supervisor at the company.

Sports Goods Manufacturing



Meerut had provided the shot puts and javelins that Swapna Barman (heptathlon), Tajinderpal Singh Toor (shot put) and Neeraj Chopra (javelin throw) used to win their gold medals.

Caption and Image source: Economic Times

The district of Meerut is popular for its sports goods industry, both nationally and internationally. To produce these goods, small and medium scale units are working tirelessly. The manufactured goods do extremely well in the export sector, offering a variety of products to buyers, like nets, general exercise equipment, boxing equipment, toys and games, carrom boards, and much more.³

³ 'Meerut,' *One District One Product*, Government of Uttar Pradesh, accessed October 04, 2020.

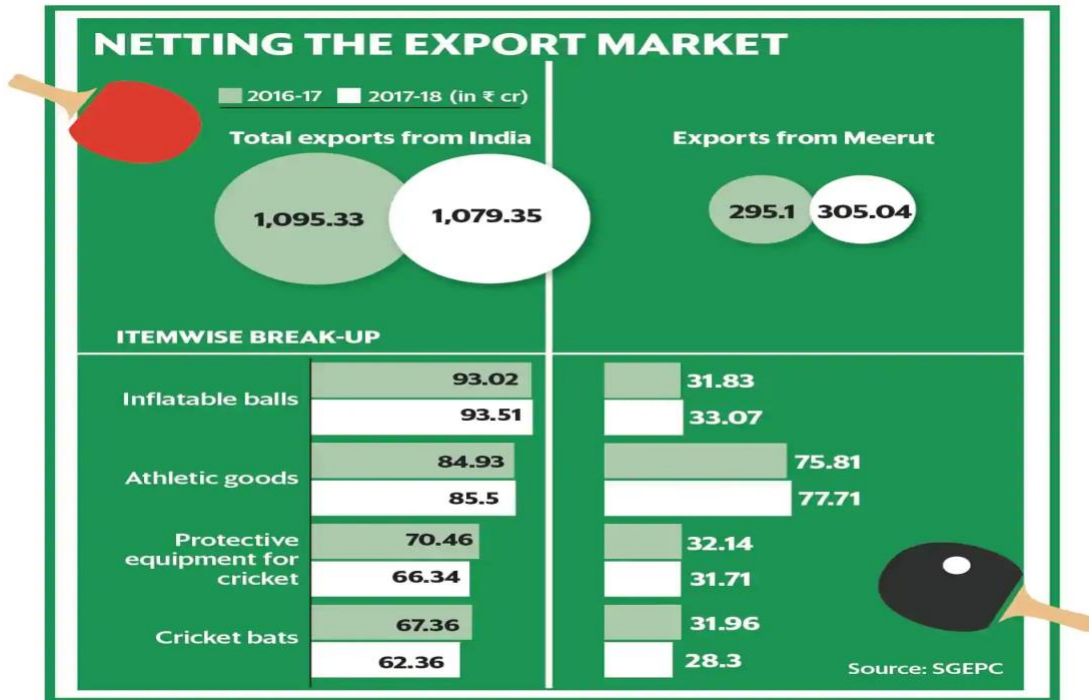


Image source: Mint



Cricket bats from Meerut. Image source: One District One Product, Government of Uttar Pradesh (<http://www.odopup.in>)



Cricket balls. Image source: One District One Product, Government of Uttar Pradesh (<http://www.odopup.in>)



Manufacture of cricket bats. Image source: One District One Product, Government of Uttar Pradesh (<http://www.odopup.in>)



Manufacture of cricket bats. Image source: One District One Product, Government of Uttar Pradesh (<http://www.odopup.in>)

ADVANTAGE MEERUT

Improving road connectivity with Delhi & NCR

Availability of skilled and high-tech labour

The global fitness equipment market was worth \$7 billion in 2016 and it is expected to keep growing

The sports industry in Meerut was focussed on apparel and equipment for cricket, but athletics and fitness segments are providing additional opportunities

There is a growing demand for non-cricket sports goods in the domestic market, too

₹ 1,756 crore budget set aside for Khelo India. The Indian government has turned its attention to developing the sports sector, as part of its plan to create jobs, generate revenue, and attract investment into the country, aside from nurturing talent

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Image source: Economic Times

According to the Census of India 2011, which was conducted by the District Industry Center (DIC), Meerut, there are approximately 3,350 sports goods manufacturing units in the district and the villages around it (namely Abdullahpur, Jangethi, Mohkampur, Nai Basti, Maliyana and others).⁴ The sports goods cluster is spread across 10 kilometres, and the various products are exported to Australia, South Africa, England, America, New Zealand, etc., as well as in India.⁵

⁴ “Chapter 4: Sports Goods Industry in Meerut,” *Shodhganga*, accessed October 06, 2020.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Embroidery Cluster

Embroidery is a means to make art, for expressive and decorative reasons. It forms a vital part of our day to day lives, from bed covers to varieties of clothing. What makes embroidery so special is that each region and culture add on to this tradition with their unique methods, evident in the type of threads, colours, and motifs they use.⁶ Historically, the origins of embroidery in Indian can be traced to the third century. This has also been mentioned in the records of Megasthenes, who noted symbols like chinar leaf, lily, and flowers and fauna of the region of Kashmir in designs.⁷ Indian embroidery has been using naturally dyed threads, which makes it different from other types of art.

Meerut is famous for having talented artisans in the fields of scissor-making, sports goods, as well as embroidery. Ruchi Tyagi focuses on the embroidery cluster in Meerut, in which the process is carried out by using manual machines in units; the payments are made on two criteria: wage per piece and daily wage basis.⁸ Around a decade ago, digital embroidery machines were introduced in 25 units of the embroidery cluster, which run on power and form a uniform product.

According to the MSME report of 2008, the embroidery cluster of Meerut is mainly located in Karim Nagar, Ansar Block, Zaidi Farm, Manzoor Nagar, Zakir Hussain Colony, Kamaruddin Ali Ahmed Nagar, Qidwai Nagar, Umar Nagar, Inderlok Colony, Islamabad, Azad Road, Purva Abdul Wali Gali, Shahpeer Gate, Ashampura, Khair Nagar, Rasheed Nagar, Shyam Nagar, Shastri Nagar (Sectors 4, 10 and 11) and Rambagh Colony areas of the city, and adjacent rural areas including Mawana, Kalawada, Sardhana, Lakhadkheekha, Jalalpur, Abdullahpur, Kazipur, Ram Manohar Lohia Nagar and Zahidpur.⁹

The cluster is more than a 100 years old and covers an area of around 20 kilometres. Having approximately 2,025 units, it employs more than 30,000 artisans. The products made by the cluster are mainly exported to Malaysia, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Gulf Countries. Within India, Noida, Delhi, and Mumbai are the three main centres for trade. According to Tyagi, “The major

⁶ Tyagi, Ruchi. ‘Meerut Embroidery Cluster: A Case Study.’ *South Asian Journal of Business and Management Cases* 1, no. 2 (2012): 185-202.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

items are saris, lehenga chunni, salwar suits (all dresses for women), bedsheet, cushion cover, curtains, scarf, burka, ready-made garments and monograms of various types.”¹⁰



A representational photograph of computer embroidery work from Meerut.
Image source: IndiaMART

¹⁰ Ibid.

Fairs and Festivals in Meerut

The distinct culture of Meerut region is marked by several fairs and festivals that are celebrated here. Many of these hold religious significance and are an annual feature of Meerut and its surrounding districts. It would not be wrong to say that Meerut can be called the city of fairs and festivals. People from the nearby districts, towns and villages gather in large numbers to witness and experience the gaiety and colour of the festivals held in the city.

Nauchandi Mela



Festivities at the Nauchandi Fair attended by thousands.

Image source: Wikipedia (<https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

The name of this fair is derived from the temple of Nauchandi Devi which exists within the grounds where this fair is held annually. The *Mazaar* of Bale Mian is also situated within the fairgrounds and these two religious' shrines play host to many cultural activities during the days of the Mela.

It is said that this fair has its origin in a religious ceremony in honour of the new Moon, 'Chaitra Amavasya', Chaitra being the first month of the Hindu New Year in northern India. Presently the Nauchandi Mela starts from the second Sunday that falls after Holi and continues for approximately one month.

As per the legends, Mandodari, wife of Ravana, was born to the family of demons in Meerut. Her faith in Goddess Chandi was well known. The Chandi Devi Temple was built in the goddess' honour. The Nauchandi fair takes place on the grounds of this temple. The fair was, however, believed to have started in 1672 mainly for cattle traders. However, over time, this festival is observed as a month-long festivity in honour of Goddess Chandi. Handicraft stalls, food stalls, music etc. mark this event.

The nature of Nauchandi is associated with the history of mythical Meerut. Many freedom movements of the city were inaugurated at the Nauchandi fair which has been going on since the Mughal period.



Nauchandi shrine. Image source: Wikipedia (<https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

The Mela also witnessed the pain of martyrdom closely. It is also said that when communal riots took place in the city, only the Nauchandi fair removed the animosity in the hearts of Hindus and Muslims alike. Even after the riots, people from both sides were seen together at the Nauchandi fair. In 1672

the fair of Nauchandi fair started from the temple of Maa Nauchandi located in the city. Initially, it was named Nauchandi Mela, which later became known as Nauchandi.

Senior author and historian Dharmaveer Diwakar explained that the fair started here on the ninth day of Navratri. Gradually, the fair became bigger and its form changed over time.



The colourful Mela.
Image source: The Statesman



The Nauchandi Gate in Meerut. Image source: Wikipedia (<https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

The mela also increased in popularity as vendors were attracted to showcase and sell their best products. The devotees from both the dargah and the mandir would visit the fair, as part of the festive routine and spirit. Organised and managed by the local municipal authorities from 1880s onwards, it hosts hundreds of stalls and draws thousands of people.



A glimpse of Nauchandi Mela. Images courtesy Dr. Amit Pathak, Meerut

Sardhana Christ Fair

The Sardhana Christ Fair takes place on the first Sunday of November. A gathering of nearly six lakh people from the world over witness the feast that is held in honour of Mother Mary. An Indian style carnival and various other traditional celebrations are the main highlights of the event here. Food stalls and other exhibits, and performances by artists take place during this fair.

Boodha Babu Mela

This fair is organized by the Sardhana Municipal corporation after the Nauchandi festival, generally in June.

Garh Ganga Mela

The Garh Ganga Mela is one of the most popular fairs that is held in Garhmukteshwar during November every year, and attended by people from Meerut and Muzaffarnagar as well. The holy dip at the Ganga followed by religious rituals mark this event. An estimated ten lakh of people get together during this Mela that takes place during the Dussehra festival. *Gadhon ka Mela* is a part of this fair where an estimated 50,000 donkeys are traded during the day.

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.



Ganga Snana, Makhdumpur. Image source: <https://www.patrika.com>

Ajrada Gharana: Music Traditions

The Origin of Ajrada Gharana

The tabla playing of the Ajrada gharana is traced to Ajrada village. The inspiration for the origin of this gharana is associated with the Delhi gharana. According to eminent tabla player Prof Sudhir Kumar Saxena, 'The Ajrada is a son of the Delhi gharana'. He states in his book, *The Art of Tabla Rhythm*, "The Ajrada gharana is commonly regarded as an offshoot of the Delhi gharana."



Habibuddin Khan of the Ajrada Gharana displays his mastery with the tabla. Image source: <https://scroll.in>

The Ajrada repertoire primarily focuses on compositional forms like qaida, rela and rav, all of which are extendable forms following a theme and variations pattern. Habibuddin Khan, the best-known exponent of this gharana, was respected for his immense virtuosity and his dexterity with strokes played on the baayaan.

The Founders of Ajrada Gharana

According to the historical texts, two real brothers, Ustad Kallu Khan and Ustad Meeru Khan, the key founders of this gharana, were native of Ajrada village. It is said that both brothers came to Delhi in 1770 AD and settled over here with the intention of learning tabla.

They become disciples of tabla player Ustad Sitab Khan of Delhi. They took training from the Ustad for almost twelve years. The hard work and *Riyaz* in tabla continued for these twelve years. Both the brothers acquired a thorough knowledge given by their Ustad and returned to their hometown Ajrada. From this it becomes clear that the Ajrada gharana is a gift of the Delhi gharana.

A renowned tabla player, Pandit Sudhir Mainkar of Mumbai who had taken his training from Delhi and in Ajrada gharana, confirms this. According to him, all the other gharanas, except Punjab, are directly or indirectly associated with the Delhi gharana by blood or gum-shishya. Though the style of tabla playing of all these gharanas may not be similar but they originated from the Delhi gharana. The Delhi gharana is considered to be original gharana in the field of tabla playing.

According to Prof Mainkar, "Delhi gharana means the 23 earliest and original gharanas of solo style of tabla playing." The main reason behind this was that scholars of music like Amir Khusrau and Miya Tansen belonged to Delhi. Besides this, many renowned artists got *rajashray* at the Royal Court of Emperor Akbar. *Rajashray* was given at the Royal Court to artists not only from Delhi but from outside Delhi as well.

Many artists used to perform at the Royal Court of Emperor Akbar. If the emperor was impressed with their performance or art, he would include them in his Royal Court. We find a mention of a caste named Dhadh in the Royal Court of Emperor Akbar. The original occupation of this caste was to play *charma vadya* (instruments made of leather). One gathers from this that Delhi gharana had originated

during this period. The presence of so many artists at the Royal Court of Emperor Akbar points to the respect they were accorded during his time.

On the related topic of tabla, we hear more of the use of pakhawaj during earlier times in tune with the vocal performance of dhrupad-dhamar. At that time, Sadarang and Adarang, the two sons of Khusaro Khan, came up with a new style of *khayal gayaki*. This *gayaki* was melodious and more soft compared to dhrupad-dhamar. To accompany *khayal gayaki*, the pakhawaj was not considered an appropriate instrument. The tabla was said to have originated at this time. Ustad Siddhar Khan Dhadhi of Delhi gharana put a lot of effort into improvising on the compositions of Pakhawaj, and introducing the new style of tabla playing. The Delhi gharana came into existence with his innovative ideas and compositions of new *bandishes*.

Folk Renditions of Uttar Pradesh

The folk traditions of this region are linked to such traditions in other parts of the country through renditions like the Alha, and there are others which are primarily rooted through history and tradition to this region itself, namely Ragini, Swaang, Holi etc.

Folk renditions associated with folk instruments were primarily used for entertainment but these were also carrying the collective memory of the people as well as being the store houses of common knowledge. These stories have folklore spanning centuries woven within them. Other than entertainment, these renditions were sung to herald the onset of various seasons, were part of the celebration of seasonal festivals and were also sung or enacted as part of religious and marriage ceremonies.

Alha

The Alha rendition originated in about 1160 AD and due to the other contemporary rendition, the *Prithviraj Raso*, the Alha rendition remains mostly neglected. The Alha rendition deals with stories of Rajput warriors Alha and Udal who were Banafal Rajputs and generals under the last Chandel King Parmardidev. The Alha rendition was one of the most widespread oral renditions of war between various Rajput clans of northern and central India. It was sung through vast tracts of India in all the various languages and dialects that were prevalent in this region including languages spoken around Delhi—Bundeli, Kannauji, Bhojpuri etc. There is a distinct Alha rendition of Western Uttar Pradesh, sung in the local dialect of this region, variously called Kauravi or Khariboli.

Ragini

Each Ragini is a story sung with musical instruments and has only very limited enactment associated with the singing. The stories deal with family ties, historical experiences, man-woman relationships etc. Many of them date back to the medieval era. The best fact about this tradition is that now the younger generation is learning these age-old renditions and making CDs for commercial dissemination.

Swaang

These are also stories which were traditionally sung by poets for entertainment. The poets enact as well as sing mythical stories ranging from those of great epics to folktales of the medieval era as well as of the later period, one of the interesting and prominent ones being *Sultana Daku*. Presently, this tradition is almost on the verge of extinction.

Dola

This is a unique tradition which is almost lost from this region as most people seem to have forgotten its name. The name Dola appears to have been probably derived from *dhol*, a percussion instrument. Dola 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. There are elements of Veer Ras, and Raas with emotions. The singer has to jump from one format to another as per the singing requirement and narration.

Mollywood of Meerut

Not to be confused with the genre of films that emerge from Malayali Cinema, Mollywood is a local name used by the citizens of Meerut to refer to their own rural cinema industry. Unlike Bollywood, these types of films are shot in local fields and houses, usually on an extremely low budget for a feature film (Rs 100,000 on average). These films are not released in cinema halls but are distributed in the market as CDs. The actors are usually paid between Rs 5000-10,000 a day, and a movie is usually wrapped up in about 10-20 days. The movies are then sold to distributors based in Delhi, who release CDs into the market. One CD costs anywhere between Rs 25 and Rs 40. These films, made in Haryanvi, are extremely popular in western UP, the National Capital Region and Rajasthan's border areas.

It all started with comedy programmes recorded on audio tapes, which were quite popular in the area in the 1990s. By the end of the 20th century, audio tapes were replaced by CDs, which led to the comedy-audio 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.

In 2000, actor and mimicry artist Kamal Azad, in association with T-Series, released an audio CD of jokes called *Very Good*. People in the industry often cite this as the beginning of Mollywood. A spike of such CDs in the market followed. Soon after, the trend shifted from audio to video, and people began referring to them as films, although they were only 40-minute to an hour-long comedy-dramas.

In 2004, the film *Dhaakad Chhora*, which is believed to be the very first feature film from Mollywood, was released to the public and went on to become a big hit. This was a milestone in the brief history of the industry and is often dubbed the 'Sholay of Mollywood'. It has become a standard for measuring the success of films in this industry today. Actors Uttar Kumar and Suman Negi became idols for local youth, comparisons of their popularity were drawn with famous celebrities such as Salman Khan and Aishwarya Rai.

By 2009, the fate of the industry took a turn for the worse. Piracy of movies and TV shows, something which even major companies and publishing houses have a tough time dealing with, nearly crippled Mollywood. Mollywood producer and actor Bhupendra Titauria, who played the villain in *Dhaakad Chhora*, says, "Because of piracy, companies who invested in these films were not able to retrieve their money. At one time, the film industry gave up."

For some time, film production was paused almost completely, but some people in the industry were relentless. Work started on films which could be released in single screen theatres and a new journey

began. Professional cameras were employed to shoot films. The next challenge was to take these films to the theatres. For single-screen theatres, they turned to cities like Meerut, Baghpat, Muzaffarnagar, Shamli and Hapur.

A major problem this industry faces is a lack of coordination. Unlike other major cinema industries, films from Mollywood are not released on a regular basis since it is up to the director and producer to decide when to release their work. A lack of support from the government is often cited as a major reason why Mollywood cannot compete with the likes of Bollywood and its Malayalam counterpart.

“Mollywood films do not have fixed release dates. So, it is difficult to track which was the last film released and how much business it did. These films are still developing. If the government extends support to filmmakers and gives tax relaxation to cinemas, they will not only do good business but also become popular,” says Ashutosh Agrawal, who runs Vijay Theatre at Hasanpur near Gajraula.

“The industry has not been organised because once the actors are established here, they move to Bollywood,” claims the producer of *Laat Sahab* and *Katto*, O.P. Rai. “There are various organisations here but there is no coordination. Besides, there is a lack of government support. It is easier to reach Delhi than Lucknow to seek the help of the state government.”

“We can only help if they reach out to us,” says Uttar Pradesh Film Development Authority vice president Gaurav Dwivedi. “Six months ago, I offered to visit them but there was no response from their side. The government has recently released funds for Hindi and Bhojpuri films. People from Mumbai seek our support and work here. But, so close at home, they (Mollywood) do not come to us.”

Ayurveda and Folk Medicine

One can find several references to the use of plants as medicines in old literature, like the *Charak Samhita*. Despite the rising popularity of allopathic medicines, the Indian system of medicine continues to provide relief to many people, since it is cost effective with comparatively no side effects. With folkloric evidence of use of medicinal plants in various parts of India like Gwalior, Chittor, Barnawa, and others, Meerut is no exception.

The district of Meerut is situated in the Upper Ganga-Yamuna doab. It is bound in the north by Muzaffarnagar, in the east by Bijnor, in the south by Ghaziabad, and in the west by Baghpat. It comprises 12 blocks of 3 tehsils. Amit Tomar's survey of the plants here was conducted for two years in villages of the 12 blocks, the results of which were released in April 2009. His study involved field work and conducting of interviews, including the collection of folk medicinal information from *hakims* and elderly villagers. Tomar describes more than 35 medicinal plant species which are used by the rural and common people of Meerut region to treat a number of 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. *Jaljamini* (*cissampelos pareira*) is applied locally in skin diseases. Mixed with *kali mirch* (black pepper), it helps in the treatment of malaria. *Berkateli* (*solanum virginianum*) is extracted and mixed with equal parts of lemon juice daily for a month as a preventative measure against cataract.

Cuisine of Meerut

The cuisine of western Uttar Pradesh is special because the culinary culture of this region has evolved with generations of cooks and *Khansamas* who have been residents of the cities and towns of the region. There is another pattern of culinary culture in Meerut which is based on different seasons, like in winter the appearance of Rewadi and Gajak, Makke ki roti and Sarson ka Saag, and Tilkut, prepared by crushing and mixing *Til* or sesame seeds with sugar. This is a very special item and is made during Sakat Chauth in January.

With the advent of winter, one notices truckloads of sugarcane and carts loaded with jaggery lining the roads around Meerut city. Meerut is famous for delicacies made of jaggery including Gatta. Gatta requires a lot of energy and is beaten several times against a pole to give it that sticky yet crisp texture.



A famous Rewadi and Gajak shop in Meerut

The Rewadi and Gajak of Meerut are so popular that they are marketed in various places across India and exported to other countries. During the spring season, dishes cooked during Holi festival are Gujai, Dahi ke Bare, Rai ka Pani, Namkeen Seb, Namakpare and Shakarpore. The summer cuisine is Ghie ki Lauji, a sweetmeat, Thandai and Firni.

Firni is a sweet preparation which has thin white strands, resembling vermicelli but thinner and longer, and bound spirally like a bundle of wire. Firni is usually soaked in milk and eaten; its caramelized version can be eaten as is.



A bowl of Firni, a specialty of the region

During the Monsoons, the Ghevar has a special significance. It is a sweet *Mithai* prepared specially during the rainy season. It comes in different sizes and is made up of Rabri, Khoya and caramel.



Ghevar

Mughal Legacy in Culinary Preparations of Meerut

Meerut city is also famous for its Mughal cultural legacy; its tradition of Mughlai cuisine is testimony to that. Meerut preserved the original but distinct style of Mughlai cooking and is one of the very few places where one can still find authentic Mughlai food. 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 there.

According to Rajiv Goel, a Mughal food aficionado residing in Meerut, "Season also plays an important role here. For instance, winter is best to enjoy Mughlai food as a lot many aromatic spices are thermogenic and can be conveniently consumed in the colder season."

Hindi Tithi Calendar - Meerut & Hastinapur 2020-21

January

Pausha Poornima - 10th January 2020

Paush Purnima is a significant day in the Hindu calendar. It marks the beginning of a one-month long austerity period which is observed during Magha month. In lunar calendar followed in North India, Magha month starts from the next day of Paush Purnima.

During Magha Mahina people take early morning bath in the Ganga or in the Yamuna throughout the month. The tough winter season in North makes the austerity period more difficult. The daily bathing starts from Paush Purnima and ends on Magha Purnima. It is believed that all charity works done during this time bear fruit easily. Hence people offer charity to the needy according to their capacity.

Sakat Chauth - 13th January 2020

Krishna Paksha Chaturthi is dedicated to Lord Ganesha and devotees observe Sankashti Chaturthi fasting on each Krishna Paksha Chaturthi. However, Krishna Paksha Chaturthi during month of Magh is also observed as Sakat Chauth and it is observed mainly in North Indian states. Sakat Chauth is dedicated to Goddess Sakat and women observe fasting on the very same day for well-being of their sons. The legend of Sakat Chauth describes compassionate nature of Goddess Sakat.

There is Sakat village in Rajasthan and it has a temple dedicated to Goddess Sankat. The deity is famous as Sankat Chauth Mata. This temple is about 60 K.M. from Alwar and 150 K.M. from Jaipur, the state capital of Rajasthan. Sakat Chauth is also known as Sankat Chauth, Til-Kuta Chauth, Vakra-Tundi Chaturthi and Maghi Chauth.

Makar Sankranti- 15th January 2020

The day of Sankranti is dedicated to Lord Surya (i.e. Sun God) and this day is considered significant to worship Surya Deva. Although there are twelve Sankranti in the Hindu calendar, Makar Sankranti is the most significant among all Sankranti(s) due to its religious significance. Due to the popularity of Makar Sankranti, most of the time people call it just Sankranti.

Vasant Panchami -29th January 2020

Vasant Panchami day is dedicated to Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music, arts, science and technology. Goddess Saraswati is worshipped on this day. Vasant Panchami is also known as Shri Panchami and Saraswati Panchami.

People worship Goddess Saraswati to get enlightened with knowledge and to get rid of lethargy, sluggishness and ignorance. The ritual of initiating education to children is known as *Akshar-Abhyasam* or *Vidya-Arambham/Praasana* which is one of the famous rituals of Vasant Panchami. Schools and colleges arrange pujas in the morning to seek blessings of the Goddess.

February

Maha Shivaratri -21st February 2020

Shivaratri is a great festival of convergence of Shiva and Shakti. Chaturdashi Tithi during Krishna Paksha in the month of Magha is known as Maha Shivaratri according to the South Indian calendar. However according to North Indian calendar Masik Shivaratri in month of Phalgun is known as Maha Shivaratri. In both calendars it is the naming convention of the lunar month which differs. However, both, North Indians and South Indians, celebrate Maha Shivaratri on the same day.

Bhishma Ashtami -2nd February 2020

Magha Shukla Ashtami is the death anniversary of Bhishma Pitamah, one of the most prominent characters of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata* and this day is known as Bhishma Ashtami. Bhishma vowed to be celibate and followed the vow throughout his life. Due to his loyalty and devotion to his father Pitamah Bhishma was blessed with a boon to choose the time of his death. When he got injured in the battle of Mahabharata, he didn't leave his body due to his boon. He waited for the auspicious moment to give up his body. According to Hindu belief God Suryadev moves in South direction during half of year which is inauspicious period and all auspicious activities are postponed till Suryadev starts moving back in North direction. Pitamah Bhishma chose Magha Shukla Ashtami to give up his body and by this time Suryadev started moving back in North direction or Uttarayana.

Magha Purnima -9th February

Magha Purnima is an important day in the Hindu calendar. Religious texts describe the glory of the holy bath and austerity observed

during Magha month. It is believed that every single day in month of Magha is special for doing charity work. Magha Purnima, which is popularly known as Maghi Purnima, is the last and most important day of Magha Mahina. People perform certain rituals like holy bath, offering alms, donating cow and Homa at Prayag, the confluence point of the river Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, on Maghi Purnima. During Magha people take early morning bath in the Ganga or in the Yamuna throughout the month. The daily bathing which starts from Paush Purnima ends on Magha Purnima.

March

Holi Rangawali-10th March

There are various Holi legends. The most famous one is about Prahlada who was an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Prahlada, the son of demon Hiranyakashipu and his wife Kayadhu, was born and brought up under guidance of sage Narada when Hiranyakashipu was busy in pleasing Lord Brahma to gain immortality. Hiranyakashipu, the father of Prahlada, was an enemy of Lord Vishnu. He was against of his son being devotee of Lord Vishnu. When Prahlada refused to obey Hiranyakashipu, Hiranyakashipu asked his sister Holika, a lady demon, to kill Prahlada. Holika had a divine shawl, gifted by Lord Brahma, to protect her from fire. Holika made a plan to kill Prahlada in a huge bonfire. She lured Prahlada to the bonfire but due to the grace of Lord Vishnu, the divine shawl protected Prahlada instead of Holika. As folklore goes when the fire was lit Prahlada started chanting the name of Lord Vishnu. When Lord Vishnu found his devotee in danger, he summoned a gust of wind to blow the shawl off Holika and onto his devotee Prahlada. Hence, the demoness Holika was burned to ashes and Prahlada was unhurt due to grace of Lord Vishnu and divine shawl.

Later, when Hiranyakashipu didn't stop his attempts to kill Prahlada, Lord Vishnu appeared on the Earth in form of Lord Narasimha to protect Prahlada and to kill Hiranyakashipu.

Gangaur-27th March

Gangaur is celebrated mainly in North Indian states especially in Rajasthan and some parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat.

The festival commences on the first day of Chaitra according to Purnimant School and continues for 18 days. In North India Purnima based calendars start Chaitra month approximately fifteen days before Ugadi and Gudi Padwa.

Gangaur is also known as Gauri Tritiya.

April

Ganga Jayanti- 30th April

Ganga Saptami day is dedicated to Goddess Ganga. This day is also known as Ganga Pujan and Ganga Jayanti as Ganga was reborn on this day.

According to Hindu Mythology Ganga descended to Earth on Ganga Dussehra day. When the mighty Ganga descended, Lord Shiva took her in His tresses to break her descent and to avoid Ganga sweeping the whole Earth away. Later Lord Shiva released Ganga so that she could accomplish her mission to purge the cursed souls of Bhagiratha's ancestors.

While on her way to the kingdom of Bhagiratha, her mighty flow and gushing turbulent water destroyed the Ashram of sage Jahnu. This angered Sage Jahnu and he drank up all of Ganga's water. Upon this, Bhagiratha and the Gods prayed to Rishi Jahnu to release Ganga so that she could proceed on her mission. Pleased with the prayers, Jahnu released Ganga from his ear.

According to legends, Jahnu Rishi released Ganga on Saptami of Vaishakha Shukla Paksha. Because of this legend this day is also known as Jahnu Saptami. Ganga is also known as Jahnvi, the daughter of Rishi Jahnu.

On Ganga Saptami, devotees worship Goddess Ganga and take a dip in the Ganga. Taking bath in the Ganga on Ganga Saptami day is considered highly auspicious.

May

Buddha Purnima-7th May

Buddha Purnima during Vaishakha month is celebrated as birth anniversary of Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha whose birth name was Siddhartha Gautama was a spiritual teacher on whose teaching's Buddhism was founded. It is believed that Gautama Buddha obtained Enlightenment on this day. Buddha Purnima is also known as Buddha Jayanti, Vesak, Vaishaka and Buddha's Birthday.

Vat Savitri Vrat-22nd May

Vat Savitri Vrat could be considered as an exception. In Purnimanta calendar Vat Savitri Vrat is observed during Jyeshtha Amavasya which coincides with Shani Jayanti. In Amanta calendar Vat Savitri Vrat, which is also called as Vat Purnima Vrat, is observed during Jyeshtha Purnima.

According to legend great Savitri tricked Lord Yama, the lord of death, and compelled him to return the life of her husband Satyawana. Hence married women observe Vat Savitri Vrat for the well-being and long life of their husbands.

June

Ganga Dussehra-1st June

Ganga Dussehra falls during Dashami Tithi of Jyeshtha Shukla Paksha and currently falls in month of May or June. Ganga Dussehra is also known as Gangavataran which means *the descent of the Ganga*.

Usually Ganga Dussehra is celebrated one day before Nirjala Ekadashi but in some years Ganga Dussehra and Nirjala Ekadashi might fall on the same day.

Ganga Dussehra is dedicated to Goddess Ganga and this day is commemorated as the day when Ganga descended to Earth to accomplish her mission to purge the cursed souls of Bhagiratha's ancestors. Before coming to the Earth, the Goddess Ganga was residing in Kamandal of Lord Brahma and along with her the Goddess Ganga brought the purity of heaven to the Earth.

On Ganga Dussehra devotees worship Goddess Ganga and take a dip in the Ganga. Taking bath in Ganga and offering charity or Dan-Punya (दान-पुण्य) on Ganga Dussehra day is considered highly auspicious. It is believed that holy dip in Ganga on Ganga Dussehra day can purge all type of sins.

July

Guru Purnima-5th July

Traditionally this day is reserved for Guru Puja or Guru Worship. On this day disciples offer Puja or pay respect to their Gurus. Guru refers to a spiritual guide who enlightens disciples by his knowledge and teachings.

Guru Purnima is also known as Vyasa Purnima and this day is commemorated as birth anniversary of Veda Vyasa. Veda Vyasa was the author as well as a character in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.

Nag Panchami-25th July

Shukla Paksha Panchami during Sawan month is observed as Nag Panchami. Usually Nag Panchami day falls two days after Hariyali Teej. Currently Nag Panchami falls in month of July and August in English calendar. Women worship Nag Devta and offer milk to snakes on this day. Women also pray for the wellness of their brothers and family.

Nag Panchami is a traditional worship of serpent Gods observed by Hindus throughout India. In Hindu calendar, some days are considered significant to worship serpent Gods and Panchami Tithi especially during Shravan month is considered highly auspicious to worship serpent Gods. Nag Panchami is one of those significant days and it observed on Shukla Paksha Panchami during Shravana month.

August

Raksha Bandhan-3rd August

Rakhi, which is also known as Raksha Bandhan, is a Hindu festival which is celebrated across India. Raksha Bandhan is recognized and celebrated among Hindus for its symbolic significance. Raksha Bandhan draws its significance from a sacred thread which is known as Rakhi. It is believed that the thread protects the one who wears it, especially during the auspicious time of Shravana Purnima.

Janmashtami-12th August

The main deity which is worshipped during Janmashtami is Lord Krishna. As Janmashtami is the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna, the toddler forms of Lord Krishna, which are known as Bal Gopal and Laddu Gopal, are worshipped on the day of Krishna Janmashtami.

September

Anant Chaturdashi -1st September

Anant Chaturdashi is the most significant day to worship Lord Vishnu in Anant form. On this day devotees of Lord Vishnu observe a day long fast and tie sacred thread during Puja.

October

Ashwina Navratri-17th October

Navratri is a nine days festival dedicated to Goddess Durga. Navratri is a Sanskrit word which literally means nine nights. During these nine nights and ten days, Goddess Durga is worshipped in 9 different forms, known as Navdurga. The tenth day is celebrated as Vijayadashami when idols of Goddess Durga are immersed in the water body.

Navratri is celebrated in most Indian states. However, Navratri is a very popular festival in the western states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and the southern state of Karnataka. On the very first day of Navratri, Goddess Durga is invoked into a Kalash with full Vedic rituals along with chanting of Mantras. The invocation and dwelling of Goddess Durga into the Kalash is known as *Ghatasthapana* or *Kalashsthapana* and is done at an appropriate time of the day.

Sharad Purnima -30th October

Sharad Purnima is one of the most famous Purnima(s) in the Hindu Calendar. It is believed that Sharad Purnima is the only day in the year

when the moon comes out with all sixteen Kala(s). In Hinduism, each human quality is associated with certain Kala and it is believed that the combination of sixteen different Kala(s) creates a perfect human personality. It was Lord Krishna who was born with all sixteen Kala(s) and He was the complete incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Lord Rama was born with only twelve Kala(s).

November

Lakshmi Puja-14th November

On the day of Diwali, people get up early in the morning and pay tribute to their ancestors and worship family gods. Being Amavasya day, people also perform Shradh for their ancestors. Traditionally, most Puja are performed after keeping a day long fast. Hence, the devotees of Goddess Lakshmi observe a day long fast on the day of Lakshmi Puja. The fast is broken after Lakshmi Puja in the evening.

Govardhan Puja-15th November

Mostly, Govardhan Puja day falls next day after Diwali Puja and it is celebrated as the day when Lord Krishna defeated God Indra. Sometimes there might be a one day gap between Diwali and Govardhan Puja. In religious texts, Govardhan Puja celebrations are suggested during Pratipada Tithi of Kartik month. Depending on starting time of Pratipada, Govardhan Puja day might fall one day before on Amavasya day in the Hindu calendar. Govardhan Puja is also known as Annakut Puja.

Prabodhini Ekadashi Vrat-25th,26th November

Prabodhini Ekadashi is also known as Dev Uthani Ekadashi and Devutthana Ekadashi. On this day Tulsi ji gets married to the Shaligram.

Kartik Purnima-30th November

Kartik is the eighth lunar month in the Hindu calendar. The full moon day during the month of Kartik is known as Kartik Purnima. Depending on people and the region, the full moon day in Hindu calendar is also referred as Poornima, Poonam, Pournami and Pournimasi. In Vaishnava tradition Kartik month is known as Damodara month. Damodara is one of the names of Lord Krishna. In the Hindu calendar, Kartik is the holiest month among all lunar months. Many people take pledge to take holy dip, before sunrise, in the Ganga and other holy rivers every day during the month of Kartik. The ritual of holy dip during Kartik month begins on the day of Sharad Purnima and ends on Kartik Purnima.

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