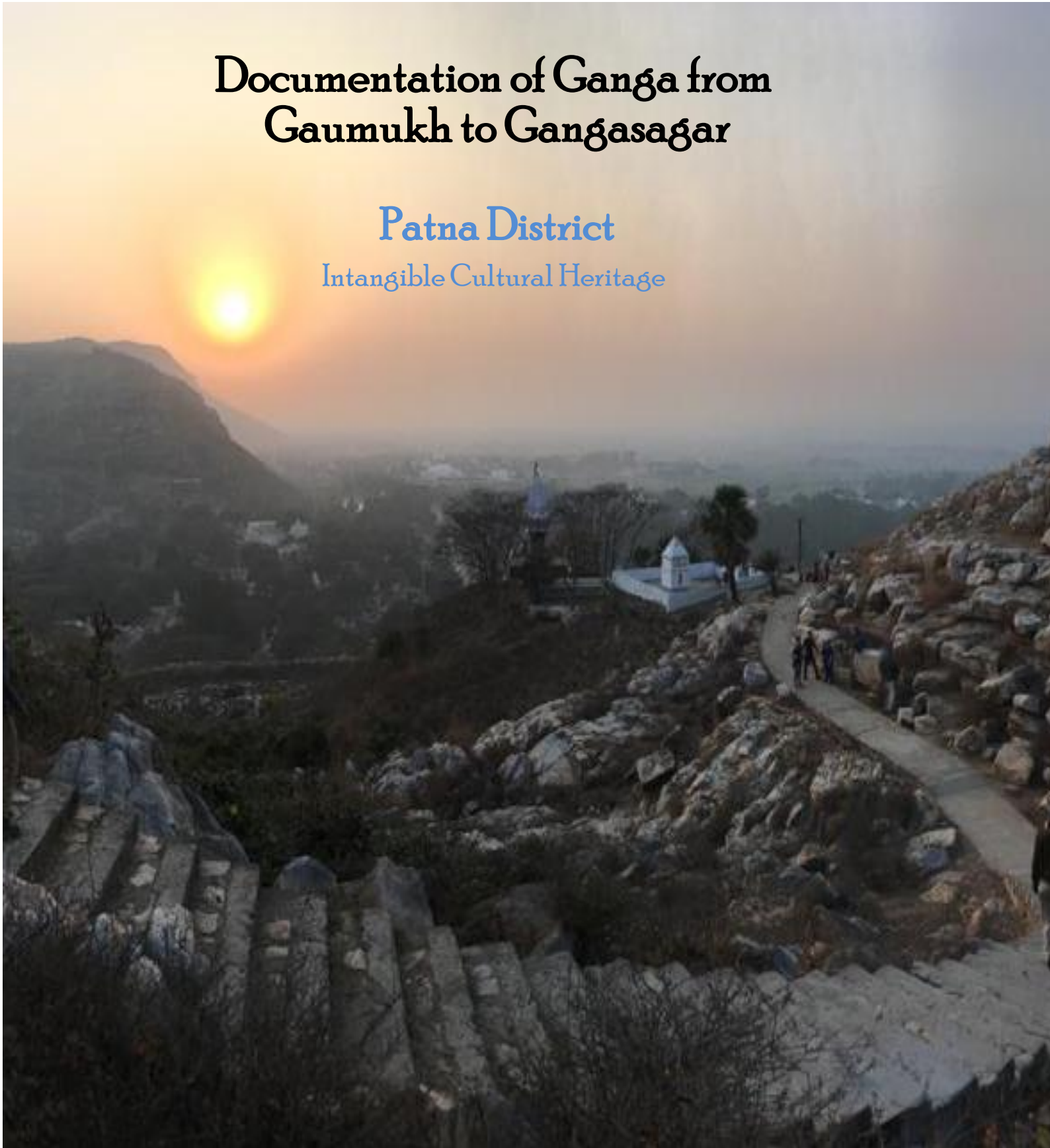


Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Patna District

Intangible Cultural Heritage



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January - March 2020

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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Introduction



(Fig.1. Ganges in Patna, NIT Ghat Patna)

देवि सुरेश्वरि भगवति गङ्गे त्रिभुवनतारिणि तरलतरङ्गे ।
शङ्करमौलिविहारिणि विमले मम मतिरास्तां तव पदकमले ॥१॥¹

Ganga in Bihar is not limited to a geographical watercourse stretch but it inhabits many legends of its own. *Each river is a special little world*² and the imagination which revolves around it is never-ending and transcendental. Bihar, with a geographical area of some 94,000

¹Ganga Stotram, *In the name of the highest manifestation of the three worlds I pray you O! Devi Bhagvati Ganga, the goddess of the Devas, You liberate the three worlds with the (Merciful) waves of your liquid form. O! the stainless pure, one who resides in the head of Shankara, may my devotion remain firmly established on your lotus feet.* Nupur Choudhary (Translation).

² Lucien Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, in collaboration with LionlBataillon, tran. E.G. Mountford and J.H. Paxton (London Kegal Paul, 1932), 302.

sq. km., occupies approximately 89 per cent of the mid-Ganga plain.³ Only some portions of eastern Uttar Pradesh—Ballia, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, and Varanasi—are part of the mid-Gangetic plain. Ganga forms the natural boundary between Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and also marked the political boundary between the two parts. Minhajuddin-us-Siraj of Juzjan in his *Tabqat-i-Nasiri* mentions ‘Tirhut’ (north Bihar) and Bihar (south Bihar) as two separate political regions in the first half of the thirteenth century when Bhakhtiyar Khilji carved his own principality in Bengal. Bihar first appeared as a single province for some time under Ghias-al-din Tughlaq in 1324, but this excluded Bhagalpur and Moongyer (Munger).

The river as a clearly defined object- with a beginning, a middle, and an end- is, after all a human fabrication. At the same time, the Ganga is also a river incarnate, indispensable to thinking about the history and culture of the Indian subcontinent. In this regard it is not only a natural entity outside the frame of ordinary human experience but also a reflexive extension of something akin to a uniquely Indian consciousness.⁴ The work divides itself in several chapters explaining the various historical and sub-historical elements of the river in Bihar. **Chapter 1** deals with the various empires of the time(s) and how Ganga has played a geo-political role in the making of such territorial regimes. Political powers from the Mauryas to the British Raj have exploited the Ganga as a highway of imperial conquest, control, and exploitation. Although the sources on the Mauryas (321–184 BC) do not specifically link the Ganga to empire, the location of the imperial seat at Pataliputra (Patna) speaks of the river’s importance as the arterial vein of empire.⁵ The river remained the

³ Vipul Singh, *Speaking Rivers: Environmental History of Mid-Ganga Flood Country, 1540-1885*. Primus Books: New Delhi. 79.

⁴ Sudipta Sen. *Ganga: The many Past of the River*. Penguin Random House, 2019. 6.

⁵ Kautilya the author of the *Arthashastra*, a monumental Sanskrit work in political economy assumed to have been written in the late fourth and third centuries BC with later additions to the corpus, suggested the worship of the Ganga during the famine; see Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, ed. and trans. L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), 107.

cornerstone of the state-building projects of later rulers, be it with the far-reaching imperial ambition of Harsha of Kannauj (r. 606–47 AD), or a more regional orbit of the Palas of Bengal (750–1185 AD).

In the first half of the second millennium AD, Turkish and Afghan conquerors from the semi-arid marches of the northwest set up camp in Delhi and started to use the Ganga to exploit the far more humid and fertile river-plains of Hindustan to their east.⁶ Just like these Delhi Sultans, their Mughal successors could hardly ensure the survival of their empire without exploiting the agricultural resources along the eastern tracks of the Ganga.⁵ Although the first Mughal emperor, Babur (r. 1526–30), failed to completely subdue Bihar in 1529, his son and successor Humayun (r. 1530–40 and 1555–56) marched eastward along the Ganga to consolidate his empire. Mughal expansion encountered serious resistance from the Afghans, who controlled the strategic marchlands along the Ganga and had access to the agricultural wealth of the flood plains. One of them, Farid Khan, managed to overthrow the Mughals to become Sher Shah (r. 1540–45), the first ruler of the Sur dynasty. Humayun's defeats at the battles of Chausa and Bilgram (1540) gave a decisive edge to Sher Shah, who now became the undisputed master of the Ganga plain. For obvious logistical reasons, both these encounters occurred close to the banks of the Ganga. On the last occasion, Humayun was able to save his life by swimming across the Ganga on a leather bag given to him by a *visti* (water carrier). Saved by the river, Humayun survived the Afghan onslaught and successfully reclaimed the empire in 1555. Humayun's successor, Akbar (r. 1556–1605) could hardly delay the conquest of this economic powerhouse of northern India. Hence in the 1570s his army marched along the river and conquered Bihar and Bengal, meanwhile pacifying

⁶ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A political and military history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19, 138.

numerous landed gentry (*zamindars*), partly by making them stakeholders in his empire. Not surprisingly, when the Mughal Empire began to decline in the eighteenth century, the *zamindars* along the eastern banks of the Ganga became the focus of a renewed process of state formation. This time, the integration of the commercial economy of eastern India with the global maritime economy worked as a catalyst on a long-established, if as yet unarticulated, geopolitical logic. As we shall see in this study, like the *zamindars*, merchants and imperial *jagirdars* (holder of revenue-bearing area) also forged links with the maritime forces, and eventually one of them, the English *Company Bahadur*, was able to lay the foundation of the British Indian Empire on the banks of the Ganga after 1757.



(Fig.2. Battle on the Ganga in eastern India in the 1570s, source: *The Akbarnama*.)

Chapter 2 similarly talks about the various sagas related to the epical and mythological stories of the Ganga which changes its shift over a period of time. The different empires played a crucial role in contributing to the imagery of Ganga, both as an Imperial symbol

and as an element of sacredness. The veneration of the Ganga in the form of a goddess also relates to the positioning of various Shakti Peethas along the river. **Chapter 3** mentions this aspect of location of Tanta peeth and its relevance.

As the river nurtured the material life of the people who lived along its banks, these riparians reciprocated by vividly imagining and portraying the river in scripture, art and architecture as early as the first millennium BC, if not before. Through the process of representation in art and letters the Ganga came to forge a common bond among diverse people who found themselves members of a community based on material bounty but by shared cultural perception generated by their veneration of the river. On a similar tangent **Chapter 4** revolves around the living communities across the Ganga in Bihar. Bihar is a cultural land of much linguistic diversity which has changed its forms often and in contemporary times, a few languages like Bhojpuri, Maghi, Maithi, Angika etc. have been established as the vernacular majors of the region. Looking at this, **chapter 5** details the explanations for the linguistic plurality of the region. The final part of this study, **chapter 6**, locates history through the present time and space. The various ritualistic fairs, and important festivals which take place through the year are referenced here. The cultural diversity of food is also taken into consideration.

Chapter 1

Age of Empire(s)

In prehistoric times the area now within the Patna region with the tract known in later days as Bihar district, comprises the present districts of Patna and Gaya. It was regarded by the Aryans as a *land peopled by wild tribes*⁷ and from the early references to Magadha in Epic Literature we may conclude that it was still under the possession of aboriginal races, who gave place to the Aryan immigrants at a later period than in the areas north of the Ganges. This was during the time of the legendary king *Jarasantha* who was a prominent figure in the great conflict between the two branches of Aryan stock recorded in the Mahabharata. The date of the monarch is too remote to be fixed with any certainty but his name lives in the local legends, and it is known that his capital was at *Rajgir*, where the remains of his stronghold may still be seen in the great stone walls and causeways which skirt and climb the rocky hills. (Fig.2) and (Fig.3).

The first event after Jarasantha dynasty which claims historic reality is the rise of Saisunaka (cir.600 B.C). The fifth monarch of the line, Bimbisara, was the first to extend the frontiers of Magadha by the annexation of Anga (a small kingdom surrounding the current districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur). The chief interest attaching to the reign of Bimbisara arises from the fact that it witnessed the foundation of both Buddhism and Jainism. Gautama Buddha came to this district at an early stage in his search after truth, and Rajgir was the first place where he settled after leaving his father's territory⁸. (Fig.4).

⁷ L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers Patna*, revised edition by J.F.W. James (Logos Press, New Delhi), 15.

⁸L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteers Patna*, revised edition by J.F.W. James (Logos Press, New Delhi), 18.



(Fig.3. Bhima slays Jarasandha, Gift of Cynthia Polnsky, The MET Museum)

The great contemporary of Buddha, *Vardhamana Mahavira*, the founder of Jainism, was engaged in his ministry at the same time and in the same tract of the country. Followed by the foundation of Jainism, *Bimbisara* succeeded in 500 B.C by his son *Ajatasatru* who later made Rajgir the capital and next erected a fortress at the *village of Patali on the southern banks of Ganges* in order to hold in check the powerful Lichchhavi clan to the north of the river. There are also legends where Buddha is said to have prophesied about the ***foundation of Patliputra***, on how great it was to become but would be always threatened by fire, flood and internal dissension. About half a century later (434 B.C) Udaya grandson of Ajatsatru transferred the capital from Rajgir to Patliputra.



(From the hills of Rajgir, Vultures Peak, 2018)



(Fig.4. King Bimbisara offering his kingdom Magadha to Budha who refused and esired not for wordly enjoyment, Burmese Art Gallery)⁹

⁹https://www.google.com/search?q=bimbisara%20and%20buddha%20in%20paintings&tbm=isch&tbs=ring%3ACUe6xPI65-3nImB9zP5fBa7gcq9rLtFDEpsWI8fbc4gC3H1qYY7nhCCV5_1gzzS8D66p7eCh_1FErkIJ3bh13_12D5w9LsG7WiWuxGJvSmtYEsySF3sFpoeQPqigrdKG3PDtWENDmhdF0_1B2wqEgl9zP5fBa7gchFXW89v3FpsMioSCa9rLtFDEpsWEcYtZ7hndA1ZKhJI8fbc4gC3H0RT5PEujVd7zQqEglqYY7nhCCV5xEu0CzkKTDfeyoSCfgzzS8D66p7ET-MRxwt4J2KhJJeCh_1FErkIJ0RsZZtdW3sl9wqEgnbh13_12D5w9BF0afnHnLABSoSCbsG7WiWuxGJEVN1JSZYKZ9KhJvSmtYEsySF0R0bcd9dA9H3cqEgnsFpoeQPqiqhHJymUwEk1zUioSCbdKG3PDtWEEfp3G1cVW-IYKhIJNDmhdF0_1B2wRt-2EebUMVVRhQK_1BjDvk8KA&hl=en&ved=0CBsQuIIBahcKEWjYu7i95NbnAhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQBw&biw=1226&bih=597#imgrc=fcz-XwWu4HJnTM

Magadha had now become a great kingdom, the suzerainty of which was acknowledged as far as the Himalayas, and a central site was necessary for the capital. Such a site was found, in the shadow of Ajatasatru's fort, in Patliputra, which stood at a point of great commercial and strategic importance, *near the confluence of the great rivers of mid India*.

The rule of the Nanda kings was overcome by Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire. Himself a native of Magadha he headed a revolt against the Greek domination which Alexander had established in the north of India and later destroyed most of the Macedonian garrisons. He then turned against the Nandas, and in 321 B.C. captured Patliputra. He extended his empire from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea and established his expansionist credentials. The empire had excellent infrastructure leading to it developing a strong economy. Ancient epigraphical evidence suggests that Chandragupta Maurya, under counsel from Chanakya, started and completed many irrigation reservoirs and networks across the Indian subcontinent to ensure food supplies for the civilian population and the army, a practice continued by his dynastic successors.¹⁰ The evidence of arts and architecture during Chandragupta's time is mostly limited to texts such as those by Megasthenes and Kautilya's Arthashastra. The edict inscriptions and carvings on monumental pillars are attributed to his grandson Ashoka. The texts imply the existence of cities, public works, and prosperous architecture but the historicity of these is in question.¹¹ Archaeological discoveries in the modern age, such as the *DidarganjYakshani* discovered in 1917 buried beneath the banks of the River Ganges, suggest exceptional artisanal accomplishment. The site has been dated to the 3rd century BCE by many scholars but later dates such as the Kushan era (1st-4th century CE) have also been proposed. The competing theories state that the art linked to Chandragupta Maurya's dynasty was either learnt from the Greeks and from West Asia in the

¹⁰Allichin, Erdosrsy George. *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: Emergence of cities and states*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 187.

¹¹ Thomas Harrison. *The great empires of the ancient world*. (Getty Publications, 2009). 234

years Alexander the Great waged war in the region; or that these artifacts belong to an older indigenous Indian tradition.¹²



(Fig.5. DidarganjYakshini, excavated in 1917, 3rd century BCE-2nd Century BCE)

¹²Partha Chatterjee. *History and the Present*. (Anthem Press, 2006).56.



(Fig.6. Silver Punch Mark Coin, Mauryan Empire, 3rd century BCE)

Later, Bindusara, son of Chandragupta, continued his father's career of conquest and annexation. When his son Asoka succeeded to the throne, the Mauryan Empire extended as far as Madras, covering almost the whole of India. **Ashoka's** own inscriptions are the earliest self-representations of an imperial power in the Indian subcontinent.¹³ However, these inscriptions are focused mainly on the topic of *dhamma*, and provide little information regarding other aspects of the Maurya state and society. Even on the topic of *dhamma*, the content of these inscriptions cannot be taken at face value: in words of American academic John S. Strong, it is sometimes useful to think of Ashoka's messages as propaganda by a politician whose aim is to present a favourable image of himself and his administration, rather than record historical facts.¹⁴

¹³Singh, Upinder (2012). "Governing the State and the Self: Political Philosophy and Practice in the Edicts of Aśoka". *South Asian Studies*. University of Delhi. **28** (2): 131–145.

¹⁴Strong, John S. (1995). "Images of Aśoka: Some Indian and Sri Lankan Legends and their Development". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed)



Fig.7. Ashoka Rock Edict at Junagadh

According to the Sri Lankan texts *Mahavamsa* and the *Dipavamsa*, Ashoka ascended the throne 218 years after the death of Gautama Buddha, and ruled for 37 years.¹⁵ The date of the Buddha's death is itself a matter of debate, and the North Indian tradition states that Ashoka ruled a hundred years after the Buddha's death, which has led to further debates about the date.¹⁶

Assuming that the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, and assuming that the Buddha died in 483 BCE—a date proposed by several scholars—Ashoka must have ascended the throne in 265 BCE. The Puranas state that Ashoka's father Bindusara reigned for 25 years, not 28 years as

¹⁵Thapar, Romila (1961). *Ashoka and the decline of Mauryas*. Oxford University Press. 13.

¹⁶Strong, John S. (1995). "Images of Aśoka: Some Indian and Sri Lankan Legends and their Development". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.)

specified in the Sri Lankan tradition. If this is true, Ashoka's ascension can be dated three years earlier, to 268 BCE. Alternatively, if the Sri Lankan tradition is correct, but if we assume that the Buddha died in 486 BCE (a date supported by the Cantonese Dotted Record), Ashoka's ascension can be dated to 268 BCE. The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka consecrated himself as the king four years after becoming a sovereign. This interregnum can be explained by the assumption that he fought a war of succession with the other sons of Bindusara during these four years.

Both *Mahavamsa* and *Ashokavadana* state that Ashoka constructed 84,000 stupas or viharas. According to the *Mahavamsa*, this activity took place during his 5th–7th regnal years.¹⁷

The *Ashokavadana* states that Ashoka collected seven out of the eight relics of Gautama Buddha, and had their portions kept in 84,000 boxes made of gold, silver, cat's eye, and crystal. He ordered construction of 84,000 stupas throughout the world, in towns that had a population of 100,000 or more. He told Elder Yashas, a monk at the Kukkutarama monastery, that he wanted these stupas to be completed on the same day. Yashas stated that he would signal the completion time by eclipsing the sun with his hand. When he did so, the 84,000 stupas were completed at once.¹⁸

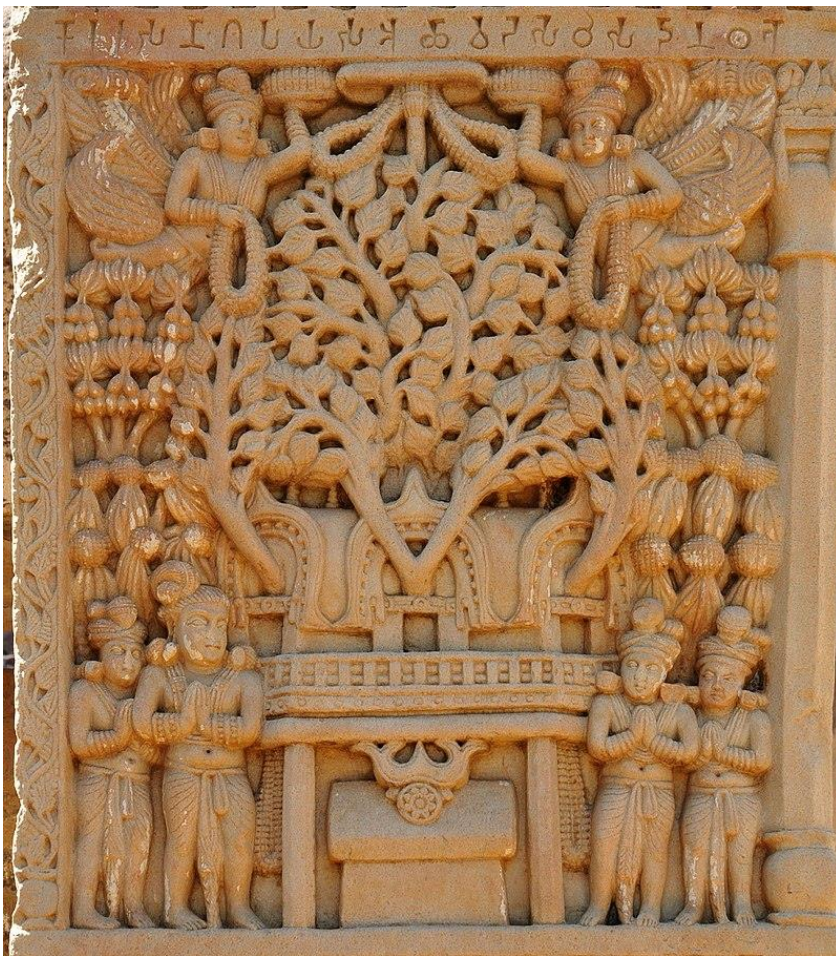
The *Mahavamsa* states that Ashoka ordered construction of 84,000 viharas (monasteries) rather than the stupas to house the relics. Like *Ashokavadana*, the *Mahavamsa* describes Ashoka's collection of the relics, but does not mention this episode in the context of the construction activities. It states that Ashoka decided to construct the 84,000 viharas when

¹⁷Guruge, Ananda W. P. (1995). "Emperor Aśoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist Tradition & Aśokan Inscriptions". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). 154

¹⁸Strong, John S. (1995). "Images of Aśoka: Some Indian and Sri Lankan Legends and their Development". In Anuradha Seneviratna (ed.). 155

MoggaliputtaTissa told him that there were 84,000 sections of the Buddha's Dhamma. Ashoka himself began the construction of the Ashokarama vihara, and ordered subordinate kings to build the other viharas. Ashokarama was said to have been completed by the miraculous power of Thera Indagutta, and the news about the completion of the 84,000 viharas arrived from various cities on the same day.

The number 84,000 is an obvious exaggeration, and it appears that in later periods, the construction of almost every old stupa was attributed to Ashoka.



(Fig.8. Illustration of original temple made at Bodh Gaya on the location of Mahabodhi Temple, 1st century BCE)

Shortly after the death of Ashoka, the Mauryan dynasty was overthrown and the power of Magadha began to decline. Outlying provinces asserted their independence. *Patliputra continued to be the capital of the diminished kingdom of Magadha and did not come to prominence until the rise of the Gupta empire in the fourth century A.D.*

The **Gupta Empire** was an ancient India empire in power from the mid-to-late 3rd century CE to 543 CE. At its zenith, from approximately 319 to 543 CE, it covered much of the Indian Subcontinent. This period is considered as the Golden age of India by some historians. The ruling dynasty of the empire was founded by the king Sri Gupta; the most notable rulers of the dynasty were Chandragupta I, Samudragupta and Chandragupta II (alias Vikramaditya). The 5th-century CE Sanskrit poet Kalidasa credits the Guptas with having conquered about twenty-one kingdoms, both within and outside India, including the kingdoms of Parariskaras the Hunas, the Kambojas, tribes located in the west and east Oxus Valley the Kinnaras, Kiratas, and others.¹⁹

The high points of this period are the great cultural developments which took place primarily during the reigns of Samudragupta, Chandragupta II and Kumaragupta I. Many of the literary sources, such as Mahabharata and Ramayana were canonised during this period. The Gupta period produced scholars such as Kalidasa, Aryabhata, Varahamihira and Vatsyana who made great advancements in many academic fields. Science and political administration reached new heights during the Gupta era. The period gave rise to achievements in architecture, sculpture, and painting that "set standards of form and taste [that] determined the whole subsequent course of art, not only in India but far beyond her borders". Strong trade ties also made the region an important cultural centre and established the region as a base that would influence nearby kingdoms and regions in South Asia and Southeast Asia:

¹⁹N. Jayapalan, *History of India*, Vol. I, (Atlantic Publishers, 2001), 130.

The Puranas' earliest epic poems on a variety of subjects, are also thought to have been committed to written texts around this period.

The empire eventually faded away due to many factors such as a substantial loss of territory and imperial authority caused by their own erstwhile feudatories, as well as the invasion by the Huna People from Central Asia. After the collapse of the Gupta Empire in the 6th century, India again came to be ruled by numerous regional kingdoms.



(Fig. 9. Queen Kumaradevi and King Chandragupta depicted on a gold coin, British Museum)

In the heart of the former Gupta Empire, in the Gangetic region, the Guptas were succeeded by the Maukhari Dynasty and the Pushyabhuti Dynasty. The coinage of the Maukharis and Pushyabhutis followed the silver coin type of the Guptas, with the portrait of the ruler in profile (although facing in the reverse direction compared to the Guptas, a possible symbol of

antagonism)and the peacock on the reverse, the Brahmi legend being kept except for the name of the ruler.

In the western regions, they were succeeded by the Gujaras, Pratiharas, and later the Chalukya Parmara dynasties, who issued the so-called Indo-Ssanian coinage, modelled on the coinage of the Sasasian , which had been introduced in India by the Alchon Huns.²⁰



(Fig.10. The current structure of the Mahabodhi Temple dates to the Gupta era, 5th century CE. It marks the location where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment).

²⁰Ray, Himanshu Prabha. *Negotiating Cultural Identity*, Taylor & Francis(2019).161–164.

Beal's Buddhist records of the western world are the last record/account of the splendours of Patliputra. **HiuenTsiang**, another Chinese pilgrim who visited India between 630 and 645, found its glory departed. He says "an old city long deserted; now there only remain the old foundation walls. The monasteries, the temples and Buddhist stupas, which lie in ruins may be counted as hundreds and only two or three remain entire." The devastation was probably due to the invasion of Huns in the latter half of the sixth century. The account of HiuenTsiang establishes that although Patliputra was in ruins, Magadha was the peaceful home of Buddhism, full of great shrines and splendid monasteries, chief amongst which was Nalanda.



(Fig. 11. The Chinese travel HiuenTsiang, *The Burmese Art Gallery*)

Upon the death of Harsha in 648, the throne was usurped by Arjuna, one of whose first acts was to attack a mission sent by the emperor of China, kill the escort and plunder the property. After the many succession the central power declined and each small potentate carved out an independent kingdom and later the chieftains of Gopala became the rule of Bengal and extended his power over Magadha. The successors of the kingdom was devout Buddhists and sent many emissaries across India to establish the fleet.



(Xuanzang Memorial In Nalanda, Bihar)

The Muhammadan Conquest/ invasion under Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1197 was a beginning of a new era in the history of Magadha. Khalji came from the town of Garmisir in present-day southern Afghanistan. Tradition has it that Khalji's conquest of Bengal at the head of 18

horsemen was foretold.²¹ He was first appointed as the *Dewan-i-Ard* at Ghor. He approached India around the year 1193 and tried to enrol in the army of Qutb-al-Din, but was refused rank. Then he went further eastward and took a job under Maklik Hizbar al-Din, then in command of a platoon at Badayun in northern India. After a short period, he went to Oudh where Malik Husam al-Din, recognised him for his worth. Husam gave him a landed estate in the south-eastern corner of modern Mirzapur District. Khalji soon established himself there and carried out successful raids into weakly-defended regions to the east.²²



(Fig.12. The end of Buddhist Monks, A.D. 1193. From *The End of the Buddhist Monks*, A.D. 1193. From page 168 of Hutchinson's story of the nations, containing the Egyptians, the

²¹Major H.G Rverty. *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A general histories of Muhammad dynasties of India*. (Gilbert and Rivington Press 1881).556.

²²Sarkar, Jadunath. ed. (1973) [First published 1948]. *The History of Bengal*. Volume II: Muslim Period, 1200-1757. Patna: Academica Asiatica. pp. 2-3.

Chinese, India, the Babylonian nation, the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians, the Phrygians, the Lydians, and other nations of Asia Minor.)

Khalji's career took a new turn when he subjugated Bihar in 1200.²³ This effort earned him political clout in the court at Delhi. In the same year he took his forces into Bengal. As he came upon the city of Nabadwip, it is said that he advanced so rapidly that only 18 horsemen from his army could keep up. He conquered Nabadwip from the old emperor Lakshama Sena in 1203. Subsequently, Khalji went on to capture the capital and the principal city, Gaur, and intruded into much of Bengal.

Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasions are believed to have severely damaged the Buddhist establishments at Nalanda, Odantapuri and Vikramashila. Minhaj-i-Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiris* suggests that Bakhtiyar Khalji destroyed a Buddhist monastery which the author equates in his description with a city he calls "Bihar", from what the soldiers called a *vihara*.²⁴ According to American scholar Hartmut Scharfe, Tibetan sources suggest that this monastery was the one at Vikramashila; historian André Wink believes that this monastery must have been Odantapuri. According to the early 17th century Buddhist scholar Taranatha, the invaders massacred many monks at Odantapuri, and destroyed Vikramashila. The Tibetan pilgrim Dharmasvamin, who visited the region in the 13th century, states that Vikramashila had been completely razed to the ground by the Turushka (Turkic) invaders, and Nalanda was the residence of a Turushka military commander. Around 80 small viharas remained at Nalanda, but most of them had been damaged by the Turushkas, and had been abandoned: only two were in "serviceable condition".

²³Sarkar, Jadunath. ed. (1973) [First published 1948]. *The History of Bengal*. Volume II: Muslim Period, 1200-1757. Patna: Academica Asiatica. p. 3.

²⁴André Wink (2002). *Al-Hind: The Slave Kings and the Islamic conquest, 11th-13th centuries*. BRILL. pp. 146-148.



(Fig.13.Ruins of Nalanda)

The persistent invasion of Patliputra (Magadha) for a long stretch of time there was no records found until South Bihar which was induced under the Bengal viceroyalty of Bhaktiyar Khilji and his immediate successors

In the sixteenth century Magadha emerged again from its obscurity during the era of **Emperor Babur** who in 1529 advanced as far as Maner in order to repel the rebellious Afghan chiefs. His death in the succeeding year was a signal to rouse the Afghans chiefs. **Sher Shah** on his return from Bengal in 1541 came to Patna, *he was standing on the banks of Ganges when he said 'If a fort were to be built in this place, the waters of the Ganges could never flow from it and Patna would become one of the great towns of this country.* Farid

Khan started his service under Bahar Khan Lohani, the Mughal Governor of Bihar.²⁵ Because of his valour, Bahar Khan rewarded him the title *Sher Khan (Lion Lord)*. After the death of Bahar Khan, Sher Khan became the regent ruler of the minor Sultan, Jalal Khan. Later sensing the growth of Sher Shah's power in Bihar, Jalal sought the assistance of Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah, the independent Sultan of Bengal. Ghiyasuddin sent an army under General Ibrahim Khan. But Sher Khan defeated the force at the battle of Surajgarh in 1534 after forming an alliance with Ujjainiya Rajputs and other local chiefdoms.²⁶ Thus he achieved complete control of Bihar.

In 1538, Sher Khan attacked Bengal and defeated Mahmud Shah. But he could not capture the kingdom because of the sudden expedition of Emperor Humayun. On 26 June 1539, Sher Khan faced Humayun in the Battle of Chausa and defeated him. Assuming the title *Farīd al-Dīn Shēr Shah*, he defeated Humayun once again at Kannauj in May 1540 and forced him out of India. The system of tri-metalism which came to characterise Mughal coinage was introduced by Sher Shah. While the term *rūpya* had previously been used as a generic term for any silver coin, during his rule the term *rūpee* came to be used as the name for a silver coin of a standard weight of 178 grains, which was the precursor of the modern rupee.²⁷

²⁵Ali, Muhammad Ansar (2012). "Sher Shah". In Islam, Sirajul; Jamal, Ahmed A. (eds.). *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

²⁶Ahmad, Imtiaz (2008). "State Formation and Consolidation under the Ujjainiya Rajputs." In Surinder Singh; IshawrDayal Gaur (eds.). *Popular Literature and Pre-modern Societies in South Asia*. Pearson Education India. 80.

²⁷Goron, Stan; Goenka, J. P. (2001). *The Coins of the Indian Sultanates*. MunshiramManoharlal Publishers. p. 98.



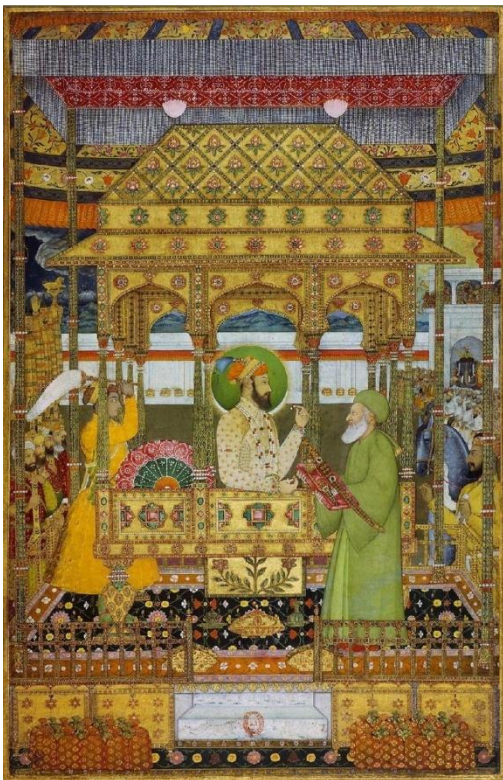
(Fig. 14& 15. Tomb of Sher Shah Suri, Sasaram, Bihar)



(Fig.16. Rupaiya released by Sher Shah Suri, 1538-1545)

The rule of the Subahdars came as an intriguing tangent to the history of Patna and Bihar. The fall of Patna meant the conquest of Bengal and henceforth the city was designated the headquarters of the Mughal governor of Bihar. Patna now became once more a nucleus of

political life. During this period the city witnessed the proclamation of two Mughal emperors Bagh Zafar Khan, and Khusru which later came in contact with Shah Jhan. During this turbulence in 1678, Aurangzeb was appointed as the new subahdar, but it was during his grandson's time **Azim-us-Shan** that Patna attained the zenith of its splendour. In 1703 he transferred the capital to Rajmahal and then again to Pataliputra (present-day Patna). The prince made his court at Patna where he improved the fortification, and in 1704 he named the city after himself, *Azimabad*. Azim got into conflict with Murshid Quli Khan, the newly appointed Divan of Bengal, over imperial financial control. Considering the complaint of Murshid Quli Khan, Aurangzeb ordered Azim to move out of Bihar.²⁸ In 1712, at the time of his father's death, he immediately proclaimed himself emperor. However, he was killed (drowned in the Ravi River) shortly afterwards in the succession struggles that ensued.



(Fig. 16. Azim-Us-Shan on the imperial throne receives the investiture of Khizr ca. 1712, Bibliotheque nationale de France, Paris.)

²⁸Chatterjee, Anjali (2012). "Azim-us-Shan". In Islam, Sirajul; Jamal, Ahmed A. (eds.). *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

After the demise of Azim-us-shan the province was passed on to **Farrukhsiyar**, his son. He was welcomed with acclamation by the people brought in great numbers to the fort and enthroned as emperor in Afzal Khan's garden-house. Later the emergence of Muhammad Shah in 1719 as the emperor and the predecessors were ill-treated. Bihar thus passed under the rule of the viceroy of Bengal and thereafter remained an appendage of that province.

The construction of Bihar in the **Early Modern Times** started with **European settlements** and was followed by many internal coups. The Ganga and its tributaries played a crucial role in such a historical progression.²⁹ The Mughals' political and economic expansion to the east along the Ganga coincided with maritime economic boom. The trade of European and Asian merchants brought larger quantities of bullion into the Ganga plain. While the expanding economy benefited the Mughal state, in the long run it also armed the dissident forces, from mobile warlords to zamindars along the Ganga.³⁰ Due to political control over agrarian and fiscal policies by the Mughals, the Imperial government was gaining what they wanted; however the alteration in the extraction of the surplus by the state and the zamindars made them (the Imperialists) take charge of this in their hands. In order to understand the processes leading to the dissolution of the Mughal Empire and transition of the EIC rule from, in essence, trader turned landlord or zamindar, to the dominant power in South Asia, we need a more nuanced appreciation of the transformation of the political economy along the Ganga. There were a number of constitutive props which benefitted by holding the Mughal imperial edifice together, not only the Mughal administrators and officials, but also zamindars, portfolio capitalists, merchants, and financiers who came from a number of ethnic and

²⁹Vipul Singh, *Speaking Rivers: Environmental History of Mid-Ganga Flood Country, 1540-1885*. Primus Books: New Delhi. 45.

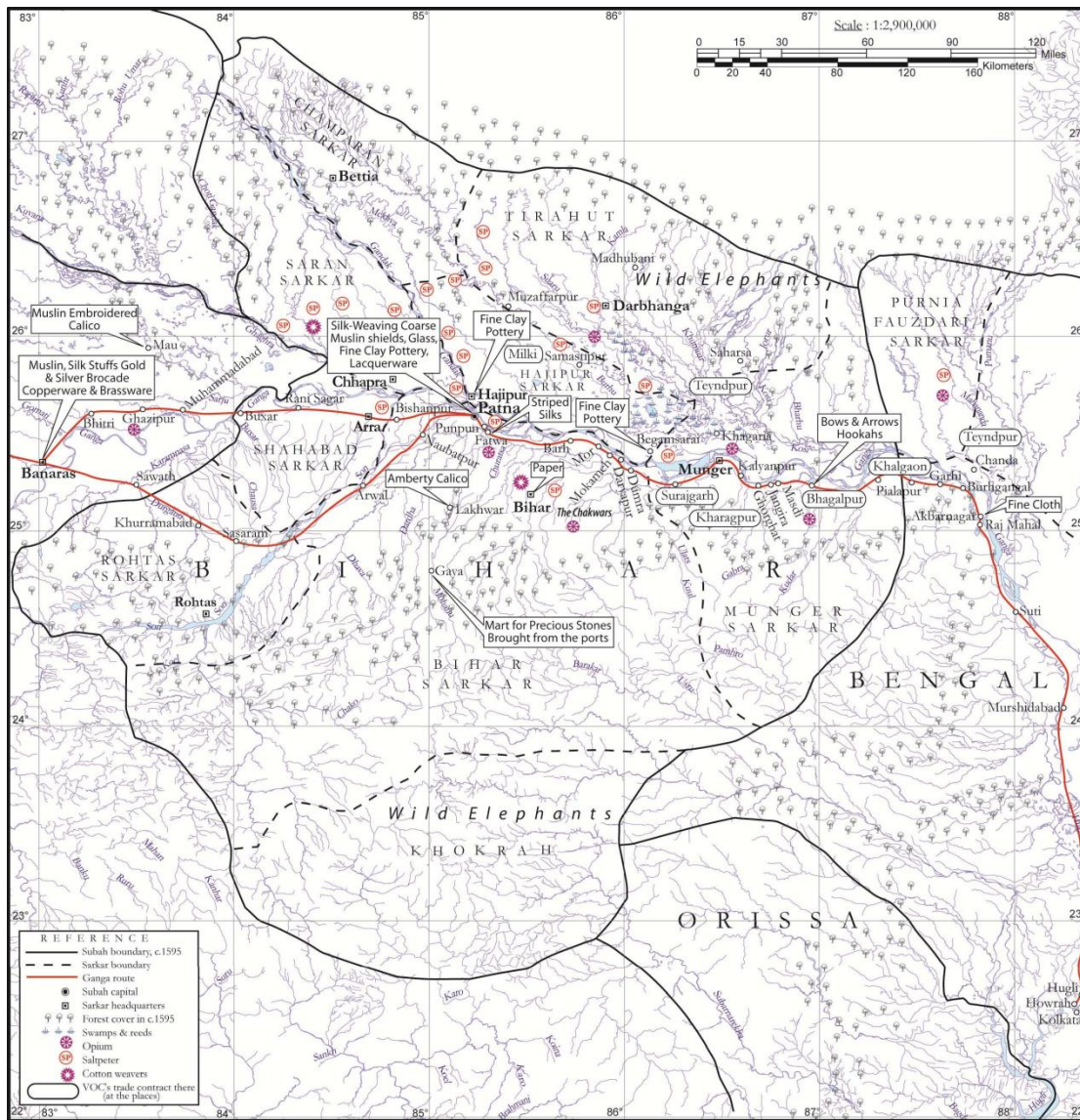
³⁰Murari Kumar Jha. *The Political Economy of the Ganga River: Highway of state formation in Mughal India*. (Leiden University Press, 2013). 233.

religious groups. Many of these competing groups were busy nursing their own economic and political ambitions, but they were as dependent upon the empire as the empire was on them.³¹

The Mughals were the chief arbitrators of differences arising amongst the ethnic and religious groups of zamindars and jagirdars.³²In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the arbitration and resolution of disputes among these constituencies was one of the empire's essential functions, but in the eighteenth century the so-called successor states to the Mughal Empire appropriated some of these functions for themselves. This was thanks in large part to the greater opportunities to accumulate resources and raise large militias that resulted from regional centralization, a process that reached its acme when the East India Company secured the *diwani* (Mughal taxation rights) and consolidated its authority over the river trade emanating from Calcutta. Thus, following the lead of the Mughal successor states and big zamindars, by the second half of the eighteenth century the **EIC emerged as a new diwan and came to be the region's supreme arbitrator**, although it still acknowledged Mughal suzerainty. By the early nineteenth century, the **Company gradually wrested or won over other regional states and emerged as a paramount power in South Asia.**

³¹ For the dual role of zamindars and jagirdars in stability and unsettling the Mughal Empire in different circumstances, see Satish Chandra, *Parties and politics at the Mughal court 1707–1740* (1959; repr. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–11. For the mansabdars drawn from various ethnic and racial stocks, factionalism among them and the Mughal emperors' balancing act, see Athar Ali, *The Mughal nobility under Aurangzeb* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1996), 7–37, see esp. pp. 16, 18–19. See also Muzaffar Alam, *The crisis of empire in Mughal north India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10–16.

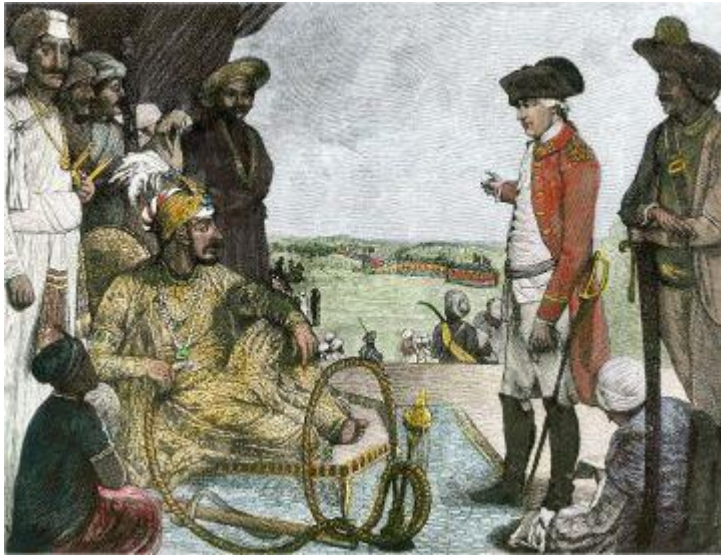
³² J. C. Heesterman, *The inner conflict of tradition: Essays in Indian ritual, kinship and society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 166–67; see also J. C. Heesterman, "India and the inner conflict of tradition," *Daedalus* 102:1 (1973): 97–113, esp. 103–4. Chandra, *Parties and politics*, 13–14.



(Map 1. The political and economic geography of Bihar in the early modern period. Adapted from Habib's *An atlas of the Mughal empire.*)

The **Battle of Buxar** was fought on 22 October 1764, between the forces under the command of the British East India Company, led by Hector Munro, and the combined armies of Mir Qasim, the Nawab of Bengal till 1763. Mir Jafar was made the Nawab of Bengal for a second time in 1763 by the Company, just after the battle. After being defeated in 4 battles in Katwa, Garia and Udaynala, the Nawab of Awadh Shuja-ud-Daula and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, accompanied by Raja Balwant Singh of

Kashi made an alliance with Mir Qasim.³³ The battle was fought at Buxar, a "small fortified town" within the territory of Bihar located on the banks of the Ganga river about 130 kilometres (81 mi) west of Patna; it was a decisive victory for the British East India Company. The war was brought to an end by the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765.



(Fig.17. Shah Alam II, Mughal Emperor of India, reviewing the East India Company's troops, 1781 (1894). An illustration from *A Short History of the English People*, by John Richard Green, illustrated edition, Volume IV, Macmillan and Co, London, New York, 1894)

The British army engaged in the fighting numbered 7,072³⁴ comprising British and Indian sepoys and Indian mounted troops. The alliance army's numbers were estimated to be over 40,000. According to other sources, the combined army of the Mughals, Awadh and Mir Qasim consisting of 40,000 men was defeated by a British army comprising less than 10,000 men. The Nawabs had virtually lost their military power after the battle of Buxar.

The lack of basic co-ordination among the three disparate allies was responsible for their decisive defeat.

³³Parshotam Mehra (1985). *A Dictionary of Modern History (1707–1947)*. Oxford University Press. 54

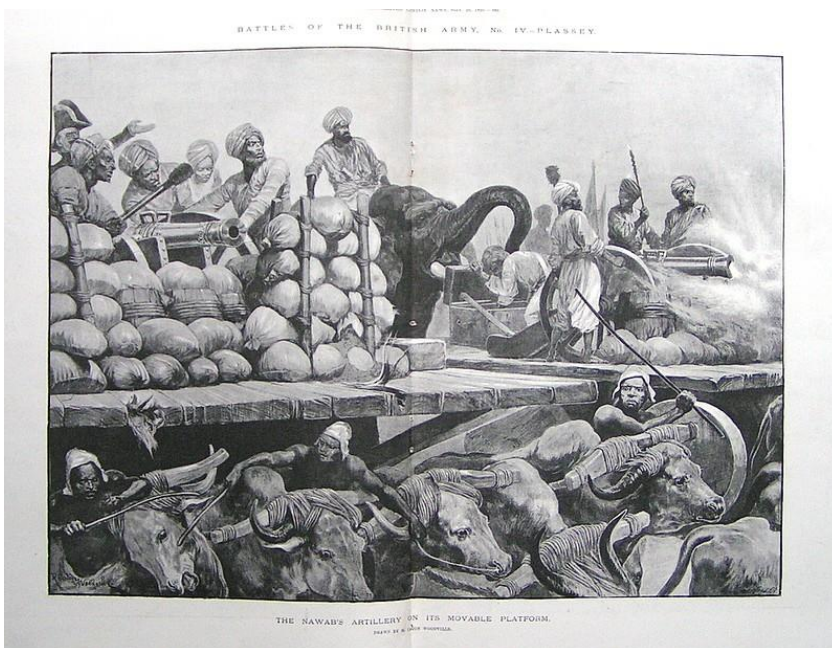
³⁴Cust, Edward (1858). *Annals of the Wars of the Eighteenth Century: 1760–1783. III*. London: Mitchell's Military Library. 113.

Mirza Najaf Khan commanded the right flank of the Mughal imperial army and was the first to advance his forces against Major Hector Munro at daybreak; the British lines formed within twenty minutes and reversed the advance of the Mughals. According to the British, Durrani and Rohilla cavalry were also present and fought during the battle in various skirmishes. But by midday, the battle was over and Shuja-ud-Daula blew up large tumbrils and three massive magazines of gunpowder.

Munro divided his army into various columns and particularly pursued the Mughal Grand Vizier Shuja-ud-Daula the Nawab of Awadh, who responded by blowing up his boat-bridge after crossing the river, thus abandoning the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II and members of his own regiment. Mir Qasim also fled with his 3 million rupees worth of Gemstones and later died in poverty in 1777. Mirza Najaf Khan reorganised formations around Shah Alam II, who retreated and then chose to negotiate with the victorious British.

Historian John William Fortescue claimed that the British casualties totalled 847: 39 killed and 64 wounded from the European regiments and 250 killed, 435 wounded and 85 missing from the East India Company's sepoys.³⁵ He also claimed that the three Indian allies suffered 2,000 dead and that many more were wounded. Source says that there were 69 European and 664 sepoy casualties on the British side and 6,000 casualties on the Mughal side. The victors captured 133 pieces of artillery and over 1 million rupees of cash. Immediately after the battle Munro decided to assist the Marathas, who were described as a "warlike race", well known for their relentless and unwavering hatred towards the Mughal Empire and its Nawabs and Mysore.

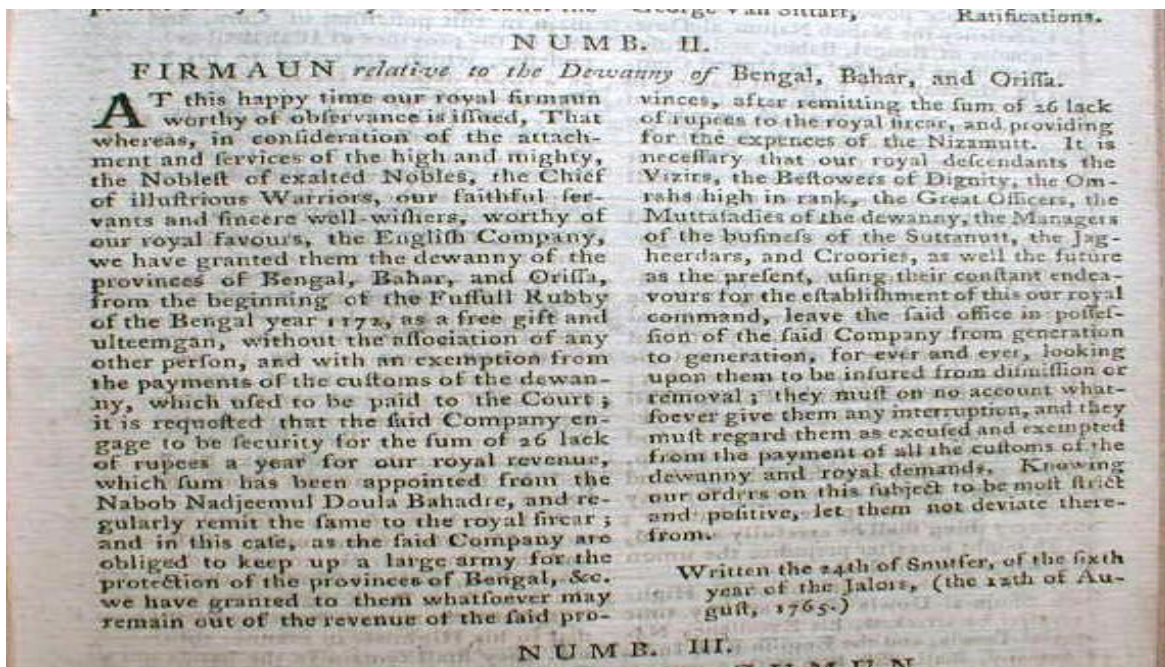
³⁵Cust, Edward (1858). *Annals of the Wars of the Eighteenth Century: 1760–1783*. III. London: Mitchell's Military Library.113.



(Fig. 18 and 19. Clive examining the enemy lines from the roof of the Nawab's hunting lodge; the Nawab's arrival before Clive's position; the Nawab's artillery on a special movable platform: three commemorative views of the Battle of Plassey from the Illustrated London News, 1893)



(Fig.20.Mir Jafar and his son Miran delivering the Treaty of 1757 to William Watts. Platinotype by Henry Dixon and Son, London, c.1890*)



(Fig.21.Excerpts from the peace treaty with Shujaud-Daulah, and the whole of Shah 'Alam'sfarman, as translated and reported by "The Universal Magazine," London, Dec. 1766



(Fig22. Shah 'Alam conveying the grant of the Diwani to Lord Clive, August 1765; an oil painting by Benjamin West, c.1818)

Chapter 2

Ganga, Saga(s) & Historicity

Gangecha Yamunechaiva Godavari Saraswati

*Narmade Sindhu Kaveri jaleasminsannidhim kuru*³⁶

*When a Hindu takes Ganga water and Toolsee in his hand he will sacrifice his life*³⁷

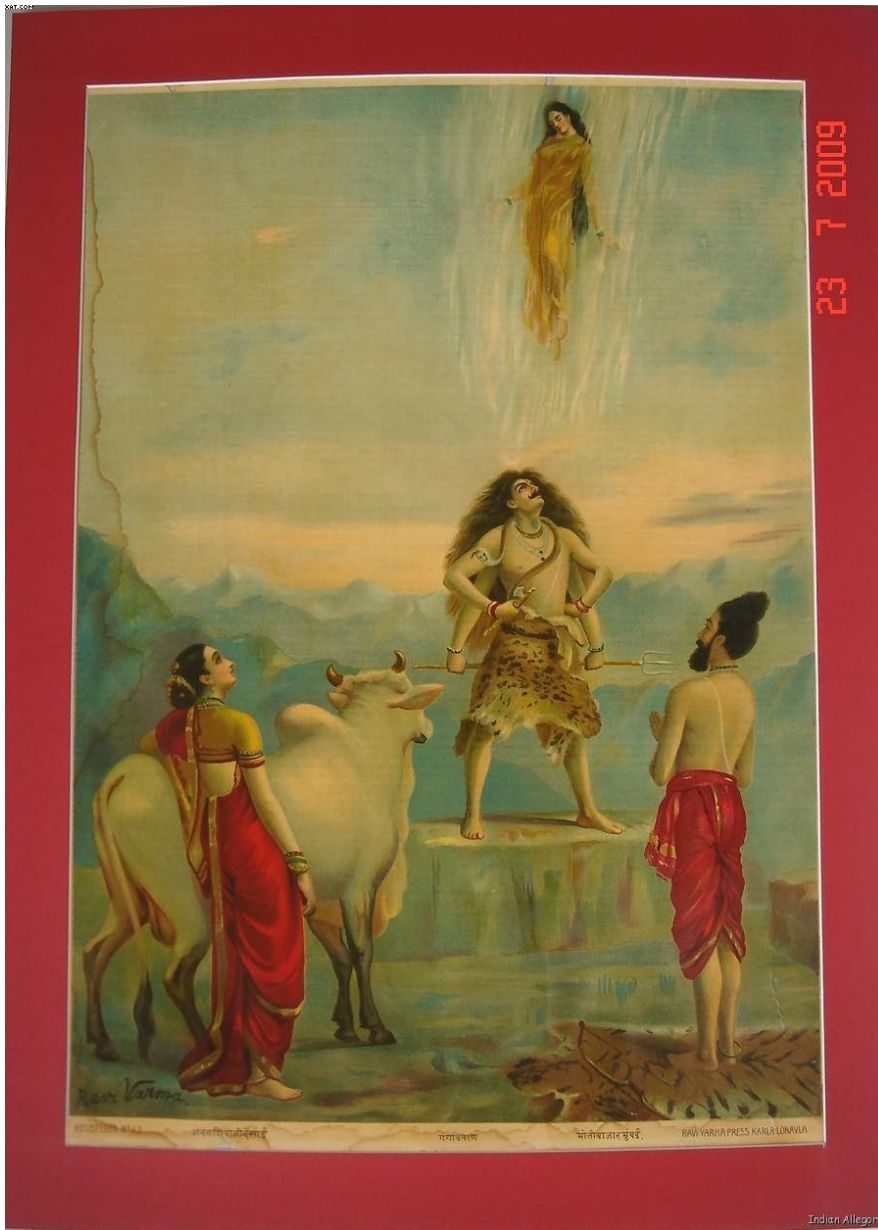
The Ganga is one of the most celebrated rivers in the world. It is not only a river but an emblem of civilization. It is a sacred river to Hindus along every fragment of its length. All along its course, Hindus bathe in its waters,³⁸ paying homage to their ancestors and to their gods by cupping the water in their hands, lifting it and letting it fall back into the river; they offer flowers and rose petals and float shallow clay dishes filled with oil and lit with wicks (diyas). On the journey back home from this sacred river, they carry small quantities of river water with them for use in rituals (Ganga jal, literally water of the Ganges). Few would argue that these rivers bring us very close to the source of the historical processes that have given rise to and nurtured civilizations. Indeed, these rivers are visible relics of the past no less than ancient monuments or ageless trade routes. Study of these rivers helps us gauge some of the structural continuities of the economy, society

³⁶ O Holy Mother Ganga! O Yamuna! O Godavari! Sarasvati! O Narmada! Sindhu! Kaveri! May you all be pleased to be manifest in these waters with which I shall purify myself. See Eric Newby, *Slowly down the Ganges* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 23.

³⁷ Petition of the sepoys to the Commander in Chief, Barrackpore Parade ground, 1 November 1824. See Premansu Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Tulsi leaves and the Ganges water: The slogan of the first sepoy mutiny at Barrackpore 1824* (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi, 2003), 27.

³⁸Eck, Diana L.(1982), *Banaras, city of light*, Columbia University,212

and geo-politics over the *longue durée*. Yet as they change their course across the landscape, these rivers influence the trajectory of history too. Thus, the Ganga embodies the characteristics of both *continuity and change*.³⁹



(Fig.23. "Gangavtaran," or the descent of the Ganges into Shiva's hair; an oleograph from the Ravi Varma Press, Lonavla, c.1910's)⁴⁰

³⁹Murari Kumar Jha. *The Political Economy of the Ganga River: Highway of state formation in Mughal India*. (Leiden University Press, 2013). 13.

⁴⁰http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/0400_0499/pantheon/arddhanarishvara/arddhanarishvara.html

The river occupied a prominent place not only in the later Vedic texts but also in the epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, believed to have been composed between 400–100 BC and 400 BC–400 AD respectively.⁴¹ Like the Sarasvati, the Ganga was supposed to have originated from the *kamandalu* or water-pot of Brahma, the primeval grandfather of the Indo-Aryans.⁴² When the *Ramayana* was composed, the Ganga was imagined to have descended from the heavens in a story nicely encapsulated in the “**Gangavataran**”(descent of the Ganga) episode of the epic. This myth forms an essential part of the Hindu religious tradition. The long story was narrated to young Rama by his royal Guru, the sage Visvamitra, in order to familiarize him with the legendary history of the Ikshvakus, the lineage which Rama belonged to.



(Fig.24. Rama, Lakshmana and Visvamitra crossing the Ganga, image taken from the *Ramayana, Bala Kanda*. Originally produced in 1712 at Udaipur, Rajasthan. Source: BL, London).

⁴¹ John S. Bowman, ed., *Columbia chronologies of Asian history and culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 328.

⁴² Steven G. Darian, *The Ganges in myth and history* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001), 58–62

As the story goes, once a just and righteous king of Ayodhya named Sagara wanted to perform *ashwamedha* (horse sacrifice) in order to claim the title of *chakravartin* (universal ruler), and for this purpose he let loose a sacrificial horse. Whatever lands the horse roamed in during the year became the territory of Sagara. Eventually, the gods became worried about the expansion of the king's realm. Fearing that even heaven would be annexed they beseeched the sage Kapila to capture the horse. When the horse did not return to Ayodhya at the end of the year, Sagara commanded his sixty thousand sons to find out who had captured the horse. When the sons of Sagara went to the northeast of the *Jambu-dvipa* (name of the Indian subcontinent in the epics) they found the horse and the sage in the netherworld. They attacked Kapila who reduced them to ashes by uttering the syllable 'Hum'. Later a great, great-grandson of Sagara named Bhagiratha decided to do the funerary libation for his sixty thousand dead ancestors. Bhagiratha was told that the sixty thousand souls would reach heaven only if their ashes could be purified with Ganga water. As the Ganga was still a celestial body, Bhagiratha did penance and strove hard to bring her to earth in order to carry the river water to the netherworld to liberate the souls of his ancestors.⁴³

After years of austerities and aesthetic living, Bhagiratha was able to please Brahma, who asked him to request a favour. When Bhagiratha said he wanted to be the one who could perform the funerary libations for his ancestors with Ganga water, Brahma replied that only the god Shiva could hold the fall of the Ganga on his matted hair because the earth would be unable to withstand the force of such a thunderous fall. In order to please the

⁴³ Valmiki, *Ramayana: Boyhood: 38–41, book one*, trans. Robert P. Goldman (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 217–29.

god Shiva, Bhagiratha stood on the tip of one toe for a year and constantly worshipped him. In acknowledgment of this dedication, the god Shiva agreed to allow the Ganga to fall via his head. As the Ganga plunged from the sky, she got entangled in his matted hair and after many years Shiva released her into a lake from which the river then flowed onto the earth, this was a great event that was watched by all the celestials and worldly creatures with great astonishment. The mighty flow of the river was not uniform. In some places it flowed swiftly, winding its course while at other places the river moved slowly. In some areas it broadened out while at some other places it narrowed. Riding his celestial chariot, Bhagiratha guided the course of the Ganga to the ocean. He then entered a gaping hole in the netherworld where the ashes of his ancestors were washed in Ganga water and the sixty thousand sons of Sagara ultimately attained heaven. Then Brahma made an appearance and spoke to Bhagiratha congratulating him on his momentous feat. He named the river after Bhagiratha and called it Bhagiratha Ganga.⁴⁴

A host of economic, political and cultural factors contributed to the emergence of the Ganga as the river *par excellence*, and the word Ganga became a generic term for a river in the Indian subcontinent. In myths and legends, the Ganga was perceived as a manifestation of the celestial body on earth and the river could transport one's soul to heaven. The notion of the Ganga as purifier who washes away all sins became deeply rooted among Hindus of all classes. Its sanctity was beyond question for most Hindus and gradually a pilgrimage to the river for the purposes of ritual ablution became one of the most common ways to purify oneself from accumulated sins. The pilgrimage to the river

⁴⁴Diana L. Eck, "Gaṅgā: The goddess in Hindu sacred geography," in *The divine consort: Rādhā and the goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, 1st Indian ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 175.

evolved and became more popular over the course of time. That the Ganga was a holy river for a majority of their subjects was not unknown to the Muslim rulers who came to dominate a large part of the Indian subcontinent in the thirteenth century. As a result, many of these Muslim rulers also connected themselves with the river and its water in various ways. Some made it a habit to drink water from the Ganga alone, even though they were stationed far away from its banks. Others used its waters during the coronation ceremony. These attachments on the part of these Muslim rulers with the river might not have sprung from religious sentiments but they were certainly aware of the political ramifications of such acts of association with the river.⁴⁵



(Fig.25.Devotees going on a boat ride on the bank of river Ganga)

⁴⁵ Richard M Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States,” in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia*, ed. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 246–81.

Historically, Ganga has survived its illustrations in many forms and signs through various kingdoms. To begin with, inscriptions, coins, sculptures, and dedications that have survived over the eras indicate a widespread plethora of images and motifs that suggest generic Hindu expressions of divinity. During the times of the Guptas the resurgence of iconography provides the context for the proliferation of an image of river Ganga as a female deity and one of the enduring symbols of imperial might.⁴⁶

Figures of female Yaksis and guardians (dvarapalikas) served as models for the earthly and sensuous figures of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna that appear in the caves and temples of the Gupta period.



(Fig.26. The depiction of Ganga in Udaigiri Caves, Kalthana, Gupta Period)

⁴⁶Sudipta Sen. *Ganga: The many pasts of a River*. (Penguin Random House, 2019).199-203



(Fig. 27. Vishnu as Varaha Avatar lifting bhudevi in his tusk, Udaigiri Caves)

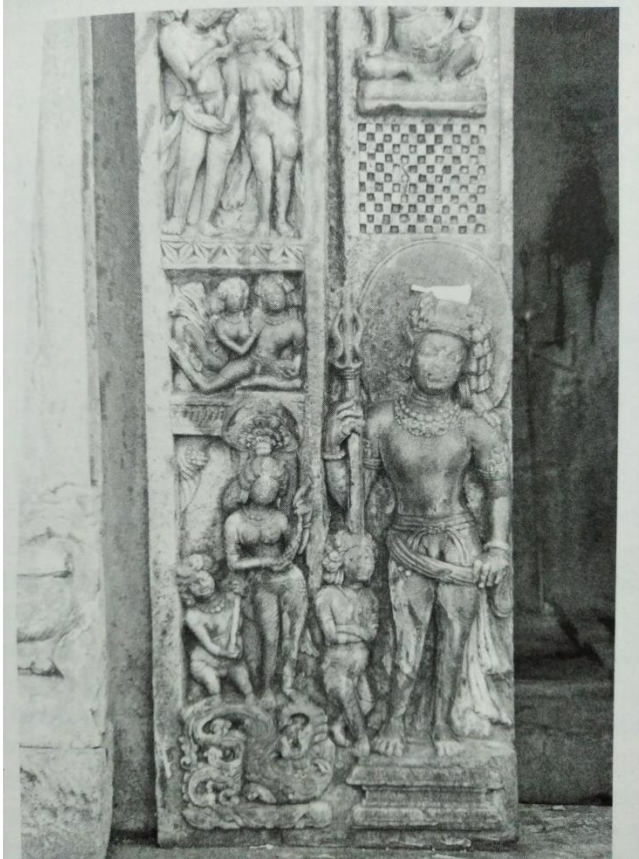


(Fig.27. Tiger Slayer type gold dinar of Samudrapupta, with Ganga astride Makara on the reverse, ca. 335-375)⁴⁷



(Fig.28. Rhinoceros-slayer type gold dinar of Kumargupta, with Ganga astride Makara with parasol on the reverse, ca.415-455 C.E. British Museum.)

⁴⁷<http://coinindia.com/galleries-gupta.html>



(**Fig. 29 &30.** This depicts Ganga on Makara overlooking the entrance of the Vishnu temple, Deogarh, Madhya Pradesh, ca. Fifth-sixth century. C.E., Photography: Frederick Asher. The above picture is of Ganga and Yamuna as guardians of the Nachna Kuthara Parvati Temple, Madhya Pradesh, fifth century.)

By the second century C.E. the waters of Ganga became an indispensable ingredient in the sumptuary rituals of Kinship in North India. Early evidence, though scattered, comes from the little-known line of the Naga kings of central India. The legendary contestation also goes back to the Mauryan Empire, of which the co-structural artefacts remain intact till date in the outskirts of Patna.

Agam Kuan is another ancient site in Patna; situated at a short distance south-west of Gulzarbagh Station. It is said to date back to the period of Mauryan emperor, Ashoka (304–232 BCE). Agam Kuan is a huge well which is also referred to as the *infinity well*, circular in plan, with a diameter extending over 20'2". It is 105' deep, as far has been fathomed and recorded. Upto a depth of 44' from the surface, a finely worked brick-casing is envisaged. The lower half, a further depth of 61' is, however, secured by a series of wooden rings. As many as eight arched windows, all at regular intervals, adorn the well just above the ground and form its most distinctive feature.

The Agam Kuan is set within an archaeological site identified by the Archaeological Survey of India which also contains the adjacent Shitala Devi temple where the folk deity Shitala Devi is venerated. Inside this temple, the pindas of the Saptamatrikas (the seven mother goddesses) are worshipped. The temple is widely revered for its belief in curing smallpox and chicken pox. The entire site, considered as Patna's most quaint monument, is famous for its two important relics—both enveloped in the mystery of legends—Agam Kuan (the unfathomable well), the fabled huge well of Ashokan legends and the famous temple of Shitala Devi, the goddess of the smallpox, associated with many miracles.

The temple is widely revered and worshipped not only for containing the small-pox, but for fulfilling all sorts of desires. The site once contained several ancient and medieval sculptures. Of these, at least one was that of the Yaksha of the Mauryan art-affiliation. This is what Cunningham reported when he visited the site in 1879-80. But we have no idea now of its whereabouts.

Waddell on his exploration of the ruins of Patliputra during the 1890s identified Agam Kuan with the legendary “hell” built by Ashoka for torturing people as cited by the Chinese travellers of the 5th and 7th centuries A.D. Another legend, still very strong, is that Ashoka threw 99 of his elder brothers in this well after killing them, in order to become king. The site also feeds the Jain legends. The most famous of them is about a Jain Monk Sudarshana who, when thrown into the well by an atrocious king Chand, was found floating over its water seated on the lotus.

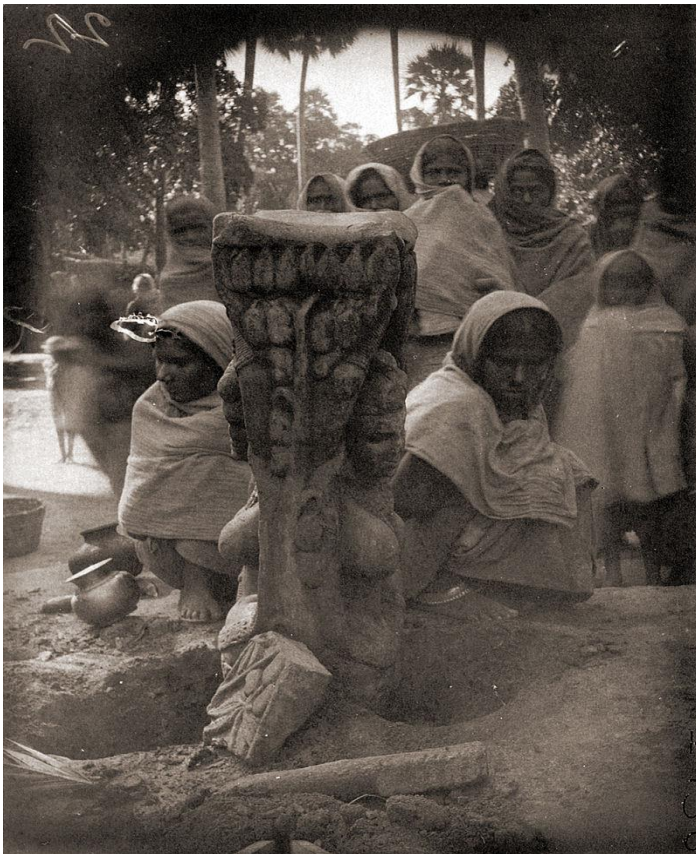
People, generally, believe the well's water to be endowed with miraculous powers, and the well auspicious.



(Fig.31. Agam Kuan. The well is surrounded by recent constructions and is supposedly connects itself to the Ganga. The site is located near Gulzarbagh. Patna)



(Fig.32. Shitala Devi Temple on the outside of Agam Kuan, Patna (Bihar)



(Fig.33. Statue of Matrikas found near Agam Kuan, said to have been built by Ashoka, Patna 1895)

Photograph of an ancient female statue near Agam Kuan, at Patna, taken by Alexander E. Caddy in 1895. In his report of a tour in 1879-80, A. Cunningham wrote, 'When I saw the two statues in the New Indian Museum at Calcutta, I then remembered that a broken statue of a similar kind was still standing at Agam Kua, just outside the city of Patna, adorned with a new head and a pair of roughly marked breasts, so as to do duty for the great goddess Mata-Mai...The Agam Kua is a very large and very old brick well...The broken figure is said to have been found in this well, and it seems probable therefore that the two statues were also found either at or near the same place.'⁴⁸

Ashoka's Hell was, according to legend, an elaborate torture chamber disguised as a beautiful palace full of amenities such as exclusive baths and decorated with flowers, fruit trees and ornaments. It was built by Emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE) in Pataliputra (modern-day Patna, India), the capital city of the Maurya Empire. The torture palace's legend is detailed in the *Ashokavadana*, the text that describes Emperor Ashoka's life through both legendary and historical accounts.

According to legend, the palatial torture chamber was artfully designed to make its exterior visually pleasing, and was referred to as the "beautiful gaol". Beneath the veneer of beauty and deep inside the exclusive mansion, however, chambers were constructed filled with sadistic and cruel instruments of torture, including furnaces producing molten metal for pouring on the prisoners.

The narrative states the chamber's architect drew inspiration from the five tortures of the Buddhist hell. The *Ashokavadana* describes the torture chamber in such terrifying detail that it spawned a belief that Ashoka—in his quest to perfect its sinister design—had visited

⁴⁸<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/a/019pho000001003u0210c000.html>

hell itself. Through a pact made between Ashoka and the official executioner of the torture chamber anyone entering the palace, even by chance as a visitor, was not allowed to come out alive.

According to the narrations of *Ashokavadana*, Emperor Ashoka, prior to his conversion to Buddhism, was a fierce and sadistic ruler, known as *Ashoka the Fierce*, or Chandashoka (Ashoka the Cruel),⁴⁹ who sent his minions on a quest to find a vicious man to work as his official executioner.⁵⁰

After some searching, Ashoka's men found a suitable candidate by the name of Girika who was so vicious that he killed his own parents because they did not want him to become Ashoka's executioner. Girika was introduced to Ashoka who soon appointed him as the official executioner of his Empire.

According to legend, Girika persuaded Ashoka to design the torture chamber based on the suffering endured by people reborn in Buddhist hell.⁵¹ The *Ashokavadana* documents a long list of torture acts Girika designed and planned to force upon his prisoners including "prying open their mouths with an iron and pouring boiling copper down their throats".⁵² Innocent persons were not exempt from such treatment.

In the narrative of *Ashokavadana*, Ashoka asked Girika to disguise the torture chamber as a beautiful and "enticing" palace full of amenities such as exclusive baths and to decorate it with flowers, fruit trees and many ornaments. The palatial torture chamber was artfully

⁴⁹GananathObeyesekere (2002). *Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth*. University of California Press. pp. 172–173.

⁵⁰Bruce Rich (1 March 2010). *To Uphold the World: A Call for a New Global Ethic from Ancient India*. Beacon Press. p. 147.

⁵¹Ben-Ami Scharfstein (1995). *Amoral Politics: The Persistent Truth of Machiavellism*. SUNY Press. pp. 61–62.

⁵²Bruce Rich (1 March 2010). *To Uphold the World: A Call for a New Global Ethic from Ancient India*. Beacon Press. p. 147.

designed to make people long to just look at it, and even attract them to enter, and was referred to as the "beautiful gaol".⁵³ In the *Biographical Sutra of Emperor Ashoka* the palace is described in the sentence: 'Emperor Ashoka constructed a hell'.⁵⁴

Ashokavadana refers to Girika as Chandagirika or Girika the Cruel. It appears that Girika overheard a Buddhist monk recite the *Balapanditasutta* which contains vivid descriptions of the five tortures of hell, such as:

‘Finally, there are beings who are reborn in hell whom the hell-guardians grab, and stretch out on their backs on a fiery floor of red-hot iron that is but a mass of flames. Then they carry out the torture of the five-fold tether; they drive two iron stakes through their hands; they drive two iron stakes through their feet, and they drive one iron stake through their heart. Truly, O monks, hell is a place of great suffering’

He got his ideas of how to torture prisoners from here. The text describes Girika's attitude toward punishment as follows: "Such are the five great agonies, Girika reflected, and he began to inflict these same tortures on people in his prison". In addition, the *Balapanditasutta* compares the King's torture methods to the tortures of hell.

The *Ashokavadana* further mentions that sometime later a Buddhist monk by the name of Samudra happened to visit the palace and upon entering he was informed by Girika that he would be tortured to death, and was subsequently led into the torture chamber. His torturers, however, failed to injure him and he appeared able to neutralise their torture methods by realising that the suffering of the other prisoners is part of the Buddhist dogma of suffering and attaining arhatship.

⁵³Ananda W. P. Gurugé (1993). *Asoka, the Righteous: A Definitive Biography*. Central Cultural Fund, The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Information. Retrieved 22 April 2013. Ashoka is reportedly ruthless enough to aid and abet with Girika in attracting innocent people to an infernal prison, a veritable hell, ...”

⁵⁴David Brazier (1 June 2002). *The New Buddhism*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. [59](#)

A particular narration detailed how Samudra, while tortured in a cauldron full of boiling water, human blood, bone marrow and excrement, caused the contents of the cauldron to cool down and then sat meditating cross-legged on a lotus sprouting from the fluid.

The narrative further describes that when Ashoka heard of these miracles, he was overcome with curiosity and decided to enter the chamber to verify for himself the veracity of the stories. After arriving there he witnessed Samudra levitating with half his body on fire and the other half raining water. Intrigued, he asked Samudra to identify himself.⁵⁵

Samudra replied that he was a disciple of Buddha and adherent to the Dharma. Samudra then chastised Ashoka for having built the torture chamber and further instructed him to build 84,000 stupas according to Buddha's prophecy, and to guarantee the security of all beings. To those demands, Ashoka acquiesced. Further, he confessed to his crimes and accepted Buddha and the Dharma.

The *Ashokavadana* describes the events leading to the demolition of Ashoka's torture chamber. According to the text, the torture chamber had become the site and the reason for his conversion to Buddhism. Girika, as the resident executioner of the chamber, however, reminded Ashoka of his pledge to kill anyone entering the chamber including Ashoka himself.

Ashoka then questioned Girika as to who had entered the torture palace first during their visit to see Samudra's miracles. Girika was then forced to admit that it was he who entered first. Upon the executioner's confession, Ashoka ordered him burnt alive and also ordered the demolition of the torture palace. According to the *Ashokavadana*, "the beautiful jail was then torn down and a guarantee of security was extended to all beings".

⁵⁵*The Legend of King Ashoka: A Study and Translation of the Ashokavadana*. Motilal Banarsidass. 1989. pp. 73–77.

From that point on, Ashoka became known as *Ashoka the Pious*. Buddhist monk [Xuanzang](#) in his writings mentions that in the 7th century AD he had visited the place where Ashoka's torture chamber once was and that it was, even at that time, referred to in Hindu tradition as "Ashoka's Hell". Xuanzang also claimed that he saw the column identifying the location of Ashoka's Hell.

In India, "Ashoka's Hell" and its location near Pataliputra became a popular destination for pilgrims. In the 5th century, Faxian, also a Buddhist monk, reports visiting it and his account of the story of the palace differs slightly from that of Xuanzang's.⁵⁶ *In the 1890s, British explorer Laurence Waddell, while in Patna, established that Agam Kuan, which means the "unfathomable well", was part of Ashoka's Hell as reported also by the two Chinese monks.*⁵⁷

⁵⁶Will Durant (7 June 2011). *Our Oriental Heritage: The Story of Civilization*. Simon & Schuster. p. 707.

⁵⁷Asha Vishnu (1993). *Material Life of Northern India: Based on an Archaeological Study, 3rd Century B.C. to 1st Century BC*. Mittal Publications. p. 173.

Chapter 3

Under the mysticism of Śakti

In Hinduism and Shaktism, Shakti is the primordial cosmic energy and represents the dynamic forces that are thought to move through the entire universe. Shakti is the personification of the Energy that is creative, sustaining, as well as destructive, sometimes referred to as "The Great Divine Mother" in Hinduism. Also known as Mahaamaya (The Greatest Delusion), it is a metaphor for energy, which no layman has ever been able to decipher—we see energy in all forms all around us. Everything is just a manifestation of energy, but what exactly energy is, no one knows—hence energy is considered the greatest delusion i.e. *Mahaamaya*.

Amidst many Shakti peethas situated here, Bihar is a land of Tantra, and devi-samhita forms an integral part of this. The interesting tangent along this land of Tantra (Bihar) is the location of this along the banks of river Ganga. This enigmatic structure of the terrain makes the research geographically more divine and introspective. Here we are going to refer two major site(s) one, *Ami Temple (Saran District now), Hariharnath temple and Patan Devi temple*. All three are situated on river Ganga. In relation to this there are several other shakti peeths which have a connective narrative.

Patan Devi, also called Maa Patneshwari, is the oldest and one of the most sacred temples of Patna. It is regarded as one of the 51 Siddha Shakti Peethas in India. According to Puranic legends, the right thigh of the corpse of Devi Sati had fallen here when it was chopped off by Lord Vishnu with his 'Sudarshan Chakra.' The ancient temple, originally called Maa Sarvanand Kari Patneshwari, is believed to be the abode of the goddess Durga. The name of the city Patna is widely believed to have been derived from the name of the BadiPatan Devi Temple. Some, however, doubt whether the name of Patna is derived from this temple.

According to them, the name is derived from *patan*, which means a town, whereby Patna was a big place for export and import.

According to Hindu mythology, it is believed that the right thigh of Devi Sati fell in Magadh and it is said that the parts of the body of Sati fell in both Maharajganj and Chowk areas in Old Patna city. At these places, the *BadiPatan* Devi temple and the *ChhotiPatan* Devi temple were built. According to the Tantra Charumani, the small images of the Bari Patan Devi Temple, Patna, are the Goddess Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. In Hindu mythology, these Goddesses protected Putraka, who was the founder of Pataliputra. A strange stone image was found in a tank near the Bari Patan Devi Temple, Patna. This image has been kept in the eastern veranda of the main temple where it is worshiped regularly.

The Bari Patan Devi Temple, Patna, faces North, towards the Ganga river. The statues of the temple are made up in black stone. At the entrance of the temple there is a portico of dimensions 1.5' x 15'. After that there is a room of about 8' x 8' for gods namely, Mahakali (12"), Maha Lakshmi (6"), Maha Saraswati (12") and Bhairav (3"). All these idols are kept on simhasans (thrones) of about 4 square inch cross section and have a height of about 7 feet. The first three goddesses are attired in sarees.

Devotees can go to the temple at any time of the day. The temple does not distinguish between any caste or creed and hence is open for all religions and castes. The temple remains open from morning 6 am to 10 pm. Tuesday is a special day for the devotees and a large number of worshipers visit the temple. Promises are made before the Goddess and on the fulfilment of the wishes, devotees offer gifts and sarees at the temple.

This temple of Choti Patan Devi is situated in the Chowk area of Patna City and was once considered the main presiding deity of Patna. Over the years it has slipped to the second position of eminence, after the Bari Patan Devi temple, as city's presiding deity, with epithet 'Choti' (smaller) to the more popular one. But a historian called Buchanan was very specific in stating that it was this very temple (Choti Patan devi) which held the primary position as the city's presiding deity during 18th and early 19th century.

The present temple does not seem to be of any great antiquity. The images inside the temple, if Buchanan is to be believed, were installed by Man Singh the famous general of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The temple, however, houses a host of intact and severed Brahmanical images, including, Ganesh, Vishnu and Surya. Beyond the temple, but within its precincts, lie in the open, fragments of door jambs/lintels and yet more sets of images. Of these, an impressive, but broken, sun-image, is the most prominent. According to many historians, it is very likely that some early medieval temple was built here sometime in 9th-11th Century A.D. and these fragmentary stray sculptural/structural relics are its ruins. Probably, these were reinstalled in a new temple, built during the 16th-17th century by Man Singh. But authentic information on this count is lacking.



(Fig. 35 & 34. Entrance and main sanctum of Choti Patan Devi)



Aami Mandir is considered as a *shakti peeth* and is a temple of Goddess Sati situated in Dighwara area. According to legends, King Manan Singh was the king of Hathua. He

considered himself to be the greatest devotee of Durga. The temple is in the structure of a fort that is surrounded from all sides, on the bank of the River Ganga. It lies in the flood-prone district of Saran and it is very near the Ganges. The Ganga takes a curb at this point going to South. The image of the Ganga at this point is Lingvat. Even during a flood, the Ganga never touches the fort. The entire structure of Temple is on debris. During 1973 the then Director of the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Bihar Sri Prakash Chandra excavated and found a wall made of bricks used during the Pal dynasty.

In the worship of Sakti an equidistant triangle has the same importance as Saligram for Lord Vishnu and Shiv Ling for Lord Shiva. The centre of the triangle is called Prambika Or Ambika. Surprisingly the distance of the three Shiv Temples (Baidyanath, Vishwanath and Pashupati Nath) are equal and if you draw an imaginary line connecting the three Shiva Temple it will an equidistant triangle with Ambika Asthan Ami in the centre. This shows the importance of Ambika Asthan Ami.

This place is also said to be the same place where King Surath & Samadhi Vaishya, performed AGYA for three years and got the desire fulfilled with the grace of Divine mother.

It is also said that the place Digwara was originally called Drigdwara. This was the main gate of the palace of Daksh Prajapati where he organised Yagya. The palace was destroyed by Maa Sati.

There are many other places claiming the same importance but in view of the fact that the incidence of Sati Sacrifice took place in Adi Satyug and has been repeated in every Satyug such claim and counterclaim ca not be denied.

There is a belief associated with the temple is that one who worships over here, his/her wishes get fulfilled by the Goddess. Hence in Dussehra, worshippers from different places gather here to obtain the divine blessing.



(Fig. 37. The Yagna Kund where Raja Dakhya performed the Mahayagya.)



(Fig.38. The head priest of the Temple and the care taker)



(The main deity in form of Shakti panda)

Hariharnath Mandir in Sonapur is also known for the famous temple of Shree Hariharnath; the site of the battle of Gaj-Grah and rescue of the former by Hari. During Kartik Purnima, Ganga Snan or ceremonial bathing in the Ganga is held by Hindus to be unusually efficacious. On the day of full moon (Kartik Purnima) immense crowds assemble and bathe in the river. The Mela commences on that day and lasts for more than a fortnight. The Shiva temple, Kali temple and other temples and historical religious monuments are a big draw here, and social and economic activities are at their highest peak during the Mela period. People come here to pay their oblation to the gods; thus, its importance is not only within Sonapur, but rather pan India. The Mela has also garnered fame as a cattle and livestock fair of gargantuan proportions.

According to Uday Pratap Singh, author of the book *Baba Hariharanath*, before 1757, the Hariharanath temple was composed of artistic rock clusters of timber and black stones. Carvings in praise of Hari were engraved on them. The temple was reconstructed by Ram

Narayan Singh, the deputy sub-ruler of Mir Qasim, and a resident of Nayagaon, Saran. After this, in 1860, the Empress of Tekai built a hospice in the temple premises. In 1871, the remaining three oases of the temple complex were constructed by Maharana Jangbahadur of Nepal. In the 1934 Nepal–Bihar earthquake the temple complex, Osara and Pakora were damaged. After this the Birla family rebuilt it. English writer Harry Abbott has highlighted the importance of this temple in his diary while visiting the Harihar Nath Temple. In 1871, English writer Minden Wilson described the Sonpur fair in his diary.

The Harinath Nath Mahadeo at Sonepur attracts devout Hindus during the Kartik Puranmasi⁵⁸



(Fig. 39. Entrance gate of Harihar Nath Temple)

⁵⁸P C Roy choudhuri. Saran: District Gazetteers. Secretariat Press Bihar, 1960. 96



(Fig. 40. Inner Sanctum of Harihar Nath Temple)

Chapter 4

Living community across the Ganga



(Fig. 41,42,&43.The many Navik community across River Ganga)

In the period between the 1760s and the 1850s boatmen were the most important transport workers in early colonial eastern India, at least numerically. Unfortunately, they have received little scholarly attention so far. By looking at the regime of work, which surprisingly had a strong base in the notion of contract from as early as the 1770s, this section explores the nature of work, work organization, and resistance by boatmen. It argues that although work was structured according to the wage or hire-based (*thika*) contract regime, the social, political, and ecological conditions in which contract operated were equally crucial. The centrality of contract was premised upon how effectively it was enforceable and, in fact, historically enforced. Boatmen being one of the most important “native” groups with which the British were left on their often long journeys, there is a suggestion that contract helps to understand the formal “structure of work”, and the minute details of the journey help to understand the “world of work”, of which clandestine trade, weather, wind, rain, torrents, tracking, mooring, internal squabbling, and, not least, preparing food were some of the main components. In Bihar these community settlers are distributed across the river which makes an important subject of investigation.

In picture 2. The boatman says he has saved more than 500 lives in his 35 years lifespan. The boatmen community consider Ganga as their mother of whom they are scared yet they know that it is also their ‘home’. Diving deep in the currents does not terrify them but regretting a life not worth living is something they are scared of. The community has an age-old existence in Indian civilization and they have been referenced in many important mythological tales, Ramayana being one of them. The ecology and political economy of eastern India perhaps made boatmen the most important transport workers in early colonial India. This community though has little knowledge about their migration and settlement patterns but their historical evidences were established in the late 18th century.

In a recent meeting in Patna, Capital of Bihar, communities living along the banks of the rivers shared their perception of their relation with these rivers. “For us, the rivers are necessary for survival. Of course rivers are also the cause of our devastation,” said Niraj Jha from Sunsari of Nepal. “Rivers have not only been making their life hard, but they have also been a cause for their prosperity. These rivers have also integrated the people living in the basin areas through religion, trade, culture and social interaction,” said Pancham Narayan Singh from Birpur India. As people living in the river basins have been sharing the benefits, they are sharing the sorrows, too. People in the downstream are living under a constant threat of floods. Similarly, communities in the upstream are living under a threat of landslide.⁵⁹

The current community has spread across the Ganges and are mostly involved in the agriculture and fishing business. For them river is not just a source of income but it is a way of living for them, a part and an entire universe for them. The depth and ferocity of the water do not scare them it just makes them feel connected to the entity of worship and the playfulness it shares with them- says Jogi Ji (one of the Boatman). The current and the flows of river is on their finger tips and this knowledge has not come overnight, it comes through generational knowledge and training of them as divers and appropriate training.

There is large migration of the community of *Mallah* (recognised boatmen) who are now in conflict with the newly emerged boatmen community of Bihar, this distinction is mostly on the basis of caste bifurcation and authenticity (which is explained in the later part of the chapter). The knowledge to dive deep and swim back to the shore is a training which they undergo through and also give to their children, this is also a source of income for many of them on the ghats of Patna. Mostly these mallahs are from farming community and eventually shifted to boating traditions due to dearth of agricultural supplies. Joginder Saini

⁵⁹ <https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2018/09/08/patna-dialogue-rivers-people-policies/>

said in one of his interviews that ‘*when we were young our father asked us to wear langot (a cloth undergarment tied across the waist) and dive deep in the banks of river ganga and collect the coin he has thrown, this made us fearless and fearful both at the same note. That’s the life we have seen.*’

This region is criss-crossed by a variety of water bodies that historically made rivers the standard means of communication throughout the year. To a great extent, the ascendancy of the English East India Company (EIC) depended on the long-distance trade in imperial commodities such as opium, indigo, textiles, salt, and saltpetre. This required a stable system of transportation to and from Calcutta. In 1780, James Rennell had estimated that about 30,000 boatmen were involved in the task of inland navigation in Bengal. Subsequently, a text published in 1836 gave a figure of 350,000 for the whole of the river Ganga. Even if these figures seem inflated, the fact that boatmen remained an important group of transport workers is beyond dispute. This is also corroborated by looking at a range of visual and textual accounts (both administrative and private) in which they start appearing early on. In the 1770s, within the government establishment, the army's requirement for boats was greatest. In 1771 and 1772 the boat establishment cost Rs 307,922 and Rs 352,264 respectively. This was the cost of the fixed boat establishment. In 1772, in addition to this, boats hired for military services cost Rs 214,926, thus bringing total expenditure to Rs 567,190. In the same year, a brigade which was on the march for four months cost Rs 18,620. The EIC therefore decided to reduce the fixed establishment and procure boats, when needed, through a system of public tenders and contracts. Arguably, the contract system had been practised at an earlier date, but due to “many difficulties and inconveniences which were found to attend it,” it was discontinued.

The reduced establishment of five budgerows (a contemporary anglicized word for one of the most popular boats in Bengal, the *bajrah*) of eighteen oars, fifteen boats for magazine

and military stores, twelve boats for the hospital (carrying the sick and supplies), twelve common transport boats, and five small boats for each brigade (there were three brigades altogether) was proposed. To reduce the cost further, private trade using these boats was strictly prohibited; the brigades were asked occasionally to assist each other, when required; and the civil officials were promised cash in lieu of their boat expenses. Mobility itself was restricted due to the seasonal navigability of rivers. In the winter months, the Hooghly passage was difficult to navigate; the boats usually took the circuitous route round the Sundarbans. It was therefore decided not to send any stores from the Bengal Presidency up the country between 20 November and 30 June of the following year. It was also pointed out that usually in these months troops marched over land, which rendered transporting them by water unnecessary.

The exact effect of these reductions and restrictions on the employability of boatmen is difficult to calculate, but it is clear that the reduction in the number of boats must have led to a significant reduction in the overall strength of the crews. Before the proposed reduction, the total estimate of boats in service was: 63 budgerows, 120 large boats, 100 small boats, and 6 *Dacca pulwars*. The cost of hiring all of these was Rs 20,060 per month. In contrast, the reduced number of boats was supposed to cost Rs 9,870 per month. For large boats, the rate of hire was also reduced, from Rs 65 to Rs 60 per boat. For the 18-oared budgerows alone, this reduction meant that the total number of men employed decreased from 1,134 to 270, i.e. to less than one-quarter.

In addition, there is strong evidence to suggest that a majority of those who were employed under the new contract system ceased to enjoy better wages. For this, the contracts have to be considered. In 1774, a contract was finalized between the EIC and Mr J. Fraser, who had been living in India for seven to eight years and was described as a “peaceable and inoffensive subject”. He was contracted to provide for 116 boats of 4 different varieties, and

therefore, was required to maintain “upwards of 5000 people, orphans and coolies”. However, a comparison of his tendered price with that of the government's estimation is revealing: for one budgerow “fitted with 18 oars and manned with one manjee, two golleahs and eighteen dandies completely found and equipped for service” he had offered the monthly hire rate of Rs 100. This was way below the rate of Rs 160 as fixed or estimated by the government. It is unclear how Fraser offered to supply the boats and maintain the crew at his proposed rate. According to a government calculation, for one budgerow with eighteen oars the monthly maintenance and labour charges would amount to Rs 113, calculated in the following manner: monthly repair charge at Rs 2 an oar ($18 \times 2 = 36$) and monthly pay of Rs 5 and 4 to a *manjee* and a dandy respectively ($1 \times 5 + 18 \times 4 = 77$). Without adding the cost of two *golleahs*, the labour and maintenance costs alone exceeded the Rs 100 being proposed.

The sources immediately related to this contract do not explain this conundrum. There can be two possibilities: either Fraser's offer of Rs 100 did not include repair and labour costs (just the boat hire); or the maintenance of boats was not taken very seriously and the monthly wages of the boatmen were significantly reduced to increase profit margins. The wording in the contract that Fraser, “*notwithstanding the difficulty*”, would maintain upwards of 5,000 people is revelatory and implies that the second reading could be correct, even more so since a monthly hire rate of Rs 100 just for boats seems untenable in the light of other evidence from the early nineteenth century. Additionally, these sources also indicate that dandies were likely to receive almost half the wage the government had fixed or estimated. To quote from the author of a two-volume guide for newcomers to India, the wages varied “from two and a half to three and a half, or even four [Rs]; all according to the kind of the boat, and the dignity of the employer”.

One thing that clearly emerges from this discussion is that boatmen, especially dandies, received lower wages under a private contract system than under the direct hiring done by the

government. Also, some form of personal perquisites that these men would have obtained through the provision of repair charges might have ceased to exist under the private contract system.

The choice of speculative phrases such as “might have”, “must have”, and “would have” is deliberate. It reflects the scarce and sketchy nature of the materials one is dealing with in constructing the history of work and work relationships between boatmen and their employers (the EIC). It was probably this, and the seductive strength of the “continuity” framework to understand the early colonial period, that led Michael Anderson to claim that the question of labour in this period did not become an independent topic of concern for early colonial administrators. According to him, they followed the available pre-colonial frameworks of kin, caste, family, and village communities to “manufacture the consent for highly coercive labour processes”. Ravi Ahuja's work on early colonial Madras convincingly refutes this argument and brings back the focus on the colonial state in not only advancing a labour policy but also, through its interventionist practices, shaping labour relationships.

One such instrument was the contract between the worker and the employer. Once again, turning to another of Ahuja's essays, it becomes clear that the notion of contract as premised upon free wage labour and an agreement supposedly formed between formally equal parties was not the only form of labour relationship. Heterogeneity, ranging from slavery and forced labour to that of contracted work, was the hallmark of early colonial labour relations. This kind of observation is possible when one covers a range of occupations, as Ahuja did. Working on a specific group of workers has its advantages and limitations. One advantage is the clear identification of the centrality of the contract system, at least for those boatmen who worked directly for the EIC. In fact, it was also crucial in the sphere of private travelling (as elaborated in the next section). One of the limitations, however, is the impossibility of determining the “coloniality” of this practice. Given the lack of studies on

pre-colonial times, it would be highly dubious to claim that the contract system for boat hiring was a colonial novelty.

Prabhu Mohapatra has recently looked at the working of contracts in the production of textiles and indigo. He argues that although contracts were theoretically based on the idea of free choice, they contradictorily induced the production or reproduction of unfree labour conditions. Before teasing out the implications of the contract, in the context of this article it is important to ask why the government resorted to contracts for procuring boats.²³ Evidently, it wanted to cut its expenses. In other words, it intentionally used contracts as a cost-saving mechanism, with repercussions for the wages of boatmen.

At the same time, it is equally necessary to ask how far this system helped the state beyond mere cost-saving. To what extent were contracts successfully enforceable and actually enforced? It is important to realize that the system was subject to the political and administrative limitations of the early colonial state; because of the nature of this occupation seasonal and ecological constraints were also significant. The fundamental question to begin with is: did the parcelling of the authority and responsibility which contracts engendered (for instance, from the military board of the EIC to Mr Fraser) help the Company to secure boats easily? Complaints, in any case, about the insufficient availability of boats were frequent. In 1781, the revenue chief at Patna complained about the unavailability of boats for transmitting the treasury (district revenue) to Calcutta. This might have been because of the season; it was already April and the hot season had set in. In another incident in 1799, fifty-two boats laden with grain for the Allahabad fort were detained at Patna. The boats were sailing under the charge of the Company and under the command of one *naik* (police supervisor) and six sepoys, but a dispute among *manjhees* caused a hold-up.

For transporting high-end commodities such as saltpetre and opium, either contractors or manufacturers were made responsible. The transportation depended on how the production

was organized. Opium serves as a good example to show the indeterminate position of the colonial state. The EIC in Bengal had enjoyed a monopoly of the trade in opium since 1761. In 1765, this trade and its profits were put in the hands of the Company's Patna factory. However, in 1773 the Governor-General Warren Hastings granted the contract to two natives, Meer Muneer and Ramsharan Pundit. Due to their irregularities and the oppression of the *raiya*s (peasants), on 11 July 1785 the EIC resorted to the public sale of the contract to the highest bidder for a term of four years. The revenue from the opium trade declined. Its quality also reportedly suffered. As a result, in 1797 the contract system was abolished. In 1799 an agency of a covenanted servant of the Company was established. The Company began to deal directly with opium manufacturers through its servants. Under the contract system, the seventh clause made it clear that “the charges of package and manufacture and the charges and risk of transportation and delivery are to be on account of the contractor”. The manufacturers privately arranged to transport opium to Calcutta. Boats were procured on the basis of contracts with *manjhees*.

Although any delays may thus appear to have been a private affair, saltpetre and opium manufacturers frequently petitioned the EIC. These petitions reveal that that the contract did not ensure efficacy. In 1826 one Ramdayal, a saltpetre manufacturer based in the United Provinces, petitioned the EIC resident at Lucknow, who then forwarded his complaint to the magistrate at Patna. In the petition, Ramdayal accused *manjhees* of holding up his boats at Patna even after they had been paid for in full and contracted to unload the saltpetre in Calcutta. In another case, from Bihar, the boats contracted by the EIC for transporting saltpetre to Calcutta were pressed into service by private merchants based at Patna.

The first example is of the private contract; the second involves the state. Both relate to disputes over and deviations from the terms of the contract. Both show the complexity of the socio-economic and political set-up in which the contract worked. Its successful realization

depended upon different stakeholders involved in the production and transportation of commodities. A Company monopoly in the trade of certain commodities existed alongside the private trade clandestinely carried in those very commodities and in others for which private traders also needed boats. However, these cases also highlight the way the state authorities were drawn into resolving disputes. Contracts of a private nature did not mean the marginality of the state. The reasons why the state got deeply involved were twofold. First, even if the matter related to a private contract, the nature of commodities (usually the EIC monopoly ones) demanded direct state action. Walter S. Sherwill's account of the production and transportation of opium from the Patna factory is illustrative. The Opium Fleet, as he called it, was "preceded by small canoes, the crews of which sound the depth of water, warn all boats out of the channel by beat of drum, and proclaim that the Opium of the 'Companee Bahadoor' claims a passage down the river". The state directed the local authorities to prevent private merchants from seizing the Company's contracted boats. Second was the notion of the contract itself, which was based upon the twin principles of parcelling authority and responsibility on the one hand but drawing upon the state's enforcing authority on the other.

The impulse to ensure the enforcement of the contract demanded that the state play an active role. Mobility of troops was of crucial political importance, and, even when contracted, this remained an active field of state engagement. It is worth following the debates closely to see what effect the state's measures had on the workforce. The civil authorities of the Gangetic districts complained about the frequent irregularities and improprieties committed by military officials when troops passed through. The army needed coolies, boatmen, boats, and supplies, which they forced the neighbouring villages to provide, often without making adequate payments. This led to peasants deserting the villages. The military complained about the shortage of workers, but civil officials drew an interesting parallel by pointing out

that private individuals did not complain about the shortage of coolies or dandies. Clearly, responsibility for this highhandedness was placed at the door of the military.

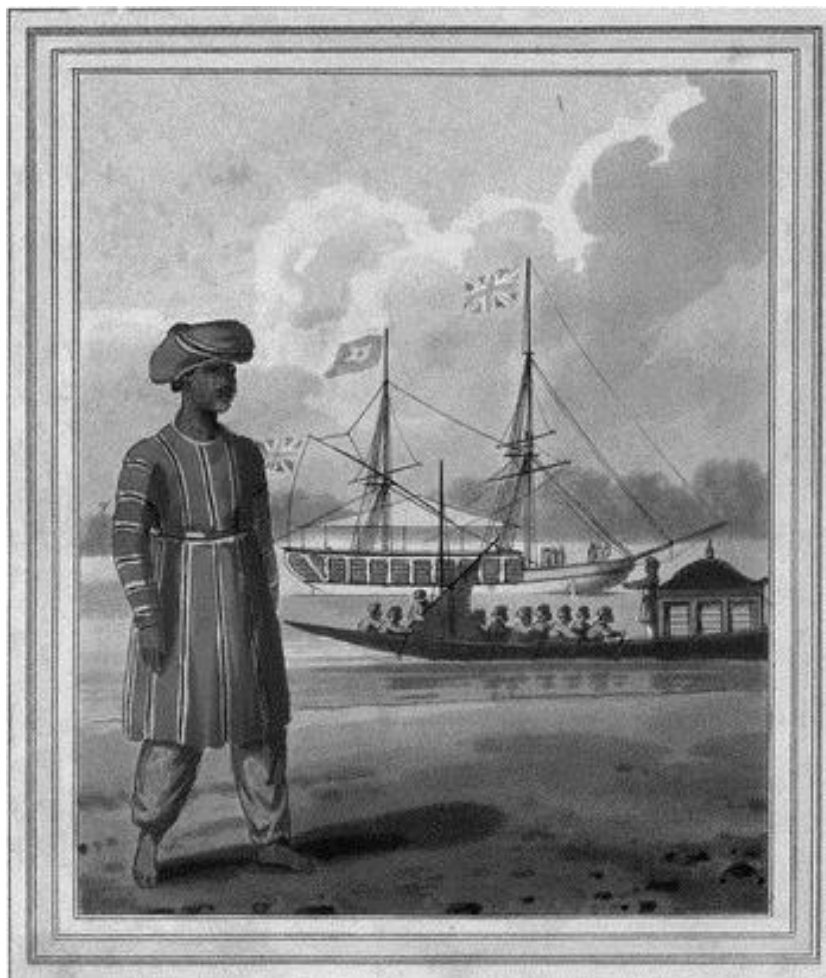
The government took notice of such complaints and framed a regulation in 1806 to assist both troops and private travellers. It directed collectors (a civil authority in the district) and magistrates (a police authority) to help in providing troops with supplies but also in ensuring that any damage done by them should be enquired into and adequately compensated for. A native official was deputed to supply bearers, coolies, boatmen, carts, and bullocks from landholders, farmers, and other relevant persons. The cost of labour and commodities provided for was calculated on the basis of the prevailing bazaar prices. The police authorities were strictly forbidden (leading to dismissal, if found guilty) “to compel any persons not accustomed to act as bearers, *coolies*, or boatmen”, or to furnish any bullocks or carts kept for private use or exclusively for agricultural purposes. Attempts to protect the workforce (coolies and boatmen) and *raiyyats* (by protecting them against military highhandedness) and ensuring the smooth passage of the troops and individuals were the twin objectives of this regulation. The market played a crucial role. The cost of hire was to be market-based. Should the coolies and boatmen desire, they could enter into a “voluntary exchange” for distances exceeding the jurisdiction of the mediating district official. However, this was to be regulated and enforced by the state. Crucially, in the case of private individuals (both European and native), the police could demand that they give boatmen full or partial advance payment. Refusal to do so meant denial of government assistance.

Shades of freedom, protection, and violation were enshrined in this regulation and more broadly in conceptual categories such as the market and contract as they historically unfolded through the state's regulative measures. Adherence to the practice of market rate and wilful exchange was tempered with the administrative and political demands of a state that was still in the process of stabilizing itself. As a result, the apparent benevolence of the state in

protecting the workforce intensified the “highly injurious practice” of *begari* (forced labour) because state officials were invested with the authority and responsibility to provide men and material for convenient passages of troops and individuals. It can be seen as an abuse of authority, or the limitation of a state that failed to realize its ideological objectives.

Another way of looking at it is by recognizing the centrality of labour mobilization in the state-formation process, in which the regulative mechanisms of the state not only shifted and changed but also produced unintended results. There remained an indistinct zone between regulations and practices, which explains why, in spite of the regulative commitment to observe adequate payment and compensation, and also not to indulge in unnecessary force, the practice of *begari* became widespread. The clause that purported to punish subordinate state officials for the forceful extortion of labour seems to have had little effect. However, the structure of command and organization for facilitating help as enshrined in this regulation itself provides clues as to why the fuzziness would arise in the first place. On receiving requests from military commanders, the collectors would issue “necessary orders” (with the provision of fines for disobedience) to “landholders, farmers, tahsildars and other persons in charge of the lands through which the troops are to pass” to arrange for supplies. A “credible native officer” would accompany the troops to make sure that men and material were duly provided; in the case of difficulties, he would seek the assistance of the nearest police officer. Two things are noteworthy here: first, nowhere in the regulations was the phrase “necessary orders” explained, meaning that the group of providers (landlords and others) had no opportunity of saying “no”. Second, although the whole organization was done under civil authority, the on-the-spot resolution of difficulties through the involvement of police authority might have opened the space for the temporary criminalization and coercion of a reluctant workforce.

In 1820, therefore, the authority vested in local officials to provide men (coolies and boatmen) was rescinded. That marked the official termination of the practice of *begari* but it does not mean that historical reality would have changed overnight. Rather, it appears that the state compensated for this abolition with a regulation strengthening control over the providers. In 1825, it passed another regulation that made any “wilful neglect or disobedience” (which had to be proved to the “satisfaction” of the collector) on the part of “landholder, farmer, tahsildar and other person” in providing supplies (including boats) punishable, not criminally but through the imposition of fines not exceeding Rs 1,000



(A state boat establishment dandy. *The European in India, Plate XII.*)



(A dandy working on the river Ganges. *Francis James Hawkins, Diaries and Letters, Mss. Eur. B 365/4 ff. 2.* © The British Library Board, *EUR B 365 f2-4.* Used with permission.)

Chapter 5

Linguistic Plurality

The boundaries of Sarkar in Bihar also coincided with the 'dialectal boundaries' as suggested by Beames.⁶⁰ Beames' observation can be treated corrected as we see that division of Bihar is *a Maghi speaking; Hajipur and Tirhut are Maithil speaking and Munger is an Angika-speaking area.*

Bhojpuri is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in northern-eastern India and the Terai region of Nepal. It is chiefly spoken in western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Socio-linguistically, Bhojpuri is considered one of several Hindi dialects. The language is an official language of Nepal and a minority language in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, South Africa, and Mauritius.⁶¹

Fiji Hindi, an official language of Fiji, is a variant of Awadhi and Bhojpuri. Caribbean Hindustani, another variant of Awadhi and Bhojpuri, is spoken by the Indo-Caribbean people. It has experienced lexical influence from Caribbean English in Trinidad and Tobago and in Guyana. In Suriname, languages that have lexically influenced it include Sranan, Tongo, Creole, Surinamese, Dutch and English. Another dialect (concerning the other spoken languages) is spoken in Mauritius; its use is declining, and as of 2000 it is spoken by about 5% of the country's population.

Bhojpuri has several dialects: Southern Standard Bhojpuroi, Northern Standard Bhojpuri, Western Standard Bhojpuri and Nagpuria Bhojpuri. The first three are the major dialects.

⁶⁰Syed Hasan Askari and Ahmad, do not agree with Beames and argue that this type of dialect based division might not have been in due to my conscious effort of the rulers. *See Askari and Ahmad. Bihar, vol.II. part I. .p.19.*

⁶¹Rajend Mesthrie, *Language in indenture: a sociolinguistic history of Bhojpuri-Hindi in South Africa*, Routledge, 1992, 30-32

Southern Standard Bhojpuri is prevalent in the Shahabad district (Buxar, Bhojpur, Rohtas, and Kaimur districts) and the Saran region (Saran, Siwan and Gopalganj districts) in Bihar, and the eastern Azamgarh (Ballia and Mau districts) and Varanasi (eastern part of Ghazipur district) regions in Uttar Pradesh. The dialect is also known as *Kharwari*. It can be further divided into Shahabadi, Chapariyah, and Pachhimahi.

Northern Bhojpuri is common in the western Tirhut division (east and west Champaran districts) in Bihar, and Gorakhpur division (Deoria, Kushinagar, Gorakhpur, and Maharajganj districts) and Basti division (Basti, Sidharthanagar and Sant Kabir Nagar districts) in Uttar Pradesh. It is also spoken in Nepal.

Western Bhojpuri is prevalent in the areas of Varanasi (Varanasi, Chandauli, Jaunpur, and the western part of Ghazipur district), Azamgarh (Azamgar district), and Mirzapur (Mirzapur, Sant Ravidas Nagar and Bhadohi districts) in Uttar Pradesh. Banarasi is a local name for Bhojpuri, named after Banaras. Other names for Western Bhojpuri include *Purbi* and *Benarsi*.

Nagpuria Bhojpuri is the southernmost popular dialect, found in the Chota Nagpur Plateau of Jharkhand, particularly parts of Palamau and Ranchi. It has been influenced more by the Magahi language than by other dialects. It is sometimes referred to as *Sadari*.⁶²

A more specific classification recognises the dialects of Bhojpuri as Bhojpuri Tharu, Domra, Madhesi, Musahari, Northern Standard Bhojpuri (Basti, Gorakhpuri, Sarawaria), Southern Standard Bhojpuri (Kharwari), and Western Standard Bhojpuri (Benarsi, Purbi).

Maithili is an Indo-Aryan language native to the Indian subcontinent, mainly spoken in India and Nepal. In India, it is spoken in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand and is one of the

⁶²Monika Horstmann (1969), *Sadari*, Indologia Berolinensis, Otto Harrassowitz – Wiesbaden, Germany, pp 176–

22 recognised Indian languages. In Nepal, it is spoken in the eastern Terai and is the second most prevalent language of Nepal. It is also one of the 122 recognized Nepalese languages. Tirhuta was formerly the primary script for written Maithili. Less commonly, it was also written in the local variant of Kaithi. Today it is written in the Devanagari script.⁶³

Maithili varies greatly in dialects. The standard form of Maithili is Sotipura, Central Maithili or Madhubani dialect which is mainly spoken in Darbhanga and Madhubani districts in Bihar, India.

- Bajjika dialect of Maithili is spoken in Samastipur, Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, East Champaran and West Champaran districts of Bihar in India. Bajjika is listed as a distinct language in Nepal and overlaps by 76–86% with Maithili dialects spoken in Dhanusa, Morang, Saptari, and Sarlahi Districts.
- Thēthi dialect is spoken mainly in Kosi, Purnia and Munger divisions of Bihar, India and some adjoining districts of Nepal.

Several other dialects of Maithili are spoken in India and Nepal, including Dehati, Kisan, Bantar, Barmeli, Musar, Tati, Kortha and Jolaha. All the dialects are intelligible to native Maithili speakers.

The name Maithili is derived from the word Mithila, an ancient kingdom of which King Janaka was the ruler (Ramayana). Maithili is also one of the names of Sita, the wife of King Rama and daughter of King Janaka. Scholars in Mithila used Sanskrit for their literary work and Maithili was the language of the common folk (Abahatta).

The beginning of Maithili language and literature can be traced back to the 'Charyapadas', a form of Buddhist mystical verses, composed during the period of 700-1300 AD. These padas

⁶³Sah, K. K. (2013). "Some perspectives on Maithili". *Nepalese Linguistics* (28): 179–188.

were written in Sandhya bhasa by several Siddhas who belonged to Vajrayana Buddhism and were scattered throughout the territory of Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Several of Siddhas were from Mithila region such as Kanhapa, Sarhapa etc. Prominent scholars like Rahul Sankrityanan, Subhadra Jha and Jayakant Mishra provided evidences and proved that the language of Charyapada is ancient Maithili or proto Maithili.⁶⁴ Apart from Charyapadas, there has been a rich tradition of folk culture and folk songs which were popular among common folks of Mithila region.

After the fall of Pala rule, and disappearance of Buddhism, establishment of Karnāta kings and patronage of Maithili under Harasimhadeva (1226–1324) of Karnāta dynasty dates back to the 14th century (around 1327 AD). Jyotirishwar Thakur (1280–1340) wrote a unique work *Varnaratnākara* in Maithili prose. The *Varna Ratnākara* is the earliest known prose text, written by Jyotirishwar Thakur in Mithilaksar script, and is the first prose work not only in Maithili but in any modern Indian language.

In 1324, Ghyasuddin Tughluq, the emperor of Delhi invaded Mithila, defeated Harisimhadeva, and entrusted Mithila to his family priest Kameshvar Jha, a Maithil Brahmin of the Oinwar dynasty. But the disturbed era did not produce any literature in Maithili until Vidyapati Thakur (1360 to 1450), who was an epoch-making poet under the patronage of king Shiva Singh and his queen Lakhima Devi. He produced over 1,000 immortal songs in Maithili on the theme of love of Radha and Krishna and the domestic life of Shiva and Parvati as well as on the subject of suffering of migrant labourers of Morang and their families; besides, he wrote a number of treatises in Sanskrit. His love-songs spread far and wide in no time and enchanted saints, poets and youth. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu saw the divine light of love behind these songs, and soon these songs became themes of the Vaisnava sect of Bengal. Rabindranath Tagore, out of curiosity, imitated these songs under

⁶⁴Mishra, J. (1949). *A History Of Maithili Literature*.21.

the pseudonym Bhanusimha. Vidyapati influenced the religious literature of Asama, Bangal, Utkala and gave birth to a new Brajabuli language. The earliest reference to Maithili or Tirhutiya is in Amaduzzi's preface to Beligatti's *AlphabetumBrammhanicum*, published in 1771. This contains a list of Indian languages amongst which is 'Tourutiana.' Colebrooke's essay on the Sanskrit and Prakrit languages, written in 1801, was the first to describe Maithili as a distinct dialect.⁶⁵

Many devotional songs were written by Vaisnava saints, including in the mid-17th century, Vidyapati and Govindadas. Mapati Upadhyaya wrote a drama titled *Pārijātaḥaraṇa* in Maithili. Professional troupes, mostly from dalit classes known as Kirtanias, the singers of bhajan or devotional songs, started to perform this drama in public gatherings and the courts of the nobles. Lochana (c. 1575 – c. 1660) wrote *Rāgatarangni*, a significant treatise on the science of music, describing the rāgas, tālas, and lyrics prevalent in Mithila.

During the Malla dynasty's rule, Maithili spread far and wide throughout Nepal from the 16th to the 17th century. During this period, at least seventy Maithili dramas were produced. In the drama *Harishchandraṅrityam* by Siddhinarayanadeva (1620–57), some characters speak pure colloquial Maithili, while others speak Bengali, Sanskrit or Prakrit.

After the demise of Maheshwar Singh, the ruler of Darbhanga Raj, in 1860, the Raj was taken over by the British Government as regent. The Darbhanga Raj returned to his successor, Maharaj Lakshmishvar Singh, in 1898. The Zamindari Raj had a lackadaisical approach toward Maithili. The use of Maithili language was revived through personal efforts of MM Parameshvar Mishra, Chanda Jha, Munshi Raghunandan Das and others.

Publication of *MaithilHita Sadhana* (1905), *Mithila Moda* (1906), and *Mithila Mihir* (1908) further encouraged writers. The first social organization, Maithil Mahasabha, was established

⁶⁵Thomas Colebrooke, H. (1873). *Miscellaneous essays. With life of the author by his son Sir T.E. Colebrooke*, Volume 3, p. 26.

in 1910 for the development of Mithila and Maithili. It blocked its membership for people outside from the Maithil Brahmin and Karna Kayastha castes. Maithil Mahasabha campaigned for the official recognition of Maithili as a regional language. Calcutta University recognized Maithili in 1917, and other universities followed suit.

Babu Bhola Lal Das wrote *Maithili Grammar (Maithili Vyakaran)*. He edited a book *Gadyakusumanjali* and edited a journal *Maithili*. In 1965, Maithili was officially accepted by Sahitya Academy, an organization dedicated to the promotion of Indian literature

In 2002, Maithili was recognized on the VIII schedule of the Indian Constitution as a major Indian language; Maithili is now one of the twenty-two national languages of India. The publishing of Maithili books in Mithilakshar script was started by Acharya Ramlochan Saran



(Usha Kiren Khan, Padma Shri 2015 and Sahitya Academy for her excellent work in Maithili

Language tradition work)



(Shardindu Chaudhury, Owner of Shekhar Prakashan Patna, His contribution in the collection of Maithili works and an ardent knowledge of the dialect makes him a treasure as an individual. His publishing is the only house which has all the scripts from the past of Mithila. Patna)

Angika is a language spoken primarily in the Anga region of Bihar and Jharkhand states of India. In addition to India, it is also spoken in some parts of the Terai region of Nepal. It belongs to the Eastern Indo-Aryan language family. It is closely related to languages such as Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Maithili and Magahi.

Angika is not listed in the 8th schedule of the constitution of India. Nevertheless, Angika language movements have advocated its inclusion, and a submitted request is currently pending with the Government. Angika is written in the Devanagari script; although the AngaLipi and Kaithi scripts were used historically. Angika shows a regular contrast for animates.⁶⁶

Angika was classified as a dialect of Maithili by George A. Grierson in the *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903). However, the Angika speakers now assert its status as an independent language. When the proponents of the Maithili language in Bihar demanded use of Maithili-medium primary education in the early 20th century, the Angika speaking people did not support them, and instead favoured Hindi-medium education. In the 1960s and the 1970s, when the Maithili speakers demanded a separate Mithila state, the Angika and Bajjika speakers made counter-demands for recognition of their languages.

Maithili proponents believe that the Government of Bihar and the pro-Hindi Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad promoted Angika and Bajjika as distinct languages to weaken the Maithili language movement; many of them still consider Angika to be a dialect of Maithili. People from mainly Maithil Brahmins and Karan Kayasthas castes have supported the Maithili movement, while people from various other castes in the Mithila region have projected Angika and Bajjika as their mother tongues, attempting to break away from the Maithili-based regional identity.

⁶⁶Colin P. Masica (1993). *The Indo-Aryan Languages*. Cambridge University Press. 63

Chapter 6

Food, Festivals, and Fairs



(The Ghats of Patliputra during the times of Chhath Puja)

Chhath is a Vedic ritual dedicated to Hindu solar deity Surya, and goddess Shashthi (also called Chhathi Maiyya). It has also been mentioned in both the major Indian epics—in Ramayana, when Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya, then people celebrated Deepawali and on its sixth day Ramrajya was established. On this day Rama and Sita kept fast and Surya Shashthi/Chhath Puja was performed by Sita. Hence, she was blessed with Luv and Kush as their sons. In the Mahabharata, Chhath Puja was performed by Draupadi/ Kunti after they escaped from Lakshagrih. The main worshipers, called *parvaitin* (from Sanskrit *parv*, meaning "occasion" or "festival"), are usually women. However, many men also observe this festival as Chhath is not a gender-specific festival. The *parvaitin* pray for the well-being of their family, and for the prosperity of their offspring. In some communities, once a family member starts performing Chhath Puja, it is their compulsory duty to perform it every year

and to pass it on to the following generations. The festival is skipped only if there happens to be a death in the family that year. If the person stops performing the ritual on any particular year, it stops permanently and one cannot resume it. In other communities, this is not mandatory.

The prasad offerings include sweets, Kheer, Thekua and fruit(mainly sugarcane, sweet lime and banana) offered in small bamboo soop winnows. The food is strictly vegetarian and is cooked without salt, onions or garlic. Emphasis is put on maintaining the purity of the food.

This day is spent preparing the prasad (offerings)at home. On the eve of this day, the entire household accompanies the Vratins to a riverbank, pond or a common large water body to make the offerings (Arghya) to the setting sun. It is during this phase of Chhath Puja that the devotees offer prayers to the setting sun. The occasion is almost a carnival. Besides the Vratins, there are friends and family, and numerous participants and onlookers, all willing to help and receive the blessings of the worshipper. Folk songs are sung on the evening of Chhath.





(Devotees offering the rituals to the deity both in the evening and morning Arga)



Sonepur Cattle Fair is held on Kartik Poornima (the full moon day) in the month of November- December in Sonepur, Bihar, at the confluence of river Ganga and Gandak. It is also known as Harihar Kshetra Mela and it attracts visitors from all over Asia. Till date, it is the biggest cattle fair of Asia and stretches on from fifteen days upto one month. It has its origins during ancient times. This is when Chandragupta Maurya (340 - 297 BCE) used to buy elephants and horses across the river Ganga. The Sonepur Cattle Fair once used to attract traders from places as distant as Central Asia. Originally, the venue of the fair was Hajipur and only the performance of the puja used to take place at the Harihar Nath temple of Sonepur. However, under the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the venue of the fair got shifted to Sonepur. The temple of Harihar Nath is believed to have been originally built by Lord Rama, on his way to the court of King Janaka to win the hand of Mata Sita. It is further said that Raja Man Singh later got the temple repaired. The Harihar Nath temple, as it stands today, was built by Raja Ram Narain, an influential person during the late Mughal period.

Since Sonepur is situated at the convergence of the sacred rivers Ganga and Gandak, Hindus regard it as a holy site. One of the purposes of the people visiting the Sonepur Cattle Fair, apart from the fair, is to take a holy dip at the convergence and pay respects at the Hariharnath Temple. Originally, the venue of the fair was Hajipur and only the performance of the puja used to take place at the Harihar Nath temple of Sonpur. However, under the rule of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the venue of the fair got shifted to Sonpur. The temple of Harihar Nath is believed to have been originally built by Lord Rama, on his way to the court of King Janak to win the hand of Mata Sita. It is further said that Raja Man Singh later got the temple repaired. The Harihar Nath temple, as it stands today, was built by Raja Ram Narain, an influential person during the late Mughal period.

Gajendhra Moksha legend: an elephant and a crocodile respectively by the curse of great sages Agasthya and Dewala muni. One day the elephant's leg was caught by the crocodile. It is said that the location was in Nepal. It is said that both of them fought hard for many years with their herds and while fighting, they came to the place near this temple. But ultimately the King Elephant weakened and took the lotus flower from river in its trunk and prayed to the supreme god Vishnu (Hari) to save him. Vishnu heard his prayer and cut down the crocodile with his Chakra. But the touch of the chakra released Huhu from the curse. Vishnu also released Indrayamuna from his curse and took him to his abode Vaikuntha.





(The Fair which involves the various buying and selling of animals)

The historically rich land of Bihar is equally famous for the plethora of food and delicacies that feature in its cuisine. The scrumptious and exotic Bihari dishes are highly capable of tingling the taste bud of every food connoisseur.

Here is a list of must-try **Bihari food dishes**, dishes which are beyond the staple **Sattu** or **Parval ki Mithai**, which will surely leave you craving for more

The lip-smacking taste of **Litti Chokha**, savoured by one and all, needs no introduction. It is your grand welcome to the food of Bihar, in all its ghee-dripping glory. It consists of wheat and sattu with spices, kneaded into round spicy balls, dipped in ghee. The texture of Litti along with the crunchy crust makes it a foodie's delight. **Chokha** is prepared by mashing boiled vegetables (most common being potatoes, brinjal, tomatoes), adding spices and chopped onion, garlic etc and served with Litti as a complimentary delicacy. **Sattu** or fried gram flour forms a distinctive element of **Bihari food and cuisine**. The sattu is mixed with spices and filled in wheat dough balls, rolled and cooked with ghee on a hot plate to form **sattu paratha** which is also called *makuni*.



Very similar to **Gujia**, **Chandrakala** is another heavenly dessert for those with a sweet tooth. Stuffed with sweetened khoya, coconut, cardamom powder and dry fruits in a

crispy covering and dipped in sugar-syrup, Chandrakala is a dish from the traditional food of Bihar that is enough to sweeten your senses. **Chana Ghughni** is a spicy-tangy evening snack item from the food of Bihar. Extremely common yet equally delicious, this mouth-watering snack is prepared in almost every household of Bihar. Boiled chickpeas, fried with onion and spices along with “**Chuda ka bhuja**” (flattened rice) makes it a perfect answer to satisfy your hunger! Flattened and dried gram is also used to make other salty snacks. **Dal Peetha** is the Bihari way to cook dumplings or momos. This quintessential food of Bihar is covered with rice flour and stuffed with lentil paste, along with spices and pickle. The dumpling is then steamed or fried and makes for a very healthy breakfast. Another variant of this is when the lentil paste is mixed with spices and rolled into chappatis and is called *Dal-Puri*. **Khajuria** is the most commonly prepared snack of **Bihari food**. The mixture of wheat flour and jaggery is deep fried and lo! This lip-smacking snack is ready to fulfill those hunger attacks! One can also use rice flour instead of wheat flour and sugar instead of jaggery to make different varieties. **Malpua** is another **Bihari food** delight that needs no introduction. Its batter is a mixture of flour, milk, mashed bananas and sugar which is deep fried in ghee and dipped in sugar syrup. The crispy crust and soft centre melts in mouth, making it all-time favourite delicacy of Bihar. Malpuas are also complimented with thick **Rabdi**, only to add the yummy cherry on the cake.

Biharis sure seem to have a sweet tooth. Yes you read that right, they even turned the plain old vegetable like **parwal/patol** (pointed gourd) into a sweet dish, reverberant of the food of Bihar. And boy, it tastes heavenly. The inner pulp of the parwal is scooped out, boiled, dipped in syrup and filled with sweet khoya preparation. The end result looks as royal as it tastes. Rice flour and Jaggery come together to create this beautiful **Bihari food dish** that is found all year long. It is then coated in sesame seeds

and fried over medium heat until it achieves the perfect shade of red. Bite into an **anarsa** and soak in the sweet treat that awaits you.



(Malpua is a traditional sweet dish for Biharis)



(Thekua, Parwal ki Mithai and Ghugni are very popular evening snack for a Bihari household.)



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