

Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Sahibganj District

Intangible Cultural Heritage



INTACH

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Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

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INTACH Indian
National Trust
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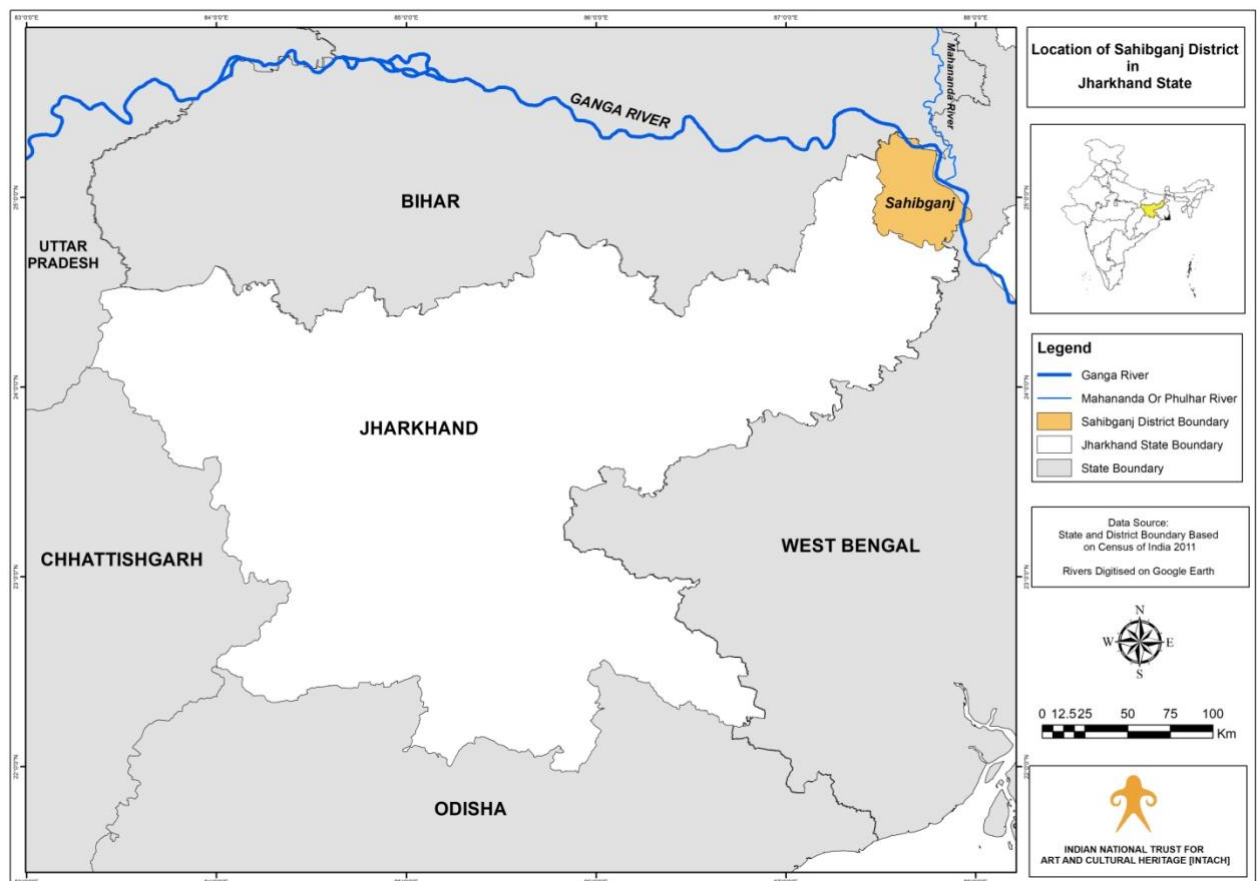
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Cover Image: A stone carving of Raja Vikramaditya signifying the royal, fossil history and relationship of locals and stone. Done by a regional artist.

Back Cover: A potter at his workshop in Old Sahibganj town area

INTRODUCTION

The district of Sahibganj lies approximately between 24°42' north and 25°21' north latitude and between 87°25' and 87°54' east longitude. Sahibganj is the administrative headquarter of the district and situated on the bank of the river Ganges at 25°15' north latitude and 87°38' east longitude. The geographical area of the district is 1599.00 sq. km. It is bound on the north by the river Ganges and district of Katihar, on the south by the district Godda, on the east by Maldah and Murshidabad districts of the state of West Bengal, and on the west by Bhagalpur and Godda districts.



A large part of the district is hilly. The vast tract of land enclosed between hill ranges had been assigned a name, Damin-I-koh, which is a Persian word meaning Skirts of the hills. The region on the bank of the Ganges is fertile and richly cultivated.



Evening view of Sahibganj town from the Ganga

Sahibganj means a place or ganj of sahebs or sahibs. Ganj is a common suffix/prefix meaning "treasured place" or "neighborhood" in Hindi, Bengali and Urdu, used in names of bazaar, mandi, store, market place and towns in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. The place could have also likely been given its name because several English and other Europeans and worked in and around the railway station during the British Raj.

The district may be divided into two natural divisions on the basis of its geographical location and cultivable land. First region consists of Borio, Mandro, Barhait, Pathna and Taljhari blocks and lies under Damin-I-koh area. The hills and slopes are covered with forests, once dense, but scanty now. The valleys have cultivable lands, yielding mostly paddy.

Sahibganj is situated on the Jamalpur Howrah railway loopline, which is said to be the second oldest railway line of india. Bhagalpur, a famous town of Bihar, is 75 Km west to this district.

The inhabitants of this region are generally Paharias, Mal Paharias and Santhals. The inhabitants on the hilltop cultivate Barbatti and maize using rainwater. The second region consists of Sahibganj, Rajmahal, Udhwa and Barharwa blocks. This plain region consists of the uplands, undulation along ridges and depressions. The Ganga,

Gumani and Bansloi rivers flow through this region. This area has plenty of fertile lands and is richly cultivated. The inhabitants of this region are mainly middle-class people of different castes, Paharias and Santhals.



View of the Ganga in Sahibganj, from the nearby hills

Santhal is most likely derived from a Bengali exonym. The term refers to inhabitants of Saont, now in the Midnapore region of West Bengal, the traditional homeland of the Santals. The history of the Sahibganj district is inseparable from the history of its parent district of Santhal Pargana with its headquarters at Dumka and interrelated with the history of Godda, Dumka, Deoghar and Pakur districts. Several historical and archaeological evidence place it as old as the period of Stone Age where stone implements such as axe, hammers, arrowheads or agricultural implements have been excavated at various sites, inclusive of unique 'shoulder-headed celts'. The shouldered headed celts have been the characteristic feature of NE Indian Neolithic cultures (7000 B.C.) and areas such as Bihar and Jharkhand too have such archaeological pieces of evidence in their various sites.

Situated in the lush green state of Jharkhand, Sahibganj district ranks thirteenth in terms of total population in the state and thirteenth in regard to decadal population growth rate (2001-11) among the twenty-four districts.

Post-Independence in 1947, the Government of India Identified the demographic region as a backward and underdeveloped area and tried upliftment through various policies, but the desired results were not achieved and even till the end of 20th century, conditions remained poor. It was only on 15th November 2000 that the Jharkhand movement, which was for long being spearheaded by the tribal population, resulted in the creation of the state of Jharkhand.

Nestled in the lap of Mother Ganga, Sahibganj owns a very special position regarding its glorious past. The historic Rajmahal hills of Jurassic age lie as the southern boundary of this district. These hills are the abode of one of the rarest tribes of India like the Sauria Paharia, and Maisa Paharia.

The birthplace of the immortal freedom fighters Sidho and Kanho, Bhognadih, is also situated in this district. Its sub-divisional headquarter Rajmahal has a golden history of its own. Its historic association goes up to the Mughal Emperor Akbar and Raja Man Singh. Later, it remained for a long time the capital of the undivided Bengal, Bihar and Orissa province. Singhi Dalan, Kanhaiyasthan, Jami Masjid, Baradwari, Teliagarhi Fort and Fossil Park, are some of the historic and tourist places of this district.

HISTORY: THE MUGHAL SULTANATE

The Mughal absorption of Bengal initially progressed during the reigns of the first two emperors, Babur and Humayun.

Consistent history of Sahibganj can be traced from the 13th century when Bakhtiar Khilji (Sultanate-e-Dilli) visited Bengal with his Muslim armies through Teliagarhi Pass. During the visit, he captured Bengal where Sahebganj was also a prominent part. Again, the battle took place between Humayun, and Sher Shah Suri and the Mughal rule was established on 12 July 1576. Then, several Mughal rulers ruled Bengal. During the reign of Akbar, Rajmahal became the capital of Bengal. On 7th November 1595, the city was named as Agmahal, but later renamed to Akbarnagar by Raja Man Singh.

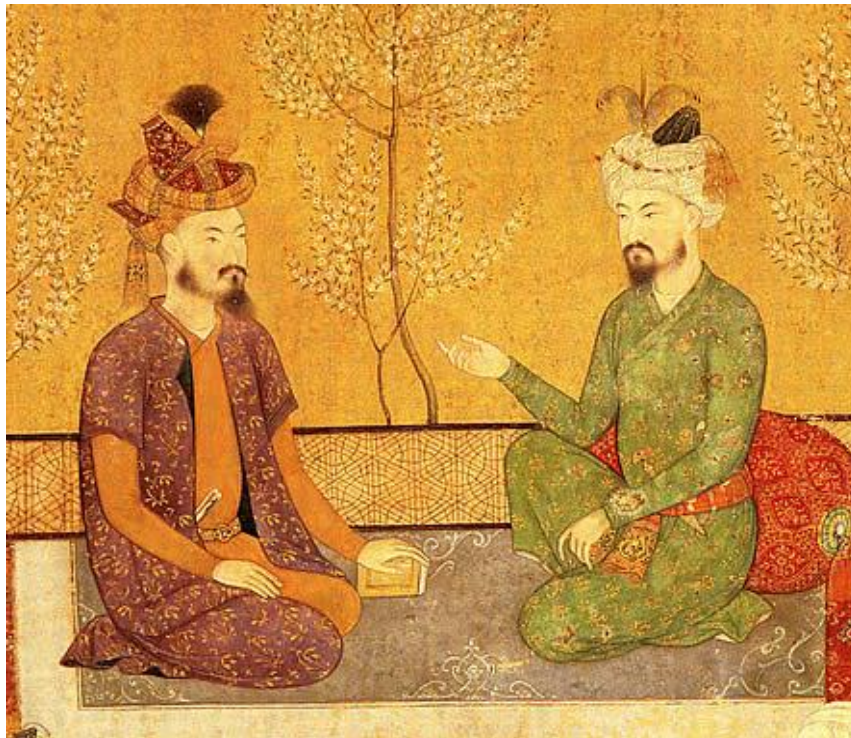


Illustration of Babar reciting verses to Humayun

Image source: <https://zompist.wordpress.com/2017/06/30/urdu-poetry/>

Within the Sahibganj district of Jharkhand lies the town of Rajmahal which holds great historical importance. Because of its strong geo-political position, Rajmahal was selected as a capital city of the Mughal Government's Bengal territory. It was the port as well as the mint-city.



Ruins of the mint in Rajmahal

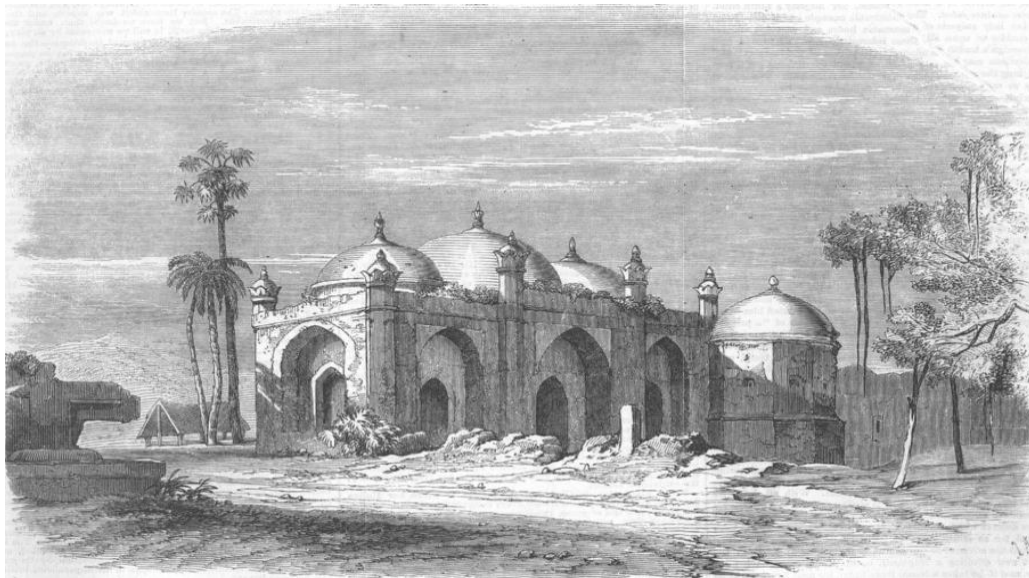
The port city of Sahibganj was often challenged by natural difficulties such as changes in the course of the Ganga and forest fires. Later the capital city was moved to Dhaka. But this location ensured unrivalled upper hand for the kingdom with command over the river Ganga in the region and the strategic placement of the Teliagarhi Fort at the bordering pass.

With time, the city further developed its size, population and its commercial activities. It came up as a magnificent city with a palace and several other buildings of royal importance being created like the Jami Masjid, Baradari building, Singhi Dalan, Machi Bhawan etc.



Baradari built in Nageshwar Bagh, Rajmahal, during the Mughal Rule

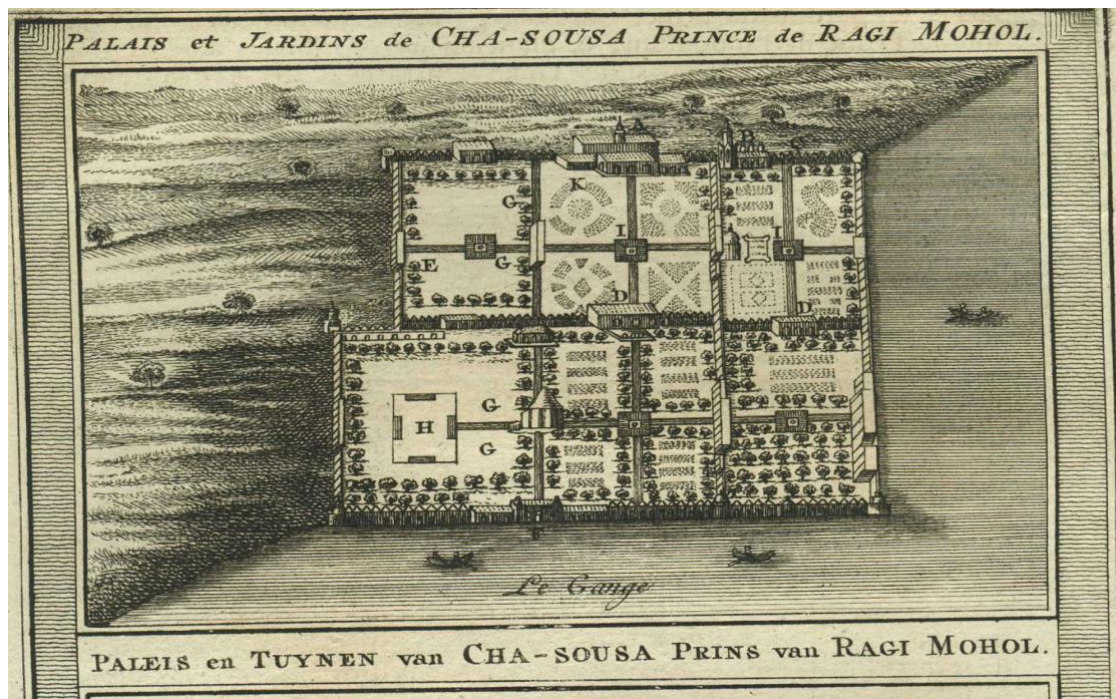
A large lake named Anand Sarovar was created by Prince Shuja, who was a Governor during the time period of 1639-1660 A.D. He played a key role in strengthening the fortified areas as well as building new buildings of royal importance.



"Remains of a Musjid attached to 'The Palace of the Lion', Rajmahal," from the Illustrated London News, 1857

Image source:

<https://www.antiquemapsandprints.com/india-musjid-remains-palace-of-the-lion-rajmahal-antique-print-1857-91417-p.asp?hcb=1>



Shah Shuja's headquarters at Rajmahal, from *Prevost*, c.1750s

Image Source:

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1500_1599/akbar/bengal_rajmahal/bengal_rajmahal.html?hcb=1http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1500_1599/akbar/bengal_rajmahal/bengal_rajmahal.html?hcb=1

Early records from the Mughal period suggest that the town was more prosperous when Ganga was closer to the city. The ships easily reached the port town. But with the change in course of the river the condition of the town also changed. Another reason for the downfall was patrolling of Portuguese bandits because the town also had the provincial mint. The mention of the port-city is also found on coins of the Mughal rulers as Akbarnagar. Many travelers and records of the East India Company also have various mentions of the city. Rajmahal continued to operate its mint for almost 200 years from 1570-1770 AD until it was shifted to Murshidabad by Murshid

Quli Khan. While it was the mint-city, coins of Akbar, Aurangzeb and Jehangir were issued. In the travelogue of Manrique, it was mentioned that he saw over 2000 boats and vessels from many different parts of the region anchored at the port of the city. They had individually faced difficulties in parking their one tiny boat owing to the large number of other bigger boats. Because of River Ganga, the city of Rajmahal was connected to Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Murshidabad, Hoogly, Malda, Dhaka and many other cities, which held importance during the Mughal reign. Large goods-containing vessels continued to facilitate this water-route and sustain the port-town. The numerous tributaries were also extensively used to ferry goods from other regions.



Artist: Sita Ram (fl. c.1810-1822). Medium: Watercolour. Date: 1820

Idealized view of the Sangi Dalan or Hall of Stone at Shah Shuja's palace at Rajmahal

Image Source:

<https://www.watercolourworld.org/painting/sangi-dalan-hall-shah-shujas-palace-rajmahal-tww00851b?hcb=1>

Along the southern side of the river, a long road route was also present which was used to connect the eastern part of India. The medieval towns had chowkies or posts along the road and taxes were collected at these centres. These custom posts were also known as *Chautoras*. Rajmahal had six of these posts where registration and

other documentation work were also done. Traders and travelers often had to spend many days for clearances and approvals. According to the travelogue of Manrique, he had to spend nine days for his clearance and many a time English folks adorned Indian Muslim robes for convenience. The officers also harassed travelers sometimes and it used to get very difficult to pass through these posts. Traders and travelers who passed through these checkpoints were given a *chaap* (stamp/seal) of the reign on a piece of cloth as a pass. According to the records of another traveler, Marshall, in the 17th century, Rajmahal collected over one crore rupees per annum during the period of Shah Alam. During the rule of Aurangzeb, postal services were also created and for their smooth functioning, the governor of Bengal during that period, Mir Jumla, created dak-chowkies which were like post offices. This primarily helped the travelers in communicating.

The capital city was also prominent in terms of trade and commerce. Silkworms produced high quality silk in this region, and they were sold to far off markets. The quality of rice was also very superior in this region. Salt petre or potassium nitrate was also a highly traded item from the city. It had multiple uses but primarily it was used as fertilizer and gun powder for fire propellants. A vast store of mobile artilleries of the zamindars of Bengal was stored here. The European merchants considered Rajmahal a fair and water-locked city armored with a powerful flotilla. The Portuguese and the Dutch captains sailed on the river, adhering to the rebel princes, according to the memoirs of Jehangir.



Raja Man Singh. Artist: Unknown, made in Jaipur in 1790 Height: 265 mm approx.; Width: 200 mm approx.

Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_Singh_I

Raja Man Singh (Man Singh I) (21 December 1550 – 6 July 1614) was the Kachwaha Rajput Raja of Amer, a state later known as Jaipur in Rajputana. He was a trusted general of the Mughal emperor Akbar, who included him among the Navaratnas, or the nine (nava) gems (ratna) of the royal court of Akbar. On 17 March 1594, Raja Man Singh was appointed Subahdar (Governor) of Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha. He made his headquarters in Rohtas, in Bihar. In doing so, he renovated the fortifications and also built a Haveli (Palatial House) in Rohtasgarh Fort, which stands to date. On 9 November 1595, Man Singh laid the foundations of a new capital of Bengal Subah at Rajmahal. During his tenure as governor, Man Singh further expanded the Mughal Empire by defeating and subduing the old kingdoms of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.

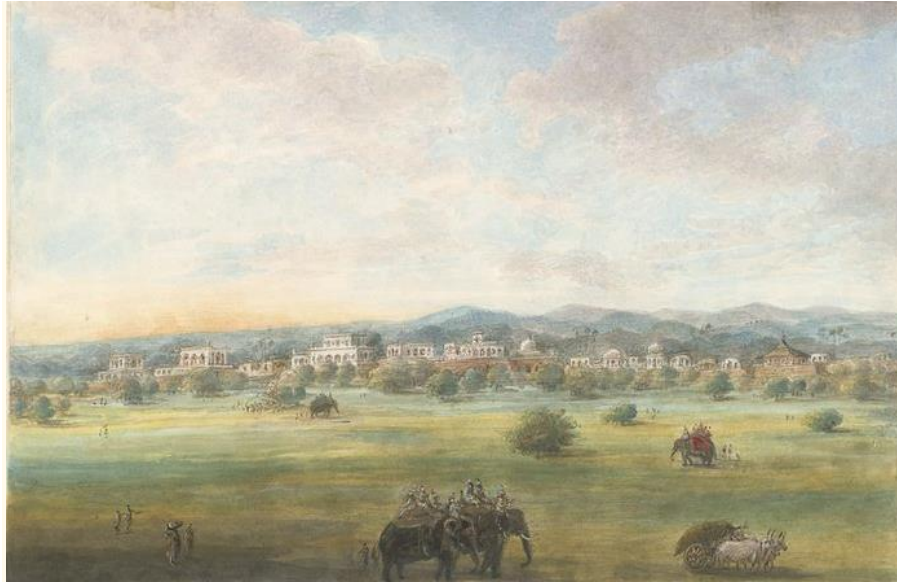


Image Source:

www.rarebooksocietyofindia.org/postDetail.php?id=196174216674

Above: Watercolour of elephants with the Rajmahal Hills in the background from an album of miscellaneous views of Bengal produced for Lord Moira, afterwards the Marquess of Hastings, by Sita Ram, between 1820-21. Marquess of Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal and the Commander-in-Chief (r.1813-23), was accompanied by artist Sita Ram (flourished c.1810-22) to illustrate his journey from Calcutta to Delhi between 1814-15 and his convalescent tour in the Rajmahal Hills in the winter of 1820-21.

Illustration of a pair of elephants with Mughals, with the town and hills of Rajmahal behind. Rajmahal, located along the right bank of the Ganges in Bihar, was chosen in 1592 as the capital of Bengal by Man Singh, the Rajput general who worked for Mughal Emperor Akbar (r.1556-1605). Rajmahal remained the capital until 1607, when it was shifted to Dacca. Sultan Shuja, the governor of Bengal, moved the capital back to Rajmahal in 1639, though by 1707 it was shifted again, this time to Murshidabad. The Rajmahal Hills in the background, located in Bihar, approximately extend over 24 miles at an elevation of 2,000 feet above sea-level and include the ridges of Mori and Sundgarsa. Inscribed below in pencil and ink: 'Nawab Mobarekood Dowlah, Rajemahl.'



'Ruins of the Palace of Sultan Shuja at Rajmahal' [Rajmahal]. Drawn and engraved by James Moffat, published Calcutta, 1800

Image Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/1v2ATbHX3EBasCDTA>

The site shown in the above drawing is the ruins of one of the inspection palaces of Emperor Akbar referred to as Singhi Dalan. It is called Singhi Dalan because it was constructed by king Mansingh from 1592 to 1595. It has also been referred as Singhi Dalan because a general meeting of *raiat* or public was also called in a campus hall here. It had three big rooms. It surrounds a roof full of garden flowers. Stones used in the construction of the fort are in grey colour from the Rajmahal trap rocks. It is situated at the center of the Rajmahal township. It was the main centre of export and import from India during the Akbar period and the British regime.

The **Bengal Subah**, also known as **Mughal Bengal**, was a subdivision of the Mughal Empire encompassing much of the Bengal region, which includes the Indian states of West Bengal and parts of Jharkhand and modern Bangladesh, between the 16th and 18th centuries. Mughal Bengal had been described as the 'Paradise of Nations', and living standards and real wages were among the highest in the world, worth 12% of the world's GDP. The trade that, in Aurangzeb's day, moved him to make his famous

remark about Bengal, describing it as “the paradise of nations for its wealth and trade,” flowed through Ganga for millennia before Calcutta was founded, after his time. It flowed, indeed, for the most part in the rivers and lands that are now also part of Bangladesh, occasioned his praise, and was certainly well known to the Mughals else they would not have spent so long struggling for their control of Bengal in the face of local resistance.

The rebellion of Shahjahan against Noor Jahan’s dominion over his father Jehangir began and ended in the Deccan though the capture of Bengal, Bihar and Purvanchal, which is now in Uttar Pradesh, from the throne of Rajmahal, was an important chapter in Indian history during the 17th Century. The revolt of Rajmahal lasted for approximately 14 months and this had created a lot of confusion in the Mughal Empire. It disturbed the interests of the Mughals in the Deccan as well as the Afghan Frontier. When Shah Jahan arrived, he first captured the strong old fort which was built on the southern bank of river Ganga. It was built in 1574 AD by Daud Khan, the last Karani Ruler of Bengal. But when he realized that the fort was losing its strategic importance because the river had receded over a kilometer, and the war boats could no longer use the facilities of the port, he abandoned it. The Bengal Governor had given up the fort. Also, the Mausoleum nearby which had Ibrahim’s camp was besieged. But some places like the Teliagarhi Fort, naval bases of Samda, Budhganga, Dogachh, Dunapur, Aamgachi were still occupied by the rebel forces.



Gateway to the Jami Masjid at Rajmahal; a watercolor by Seeta Ram, 1817-21

Image Source:

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1500_1599/akbar/bengal_rajmahal/bengal_rajmahal.html?hcb=1

Most of these areas were in the periphery of the city and on the banks of river Ganga. Rajmahal was more like a military base or camping ground for the forces, upon which the army majorly relied for success. Thousands of soldiers including some Portuguese gunners headed by Mirzalsfandiyar, Mirza Nurullah, Ibrahim's nephew Mirza Bahadur, Jalayer Khan and others garrisoned the city of Rajmahal. The most effective way to hold onto the riparian plains of Rajmahal was with the help of the naval forces. It was helped by the rulers and zamindars of Bengal by providing ammunition and supplies through the mouth of rivers Ganga and Bhagirathi. Ibrahim himself and his nephew Ahmed Beg Khan with cavalry and elephants crossed the river Ganga opposite Rajmahal and camped near Gaur in Malda. A decisive battle was fought here on 24th April 1624. Jalba (large swift boats), Kushas (small swift boats) and ghurabs (gun boats) were also used. Shahjahan directed all his strength towards his final contest. The fierce battle where the troops of the rebel Prince were better mounted and supported by a group of strong Rajput compatriots reinforced their success at the battlefield. Though the Governor of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan, fought and resisted well, in the end he was slain. During his rule from Rajmahal, Shahjahan

also concocted his daring plan of military march to Delhi. The success of Shahjahan over Bengal and Bihar had enabled him to gain unparalleled authority and also lured him to venture northwards with the prospects of equal success.



Mughal Pul played an important role during the wars. (as on 27.12.2020)

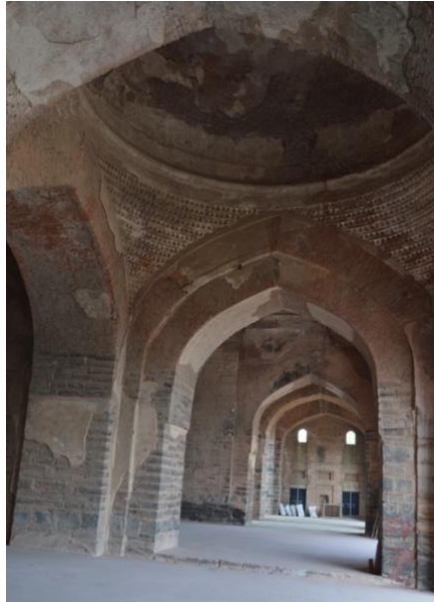
Mughal Bengal was devastated from 1741 onward by a series of Maratha invasions in which close to 400,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed by the Marathas. Contemporary accounts of the invasions report atrocities against women and children, and mutilation of victims by the Marathas, which devastated Bengal's economy. Bengal was subject to further deindustrialization, after being conquered by the British East India Company at the Battle of Plassey in 1757.



The interior of the Jam Masjid at Rajmahal; a watercolor by Seeta Ram, 1817-21

Image source:

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/addorimss/t/019addor0004906u00000000.html?hcb=1>



Jami Masjid Interiors (as on 27.12.2020)



Jami Masjid with some restoration work underway as on 27.12.2020



Watercolour of the Jami Masjid at Rajmahal from an album of miscellaneous views of Bengal produced for Lord Moira, afterwards the Marquess of Hastings, by Sita Ram between 1820-21. Marquess of Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal and the Commander-in-Chief (r.1813-23), was accompanied by artist Sita Ram (flourished c.1810-22) to illustrate his journey from Calcutta to Delhi between 1814-15 and his convalescent tour in the Rajmahal Hills in the winter of 1820-21.

Image Source:

<https://www.watercolourworld.org/painting/jami-masjid-rajmahal-tww008501?hcb=1>

ETYMOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF SAHIBGANJ



Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagiratha#/media/File:Birth_of_Ganga_on_Earth.jpg

Bhagiratha was a legendary king of the Ikshvaku dynasty who brought the river Ganga, personified as the river goddess Ganga, to earth from the heavens. When he became prince of Sagara dynasty, learning the sad end of his forefathers, who were unable to attain the legion of gods, with a sorrowful heart, he handed his kingly duties to his minister and went to practice austerities in the Himalayas. He did penance for a thousand years on the advice of his guru Trithala, to please Ganga, to gain the release of his 60,000 great-uncles from the curse of sage Kapila. Ganga told him if she descended from the sky to the earth, the force of her fall would be difficult to sustain. She asked him to obtain the favor of the blue-throated god, Shiva, as no one except him would be able to sustain her. He then did severe penance to Shiva who granted him the boon, which eventually led to the descent of the goddess Ganga in the form of the river Ganges, to the earth, filling the sea, drunk up by

Jahnu. To commemorate his efforts, the head stream of the river is called Bhagirathi, till it meets Alaknanda River at Devprayag.



Statue of Vikramaditya commemorating the pehla baisakh (beginning of first season of the year and the beginning of Vikramsamvat (Hindu calendar) at Singhi Dalan, Rajmahal

The previous history of the town is broken, with obscure bits and pieces, but it has been very well documented since the thirteenth century with the advent of the

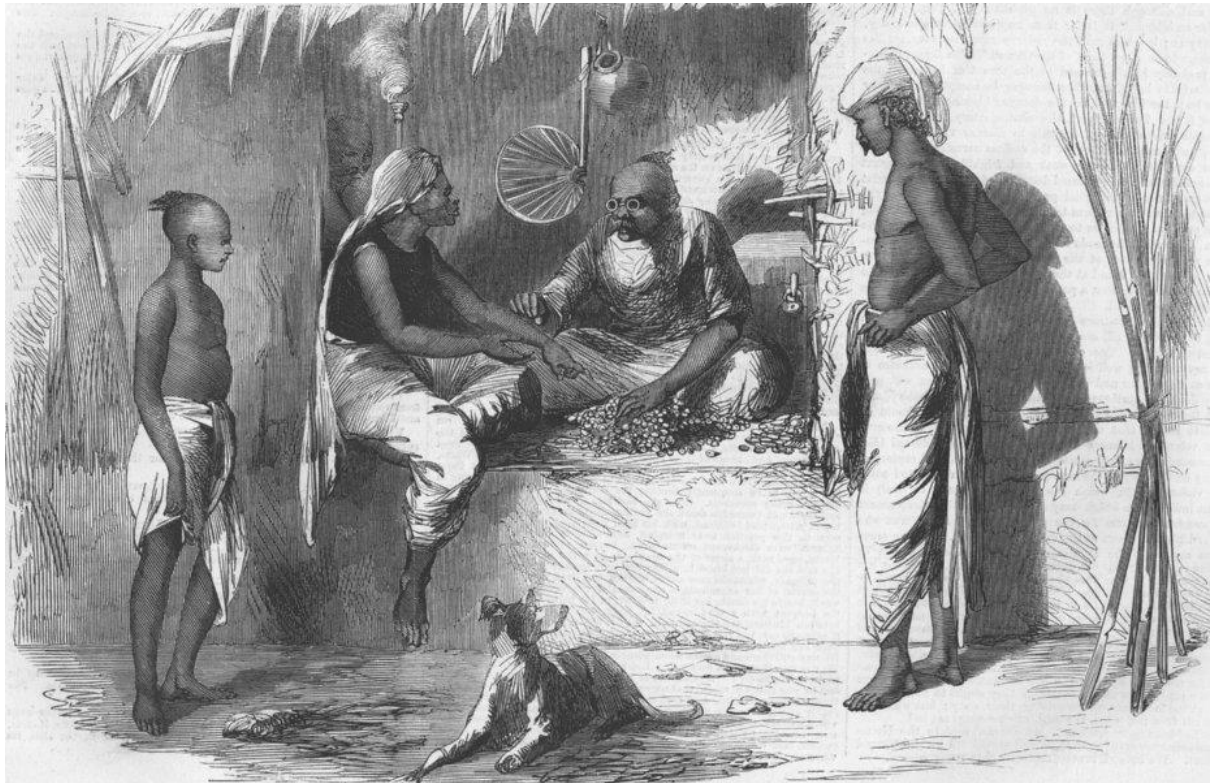
Mughals. This town was also mentioned in the travelogue of Hiuen Tsang during his trip to India in the 7th century AD. In the Chinese Buddhist text, the town was mentioned as "Kajangla", literally translating to an old town. It was mentioned that Bhaskaravarman, the King of Kamrupa, proceeded and passed river Ganga with his army which included his warships, elephants, horses and infantry to meet King Harsha of the Gupta period in 642 AD.

Although Vikramaditya is mentioned in a few works dated to before the Gupta period (240–550 CE), portions may be later Gupta-era interpolations. Vikramaditya means "the sun of valour" (*vikrama* means "valour" and *aditya* means "sun"). He is also known as Vikrama, Bikramjit and *Vikramarka* (*arka* also means "sun"). Some legends describe him as a liberator of India from *mlechchha* invaders; the invaders are identified as Shakas in most, and the king is known by the epithet *Shakari* (IAST: *Śakāri*; "enemy of the Shakas"). The earliest uncontested mentions of Vikramaditya appear in sixth-century works: the biography of Vasubandhu by Paramartha (499–569) and *Vasavadatta* by Subandhu. Paramartha quotes a legend which mentions Ayodhya ("A-yu-ja") as the capital of king Vikramaditya ("Pi-ka-la-ma-a-chi-ta"). According to this legend, the king gave 300,000 gold coins to the Samkhya scholar Vindhyavasa for defeating Vasubandhu's Buddhist teacher (Buddhamitra) in a philosophical debate. Vasubandhu then wrote *Paramartha Saptati*, illustrating deficiencies in Samkhya philosophy. Vikramaditya, pleased with Vasubandhu's arguments, gave him 300,000 gold coins as well. Vasubandhu later taught Buddhism to Prince Baladitya and converted the queen to Buddhism after the king's death.



Remains of Teliagarhi Fort

The history of Sahibganj district is rich and interesting and mainly centers on the history of Rajmahal, Teliagarhi Fort and Sahibganj town itself. Teliagarhi fort has been documented as a famous pass on the northwest border of Bengal which was formerly used as a commanding point for the military approaches. This was also one of the main routes for connecting Bengal to the rest of India. Teliagarhi fort was strategically constructed to keep a check on this popular route. It was known as the 'gateway' to Bengal. The western side of this pass was used by the Bengal army as a first line of defense to conveniently stop a larger North Indian enemy force marching in, due to its positioning. This area was a common battleground for many centuries. There are many documented battles from the Mughal Era.

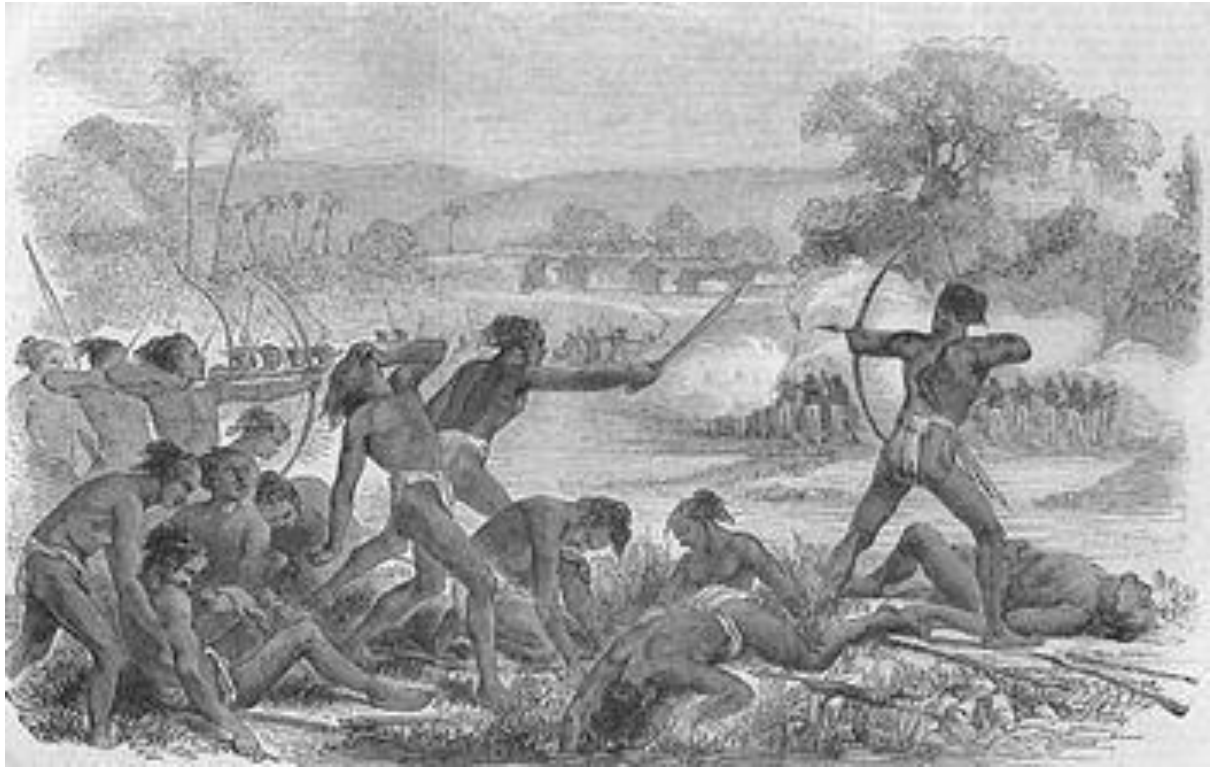


"The Hindu money-changer," from the Illustrated London News, 1859

Image Source: ebay, June 2009

The fort got its name from the builder Teli Zamindar who was a local trader. This place was also a site for a Buddhist Stupa, which has been mentioned in history. The neighboring town of Sahibganj, Rajmahal, was also used as the Capital of Bengal by multiple Kings.

During the 19th Century, there was a major rebellion by the local Santhal leaders due to the constant manipulation and suppression by the Mahajans, because of their meek nature. Economic emancipation was the primary cause of this uprising. Among the ones rebelling against the exploiting forces, Sidho, Kanu, Chand and Bhairab were four brothers from the neighbouring village of Bhognadih whereas brothers Chandrai and Singhrai were from another village Littipada who emerged as popular local leaders. Almost all of them were martyred in war. During this period, even the British got themselves into this conflict by trying to quell disturbances and suppressing the Santhal, and Hul was the First Indian Freedom Movement of 1857.



Attack by 600 Santhals upon a party of 50 sepoys, 40th regiment native infantry

Image Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/AiqsNg6X6vGkHSX28>

CULTURAL EVOLUTION OF SAHIBGANJ

There is evidence in the pages of history that the area is inhabited since time immemorial only by Malers (Mal Paharia). They were the early settlers of the territory of Rajmahal hills, and still reside in some areas of the same hills. They are considered to be the “Malli” mentioned in the notes of Megasthenes, Greek Ambassador of Selukus Nikater, who happened to be in the vicinity of Rajmahal hills in 302 BC. Till the visit of Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in 645 AD, the history of this area was wrapped in obscurity. In his travelogue, the Chinese pilgrim mentions about the Fort of Teliagarhi, when he saw the lofty bricks and stone tower not far from the Ganga. We gather information through the pages of history that it was certainly a Buddhist Vihar.



Watercolour by Sir Charles D'Oyly of the ruined fort of Teliagarhi, formerly known as the key to Bengal because of its earlier strategic importance

Image source:

https://www.rarebooksocietyofindia.org/photo_archive/196174216674_456980086674

A continuous history of the district is available from the 13th Century when Teliagarhi became the main gateway of Muslim armies marching to and from Bengal. During the Turkish dynasty rule in Delhi, Malik Ikhtiaruddin-bin-Bakhtiar Khilji marched towards Bengal and Assam through the Teliagrahi pass. He captured Bengal and its king Lakshaman Sena fled to Cooch Behar. In 1538, Sher Shah Suri and Humayun came face to face for a decisive battle near Teliagarhi. On 12th July 1576, the battle of Rajmahal was fought and the foundation of the Mughal rule in Bengal was laid. It was Man Singh, the most trusted general of Akbar, who in the capacity of Viceroy of Bengal and Bihar made Rajmahal the capital of Bengal in 1592. But this honour to Rajmahal was short-lived, for the capital was shifted to Dacca in 1608. Shortly after this, Teliagarhi and Rajmahal became the seat of a fierce battle between the rebellious Prince Shahjahan and Ibrahim Khan. Shahjahan emerged victorious and became the master of Bengal for the time being, losing finally in 1624 at Allahabad.

In 1639, Rajmahal regained its glory and was once more made the capital of Bengal by Shah Shuja, the second son of Emperor Shahjahan, on his appointment as the Viceroy of Bengal. It continued as the seat of the Mughal Viceroy up to 1660 and a mint town till 1661. It was at Rajmahal that Dr. Gabriel Boughten cured the daughter of Shah Shuja. By this means Dr. Boughten succeeded in securing an order (farman) from Shah Shuja giving the English the liberty to trade in Bengal. Thus, the minutest foundation of the British rule was laid here. The fugitive Nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud-Daula was captured at Rajmahal during his flight after the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

The British Era

The victory at Plassey made British take over Bengal which contained the present Sahibganj district. In Santhal Pargana, the band of simple but determined opponents, the Paharias, were great lovers of freedom and could not tolerate any intruder in their homeland. The English were very much concerned, and Warren Hastings the Governor General of India organized a special corps of 800 men in 1772 to curb the Paharias. The corps was put under the command of Captain Brooke, who was appointed the Military Governor of the Jungle terai. He partly succeeded in his mission. Captain James Browne, who succeeded Brooke in 1774, found himself busy mostly in suppressing the rebellion of the Bhuniyas. He however, prepared a scheme to win over the Paharias, which was left to be elaborated and put into action actually by Augustus Cleveland, the first British Collector of Rajmahal. He introduced the system of trial of cases by an assembly of chiefs. This system received further sanction by Regulation I of 1796, which made it obligatory on the Magistrate to commit all-important cases for trial by the assembly of Chiefs. The Magistrate was, of course, to attend the trial as a superintending officer and had the power to confirm or modify the punishment. This show of self-rule continued till 1827 when Paharias were declared amenable to ordinary courts of law, though they even then enjoyed the privilege to settle petty disputes.

One of the successors of Augustus Cleveland, J. Sutherland, who, in the capacity of Joint Magistrate of Bhagalpur, toured the old district of Santhal Pargana in 1818 to enquire into the causes of local unrest, and in 1819, suggested to the Fort William, Calcutta, that the hill tracts inhabited by the tribal population should be declared the direct property of Government so that they could be looked after better. As a follow-up action of the above suggestion in 1824, John Perty Ward was deputed to demarcate the Government Estate. He was assisted by Captain Tanner, a Survey Officer. This Estate was named as "Damin-i-koh", a Persian term meaning, 'skirts of the hills'. The work was over in 1837 and Mr. Pontet, Deputy Collector, was made in-charge of the revenue administration of the Damin area in the same year. The pouring in of Santhals was encouraged for clearing the jungle for the purpose of cultivation. The impression was that all was well with the administration and that the Santhals were happy. But this was illusive. The internal set-up of the administrative

system could not ensure proper justice to the common man and there was a deep underlying discontent among the Santhals.

The Santhal Rebellion of 1855

The Santhals settled in the district, migrating from Birbhum, Bankura, Hazaribag and Rohtas between 1790 and 1810. As per William W. Hunter, "The Permanent Settlement for the land tax in 1790 resulted in general extension of tillage and the Santhals were hired to rid the lowlands of the wild beasts which, since the great famine of 1769, had everywhere encroached upon the margin of cultivation".

The Santhals who were encouraged to settle in the district were simple and hardy. Thus, they fell as an easy prey to the unscrupulous hillmen and non-Santhal traders. Chaudhary P.C. Roy, writer of the new Gazetteer of Santhal Praganas, held the view that "It was common practice for the hill-men to apply for grant of land on condition of cultivating it themselves, but they frequently gave it to Santhals, in the hope of collecting rents from them. Baniyas and mahajans made heavy gains from the innocent Santhals and there was no check on them. The local administration was extremely corrupt. In the area where Santhals had settled in large numbers, the Naib Sazwals, assistants of the English superintendents, were greedy and oppressive. The police were equally corrupt. The Santhals were used to ready justice at no cost. But to add to their hardship they had to trek a long way, either to Jangipur in Murshidabad district, or to Bhagalpur, for justice, as the civil and criminal courts were located there. If at all they could get justice there, it proved too costly for them. To add to their injury, the court staff and lawyers all pounced on them and exploited them to the maximum."

Besides, there was the 'Kamauti' system. The idea of it was repayment of a debt by physical labour. In practice, however the debtor worked, in many cases, for a generation or two and yet the loan, no matter how small, could not be repaid. The mahajans were crooked and took advantage of the meekness of the Santhals. Disgruntled, the Santhals felt insecure, and their discontent was sharpened as their co-tribesmen outside the clutches of mahajans and baniyas earned handsome wages

in the forests which were being cleared for the rail lines to be laid. These issues and circumstances led to the Santhal Hul or Rebellion of 1855.



A commemorative postage stamp on Sidho and Kanho

Image Source: <https://www.istampgallery.com/sido-murmu-kanhu-murmu/>

The Santhals got leaders in Sidho, Kanho, Chand and Bhairab, all the four brothers from village Bhognadih near Barhait of Sahibganj district. Chandrai and Simgrai were also main figures. Singrai was the son of Baijal Manjhi of Littipara. Kanu was killed in action and Sido was arrested and hanged at Barhait.



Hul Kranti Sthal in memory of Sidho Kanho in Barhait

The object of the Santhal uprising was the economic emancipation of the Santhals. The first spark of the revolt was ignited at Littipara. Kena Ram Bhagat was a leading merchant and moneylender of Amrapara. The altercation which took place led to the arrest of Baijai Manjhi, who was sent to Bhagalpur jail where he died shortly after without any trial. His son Singrai, who raised the banner of revolt, was also hanged in Barhait bazaar after a summary trial. The Santhals became infuriated and Hul ensued, as a precursor to the first War of Independence in 1857.

Without going into the depth of the disturbance, the foreign rulers took this as a challenge to their authority and pounced upon the Santhals with mighty forces and engaged troops to quell the disturbances. As the English tried to arrest the Santhals and thereby protect the 'dikus' whom the Santhals had branded as their enemy, the trouble spread over a large area covering present Santhal Pargana division, Birbhum, Bankura and Hazaribagh districts. A large number of troops were forced into action and all sorts of atrocities were resorted to. But for a brief lull of about a month in

September 1855, the waves of uprising continued up to December 1855. Martial law was proclaimed on the 10th of November 1855 and with ruthless hands, the British Government succeeded in suppressing the rebellion by December 1855. On 3rd January, 1856, the operation of the Martial Law was suspended.

India's Freedom Movement

Sahibganj was not immune from patriotic fervor and played its role in the country's struggle for freedom from 1921 onwards. Even in the hills and forests of Sahibganj, there was a patriot named Lambodar Mukherjee, moving and rousing the people, telling the simple folk who they really were and what they should be. He brought to them the outside world, so securely closed by the British, with the help of lantern slides.

The district played its role in the Salt Satyagraha Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 and in the boycott of foreign liquors and cloth. The movement gathered momentum and the government had to send military forces and use violence to control the situation. The Paharias reacted very favorably to the Civil Disobedience Movement, and some of them moved about appealing to the Santhals and other Paharias to join hands with the freedom fighters.

The 1942 movement also spread to entire Santhal Pargana division, for that matter in Sahibganj on the 11th of August 1942, a general strike was observed. On the 12th of August 1942, a procession was taken out at Godda and soon the entire district was aflame. Thus, the district of Santhal Pargana marched together with other parts of the state in the protracted struggle for the country's freedom, which yielded the result on 15th August 1947 in the form of the end of British domination.

Source courtesy: <https://sahibganj.nic.in/history/>

Cultural Heritage of Sahibganj

When it comes to the cultural heritage of Sahibganj district, there are currently three tribes that reside in the region. They are the Paharia, the Mal Paharia, and the Santhal tribes.

1) Paharia and Mal Paharia Tribes

The word “Paharia” has an etymological significance. It is an Indo-Aryan word which stands for the people residing in hilly or mountainous regions. There are different tribal groups having the tradition of living in hills, mountains and forests.

The Pahari are nearly all Hindus and follow the basic Hindu customs and traditions.

They are a community that claims to be the earliest inhabitants of the region and find mention in Megasthenes’ book as well as Hiuen Tsang’s travelogue.

Unfortunately, they have now been pushed to the edge and are an ecologically and biologically endangered tribe.

The Paharia tribal people practice cultivation. Some of them have even developed expertise as gathers and collectors. Also, some of them have adopted or adapted to, especially in the earlier days, other professions like hunting, fishing, working as laborers etc. They are also adept in basketry. Though in earlier times, the Paharia were nomadic, they later settled down in various areas here. They have also mastered the art of making clothes and fibres. They go on hunting expeditions, practice sharecropping as well as shifting cultivation, live in mud houses, collect firewood from the forest and practice herbal medicine. While the majority of the Paharia tribe practice Hinduism, some have embraced Christianity. Singing Christian religious hymns are in vogue, especially during Christian weddings.



A local wedding beside the river Ganga

Though poverty, under-development and lack of education has deprived them of the benefits of modernization, they celebrate Magahī Parab (festival) with ecstatic joy and vivacious song and dance. Young males mainly perform the Paharia dance. Their dance resembles a "twist" dance. In the older forms of dancing, however, when people had consumed a substantial amount of rice beer, young ladies would also join the dance with increasing zest.

2) Santhal Tribe

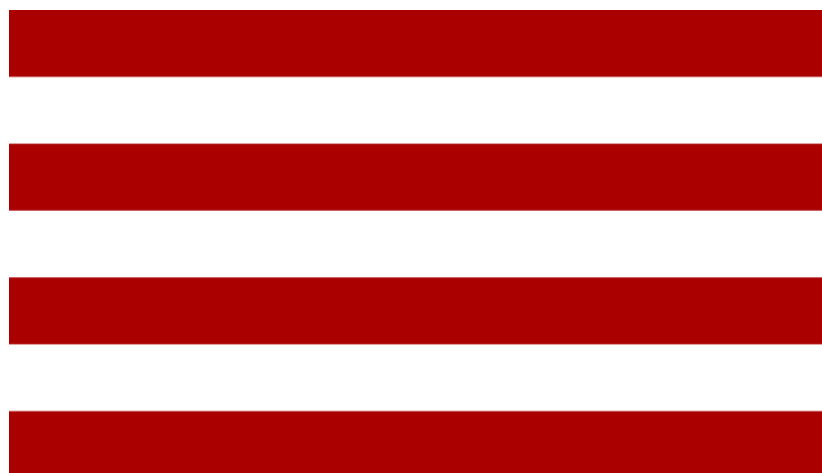


Image Source: <https://jhpolicе.gov.in/about-jharkhand/tribals>

The Santhal are the largest tribal group of Sahibganj, Jharkhand, and India. The Santhals were well-known fighters in the time of the British rule in India (some details in the Santhal rebellion section). People of this community waged war versus Lord Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement in the year 1855. During the later parts of 1850, one of the tribal heroes named Sidhu was able to gather about 10,000 Santhals in order to run a parallel government against the British. The first Santhal leader was Baba Tilka Majhi who raised weapons in the year 1789 against the British.

Celebration of Sarna among the Santhal

Sarna means "grove" and is etymologically related to the name of the sal tree. For Santhali mythological belief, 'Sarna' means 'it is arrow' [Sar- arrow, Na- it is (in feminine gender of Santhali grammar)]. The day-to-day life of the Santhals revolves around the area of the forests in which they live. The Santhals fulfill their basic requirements from plants and trees in the forests. They also engage themselves in fishing, hunting and cultivation in order to sustain their livelihood. People of this tribal community have unique skills in constructing musical equipment, baskets and mats from plants and this talent is passed safely from one generation to the next.



Flag representing the indigenous Sarna religion of the Adivasis

The Santhal tribes follow the religion 'Sarna'. They believe in supernatural beings and ancestral spirits. Santhals do not construct any temples and they worship no idols. Followers of **Sarnaism** believe in worship, and revere a village deity as protector of village, who is known as Gaon khunt, Gram Deoti, Dharmes, Marang Buru, Singbonga, etc. Adherents also believe in worship, and revere Dharti Ayo or Chalapachho Devi, the mother goddess identified as the earth or nature. Thakurjiu is their ancestral deity. Goddesses and gods of Santhals are Jaheraera, Marangburu and Manjhi. They also believe in spirits and ghosts like Lakchera, Kal Sing, Beudarang, etc. Dancing is an integral part of the Santhal way of life and is a part and parcel of any utsav or celebration.

After a hard day's work, the Santhal take rest by enjoying very light music along with dance. The women of this tribal community dress in sarees and they dance in the sequence of a line. The Santhal men play the music with instruments like Tirio, Hotok, Dhodrobanam, Phetbanam, Tamak, Tumdak, Junko and Singa. The Santhal tribes generally celebrate the Karma festival which comes every year in September and October. This festival is celebrated to please the God to bless them with more wealth and decrease their enemies. Some of the other major festivals observed by the Santhal include Baba Bonga, Sahrai, Maghe, Ero, Namah and Asaria. Santhals also enjoy the hunting festival known as Disum Sendra on Baishakhi Purnima.

According to Krishi Vigyan Kendra Agro scientist Dr. Amrit Kumar Jha, in terms of agriculture, the Paharia tribe which are based in the Rajmahal Hills, focus on shifting cultivation on a rotational cycle wherein they clear a certain amount of land and practice the cultivation of Jhum for three years before moving on to a new location. They also focus on growing legumes like barbatti, and makka, on the slopes, in a way that both plants grow close to each other. This is a unique style of agriculture followed by the Paharia tribes which isn't followed anywhere else.



Corn as one of the most grown crops in Sahibganj district

A dietary survey was conducted between August 1986 and July 1987, to investigate the various food ingredients consumed by the two tribes (the Santhal and the Paharia) residing in the villages of Rajmahal hills of Bihar. A total of 651 families of two tribes of Sahibganj (Pakur and Rajmahal sub-divisions) and Godda districts were surveyed. Agriculture and forest products were the principal sources of income and food. Only about 12.6 percent of the Paharia and 28.2 percent Santhal could afford regular meals every day for the whole year. Maize, rice, dry jowar powder and Ghangara were the staple foods of these tribes. Pulses and milk found no place in the diet of the Paharia. About 4.3 per cent Mal, 2.9 percent Kumarbhag, 1.8 per cent Sauria, and 7.2 per cent Santhal ate fish/meat regularly. Toddy and locally distilled wines were regularly consumed by the tribes. The number of cereals, roots/tubers and toddy consumed by the Paharia was greater than that by the Santhal (cereals: 82 and 64.6 percent of the total food consumed by the Paharia and Santhal respectively). Similar amounts of leafy vegetables (5.1% in Santhal and 4.8 to 6.8% among the Paharia) were consumed by these tribes. Slightly higher quantity of non-leafy vegetables was consumed by the Santhal (4.4%) than the Paharia (2.3% to 3.6%). Mean body weight, height, chest circumference, arm circumference and

skinfold thickness etc., of the Paharia were significantly lower than those of the Santhal.

According to the DFO of Sahibganj, Sh. Vikas Paliwal, soil and wetland conservation is also actively done which prevents soil erosion from the banks of the Ganga where people reside and increases the water level as well. In terms of fruit farming, Mango trees and Jamun trees are actively planted here and distributed among the tribal population to sell, which helps them generate more income. Apart from this, trees like Teak, Indian Rosewood and Mahogany are grown.



Teak plantation along the road

Flavours of Sahibganj

Currently, Sahibganj district and Jharkhand's residents comprise mainly the Bengali, Bihari, and Muslim communities, and the tribal population. This presence of diverse communities makes Jharkhandi cuisine vivid and a combination reflecting these various communities in the region. Most of the dishes of Jharkhand are traditional and some are adopted from a mixed culture of the adjoining areas. Every season—mainly winter, summer and rain—brings a range of food to savour.

However, rice, roti, daal, tarkari and sweets are staples for all seasons. The food of Jharkhand is generally very light on the stomach and easy to digest. The native folk of Jharkhand have absorbed this fact very well, as shown by their food habits. One of the most important and famous cuisines of Jharkhand is Litti and Chokha.



Common Bihari delicacy Litti Chokha served with coriander chutney

Among the delicious non-vegetarian Jharkhand delicacies, spicy chicken is popular among a significant section of Jharkhand's population. One can also see a faint influence of food of the Mughals in some varieties of Jharkhandi delicacies.



Popular biryani joint at Rajmahal town, selling traditional Dum Biryani with a flavour of various spices.



Handia, a popular local alcoholic beverage made from rice

Handia is a drink which is prevalent in the state of Jharkhand. It is a rice beer, which is prepared by the local community, from the ranu tablet, which is a combination of

20-25 herbs. It is mixed with boiled rice and left to ferment for a week. It is loved by the people and has lower alcoholic content than the typical country liquors.



Rugra which is also known as the local Mushroom

Rugra is an edible item, which tastes like mushroom and is very delicious to eat. Rugra is basically an indigenous variety of vegetable, rich in protein and minerals and high on calorific value. This is thus a very healthy dish. It is available in abundance during the monsoon season. This dish is preferred by the local people and is high in demand during the peak seasons.



Deep fried Parwal or pointed gourd

Among the other vegetables, parwal or pointed gourd is very commonly used in the daily diet. It is prepared in multiple ways—as a curry and eaten with rice or deep-fried and served in thali and eaten with chapatis. The vegetable is also prepared in the form of sweets where it is filled with sugary, dried whole milk.



Dhuska served in the traditional way

Dhuska is one of the most popular items in Jharkhand and is a part of every household. One's journey to Jharkhand is incomplete without tasting Dhuska. It is usually consumed as a breakfast item and is prepared from rice and lentil batter, which is later fried. It is normally served with traditional ghugni, which is a simple curry made with black chickpeas. Even nowadays in the rural areas, food is served in traditional bowls made from Sal leaves.



Bamboo shoots being used as food

Bamboo shoots are the shoots of the bamboo plants, but they are totally edible and are a part of the staple food of Jharkhand. This shoot, which has a tough exterior, has a faintly sweet flavour and a unique taste. The local people prepare a variety of dishes from the bamboo shoot and mainly use it as a vegetable.



Popular sweet, Mitha Khaja

People of Jharkhand seem to have a fascination for desserts, which would explain the mind-boggling variety of sweets available here. They prepare desserts like halwa, gujia, kheer, but what tops it all is Mitha Khaja. It is an item which is prepared in almost every household and then exchanged with friends and relatives during the festive season. It is basically synonymous with Diwali in the region.



Local delicacy Chamcham

Another sweet that is associated with Sahibganj is Chamcham. It is a traditional Bengali sweet, popular throughout the Indian subcontinent. The sweet comes in a

variety of colours, mainly light pink, light yellow, and white. It is coated with coconut or mawa flakes as a garnish. The history of Porabari chamcham, an oval-shaped brownish variety of chamcham from Porabari in Tangail district of modern day Bangladesh, dates back to the mid-19th century. The modern version of this dish was made by Matilal Gore, based on a sweet dish prepared by his grandfather Raja Ramgore, who was a native of Ballia district in Uttar Pradesh.



Local tea served in cups made from clay

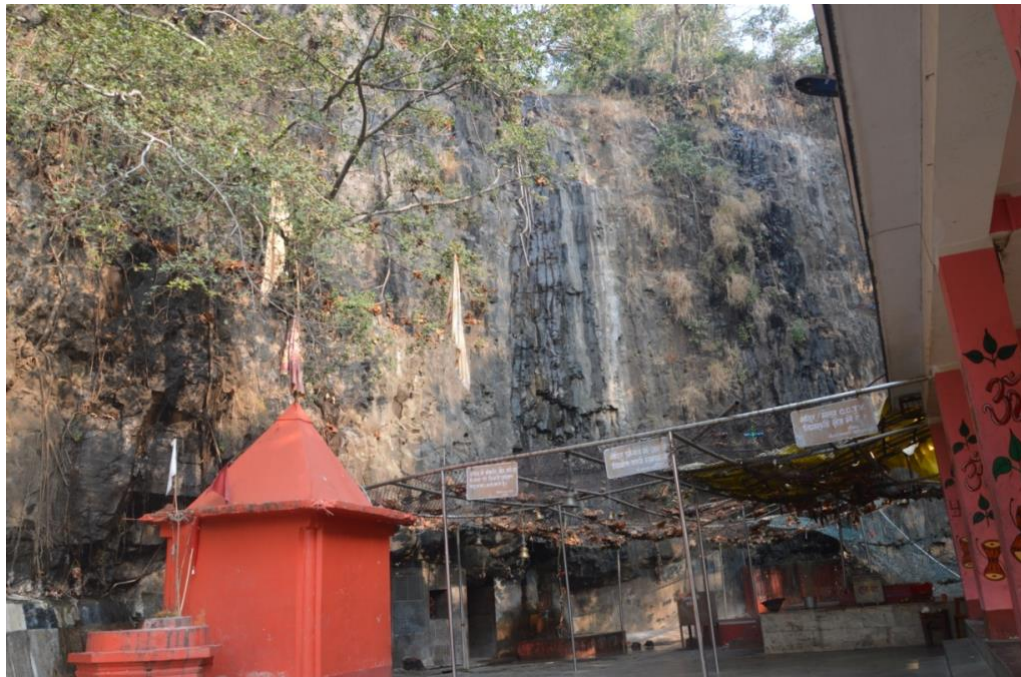
Among beverages, tea is most commonly consumed. At most places, it is relished in clay cups, also called Kullad, which are eco-friendly and commonly used among vendors as they also provide livelihood to local potters.

Places of Worship

The tribal population of Sahibganj is known to rely on natural symbology and invoking the blessings of deities symbolized by the trees, rivers, mountains and even stones. Housed in small temples that are integrated beautifully with the natural surroundings, these local deities act akin to a bridge between ancient beliefs and a contemporary narrative that defines Hinduism amidst the non-tribal people.

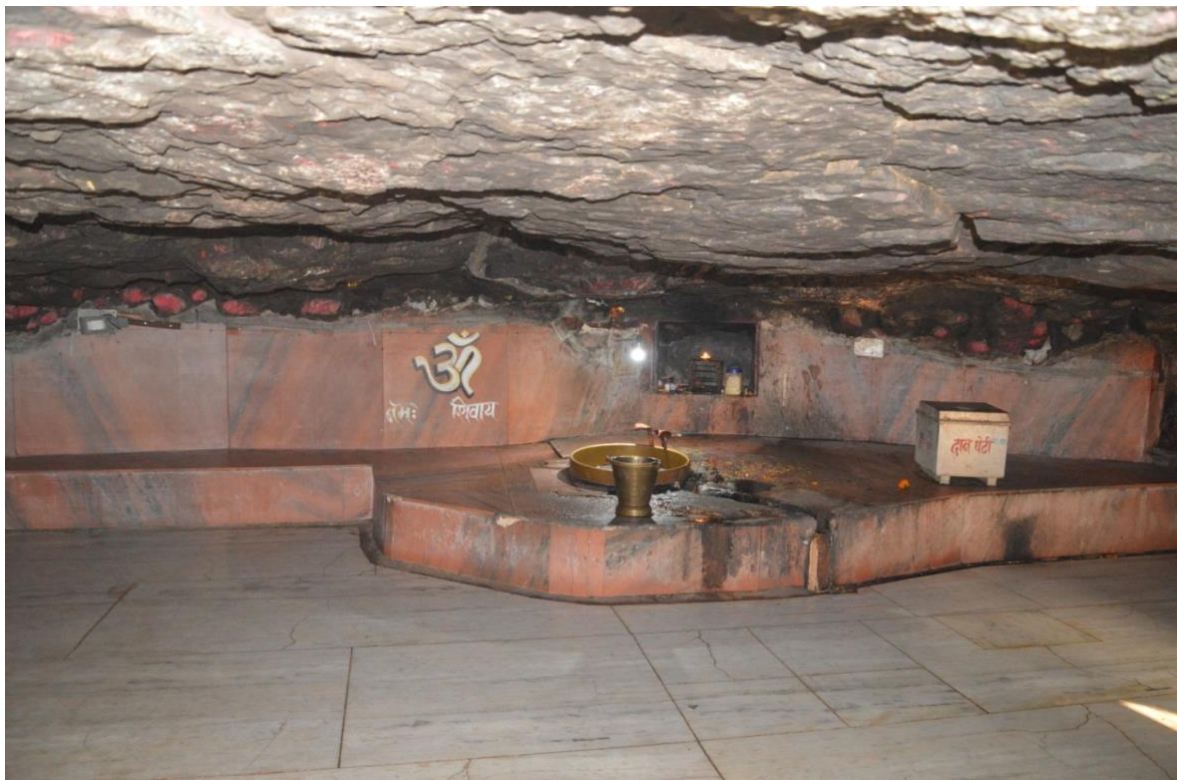
As has been mentioned earlier, the Mal Paharia tribals were the oldest living natives of the areas under the rule of Hindu and Rajput kings such as Raja Man Singh. When the Muslims ousted them from their seat of power, they too built mosques and places of Islamic worship.

Eventually, the British Raj saw the advent of churches when a lot of missionaries were involved in the task of converting the tribal people to Christianity. Therefore, owing to mixed influences, Sahibganj district has a robust amalgamation of varied religious structures.



Shiv Gadhi Temple

The Shiva lingam of Gajeshwar Nath is believed to have been installed by Danavaraja Gajasur. In the *Shiva Purana*, there is a description of a demon named Gajasur, who was the able son of the mighty Mahishasura. For thousands of years, he stood on the strength of the thumb and did fierce penance and received a boon from Lord Shankar. After getting the boon, he became extremely powerful and vicious. Due to his tyranny and fear, the Muni Devtas decided to do something to stop this. The sage munis and deities praised Lord Shankar. Hearing the cry, Lord Shankar decided to intervene, and he killed Gajasur. Even while dying, Gajasur praised Lord Shankar. This pleased Lord Shankar who said that this Shivling established by him would get fame in his name, and people would know it by the name of Gajeshwar Dham.



It is said that when Lord Shankar was riding on Nandi and killing Gajasur, Nandi stood on two legs. The same two footprints of Nandi fell on a rock which is still present and is known as Sivaganga. According to another belief, during the Mahabharata period, Lord Shankar was seen on this Devana mountain.

In the 15th century, this temple was partially seen by the common people. It became famous after King Man Singh worshiped at this temple in the 16th century. Earlier, the way to reach this temple was inaccessible and difficult. The worship was by tribals in these inaccessible hills and they named this temple Shivgadi i.e., Shiva's home. Amar Shahid Siddho, the hero of the Santhal Rebellion – Kanhu, worshiped in this temple. From then on it became a major center of faith for the Santhal.



Baba Gajeshwar Nath Dham "Shivgadi", popularly known as Jharkhand's second Baba Dham (Mini Baba Dham), is a scenic and sacred shrine, amidst the scenic beauty of the place and its waterfalls. There is a Giri cave temple. This temple is located 6 km north of Barhet block under Sahibganj district. This temple of Baba Gajeshwar Nath is situated at the height of the hill, so devotees get a glimpse of the temple after

climbing 195 stairs. Baba's father Pitambari Shivling, located in the cave, keeps continuously dripping water from the upper rocks, which is amazing and unique.

Source: <https://shivgadi.com/>



Kanhaiya Sthan Temple

Kanhaiya Sthan, situated on the banks of the Ganga, 26 km from the district headquarters of Sahibganj, has a name not only within the country but abroad too. It is currently being run by ISKON. Krishna followers consider it to be the Leela place of Lord Krishna. It is said that in ancient times, Lord Krishna gave a vision of his Baal form to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the propagator of Vaishnavism. According to the Hindu scripture *Srichaitanya Charitamrit*, in 1505 AD, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stayed here in order to return to Navdeep, his home in Gaya in Bihar for his parents' paddan. According to the text *Prem Vilas*, in 1505 AD there was a grand temple in which the statue of Radha-Krishna was installed. Lord Shri Krishna appeared to Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the same temple, wearing the peacock crown. Seeing the

child form of Shri Krishna, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu became obsessed and became enamored. It is said that in the Dwapar era even before this, Krishna once came here. According to the scriptures, Lord Krishna was once doing Maharas with the Gopis. During this, there was envy in Radha's mind about the gopis. Shri Krishna learned the thoughts of Radharani's conscience and went to a secret place. Radha got upset by this. After his considerable persuasion, Shri Krishna showed the feeling of love by bringing Radharani to Kanhai theater. Later, this place got the name Kanhaiya Sthan.

Source:

<https://www.jagran.com/jharkhand/sahibganj-kanhaiya-place-favorite-place-of-foreign-tourists-19615500.html>



Wall murals at Kanhaiya Sthan.



Temple at Moti Jharna

Moti Jharna is a picturesque waterfall lying in the Taljhari block of Sahibganj. Since it is atop the Rajmahal hills, it overlooks the Ganga. There is a Shiv Temple at the site. According to locals, this place has been known for centuries and many Hindu priests chose this serene place as a place for meditation.

Bindudham

Bindudham, also known as Binduwasni Mandir, is a Hindu temple, located at Barharwa in Sahibganj district, dedicated to the Maha Durga (Kali), Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati (Tridevi) in the form of Shaktipeeth. Binduwasni Mandir is at the top of the Binduwasni hill. The main temple has a statue of the Hindu god Surya (Sun). He is seated in a seven horsed Rath (an old Indian royal

horse cart). In another part of Binduwasni hill, a large 35-foot statue of Hanuman stands, where people can see his sacred footprints. A Rama temple is under construction now at the same site.

Bindudham temple was an ancient temple, but with time, it lost its popularity. Swami Hariharanand Giri, popularly known as Pahari Baba, realized this ancient temple's importance. It is thanks to the work and direction of Pahari Baba that this Bindudham, Barharwa, has again gained its prestige and heritage. Binduwasni Temple (the temple of Tridevi) is related to the story of the Goddess Sati.



Shiva carrying the corpse of Sati

Three sacred blood drops of Sati are placed in the form of Shakti Peeth; this is why people call Sati Maa Binduwasni and the place Bindudham, i.e. a place of Adi Parashakti (Divine Mother) in the form of a Bindu (point). In metaphysical terms, Bindu is considered the point where creation begins and the many become the unity. It is also described as "the sacred symbol of the cosmos in its unmanifested state".

Source <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bindudham>

Some of the other places of worship observed in the study area are as follows:



Maa Waisi Temple, Sahibganj



Maa Bhavani Parvati Temple on banks of the river Ganga in old Sahibganj town



Mukteshwar Nath Dham, Bijli Ghat, Sahibganj





Mosque in Barharwa



Church in Brindabon



Missionary chapel in Mandro

Festivals and Celebration of Life



Image Source: <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/791296597003851738/?hcb=1>

Sarhul is celebrated during the spring season when the saal trees get new flowers on their branches. It involves the worship of the village deity who is considered the protector of the tribes. People sing and dance with the appearance of new flowers and deities are worshiped with saal flowers. The village priest or Pahan fasts for a couple of days. In the early morning he takes a bath and puts on a new dhoti made of virgin cotton (kachhadhaga). The previous evening, the Pahan takes three new earthen pots and fills them with fresh water; the next morning he observes the water level inside. If the water level decreases, he predicts that there would be famine or less rain, and if the water level is normal, that is the signal of a good rain. Before pooja starts, the wife of the Pahan washes his feet and gets blessings from him. At the pooja, Pahan offers three young roosters of different colours: one for the almighty god, another for the village deities and the third for the ancestors. Traditional drums Dhol, Nagara and Turhi players keep drumming and playing along with Pahan chanting prayers to deities. After the pooja ends, boys carry the Pahan on their shoulders and girls dancing ahead take him to his house where his wife welcomes him by washing his feet. The Pahan offers saal flowers to his wife and the villagers as they represent brotherhood and friendship. He also puts saal flowers on every house's roof, which is called "phoolkhonsi". At the same time, prasad, a rice

made beer known as Handia, is distributed amongst the villagers. And the whole village celebrates with singing and dancing during this festival of Sarhul.



Image Source: <https://www.kudumi.org/karam-festival-in-jharkhand/?hcb=1>

The **Karam** festival is a worship of Karamdevta, the god of power, youth and youthfulness. Karam is held in the month of Bhadra. Groups of young villagers go to the jungle and collect wood, fruits and flowers. These are required during the Puja of Karam God. During this period, people sing and dance in groups and the entire valley seems to be dancing with the drumbeats.

At the same time, unmarried tribal girls celebrate the **Jawa** festival, which has its own types of songs and dance. This is held mainly for the expectation of good fertility and better households. The unmarried girls decorate a small basket with germinating seeds. It is believed that the worship for good germination of the grains would increase fertility. The girls offer green melons to the Karam deity as a symbol of 'son,' which reveals the primitive expectation of human beings (i.e., foodgrains and children). The entire tribal area of Jharkhand celebrates with gusto.

Tusu is a harvest festival held during the winter season on the last day of Paush month. It is also for unmarried girls, wherein they decorate a wooden/bamboo frame with coloured paper and then gift it to the nearby hilly river.



Local woman preparing bamboo products for the festivities

Although there is no documented history available on this festival, it has a huge collection of scintillating songs full of life. These songs reflect the simplicity and innocence of the tribal people.



Image Source: <https://www.jhpolice.gov.in/about-jharkhand/festivals?hcb=1>

Hal Punhya is a festival which begins with the onset of winter. The first day of Magh month, known as "Akhain Jatra" or "Hal Punhya", is considered as the beginning of the ploughing season. In order to symbolize this auspicious morning, two and half circles of agricultural land are ploughed on this day as a symbol of good fortune.



Bhagta Parab is the festival that comes between the period of spring and summer and is celebrated by the tribals. It is best known as the worship of Budha Baba. People fast during the day and carry the Pahan or priest, to the tribal mandir known

as Sarana Mandir. The Pahan, sometimes called Laya, bathes, gets out of the pond, the devotees make a chain, locking their thighs with each other and come forward to offer their bare chest to Laya for a walk over. After worship in the evening, devotees take part in the dynamic and vigorous Chhau dance with lots of gymnastic actions and masks. The next day is full of primitive sports of bravery. The devotees pierce hooks on the skin and get tied at one end of a long horizontal wooden pole, which is hanging on the top of a vertical Shal wood pole. The height of this goes up to 40 feet approximately. The other end of the pole, which is connected with a rope, is pulled around the pole by the people and the tied devotee displays the breath-taking and astonishing dance in the sky.

Rohini is perhaps the oldest known festival of Jharkhand. It is a festival of sowing seeds in the field. Farmers start sowing seeds from this day onward but there is no dance or song like other tribal festivals, just a few rituals. There are some other festivals like Rajsawala, Ambavati and Chitgomha, which are also celebrated along with Rohini.



Bandana is one of the most famous festivals celebrated during the month of Kartik (Kartik Amavasya). This festival is mainly for the animals. Tribals are very close to nature, animals, and their pets. In this festival, people wash, clean, paint, decorate, feed and put ornaments on their cows and bulls. The song dedicated for this festival is called Ohira, which is an acknowledgement of the animal's contribution to their day-to-day life. The belief behind this festival is that animals are an integral part of life and have souls as human beings do. Ironically, the most exciting day of the Bandana week is the last day. Closed bulls and buffaloes are chained to a strong pole and they are struck with a dry animal hide. The angry animals hit the dry skin with their horns and the crowd enjoys it. Generally, the colour used for decorating animals is natural colours and the artwork is typically representative of folk art.



Jani Shikaar is a festival held once every 12 years where the womenfolk wear male attire and dressed up as men, go hunting in the forest. Jani Shikaar is performed in

memory of the Kurukh womenfolk who drove away the Mohammedans in Roh-tas-garh.



Chhath is an ancient Hindu festival and perhaps the only Vedic festival dedicated to the Hindu Sun god, Surya, also known as **Surya Shashti**. Chhath Puja is performed in order to thank Lord Surya for sustaining life on earth and to request the granting of certain wishes. The Sun, considered the god of energy and of life-force, is worshiped during the Chhath festival to promote well-being, prosperity and progress. In Hinduism, Sun worship is believed to help cure a variety of diseases, including leprosy, and helps ensure the longevity and prosperity of family members, friends, and elders.

Trade via the Ganga



Corn being transported from one shore of Ganga to another



The River Ganga is a treasure trove of rich alluvial soil and an unrelenting supply of fresh water that sustains a series of livelihoods for the people inhabiting its banks.

From bamboo-craft to fishing, from ferrying goods to clay and pottery-based cottage industries, these small-scale ventures are the lifeline that sustain the local population of Sahibganj and areas lying in its vicinity.



Abundant bamboo growth in the region makes way for handicraft MSMEs to flourish. Bamboo farms and crafts are very popular in Sahibganj and other parts of Jharkhand as well. Some of the special types of bamboo like Bambusa Tulda, Bambusa Nutans and Bambusa Balcooa (Female bamboo), which are grown here, are also in high demand worldwide. Bamboo's abundance promises great potential for the people in terms of employment. Also, it can be utilized in various ways ranging from agriculture to alternative sources of energy.



Soil extracted from the Ganga wetlands is good for the pottery industry. They are extracted and molded into various shapes and then put into a clay furnace to get baked before being finished and sold. The above is a common practice for communities residing on the banks of the river in Old Sahibganj.





Fishing is a very common activity in the region. Seen in the image is Ghinna jali, primarily used to catch prawns and small sized fish



Jetties and wooden boats mainly used to ferry people and local goods



Industries in Sahibganj

The traditional cottage and village industries of the locals constitute agriculture, animal rearing, tasar silk, boat-making, village blacksmithing, carpentry, handloom weaving, ropemaking, bidi-making, earthenware, and stoneware.

There is no large-scale industry in the area mainly due to a lack of infrastructural support. A number of small-scale industries have been set up in the district.



Stone quarry in Sahibganj next to Teligarhi Fort



Brick kiln on the outskirts of Sahibganj Town

Most of these are based on mining and related quarrying activities. There is a good potential for setting up china clay industries.

Sahibganj is by far the most important place for trade and commerce in the district. Wholesale trading in food grains is mostly carried out in Sahibganj. The main imports of the districts are linseed, mustard seed, tobacco, raw cotton, sugar, refined and unrefined molasses, salt, kerosene oil, coal, coke, gunny bags, gram, wheat and maize, whilst main exports are paddy, jawar, sabai grass, stone chips, hides, fibers, kaolin and bentonite. Kaoline and bentonite of Sahibganj are of superior quality and they are also exported to South Asian countries.

When it comes to the manufacturing sector, Sahibganj district contains approximately 80 mines and 150 crushers, which operate with the support of a huge labour force. Black stones of Sahibganj are of superior quality and they are also exported to South Asian countries. Sahibganj district also contains some 100 mines and 200 pottery and clay washing industries. Poultry farming, piggery, animal husbandry and fisheries also provide supplementary income.



Clay idol-making is also one of the main industries in Sahibganj as it helps generate significant revenue for the people in the district.

Fishing in the Ganga

The extensive bed of the Ganga at Sahibganj and Rajmahal offers one of the best fields in the state for collection of fish spawn and fishing. The spawn of Rohu, Katla, Mirga, Catfish and Hilsa and a few others are collected from this region.



Local fishermen bring fish from the Ganga every morning



Ghinna net for catching small fish and prawns



Mahajaal used for catching medium and large sized fish

When it comes to fishing in the Ganga, it is free fishing since before bifurcation of Bihar and Jharkhand. Areas near the banks of the river Ganga, commonly known

as Kol-Dhab, accommodate fishermen cooperative societies by the Fisheries Department.

Sahibganj district is also famous for spotting Gangetic dolphins which are mostly found near the Rajmahal area. With declining population of dolphins, the government has imposed a strict ban on fishing of dolphins, also imposing heavy fines and jail time for violators.

According to the fisheries department, total fish production of Ganga in 2019-20 was 12500 MT and total seed production in 2019-20 was 63.45Cr.

Many different types of fish can be found in the Sahibganj region of the Ganga. Primarily they can be classified into two: Indian Carb and Chinese Carb fish. Further, Indian Carb variety are as follows: Rohu, Katla and Mirgal. Chinese carb fish varieties as follows: Silver Carb, Grass Carb and Common Carb. Chinese Carb fish are found in fairly high quantities.

There are a few varieties of Catfish which are: Fankas, Tilapia, Singhi and Mangur. Various varieties of wild fish are also found in the region which are as follows: Reba, Bara, Pothia, Soura, Guari, Reetha, Palwa, Cheetal, and Buna.

Different sizes of prawns are also found in this belt of the Ganga.

Various types of fishing gears are used which are designed to suit the local conditions such as depth of water, prevalent water current and so on. Hook and line were found to be the main gear in the uppermost stretch where no organised fishery was observed. In the middle stretch, gill nets and drag nets are widely operated, besides hook and line, cast net and traps. In the lower stretch of the Ganga, various types of gill nets (chandijal, phansijal), drag net, seine net (kochal, konajal, berjal, chatberjal) dip or lift net (gara basal; nauka basal), purse net (sanglajal) are the main gear. Other gears viz., falling net (cast net), scoop net, hook and line and traps are also used in this stretch.



Boat maintenance site at Sakri Guli

The fishing boats used throughout the river are mostly indigenous, non-mechanized and locally built, except for mechanized boats in a few stretches.



Boats made from steel sheets called Dengi in local language



Jetty boats from Bengal travel up to Bihar and are often seen at Sahibganj

Most boats and vessels have been designed to suit local conditions. The simplest and most primitive types of boats used for fishing in the river are the rafts and dongas, operated in calm waters. In the larger rivers and estuaries subject to strong current and tidal movements, sturdier plank-built boats are used. The boats operated in the river Ganga are generally made of wood or tin (CIFRI, 2006). The highest percentage of crafts are owned under open access followed by private and co-operatives. The area of operation is limited for the co-operative and private regimes, while it is not so for open access. To avail this facility of fishing anywhere, the fishermen prefer to have their own basic infrastructural backup. It accords them freedom for fishing and augments returns. In case of co-operatives, the member fishermen have a limited area of operation and have greater association, thus preferring to share the requisites, particularly the boats.



Mid-sized wooden boat anchored in Sakri guli, waiting to be loaded

Habitation along the Ghats



Daily activities of the villagers on the newly constructed banks of the Ganga

Along the banks of the Ganga, over 29 cities, 70 towns and thousands of villages are situated. Nearly all of their sewage, over 1.3 billion liters per day, goes directly into the river, along with thousands of animal carcasses, mainly cattle. Another 260 million litres of industrial waste is added to this by hundreds of factories along the riverbanks. Municipal sewage constitutes 80 per cent by volume of the total waste dumped into the Ganga, and industries contribute about 15 percent. The majority of the pollution in the Ganga is organic waste, sewage, trash, food, and human and animal remains. Over the past century, city population along the Ganga has grown at a tremendous rate, while waste-control infrastructure has remained relatively unchanged. The industrial pollutants also contaminate the Ganga to a great extent. The major polluting industries are the leather industries, pharmaceutical companies, electronics plants, textile and paper industries, tanneries, fertilizer manufacturers and oil refineries which discharge effluent into the river.

Ecological trail

In September 2020, geologists discovered fossilised leaves, assessed to be around 150-200 million years of age, in Jharkhand's Sahibganj region. A couple of 20 cm by 5 cm fossilised leaves of genus *Ptilophyllum* have been found in Dudhkol mountain in Taljhari area and further excavation is underway. The project is being directed in tandem with the National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow, under the Department of Science and Technology of the Union government. Such leaves were devoured by herbivorous dinosaurs. Littler fossils from Upper Jurassic to Cretaceous period were earlier found in the area.



Marked and identified fossils to be displayed at the Mandro Fossil Park



Under construction Fossil Park

The Jharkhand government has sanctioned Rs 11 crore for setting up a fossil park in Sahibganj and released nearly Rs 4 crore in 2018-19 for the park at Mandro. Rajmahal hills, located in Santhal Pargana, are known for the rich fossils that attract geologists and paleo-botanists from across the world. Most of these are found in Mandro area, which is why it is the ideal spot for the park to be set up there. Interestingly, ferns, ginkgoes and some conifers flourished during the Jurassic Period. Petrified wood is a special type of fossilized remains of terrestrial vegetation.

Source courtesy:

<https://www.indiatimes.com/trending/environment/fossilised-leaves-jurassic-period-jharkhand-523873.htm>

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