

Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Kasganj District

Intangible Cultural Heritage



INTACH

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Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

National Mission for Clean Ganga
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Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation
Government of India



 Indian
National Trust
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Azaadi Ke Rang Bharatiya Sanskriti Ke Sang

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Figure 2. A beautiful representation of Lord Vishnu's third Avatar - Lord Varaha with Goddess Lakshmi, Image Source: Image extracted from a book titled Aditirth: Sukar Kshetra by Dr. Radhakrishan Dixit and Dr. Mitlesh Pandya

Introduction

Kasganj is one of the 71 districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The place is well known for its religious and historical importance. It is believed that this district is the holy place of reincarnation of Lord Vishnu in the Varaha avatar. Lord Varaha is a zoomorphic manifestation of Vishnu in the form of a boar who is regarded as the third avatar in the Dashavatar (ten principal avatars of Lord Vishnu). Therefore, the district celebrates 'Varaha Jayanti' very elaborately. Lord Varaha is primarily associated with the legend of lifting the earth out of cosmic waters.

The district 'Kasganj' is popularly known by this name due to the prime reason for its establishment in a thick forest of 'Kans' or Catkins. Kasganj district was established on April 17th, 2008 by dividing the Etah district. However, Etah and Kasganj districts are part of the Aligarh division. Etah was sanctioned as one of the districts of Uttar Pradesh in 1854 which was much before the sanction of Kasganj as a district. This district of Kasganj is also known as Kanshi Ram Nagar. Kasganj lies in the historical region of Braj and it reflects Braj heritage and culture. Nadrai, Soron and Patiyali come under the category of popular areas of Kasganj.



Figure 3. A representation of Braj culture and heritage, Image Source : [abfrl.com](https://www.abfrl.com/blog/holi-celebrations-at-braj-barsana-and-nandgaon-the-land-of-radha-krishna-by-navaldeep-thareja/)
<https://www.abfrl.com/blog/holi-celebrations-at-braj-barsana-and-nandgaon-the-land-of-radha-krishna-by-navaldeep-thareja/>



Figure 4 A view at Kasganj district, Image Source : [indiarailinfo.com](https://st2.indiarailinfo.com/kjfdsuiemjvcya1/0/7/5/9/4188759/0/201812291727371485524.jpg)
<https://st2.indiarailinfo.com/kjfdsuiemjvcya1/0/7/5/9/4188759/0/201812291727371485524.jpg>

***Kasganj** was also called as ‘**Tanay**’ and ‘**Khasganj**’ during Mughal and British period. The district was later named as **Kanshiram Nagar** after a politician, Kanshi Ram (proposed by Mayawati, then CM of Uttar Pradesh and President of BSP). A section of lawyers demonstrated the name of the district to be in honour of **Sant Tulsidas** who was born in this district. This place was known as **Soron (Shukar Kshetra)**. The district was returned to its original name in 2012.*

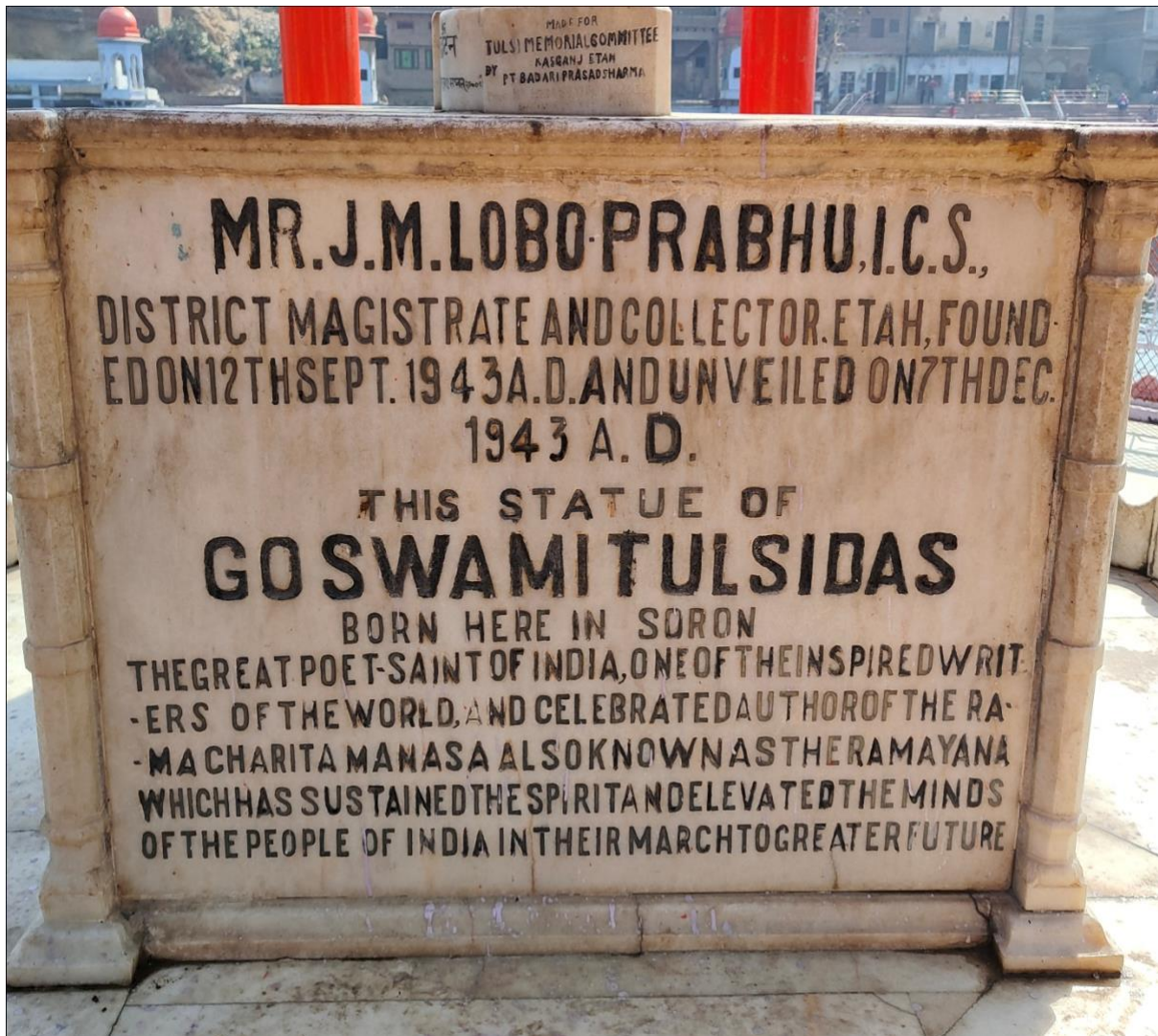


Figure 6. Information about the statue of Tulsidas at Kasganj, Image Source: INTACH Team



Figure 7. Kali river, Image Source: [mahanandariver.org](https://d3cm4d6rq8ed33.cloudfront.net/media/navpravartakfiles/17/1555e635-bbb6-4cd0-897b-843cc1e3e1c2.jpg)
<https://d3cm4d6rq8ed33.cloudfront.net/media/navpravartakfiles/17/1555e635-bbb6-4cd0-897b-843cc1e3e1c2.jpg>

This town is in the proximity of the Himalayan foothills and situated on the banks of river Kali. It is located in the doab region, which is between the holy rivers Ganges and Yamuna. The alluvium soil makes the land one of the most fertile regions for agriculture. Consequently, a majority of the population from Kasganj and the surrounding villages depend on agriculture and related economic activities. The area of Kasganj district is 1993.08 sq. km. It is at 68th place in Uttar Pradesh in terms of the area of the district. Among the total area, the rural area covers 1918.2 sq. km and the urban recorded 75.6 sq. km. There are 715 villages. The district is divided into three tehsils namely Kasganj, Sahawar and Patiyali which are further divided into seven blocks including Sahawar, Kasganj, Amanpur, Soron, Sidhpura and Ganj Dundwar.



Figure 8. William Wilson Hunter, Image Source: [wikipedia.org](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/8c/Sir_William_Wilson_Hunter_%281840-1900%29.png/220px-Sir_William_Wilson_Hunter_%281840-1900%29.png)
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/8c/Sir_William_Wilson_Hunter_%281840-1900%29.png/220px-Sir_William_Wilson_Hunter_%281840-1900%29.png

According to the *'Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XV' (1908)* by William Wilson Hunter, “Kasganj came in the hands of James V. Gardner (who was in the employ of the Marathas and later in the British service) died in here in Chhaoni, Kasganj”. The cultural integrity of Hindu-Muslim in this region is a noteworthy phenomenon as there is a long history of togetherness in both the communities living with love and respect for each other. Christians and Sikhs also form an indispensable part of the society of this district. Kasganj has had a well-established rail network since the time of British rule. It lies on a tri-junction and it is connected to Mathura, Kanpur and Bareilly through a rail network in three different directions. Trains to far away cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Kamakhya etc. are easily available. The district headquarter, Kasganj is very well connected by Grand Trunk (G.T.) road. The district is surrounded by Farukhabad in the east, Aligarh in the west, Etah district in the north and Badaun in the south.

Gross district domestic productivity in Kasganj largely depends upon agriculture and animal husbandry, forestry and logging, transportation, mining and quarrying and other manufacturing industries.

The district is situated in the western part of the state. It lies in the central fragment of the Ganga and Yamuna doab and is bounded on the northeast side by the river Ganga that separates it from the Budaun district. The drainage system of the district is controlled by the river Ganga and its tributaries, namely river Kali and Burhi Ganga. The river Kali is perennial and the remaining tributaries are ephemeral.

Soron, a small town located only 15 km away from Kasganj attracts a lot of devotees and followers, mostly coming from Rajasthan. The town is also known by the name “Soranj” and its exclusivity lies in its religious significance.

The construction of the road bridge on the 'Ganga Ji' has made the communication of Kasganj with Budaun and Bareilly side very convenient.

A village named Atranjikhera is located in the vicinity of Kasganj. At this place, Lord Gautam Buddha celebrated his anniversary. This place is famous among Buddhists for its historical importance. In the 20th century, when excavation expeditions began, it was revealed that this site is important from the perspective of heritage and was occupied from 1200 B.C. to 300 B.C.

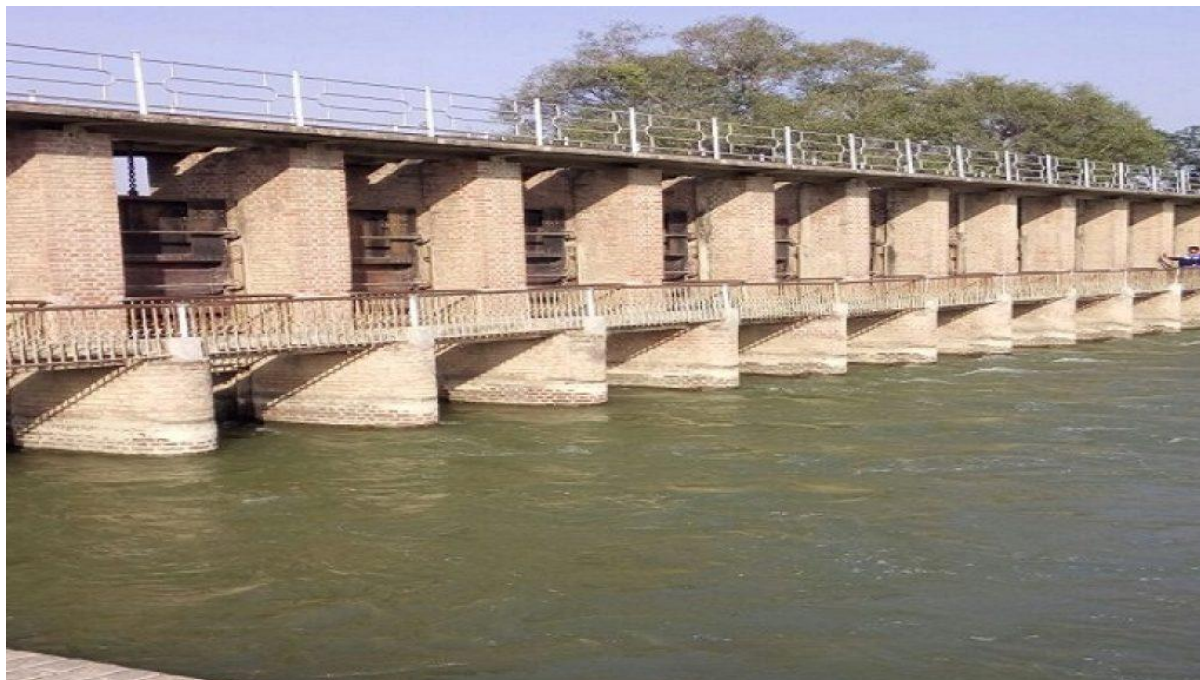


Figure 9. Nadrai Pul/Bridge at Kasganj, Image Source : [kasganj.nic.in
https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3a597e50502f5ff68e3e25b9114205d4a/uploads/bfi_thumb/2018062768-1-olwb0jqdw9giw8l16bt5dc3h53wqssfjrinngjatfu.jpg](https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3a597e50502f5ff68e3e25b9114205d4a/uploads/bfi_thumb/2018062768-1-olwb0jqdw9giw8l16bt5dc3h53wqssfjrinngjatfu.jpg)

Nadrai Bridge, also known as Jhaal Bridge is constructed on the Ganga canal and Kali River. It was constructed from 1853 to 1889. The length of the bridge is 346 metres and its discharge

capacity is 7095 cusecs (as per the official website of Kasganj district <https://kasganj.nic.in/>). Students from different universities of Aligarh and Agra come to study the architecture of this bridge. In addition to this, one of the famous temples of Chamunda Devi is located in this region where devotees come in huge numbers to visit during the festival of Navratri.



Figure 10. Chamunda Devi Temple, Image Source : kasganj.nic.in

Demography

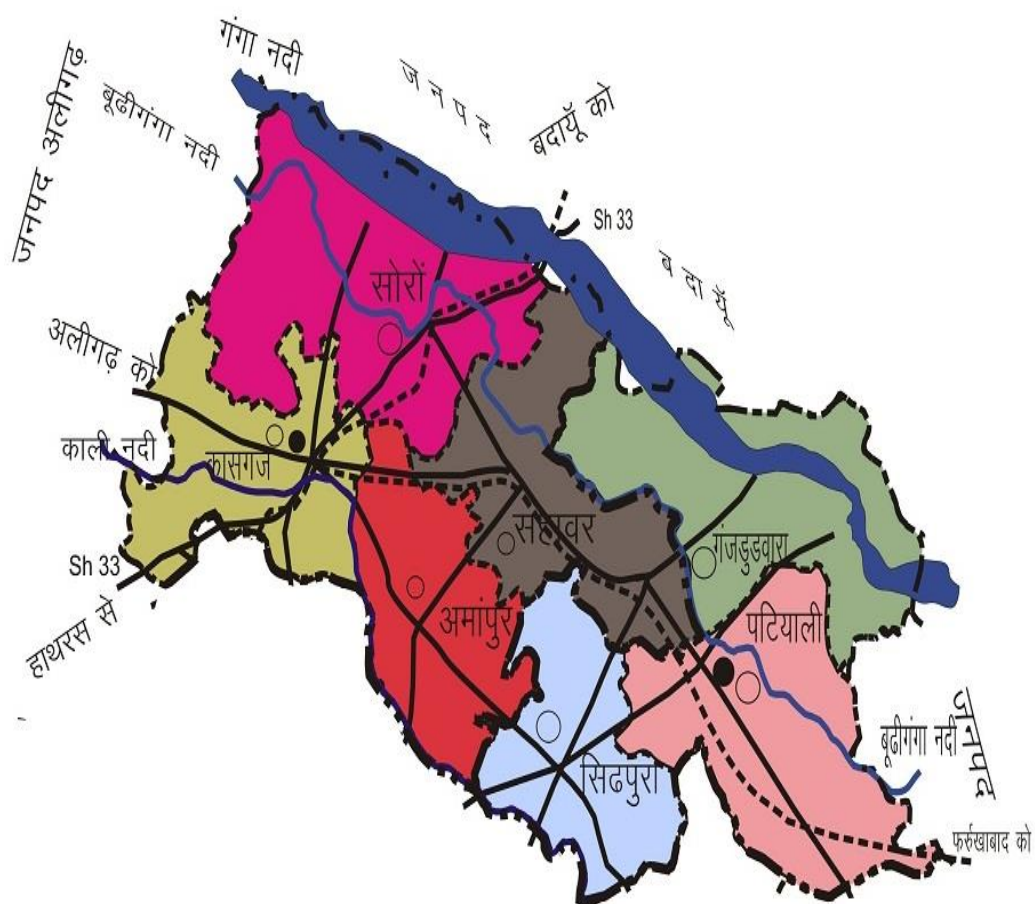


Figure 11. Kasganj Map, Image Source: Official website of district Kasganj
<https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3a597e50502f5ff68e3e25b9114205d4a/uploads/2018/02/2018021684.jp>

Kasganj is one of the districts where interwoven culture of Muslim and Hindu communities can be witnessed. According to the data from the 2011 Census, Kasganj has a population of 14,38,156 (as per the 2011 Census). The literacy rate was 61.2 per cent. The religions that have prospered here are Hindu, Islam, Sikh, Buddhism and Christianity. Kasganj is strategically located and is well-connected by road and railway network. In addition to this, the economy of the region is based on agriculture and Rabi crops are considered to be the staple crops of this area. There are 389 Gram panchayats and 715 Revenue villages in the district. In the urban area, there are 10 statutory towns and 01 census town. Statutory towns comprise 03 Nagar Pallika Parishad and 07 Nagar Panchayats.

District Highlights as per 2011 Census:

1. This district ranks at the 64th place in terms of population size in the state.
2. Kasganj has a population density of 735 persons per square kilometre which is less than the state average of 829 persons per square kilometre.
3. This district is placed at the 50th position in terms of sex ratio (880) which is lower than the state average of 912 females per thousand males.
4. Kanshiram Nagar district ranks 60th in literacy with 61.0 percent which is lower than the state average of 67.7 percent.
5. There are only 65 uninhabited villages out of a total of 715 villages in the district.
6. Decadal growth rate of the district is 16.9 percent which is lower than the state average of 20.2 percent.
7. Patiyali tehsil has the highest number of inhabited villages which stands at 258 while Sahawar tehsil has the lowest number (168) of inhabited villages.
8. Kasganj has been created after the 2001 census by splitting of district Etah. The district has 11 towns out of which 10 are statutory and 1 is a census town. One new tehsil Sahawar has been added after the creation of the district.
9. There are 237,903 households in the district accounting for 0.7 percent of the total households in the state. The average size of households in the district is 6.0 persons.

Geography

Kasganj can be counted as a religious place that is situated on the western side of Uttar Pradesh. This region geographically lies in the central part of Ganga and Yamuna doab which makes this region most fertile. Hence, a large number of surrounding villages depend upon agriculture as their economic activity. This district is bounded on the northeast side by the river Ganga that separates it from the Budaun district. It has an average elevation of 177 metres and is located on the banks of the Kali River. Kasganj is located at 27.82°N latitude 78.65°E longitude. This district is in proximity to the Himalayan foothills. During the Harshavardhana period in the ancient era, this district used to be an economic hub of the region. It is at the intersection of important caravan routes.



Figure 12. Kali Nadi (river), Image Source: INTACH Team



Figure 13. Map of District Kasganj, Image Source: www.mapsofindia.com

The river Ganga is the main river of the district and its tributaries are the river "Kali" and the river "Bhuri Ganga". These rivers play a vital role in the deposition of sediments. The topography of Kasganj is mainly plain. There are geomorphic units into which Kasganj may be divided, like, flood plain, younger Alluvium plain and older alluvium plain. The soil of this district is good for agriculture and consists of sand, clay and pebbles (kankar).

Historical Significance and a Journey from Ancient to Modern

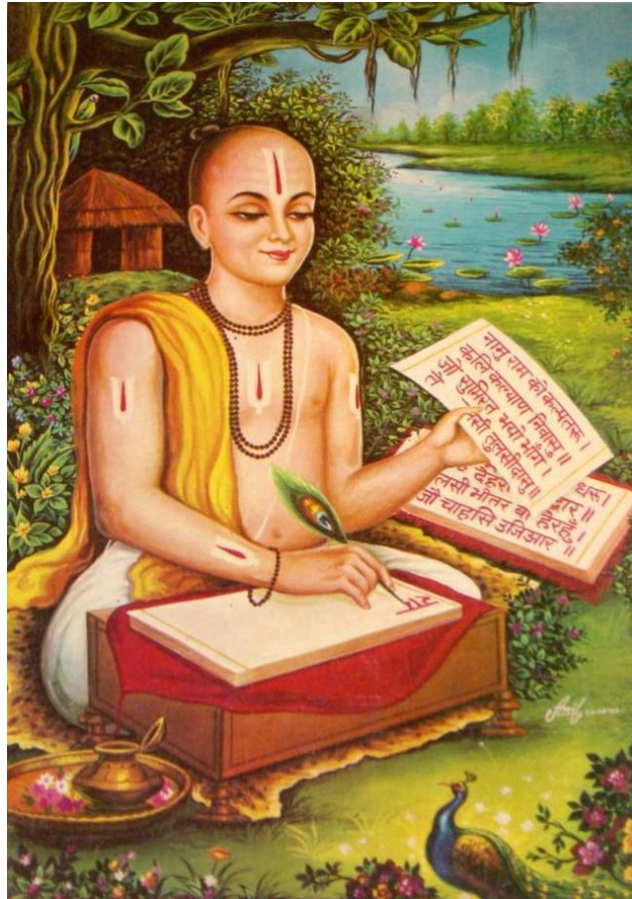


Figure 14. Goswami Tulsidas, a Hindu saint, Image Source: [wikipedia.org
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/Tulsidas_composing_his_famous_Avadhi_Ramcharitmanas.jpg/640px-Tulsidas_composing_his_famous_Avadhi_Ramcharitmanas.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/Tulsidas_composing_his_famous_Avadhi_Ramcharitmanas.jpg/640px-Tulsidas_composing_his_famous_Avadhi_Ramcharitmanas.jpg)

Kasganj, the birthplace of Tulsidas, lies in the historical region of Braj. It was known as "Khasganj" during the Mughal and British periods. Kasganj is situated at the strategic location of the Indo-Gangetic plain since ancient times. Even the region is mentioned for its military and political vicissitudes of the ancient kingdom in mythical stories of the Mahabharata period. According to the mythological stories, it is believed that the demon Hiranyakashipu stole the earth and hid it in the Kund of Soron. The third incarnation of Lord Varaha killed the demon and restored the earth to its original place. Consequently, Soron celebrates the victory of good over evil to date.



Figure 15. Tulsi Smarak at Shukar Kshetra, Image Source: INTACH Team



Figure 16. Tulsi Smarak at Shukarshetra, Image Source: INTACH Team



Figure 17. Architectural Heritage at Tulsi Smarak at Shukarshetra, Image Source: INTACH Team

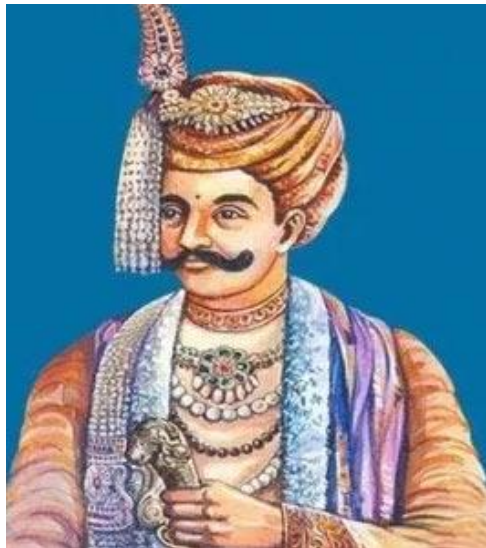


Figure 18. King Harshavardhan, Image
Source : currentgk.wordpress.com
<https://currentgk.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/harshavardhana-king.jpg>

This district was also ruled by the mighty king Harshavardhana. The interesting accounts of 7th century Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang (Xuan Zang) also sheds light on Kasganj as he passed through this region.

There is a village called "Atranjikhhera" in the vicinity of Kasganj. Lord Gautama Buddha is said to have kept his anniversary in this village. The place is revered as a holy pilgrim place for the

Buddhists. Excavations that took place in the 20th century have brought various artifacts and ruined structures into the limelight reflecting the

historical significance of this region. Another village near Kasganj named as Jakhera is a major archaeological site that reveals Jakhera as part of the painted grey ware culture and Northern black polished ware culture of ancient India. Currently, research is undertaken on these artifacts. This shows that Kasganj has a rich history, both in terms of tangible and intangible heritage since the bygone eras of ancient and medieval times.



Figure 19. An ancient statue of Devi found at Yogeshwar mandir, Image Source: Image extracted from a book titled Aditirth: Sukar Kshetra by Dr. Radhakrishan Dixit and Dr. Mitlesh Pandya

At Kasganj, there are various ancient sculptures which belong to different periods of history. The knowledge of the ancient era is also well captured through the existing historical sculptures, idols, and artifacts.

Kasganj was established by Nawab Yaqoot Ali Khan, a successor from the family of Nawabs of Farrukhabad. The city was also called Yaqoot Ganj in the early 16th century. Inscriptions regarding its establishment are still visible in the Jama Masjid of the city. According to the locals, the well-conserved building of Tehsil Road was once the residence of Nawab Yaqoot Ali Khan until it came into the hands of the British after the fall of Awadh. It is also believed that this place was ruled by Kunwar Bhartendra Singh Jain, the only Zamindars of the city.

Kasganj represented a centre point between various small, ancient cities of the undivided district Etah like Bilram, Marehra, Etah, Saket, Atranjikhhera and Aligarh. Kasganj is a city of rich cultural importance. This region is at the junction of east, west and south Uttar Pradesh which is well known for the language, food and traditional dresses of the people.

According to the 'Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol XV' (1908) by William Wilson Hunter, 'Kasganj' was ruled by James V. Gardner. James V Gardner was initially employed by the Marathas but later he was also employed in the British service. His father William Linnaeus Gardner was also stationed at this place. William Gardner also built his estate in Kasganj after retiring from the army. He died in Kasganj in the year 1835 as per different historical sources.

Archaeological Importance: Inscriptions, Numismatic sources and Sculptures

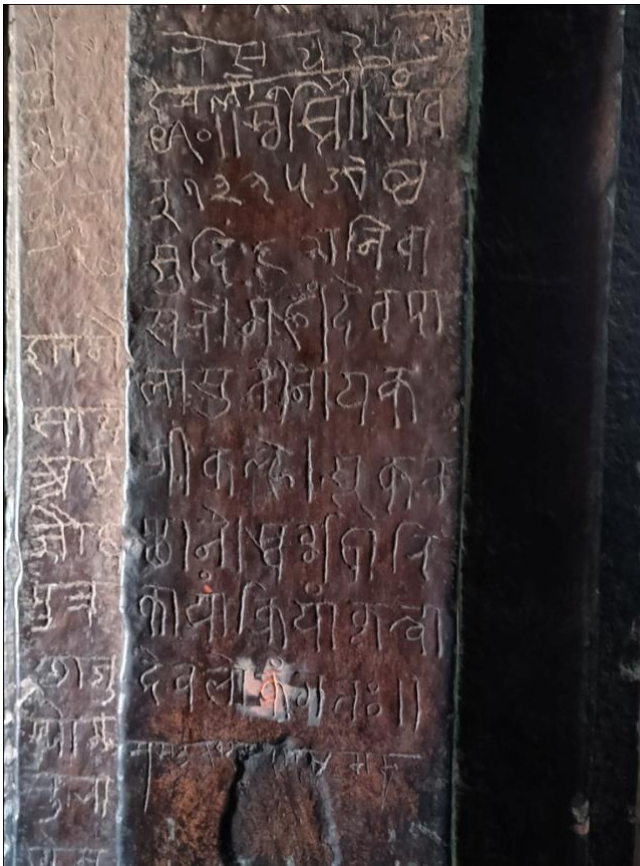


Figure 20. A Pillar at one of the temples at Kasganj,
Image Source : INTACH Team

The archaeological heritage of Kasganj is very rich which helps in interpreting its historical and ancient importance. The amalgamation of tangible and intangible culture is represented through the forts, palaces, temples, caves, statues, sculptures, stupas, pillars, jewellery, coins as well as various types of letters etc. In addition to these elements, other aspects include folklore and traditional crafts. These aspects provide us with minute details of the representation of culture and tradition of those times. The monuments and inscriptions introduce

us to the glories of the old times as well as these also give us a depiction of the

bravery of the then-contemporary kings and warriors.

John Princep, an English scholar and orientalist has played a wonderful role in deciphering the scripts of ancient times. These scripts primarily include the Brahmi and Kharosti. He got help from inscriptions of the Indo-Greek kings. The task of deciphering these inscriptions started with the efforts of William Jones who is the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Based on these studies, excavations and findings, John Princep conducted his study.

Inscriptions

Among the ancient inscriptions of Kasganj, the one found at the Sitaram temple are very unique and represents the glories of a bygone era. However, the structure and present Sitaram temple including the pillars of ancient times are not in a good condition.

The archaeological report of Sir General **Alexander Cunningham** says:

"Internally the temple is a square 27 feet supported on 16 stone pillars, but the people say that the original building was much larger and that it contained 32 pillars. This account is more probably correct, as the foundation of the walls of the 'sanctum' or shrine is still standing at the back on West side of the temple. There are also 10 superfluous pillars inside the temple, of which two support the broken architraves and light are built into the corner space of the walls."

With reference to the context of historicity of "Sitaram"
temple General Cunningham says :

*"There are numerous pilgrims records on the temple the
earliest of which bears date in Samvat 1226 (1169 A.D.).....
it is almost certain that some records of the pilgrim visits
would have been inscribed on the pillars of the temple for this
reason satisfied that the destructions of the great temple of
Soron must be assigned to an earlier period than that of the
bigotes Aurang Shah".*

Tamralekh/ Copper Plate Inscriptions

Copperplate inscriptions have played a major role in solving the paradox of Indian history. Various copper plates have been found in different places of Kasganj after excavations. These copper plate inscriptions are different from other kinds of inscriptions because of the varied information that they provide us.

Numismatic Sources

Coins hold an important place in understanding the culture. The name of the kings is mentioned on these coins. The numismatic sources found at this place include coins of Raja Bhojdev and the Pratihara dynasty. The coins of silver and copper found here date back to the period of Bhojdev I (836-839 A.D.). On one side of these coins, Srimadadivarah is written and on another side God Varaha's idol impression is present. In the times of Mahabharata, Panchala was the capital of ancient Sukhar Kshetra (present Kashiram Nagar). In the context of Panchala Rajya, the important kings include Vishnumitra, Agnimitra, Suryamitra, Bhanumitra, Brihaspatimitra, Jayamitra, Dhruvmitra, Falgunimitra and Indiramitra etc. Coins relating to these kings have been found.



Figure 21. A sculpture in a ruined state at Kasganj, Image Source: INTACH Team

Sculpture

The knowledge of the ancient era is also well captured through the existing sculptures, idols and artifacts of historical times. Acharya Vedvrat Shastriji have found the artifacts and sculptures including

1. A sculpture of a tapaswi (saint) from the Gupta period. As per Vedvrat Shastriji's research and findings, this sculpture is around 2000 years old.
2. *Dowarik Stree ki murti*: This is made up of red sandstone and dates back to the period of the Gupta empire.
3. *Navdurga ki murti*: The sculpture of Bhagwati Durga represents Goddess Durga. From the context of time, this sculpture seems to be ancient.

Dr. Ramkrishna Sharma also led certain excavations and found certain sculptures that include, A women's face (Nari Mukh) presently in a deteriorating state. Other murtis or idols include Chaturbhuj Shiv Mandir and Gaura Shankar Parigrahan murti.

Another excavation conducted by Shri Chandraprabha Pathak reveals that the idol of Dev Pratima and Nari Mukh is the depiction of Parvati, the Indian Goddess and consort of Lord Shiva. Naga Akhara at Shukar Kshetra is the representation of Agnidev. It is conserved at the Kundal ghat of Haripadi Ganga. Agnidev is showered with flowers and worshipped by devotees every day. Swaha and Swadha are the names of the two wives of Lord Agnidev. This Chaturbhuj pratima or idol has three arms that are in fragmented condition. The famous idol of Mahakali at Gridhvat Tirthsthal is also considered to be very ancient. This idol is the symbolization of devotion and belief that the devotees have in Maa Kali. On the occasion of Navratri, a fair is organized at this place where Maa Kali is beautifully adorned with jewels, Poshak (dress) and Shringars (toilette). According to the devotees and Pandits (priests) of this temple, the idol of Mahakali is thousand years old. Many other known and unknown sculptures of historical importance from the religious point of view have been destroyed. Although, the government has taken several steps for their conservation.

An ornate idol is housed at the sacred complex of Suryakunda sthal (Surya Mandir). It represents the symbol of power that resides in the Surya God and the faith that devotees have towards that Surya or sun god.

Famous litterateur Shri Prem Narayan Gupta has also conserved some sculptures at his home which are approximately 200 years old. One among them is the idol of Tulsidas. Some idols, artifacts and sculptures dating back to the period of ancient times are also found at Yogeshwar temple at Kasganj. One such artifact depicts a Devipratima where a sevika (celibate) is standing near her. This sculpture is claimed to be around 1500 years old. One of the Shaktipeeths, "Shriyantra" is located in the city of Kasganj. A lot of saints and devotees come to this place and do pooja archana (perform rituals) for leading the path towards salvation.

Temples and Sacred Complexes

Adi Varah Mandir



Figure 22. Lord Varaha with Goddess Earth, Image Source: Jagran Images
<https://www.jagranimages.com/images/soron2.jpg>

On the eastern banks of the holy river Ganga, the third avatar of Lord Vishnu in form of God Varah is worshipped in the ancient temple of Adi Varah Mandir. The renovation of this historical temple took place around 200 years ago under the patronage of Nepal Naresh. A lot of devotees come from Nepal to Kashganj to visit this temple. It is believed that if any devotee daubs the surface of this temple with cow dung or simply wipes the floor, his all-rightful aspirations come true. In addition to this, according to the local people, it is also believed that if any devotee sings bhajan in praise of Lord Varaha and recites prayers in front of the temple, then that person gets relieved from the barriers of the world and resides in Vaikuntha Dham. Morning prayers and Sankirtana is regularly sung by the devotees and saints to please Lord Varaha.

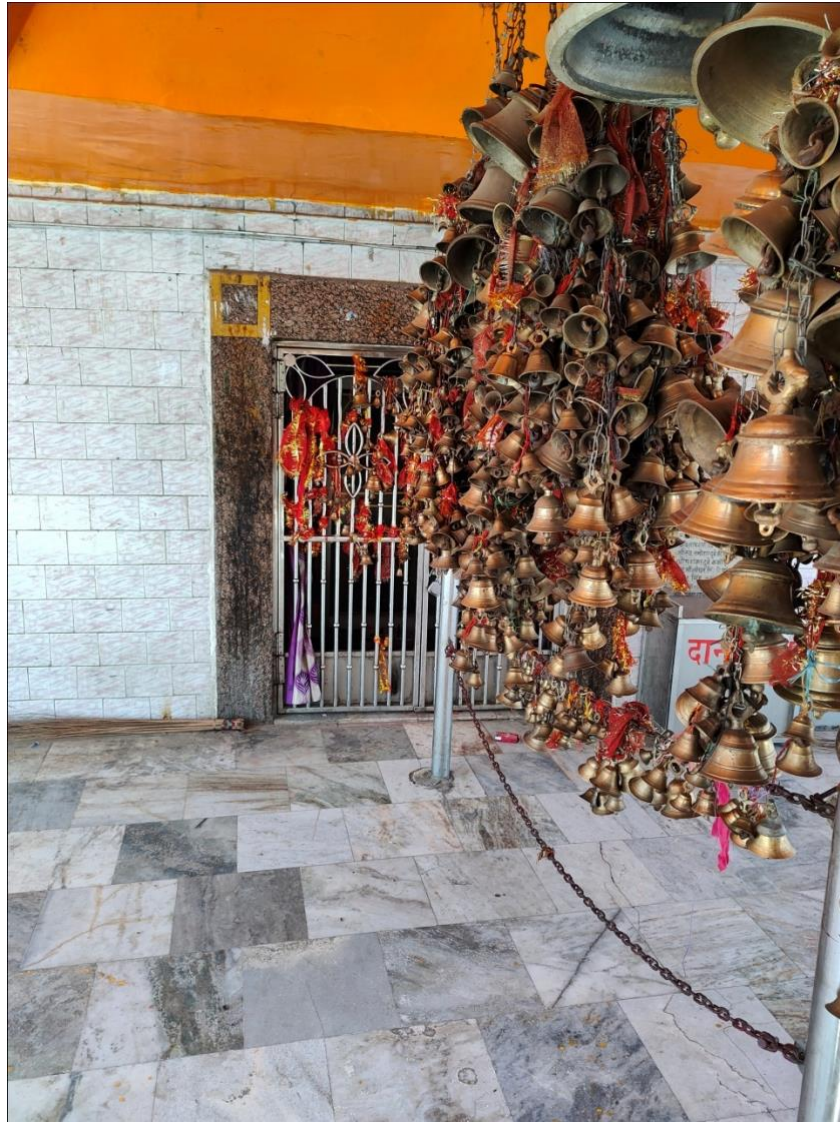


Figure 23. A glimpse at a sacred complex, Image Source: INTACH Team

Several other ancient temples are located in the vicinity of this temple. Some of these temples are Maa Bhagirathi Ganga temple and Shri Baldauji Mandir. In Shri Baldauji temple, the idol of Rohinandan Balaram, brother of Lord Krishna is worshipped. Baldauji mandir is located in the south of the Varaha temple. In the east direction on the banks of the Ganga River, another temple called Raghunath temple is situated. The architecture of this temple is adorned with intricate stone carvings.

The ancient temple of Balaji



Figure 24. A glimpse of Balaji temple, Image Source: <https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipPg4j6loPYarPXZiJHcrZ3qXTOYGbPb-44uCAa4=s1600-w400>

This temple is dedicated to Lord Hanuman, known by the name of Balaji. The Balaji temple is located on the east bank of the river Ganga. A lot of devotees visit this temple and pray to Lord Hanuman to fulfil their wishes mainly on Tuesdays and Saturdays. In this temple, the annual festival of Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated with grandeur. Morning hawan, Bhandara and evening jagrans are held at the time of the annual ritualistic celebration. Bhandara is described as the free meal served to the people invited to the temple. This event mainly takes place on festival occasions as part of worshipping the Lord.

Someshwar Mandir



Figure 25. Shiv Linga, Image Source: www.learnreligions.com
[https://www.learnreligions.com/thmb/byXfNJVdHnxAN57rlapBVviciVs=/768x0/filters:no_upscale\(\):max_bytes\(150000\):strip_icc\(\):format\(webp\)/Shiva-lingam--](https://www.learnreligions.com/thmb/byXfNJVdHnxAN57rlapBVviciVs=/768x0/filters:no_upscale():max_bytes(150000):strip_icc():format(webp)/Shiva-lingam--)

Someshwar Mandir is located in the south direction towards the bank of Haripada Ganga. Lord Shiva is worshipped at this sacred temple. In the morning, the ritual of early morning prayers starts and it ends at night. On the occasion of Shiv Ratri, this temple is thronged by a lot of devotees. According to the historical pieces of evidence and mythological stories, on the auspicious day of Chatrashukal Chaturdashi, devotees keep fast and perform the ritual of sacred bathing at the Somtirth. Following these, the devotees pray to Lord Shiva with flowers, garlands and dhoop-deep (incense sticks).

Teli Jatiya Ganga Mandir



Figure 26. A glimpse of the ancient temple of Shri Ganga Mata Bhagirathi Ji, Image Source: INTACH Team

This mandir is situated on the southern bank of the holy river Ganga. This temple along the banks of Ganga gives a picturesque view. An idol of Maa Bhagirathi made up of white stone is worshipped in this temple. At this ancient temple, sacred chores used to take place under the patronage and guidance of Pandit Kalicharan Mafidar.

Manas Mandir



Figure 27. Lord Rama, Goddess Sita, Lakshmana and Lord Hanumana, Image Source: Wiki Commons https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Ram%2C_Sita%2C_Lakshman_and_Hanuman.jpg

Manas Mandir is situated on the west bank of Haripadi Ganga. A beautiful idol of Ram and Lakshman along with Sita is worshipped in this temple. Bhagwat- Katha is also organised and recited at this temple from time to time to revive the religious feelings and devotion toward Lord among the devotees. The establishment of this temple in Kasganj is run by an organisation called Samaj Sevak Sangh.

Haripada Shivmandir

In the middle of this temple, a Shivlinga is installed. The temple was built with the efforts of Shri Nanumal Gupta and Dr. Satyaprakash Gupta and their other fellow members.

Tulsi Samarak Mandir



Figure 28. A statue of Tulsidas in the middle of the Ganga, Image Source: INTACH Team

On the fascinating west bank of the holy river Ganga, a statue of Tulsidas, renowned author of Ramcharitamanas is positioned. This statue is the representation of the Tulsidas in his

youthful time. The foundation stone of this temple was laid on 26th November 1944 by the then-District Magistrate Shri J.M. Lovo. Here, the names of the successors of Goswami Ji and his Guru, Narsinh Ji as well as other significant devotees, followers and contributions are also mentioned.



Figure 29. Tulsi Samarak Mandir, Image Source: INTACH Team

Shri Shyam Varaha Mandir



Figure 30. Shyam Varaha Mandir at Kasganj, Image Source: INTACH Team

Lord Shyam Varaha is worshipped in this magnificent temple on the north bank of Ganga. In this temple, the beautiful idol of Lord Varaha and Bhagwati Lakshmi is worshipped. This temple is established here with the efforts of saints. On the auspicious occasion of Margashirsh Mah ki Dwadashi, Jhanki (a tableau) of Lord Varah is also organised. A small temple of Maa Bhagwati Bhagiraathi Ganga Mata is located in front of the temple.



Figure 31. Varaha Mandir, Image Source : justdial.com file:///C:/Users/ICH/Downloads/varah-mandir-salempur-bibi-marg-etah-tourist-attraction-3aqh7v4.webp

Dwarika Dheesh Mandir



Figure 32. Shri Dwarika dheesh mandir at Kasganj, Image Source : <https://www.google.com/maps/uv?pb=11s0x3974e01849921837%3A0x3f18114704b1c28a!3m1!7e115!4shtt ps%3A%2F%2Fih5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipNmjW7yyfX>

This temple is very grand and lord *Krishna* is worshipped here. The temple is decorated with beautiful carvings and sculptures. Heart-pleasing prayers are sung here regularly, conveying love and devotion toward Lord Krishna.



Figure 33. Dwarika dheesh at Kasganj, Image Source : <https://www.google.com/maps/uv?pb=!1s0x3974e01849921837%3A0x3f18114704b1c28a!3m1!7e115!4shttp%3A%2F%2Fih5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipNmjW7y>

Bhooteshwar Mandir

This temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and has great relevance from the perspective of historical archives and religious chronicles. Lord Shiva's "Rudra-Abhishek" is performed by devotees with great allegiance and devotion. On special occasions and festivals, primarily Maha Shivratri, the ritual of Maha-Abhishek and the marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati is also performed from time to time.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya Mandir

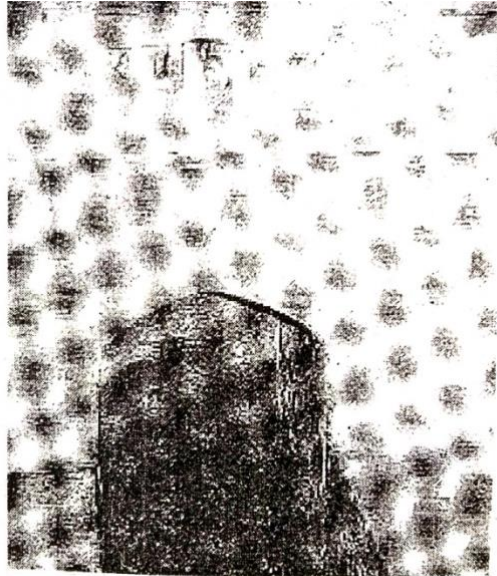


जगद्गुरु महाप्रभु श्रीमदवल्लभाचार्यचरणे सं १३३३

Figure 34. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, Image Source : Wiki Commons
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/02/Shri_mahaprabhuji.jpg/220px-Shri_mahaprabhuji.jpg

The Mahaprabhu temple is also located in the district of Kasganj. The temple is dedicated to Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. Therefore, the temple is popularly addressed by the name of "Mahaprabhu Ji ki Baithak". The temple has step marks of Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya. In addition to this, the mementoes (Smriti-Chinha) of his son Vithalnath as well as grandson Gokulnath are also present in this temple.

Brahmrishi Kapilmuni Cave



वृद्धगंगा, (सोरों) के तट पर स्थित कपिलमुनि की गुफा का दृश्य

Figure 35. Kapil muni cave, Image Source: Image extracted from a book titled Aditirth: Sukar Kshetra by Dr. Radhakrishan Dixit and Dr. Mitlesh Pandya

From the beginning of Sat-yuga, it is believed that Brahmarishi Kapil muni did intense penance of Lord Varaha in a cave of Kasganj. This cave is very important from the perspective of the historical context of Shukar Kshetra. In the contemporary era, Mahamuni Kapil cave is located on the mountain top in Kasganj.

Shri Sitaram Mandir

This temple of ancient and religious importance is placed in the north direction from the banks of the river Ganga. This temple is related to the Solanki dynasty. Solanki kingdom is also known by the name of Chalukyas, a clan name originally associated with the Rajputs in northern India. This temple is famous among its devotees by the name Raja Somdutt ki

Yagyashala. The four corners of this temple are beautifully stone carved. In the interior of the temple, big pillars give it a grand look.

Lehara Ganga Ghat

This place called Lehara Ganga Ghat is located in the vicinity of Bhagwati Bhagirathi temple. "Lehareshwar Mahadev" temple, one of the oldest temples " of Kasganj is also situated in this ghat. Devotees from different corners of the country visit this temple. According to local legends, the Lehara Ganga Ghat faced many natural calamities but the temple remained intact due to the grace of Lord Mahadev. Presently, this place is called Lehara and it falls under the administration of Nagar Palika Parishad.

Fairs and Festivals

Ekadashi Parwa Margshirsh Mela



Figure 36. Lord Varaha rescuing Goddess Earth, Image Source: wiki commons
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/7e/Varaha_Raja_Ravi_Varma.jpg/800px-Varaha_Raja_Ravi_Varma.jpg

Ekadashi Parwa Margshirsh Mela is the most popular fair in Kasganj. This fair resembles the Kumbh fair. The Margshirsh fair is organised on the day of Ekadashi when Lord Varaha is worshipped. According to the Varaha-Purana, Lord Varaha killed Hiranyakashipu, and then on the day of Dwadashi, Lord Varah kept fast and went to his abode on Triyodashi. Apart from the auspicious occasion of Ekadashi and Dwadashi, on the occasion of Poornima also, a lot of devotees come to this place and perform the bathing ritual.

Shivraj Pashumela



Figure 37. A view at Shivraj Pashumela, Image Source : Amar Ujala, https://spiderimg.amarujala.com/cdn-cgi/image/width=674,height=379.25,fit=cover,f=auto/assets/images/2016/12/05/shivraj-cattle-fair_1480956861.jpeg

This fair is part of a Margshesh fair and is organised in the vicinity of the Vataknath and Sitaram Mandir that is located on Lehara marg in Kasganj. Merchandising (buying and selling) of the animals takes place at this fair. These animals include horses, elephants, donkeys, buffaloes, bulls, cows etc. Merchants come from all over the country to buy these animals. However, the attraction of this fair is horses which are sold at high prices.

Somvati Amavasya

On the auspicious occasion of Somvati Amavasya, a lot of pilgrims come from all over the country for the Yatra of Shukar Kshetra. These devotees perform the sacred bathing ritual along with darshan; some devotees also perform Pindadaan.



Figure 38. People performing a bathing ritual, Image Source: alamy.com
<https://c8.alamy.com/comp/R8X441/local-indians-bathing-and-performing-morning-rituals-in-the-ganges-at-one-of-varanasi-ghats-varanasi-uttar-pradesh-india-R8X441.jpg>

Dasshera Mela

This fair is also very popular among the locals of Kasganj. The day when this fair is organised commemorates the victory of dharma in which Lord Rama killed the demon, Ravana. In Kasganj, this fair is organized with the efforts of the Shri Ram Leela Committee of Shukar Kshetra.



Figure 39. A glimpse of Dusshera fair, Image Source: www.livehindustan.com
https://images1.livehindustan.com/uploadimage/library/2020/10/11/16_9/16_9_1/kota_dussehra_mela_2020_1602425788.jpg

Ganesh Chaturthi Mela

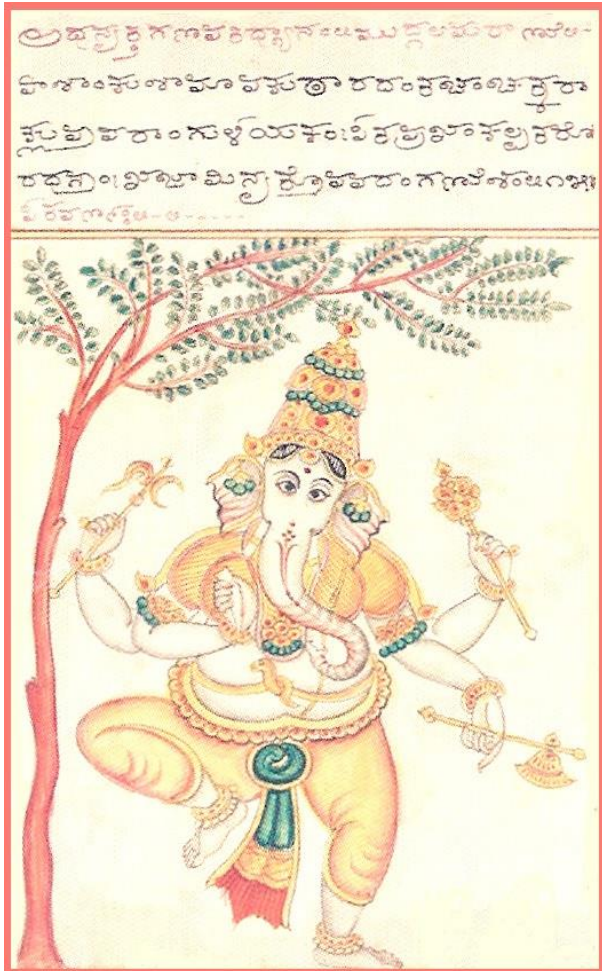


Figure 40 Lord Ganesha in a dancing form, Image Source : Wiki commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganesha#/media/File:N_Rutta_gaNapti.jpg

It is one of the oldest fairs of Kasganj in which Lord Ganesh Ji, the Vighanharta, is worshipped. Ganesh Chaturthi is a Hindu festival during which offerings and Prasadam to Lord Ganesha are distributed among the devotees.

Kavad/Kanwar Mela



Figure 41. Kanwar Mela, Image Source : www.haridwarrishikeshtourism.com
<https://www.haridwarrishikeshtourism.com/haridwar-temples/kanwar-mela-haridwar.jpg>

Kavar fair is another age-old fair in this region. A lot of devotees, mainly Shiv Bhakts come to this place and pray to the Bhagirathi River. They collect the auspicious water Gangajal of the holy river Ganga in their bottles and carry those along with them to their destinations. When these devotees return to their hometown or native places, they perform 'Rudra-Abhishek' of Lord Shiva.

The Kavadh or Kavar is decorated with colourful adornments and the devotees are called Kavadiya. This yatra is an ancient practice in India. Mainly the devotees of Lord Shiva perform this as a ritual of their pilgrim journey. The Kavadh is the centre of attraction of these Tirthyatris. Some devotees perform the yatra barefoot and some by rolling over and over again on the surface of the earth to show their devotion to Lord Shiva.

Tulsi Jayanti

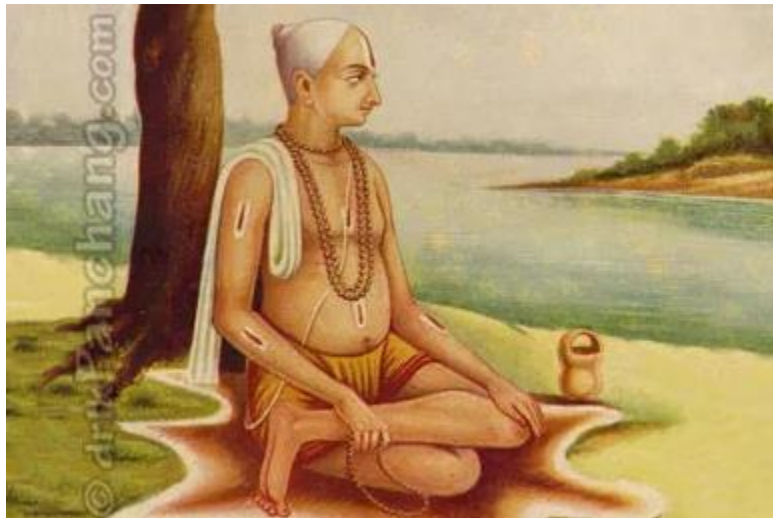


Figure 42. Tulsidas, Image Source : panchang.com
<https://www.drikpanchang.com/images/saints/tulsidas/xtulsidas.jpg.pagespeed.ic.NYN0LPviOY.webp>

The event of Tulsi Jayanti is organised on the west bank of the holy river Ganga in the loving memory of Tulsidas. Tulsidas is the author of 'Ramcharitamanas'.

Language and Literature

The prime basis of ancient literature is our culture and heritage. From this perspective, it is appropriate that on a priority basis, the glorifying literature of Kasganj should be investigated. From ancient times to the contemporary era, Kasganj is widely known for its religion, Vedic and mythical influences. The brilliant minds of Shukar Kshetra reflect the dynamic scenarios of the socio-cultural aspects and lives of people through their work. Some of the reverent personalities of Kasganj are the following:

Guru Narsinh, who is also known by the name 'Narhari'. He was born in a Brahmin family and worked in the areas of Veda, Purana, Darshana and Vyakran-Shastra (Grammar - Ethology). In addition to this, he also focused on Hari Bhajana and Shiksha daan. He was called 'Guru Nar Hari' by his followers for being a spiritual person. In the year 1928, poet Murlidhar Chaturvedi shed light on the life and achievements of Nar Hari Ji through his work 'Ratnavali-Charit'. Kavi (poet) Avinash Rai Brahma Bhatt's work 'Tulsi Prakash' also provides insights into the achievements of Guru Nar Hari. He mentions that Guru Nar Hari was the one who was equipped with an ocean of knowledge, a devotee of Lord Rama and Hanumanji as well as one who taught the students in the field of Brahmana and Purana. The name of Narsinh's father was Vanshi Dhar and his Baba's name was Shridhar. The most famous disciples of Narsinh Ji are Goswami Tulsidas and Poet Nanaddas (belonging to Ashtachaap).

Krishnadas, son of Kavi Nanddas Ji gave a vivid account of the works, moral teachings and knowledge insights of his father Kavi Nanddas Ji and Guru Narsihn Ji. Even today the place where Narsihn Ji taught his disciples is in existence in the neighbourhood of Chaudhariyaan at Kasganj.

Pandit Mevaram Mishra, one of the intellectuals in the field of literature was born in Kasganj in the 17th century. His works were mainly written in the Sanskrit and Hindi languages. His literary piece 'Vedhkostumbh', a text on Ayurveda earned him accolades in this field.

Pandit Ganpati Mishra, son of Mevaram Mishra built his analysis on his father's work in the context of Sanskrit literature and Ayurveda. He translated his father's literary masterpiece

'Vedhkostumbh' into Hindi. Pandit Mishra also wrote literary pieces like 'Lakshan Vedhak' in the field of Ayurveda. He achieved his name and fame in the fields of Sanskrit, Hindi and Ayurveda.

Pandit Angad Ram Shastri was born in the Badriya neighbourhood of Kasganj in the year 1870. His ancestors were also esteemed as intellectuals. In his early childhood, he was trained at the Shukar Kshetra under the guidance of Guruvar Virajanand Ji. Swami Dayanand was also guided by the same guru. Angad Ram Ji has achieved academic scholarship in the field of Sanskrit literature, Puranas and Vedic education. The life and achievements of Angad Ram Shastri have been discussed in 'Shrimaddayanand Prakash'. Some of the famous works of Angadram Ji include ' Saraswat Vyakran ka Padanuvad'

Pandit Dasrath Shastri, another scholar who was born in Kasganj. He was born in the year 1930. He was bestowed with many qualities. The family of Dasrath Ji is still residing in Shukar Kshetra and his successors have immensely contributed to the field of literature. His elder son, Pandit Balshastri also earned fame through his contributions in the field of Sanskrit and Hindi literature. His other son, Pandit Hariyash Shastri has also greatly contributed to the field of literature. Pandit Hariyash Sashtri's son Acharya Bhavbhuti, Varruchi Shastri and Vyadhrabhuti Shastri are no exception when it comes to the context of contributing to the literature.

Shri Dharmanand Shastri was also born in Kasganj in the year 1957. His father's name was Ramdutt Ji Koythari. His work ' Karamkand' is well known and based on the lives of Tirth Purohit Brahmins. He was a very religious and spiritual individual.

Another scholar, Pandit Bhairav Nath Upadhyayay was born on 8th July 1938 at Shukar Kshetra and he completed his doctoral studies from 1962 to 1964 at Aligarh University. His doctoral study was about ' Varah Purana - and Varah Avatar'.

There are other scholarly personalities from Kasganj including Pandit Govind Vallah Shastri, Pandit Parvati Vallabh Bhatt, Pandit Shrinath and many more.

Folklore and Culture

Culture is an integral part of the social life of every community and country. The cultural traditions encircle a person's life from birth to death. The word ' Lokkala ' is mix of two words Lok and Kala. Lok refers to the people living in this world. The word is inclusive in character and does not comprise the discriminating effects of race, caste, gender, religion, class, colour, the differences between rich and poor etc. The word Kala represents art which in other words is any form of creativity. Some of the famous personalities of Kasganj who have left an imprint in this field of art through their immense contributions are mentioned below :

Pyarelal Maheshwari

In the field of music and art, one of the famous personalities that belonged to the region of Kasganj is Pyarelal Maheshwari. He was born in the year 1940. He had a fondness for music and art since his childhood. Later he was trained under the guidance of Pandit Ramgopal Ji at the age of eleven. Pyarelal worked as a rhythm composer and music director in various films, some of them including '*Babul ki Galiya*', '*Ganga Tera Pani Amrit, Dhakan*', '*Ek mahal ho sapno ka*', '*Chingari*' etc.

Master Habib Rahi

Habib Rahi was born on 20th April 1953 at the holy place of Kasganj. He was trained under the guidance of various sangeet gurus like Guru Gupliguru, Satyanarayan Vashisht and Harish Prakash Chaurasiya. He was so passionate about music that he left his studies in medicine to pursue his passion for music. He was known by the name Bansurivadak Habib as he was a great flute player.

Yogendra Kumar Samadhiya

Yogendra Ji was born on 14th November 1946 in the Chakratirth neighbourhood of Sukar Kshetra. He completed his education in the field of Sanskrit Sahitya (literature). He also

achieved fame in the field of Sangeet Shastra. He started learning different types of music traditions under the guidance and tutelage of Ramgopal Chasmaram.

Sukar Kshetra is famous for Kali-Nritya from the advent of ancient times and Yogendra Ji was also passionate and interested in this cultural tradition. Apart from Dholak, he also practised other musical traditions like Chameli, Nal, Tabla, Nakkara etc. He received various accolades for his expertise in the field of music and other artistic traditions.

Shri Shivji Dikshit

Shivji Dikshit was born in the year 1997 in the Chosath neighbourhood at Sukar Kshetra. His father's name was Pandit Balmukund Dikshit and his mother's name was Shri Ramkali Devi. He gave utmost importance to Behatarbeel, Kanpuri, Chogala etc. when it comes to the sphere of Lokgayan. Hence, he was felicitated by many renowned authorities and earned respect and fame in society.

Pandit Sonelal Sharma

Pandit Sonelal Sharma was born in the year 1959 in Kasganj. His father's name was Sundarlal Sharma and his mother's name was Saraswati. He was from a very humble background and he used to participate in these music ceremonies and showcase his talent. Apart from musical traditions, he was also well known for his interest in Bhakti-Bhav and spiritual activities.

Malla-Yuddha, The art of Wrestling

Malla-yuddha, whose literal meaning in English is the art of wrestling has been practised in Kasganj since ancient times. The presence of this knowledge of Malla-yuddha is also known through historical and mythical sources. The enthusiasts from all over the country came to the place and learn this art form under the patronage of the local gurus of Kasganj.

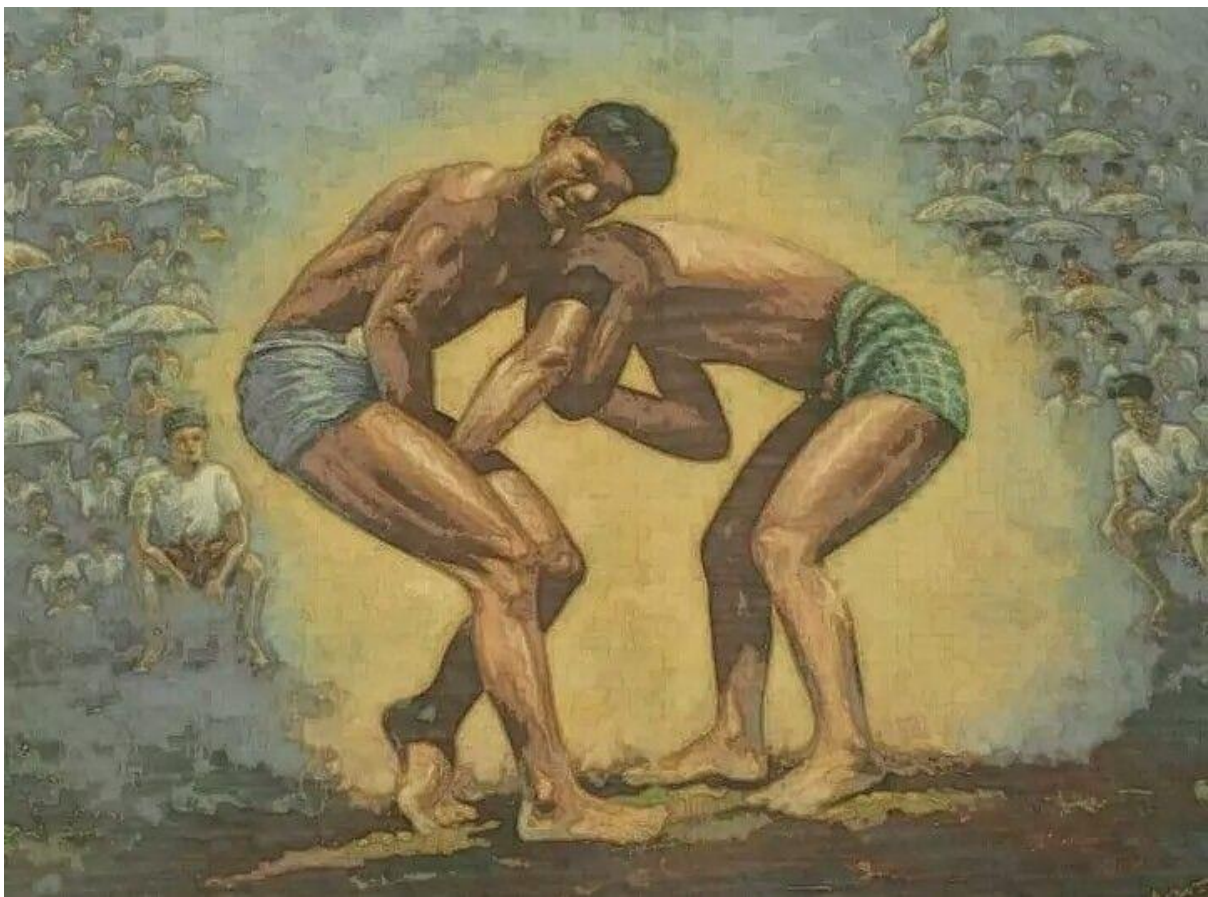


Figure 43. A picture depicting Malla-Yuddha, Image Source: [pinterest.com
https://i.pinimg.com/736x/7e/af/60/7eaf609af41bda7cf927dc08cbb05231.jpg](https://i.pinimg.com/736x/7e/af/60/7eaf609af41bda7cf927dc08cbb05231.jpg)



मल्लविद्या प्रेमी श्री शिवशंकर
तिवारी "तीती"

Figure 44. Shiv Shankar Tiwari, Image Source: Image extracted from a book titled Aditirth: Sukar Kshetra by Dr. Radhakrishan Dixit and Dr. Mitlesh Pandya

Pandit Upendra Kumar has been famous for his knowledge about Malla-yuddha. He has trained many malla enthusiasts (wrestlers) at his place Badariya. Another famous guru, Surendranath Vallabh Bhatt and his Akhara is also considered a very prestigious institution in this place. For the past two decades, this art has been declining and the young generation is not interested as they were before. Some of the famous people who were passionate about Malla-yuddha include Shri Siyaram Pahalwan, Shri Bhagwan Sahay Pehalwan, Shri Rajendra Babu Pehalwan, Shri Ramesh Chandra Pehalwan, Shri Shiv Shankar Tiwari, Shri Sonpal Dubey, Shri Ram Valabh Bhatt, Shri Surendra Valabh Bhatt, Shri Matrumal Pehalwan, Shri Ram Prakash Varvariya, Shri Upendra Kumar Pehalwan, Shri Chotelal Pehalwan and many more.

Talwar-Vidya, The Art of Swordsmanship

The art of swordsmanship is known as Talwar- Vidya in Hindi. This knowledge of sword fighting is practised at Shukar Kshetra under the tutelage of local gurus. The presentation of this art takes on the auspicious occasions and festivals such as Ram Navami, Dusshera, Navratri etc. Different kinds of competitions are organised in which the youth of Kasganj as well as people from nearby places take part. If we take a glance at the eminent personalities of this field from the time of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then Shri Gopinath Mishra shines at the top. Shri Gopinath Mishra established a Talwar-Vidya Akhara in the Batuknath temple where many people learned swordsmanship under his tutelage and guidance.

Shri Sonpal Vari also taught a lot of students who later became eminent in this tradition. Two students 'Narayana' and 'Gumaniram' of Shri Gopinath Mishra established a Talwar-Akhara at Yogeshwar Mandir and extended this heritage. Many students learn and practice this art from the early morning to evening. On some occasions, this art is practised by wearing costumes depicting Maa Kali and the act presents reverence to the glory and strength of the goddess.

Traditional Crafts

Zari- Zardozi

Zardozi comes from two Persian words, "Zar" means gold and "Dozi" means work. This embroidery is considered as a type of metal embroidery. It involves making intricate designs using gold and silver threads. Designs are decorated with studded pearls as well as precious stones. Zardozi became a popular craft under the patronage of Mughal rulers as Zardozi attires were worn by royal begums and kings of that time. This is an elaborate style of hand embroidery popular in India, Iran and Pakistan.



Figure 45. Zardozi craft, Image Source: [Pinterest.com](https://i.pinimg.com/550x/fe/ba/3b/feba3b25738ab7f5c6be8ea6ae8a94f3.jpg)
<https://i.pinimg.com/550x/fe/ba/3b/feba3b25738ab7f5c6be8ea6ae8a94f3.jpg>

A technique of beating pure gold into fine metal taar (thread) is used to embroider motifs on silk, satin and velvet. Zardozi is an ancient craft. It is considered to be one of the oldest kinds of hand embroidery that is still in existence.

Food and Cuisine

Food is an indispensable and sacred element of intangible culture. The district of Kasganj has the influence of Brijbhoomi as it is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna. One of the most defining characteristics of food found at Kasganj is its simplicity. Hence, it is also known as Satwik food. Asafoetida or heeng is used heavily in the cuisine of this region. The food is also lighter in comparison to Rampuri and Awadhi cuisine and prepared without the usage of garlic and onion. This food without garlic and onion is called as prasadam. It is believed that onion and garlic are tamasic and equipped with medicinal properties. In addition to this, food cooked with garlic and onion is also available in Kasganj to cater for the demands of tourists and local people.



Figure 46. Malai Ghewar, Image Source: Pakwangali https://www.rachnakar.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/malai-ghewar-pakwangali_520_032516023210.jpg

Secondly, the sweet delicacies in the Kasganj district are mouth-watering and there is a predominance of milk in such desserts. The famous ones include Pedas, malai-ghewar, Kurchum etc.



Figure 47. Mewa Pedas at Kasganj, Image Source: INTACH Team



Figure 48. Kachoris, Image Source: Ankit Barnawal, Quora <https://www.rachnakar.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/main-qimg-e63f58c22129a067c1c80029db5abc7c.jpg>

The emotion of unity in the community is strong in Kasganj. Some of the food delicacies are a symbol of specific community events organised at the temple or in its vicinity. Bhandaras also take place at Kasganj mainly after these religious community events. Free meals are offered to all people without any discrimination. Food served at Bhandaras primarily includes Kachoris and Sabzi and simply cooked dishes like Khichdi, Halwa and Mewa. Khichdi is a dish made from rice with vegetables whereas Mewa is a sweet dish made with milk.

Places of Interest

Nadrai Bridge



Figure 49. Nadrai Bridge, Image Source: INTACH Team

This bridge is also known by the name, Jhaal Bridge. The bridge was constructed on the Ganga canal and Kali River from 1885 to 1889 (as per the official website of district Kasganj). It is a brilliant example of historical architecture.

Laxmi Gate

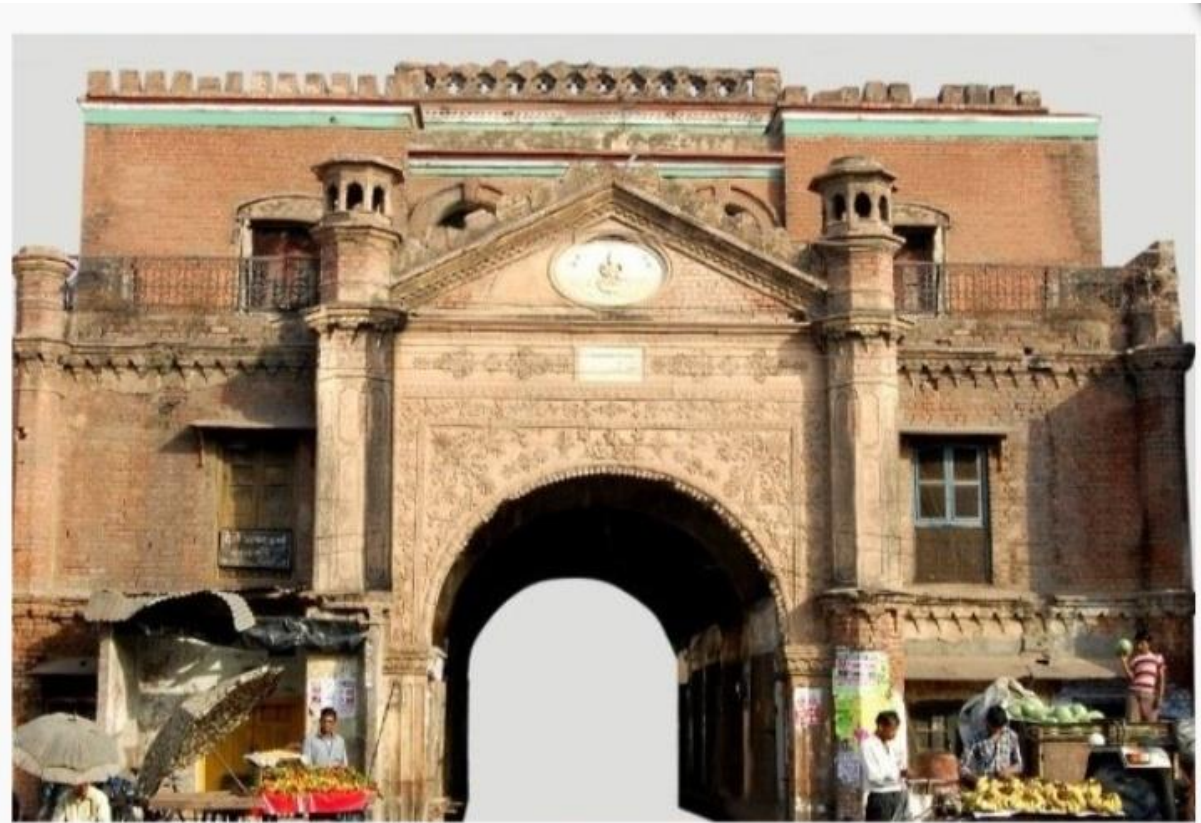


Figure 50. Laxmi Gate, Image Source: Official website of Kasganj
<https://kasganj.nic.in/hi/gallery/%e0%a4%b2%e0%a4%95%e0%a5%8d%e0%a4%b7%e0%a5%8d%e0%a4%ae%e0%a5%80-%e0%a4%97%e0%a5%87%e0%a4%9f/>

This gate is located on the way to Kasganj Railway Junction. This place is also called Laxmi Ganj and Collector Ganj.

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Research Team:

Report by:



Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

Intangible Cultural Heritage Division

Research, Coordination and Editing:

Nerupama Y. Modwel, Principal Director, ICH Division

Core Research and

Documentation:

Bindiya Kamboj,

Researcher, ICH Division

