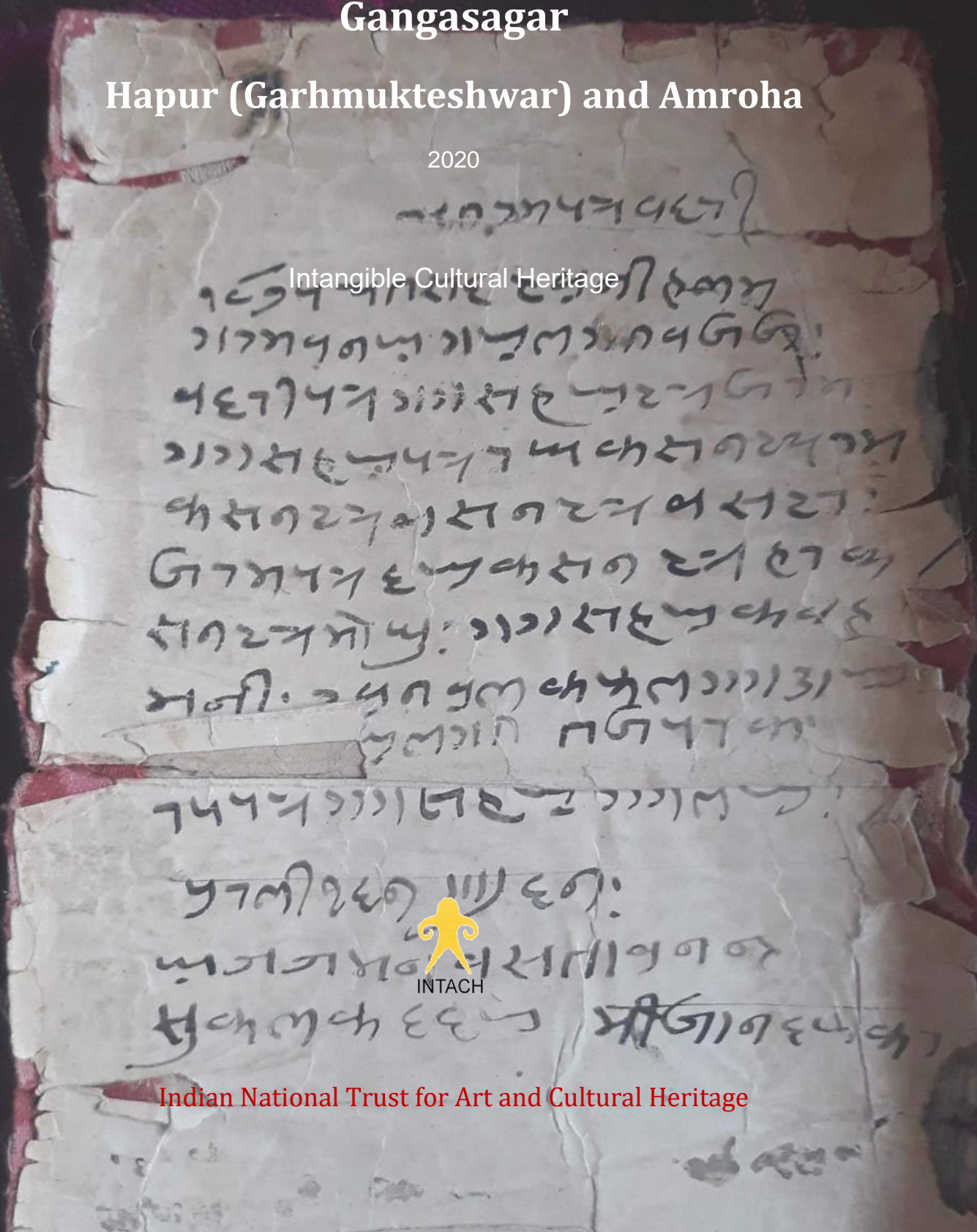


Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Hapur (Garhmukteshwar) and Amroha

2020

Intangible Cultural Heritage



INTACH

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

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Intangible Cultural Heritage

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

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


Indian
National Trust
for Art and
Cultural Heritage



Boats on the banks of the river Ganga at Braj Ghat, Garhmukteshwar

गणानां मुक्तिदानेन गणमुक्तीश्वरः स्मृतः।

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Front cover image: *A page from Pothi displaying genealogy*

Back cover image: *Modhas at Late Sukkhan Singh's Haveli, Nagar Pallika, Garhmukteshwar*

Introduction



Figure 1. A view of Ganga and Braj Ghat, Garhmukteshwar

Garhmukteshwar is located in the Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh, close to Delhi. It is one of the pilgrimages centres of India, with a population of more than 30,000 people. It is believed that this city was once part of Hastinapur, the capital of the Pandavas, and an important centre of trade according to the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana. It is also believed that this was the city where King Shivi, an ancestor of Rama from the *Ramayana*, performed his last rites in the fourth stage of his life as an ascetic.

It is said that the name of this city is derived from the fact that two Ganas of Shiva, Jai and Vijai, attained salvation (or *mukti*) on the banks of the river Ganga here, which led to the city being named Ganamukteshwar, which over time gradually changed into Garhmukteshwar. The city has a host of historical sites and places of cultural value, for instance, the purported 80 Sati Pillars, which mark the spot where Hindu widows committed sati after the death of

their husbands (although we have yet to locate most of these pillars). The town also has a mosque, built by Ghiyas-uddin Balban that bears an inscription in Arabic dating back to the year 1283 (or 682 Hijri according to the Arabic Calendar). An ancient fort was located within the city, believed to have been constructed by the Pandavas, and later renovated by the Maratha General Mir Bhawan during the Anglo-Maratha War. Unfortunately, not much remains of the fort now, and one can only trace some ruins which once were a part of the structure. One can also visit the Meerabai ki Reti, a vast stretch of sands in a golden hue, located opposite the Mukteshwar temple. It is said that the legendary Bhakti poet Meerabai offered her prayers to the Gods here.

The Ganga Mandir (temple) of Garhmukteshwar is one of the oldest heritage sites in the city, dating back to the 13th century. Another unique thing about this site is that it is one of the very few temples in India which hosts a statue of the Creator God, Brahma. Mukteshwar Mahadev temple, said to have been built by King Shivi with the help of Parashurama, is the other major temple that is situated in Garhmukteshwar. This temple contains a unique Shiva Linga and a Peepal tree, underneath which Parashurama himself is said to have conducted a havan.

One of the crafts the people of this city engage in is the making of *chatais* (jute mats). On average, one chatai takes these skilled craftsmen one hour to make. However, in return for their hard work, these craftsmen receive only 20 rupees as payment for one chatai. Their schedule involves working for at least ten hours, from morning to evening, and by the end of the day they will have made around 200 rupees, which is barely enough to feed one person, let alone an entire family.

Another craft that families in this city engage in is the making of *mudhas*. The mudhas crafted in this city are of an extremely high quality and can be seen both in India and abroad. The craftsmen procure their material by travelling to the riverbanks and canals of the city and handpicking the reeds and grass that grow there. The amount of time it takes into crafting this chair depends on its size, for instance, four small mudhe can be crafted in a day.

Garhmukteshwar is situated on the National Highway 9, which connects it to New Delhi, around 90 kilometres away. The area is considered to be one of the holiest, according to the references from *Garud Purana* or *Narad Purana*. Situated near the river Ganga, the place is historical, mythological and culturally enriched. It is believed to be sacred for immersion of mortal remains as per Hindu tradition.

Ganga and Garhmukteshwar

Due to the presence of Ma Ganga in Garhmukteshwar, the tirtha has become even more sanctified and significant. There are many ancient temples like Mukteshwar Mahadev, Brahma and Pracheen Ganga Temple. The legend goes that when Maharaj Parikshit was doing Ashvamedha Yagya from himself, he released a horse. The horse reached Maharaj Sandipini's ashram, which is around 6 kilometres away from Garhmukteshwar. Raja Parikshit came here looking for the horse. He was impressed and inspired by this place and decided to rebuild Garhmukteshwar. It is also said that at Garhmukteshwar, Lord Shankar's Ganas (sevaks) attained Mukti.

Garhmukteshwar is believed more ancient than the times of Satyug because Lord Shankar's staunch believer, Shri Pushpadant ji Maharaj, used to live around 20 kms away from Garhmukteshwar at Hastinapur. In terms of the temples of Garhmukteshwar, all of them are very old and significant. Many holy men and saints have visited these temples. In Garhmukteshwar there is a saint known as Shri Phallari Baba who has spent all his life on a boat. A hut in his name is located at Braj Ghat. Swamy Dayanand ji also had a strong connection with Garhmukteshwar, and he studied at a school here—the Shri Bhagirathi Ved Vidyalaya. His last rites were also conducted here.

Garhmukteshwar is, thus, a place known for its holy men and saints. The place propagates the Sanatan Dharma. Garhmukteshwar was referred to as Shivallabhpur in the *Shiv Mahapurana*. It is further mentioned that other than Kashi, Lord Shankar liked Shivallabhpur. Shivallabh is the meeting point of Shiv and Parvathi. That Shivallabhpur is considered to be the present-day Garhmukteshwar.

The prominence and age of the Ganga and Garhmukteshwar is evident in the holy texts; its main mention being in the *Shiv Mahapurana*. It is stated that if one does Ganga's darshan, it is akin to doing Shiv's darshan as well. Similarly, if one does Shiv darshan, then one is said to have done Ganga darshan. This is the belief of Garhmukteshwar.

Ganga Teerth Nagari Garhmukteshwar is also mentioned in ancient texts. It is for Hindus, one of the oldest and largest pilgrimage sites, considered as old as Treta Yuga, with Sage Shivi, ancestor of Maryada Purushottam Lord Rama, having performed Chaturmas (holy period of four months—July to October) here. Maharaja Shivi also established a Shiva temple here. At that time Garhmukteshwar was known as the Khandavi Van. The Shivalinga, near Nakka Kua (well), was also known as Jharkhand Mahadev. The maintenance of the Shiva temple was undertaken by the Vallabh/Ballabh sect or community, hence the reference to the place as Shiv Ballabhpur. Due to the establishment of the Shiva temple and it being a major trading centre and a part of the capital at Hastinapur during the Mahabharata period, the history of Garh goes back a long way.

The place also became famous when, after many deliberations at the end of the war, it was chosen as the sacred spot to perform Pind Daan for the salvation of all the warriors killed during the Mahabharata. The Kartik Shukla Ashtami was fixed to perform Gau Puja and on Ekadashi the last ritual of Pind Daan to provide *moksh* was performed. Since then, Garhmukteshwar has been prominent for conducting the last rites and immersions of ashes for the deceased.

The river Ganga is considered especially sacred here, having been brought down to earth after the deep penance of King Bhagirathi. It is believed that the water of the Ganga contains many herbal and medicinal properties in its flow from the Himalaya. This has added value to its use through the ages for curing many diseases. Aparna Chattopadhyay in her research paper mentions how Aurangzeb had also realised the importance of Ganga water for health benefits and was known to supply the same to his soldiers. Akbar's use of it is well chronicled (Dr Ram Nath in *Private Lives of the Mughals*). As RV Smith writes in an article, not just Hindu rulers, but Mughal emperors like Babur and Humayun too were convinced of its purity, finding it next only to the Aab-e-Hayat, the water of paradise.

Geography and Demography of Garhmukteshwar



Figure 2. A view of the Braj Ghat at Garhmukteshwar

Garhmukteshwar has a monsoon influenced humid subtropical climate characterized by very hot summers and cool winters. Summers last from early April to late June and are extremely hot, with temperatures reaching 43 °C (109 °F). The monsoon arrives in late June and continues till the middle of September. Temperatures drop slightly, with plenty of cloud cover but with higher humidity. Temperatures rise again in October and the town then has a mild, dry winter season from late October to the middle of March. The lowest temperature recorded here is 0.5 °C (32.9 °F). Rainfall is about 80 cm to 100 cm per annum, which is suitable for growing crops. Most of the rainfall is received during the monsoon.

Garhmukteshwar has a population of 46,077 of which 24,437 are males and 21,640 are females, per the 2011 Census of India. It is a Tehsil/Block (CD) in Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh. According to Census 2011 information, the sub-district code of Garhmukteshwar block is 00741. The total area of Garhmukteshwar is 272 km² including 237.38 km² rural area

and 34.13 km² urban area. There are 64,688 houses in the sub-district. There are about 137 villages in Garhmukteshwar block.



Figure 3. Agriculture is one of the main activities in Garhmukteshwar

The Land of Ganamuktishwar, Khandavi Van and Pushpavati

गणनाम मुक्तिदानेन गणमुक्तिश्वरः स्मृतः

According to *Bhagavata Purana*¹, 'at Ganmuktiswhwar Tirtha; in front of Muktishwar Mahadev, one who performs Pinda Dana of his ancestors need not perform it (Pinda Dana) at Gaya, Bihar'.

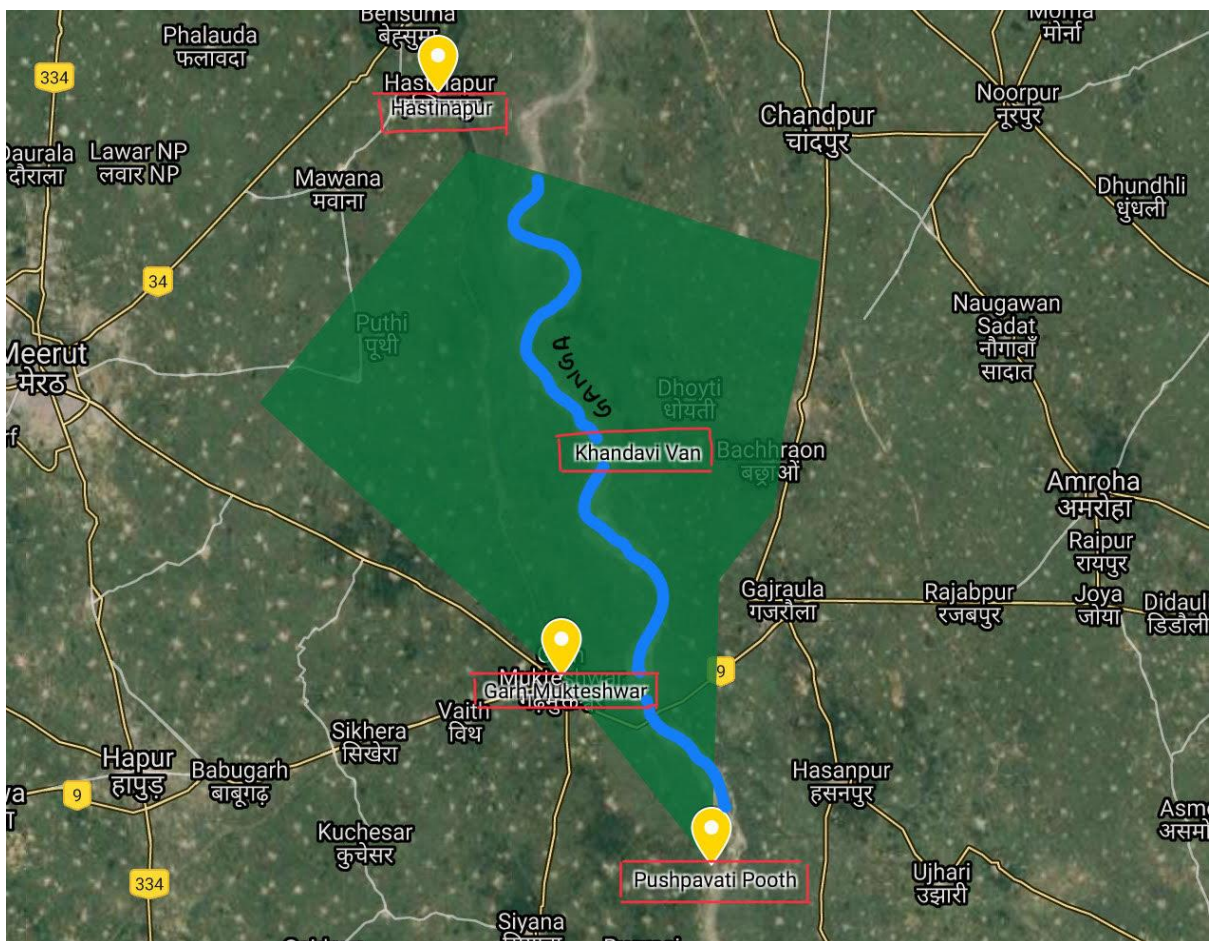


Figure 4. Google screenshot showing Hastinapur and Pushpavati with river Ganga and Khandavi Van

Garhmuktishwar, among the ancient Tirtha places, find its reference in several holy mythological scriptures. It is believed that the ancestor of Lord Rama, Maharaja Shivi

¹ The Bhagavata Purana is a revered text in Vaishnavism, a Hindu tradition that reveres Vishnu. The text presents a form of religion (dharma) that competes with that of the Vedas, wherein Bhakti ultimately leads to self-knowledge, salvation (moksha) and bliss.

established his Chaturth Ashram or Vanprastha² here at Garhmukteshwar which was known as Khandavi Van then.

An interesting story regarding how Ganmuktishwar got its name is mentioned in Vaishnodevi Khand 49 of the *Skanda Purana*. Long ago, during ancient times, Maharishi Durvasa was doing penance in the cave of Mandarachal mountain. Lord Shankar's Ganas, who were loitering around, reached there. The Ganas ridiculed the Tapasyarat Maharishi in an attempt at mischief. Annoyed by that, Durvasa cursed the Ganas to be ghosts. On hearing the harsh curse, Shiv Ganas got upset and fell at the feet of the Maharishi and started praying for forgiveness. Pleased with the prayer, Durvasa said, "O Shiva's Gana! If you do penance by going to the 'Shiva Vallabh' area located in the Khandava forest near Hastinapur, then by the grace of Lord Ashutosh (Shiva), you will be free from the shackles of being ghosts." Shiva Ganas, who had become ghosts, came to Shiv Vallabh region and did penance till Karthik Purnima. Pleased with the penance, Lord Shiva appeared to them on the day of Kartik Purnima and freed them from the curse of Durvasa Rishi. Since then, Shiv Vallabh³ region got the name of 'Ganmuktishwar'. Later, the oblation of 'Ganmuktishwar' may have become 'Garhmukteshwar'. The ancient historical temple of Ganmuktishwar still bears witness to this legend.

The other story relates how the name Shiv Ballabhpur came to be attached to the area. Jay and Vijay, the two Ganas of Lord Vishnu, due to the curse of Narada, came to Mrityu Loka and did penance to Lord Shiva, who freed them from the curse. V.K. Mathur in his book, *Aitihāsik Sthanavali*, states, "*Garhmukteshwar (AS, p.274): The famous shrine situated on the banks of the Ganges which is far and wide famous for the Kartik bathing fair. There is a detailed description of this country in Skanda Purana. The ancient name of this has been called Shiv Ballabhpur.*"⁴

² Vanaprastha is part of the Vedic ashram system, which starts when a person hands over household responsibilities to the next generation, takes an advisory role, and gradually withdraws from the world. This stage typically follows Grihastha (householder), but a man or woman may choose to skip householder stage, and enter Vanaprastha directly after Brahmacharya (student) stage, as a prelude to San yasa (ascetic) and spiritual pursuits

³ Shiv Ballabhpur got its name after a Shiva temple was established by the Ballabh community. Reference of it can be found in Shiv Mahapurana

⁴ Mathur, V. K. (1969). *Aitihāsik Sthanavali*. Vaigyanik Tatha Takaniki Shabdawali Ayog, Government of India.

The holiness of Garhmukteshwar can be understood by the following lines:

काश्यां मरणात्मुक्तिः मुक्तिः मुक्तीश्वर दर्शनात्

In other words, *In Kashi (Varanasi) one attains Moksha/Salvation after death, but in Mukteshwar, only by seeing Lord Mukteshwar one gets liberation.*

It is believed that during the Mahabharata period Hastinapur was an important link for trading activities via the Ganga. Towards the north of it was Pushpavati, known as Pooth today, which was part of Khandavi Van spread in an area of 35 sq kms. A beautiful garden, which Draupadi used to visit, was believed to be at Pushpavati. Khandava forest belonged to Lord Indra. According to the mythology, there was a dispute between Kauravas and Pandavas. Hastinapur being the joint capital, it was decided to have a separate capital for the Pandavas at Indraprastha (present Delhi). Krishna and Arjuna burned Khandava Van, with the help of Agni, the fire god, to build the capital for the Pandavas. There was said to be a secret route which connected Pushpavati with Hastinapur.

देश पूरब देश पूरब गंगनई कंठि तिहां

नगरी पुहुपावती राजकरइ हरिवंस मंडण

तसु घरि प्रोहित तसु सुत माधवानल नाम बंभण

~ कुशललाभ, माधवानल की कथा

It is possible that Puhupavati is the Pushpavati mentioned in the Prakrit text *Madhavanal Ki Katha* written by Kushallabh. According to prolific writer-historian Dr. Vighnesh Tyagi, Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY), “*Garhmukteshwar is a very ancient and prominent pilgrimage center for Hindus, situated on the banks of river Ganges. Maharaja Shivi, the forefather of Lord Rama, spent his life at the Vanaprastha Ashram in Garhmukteshwar, which is currently under Hapur district. Lord Parshuram got the Shiva temple established in the then Khandvi forest. Due to the establishment of the Shiva temple and being the major*

⁵ Written in 17th Century in Prakrit language, *Madhvaanal ki Katha* was a Romantic narration of an artist named Madhvaanal (from Pushpavati) and Kaamkandala, a dancer from Chhattisgarh.

center of the Ballabh sect, it was also named Shivballabhpur. It is also found in Shiva Purana. Lord Jai and Vijay of Lord Vishnu also came to Shivballabhpur to praise Lord Shiva and peace was saved by Shiva. Due to Lord Vishnu's liberation of these Ganas, this place came to be known as Ganmukteshwar. Later, Apabhramsa became Garhmukteshwar. Even in the Mahabharata period it was a major center of trade by waterways. Garhmukteshwar was also a part of the capital of Hastinapur. There was also a 15-km secret route from Garhmukteshwar to Hastinapur, the remains of which still exist.”



Figure 5. Burning of the Khandava Forest; A sculpture from Banteay Srei temple, Cambodia (Arjuna and Krishna are seen on chariots on either side; Indra is atop his elephant Airavata in the sky; numerous arrows in mid-air counter the downpour of rain; Different birds and animals are seen scattering; Takshaka's wife and Aswasena are seen rising in the sky⁶).

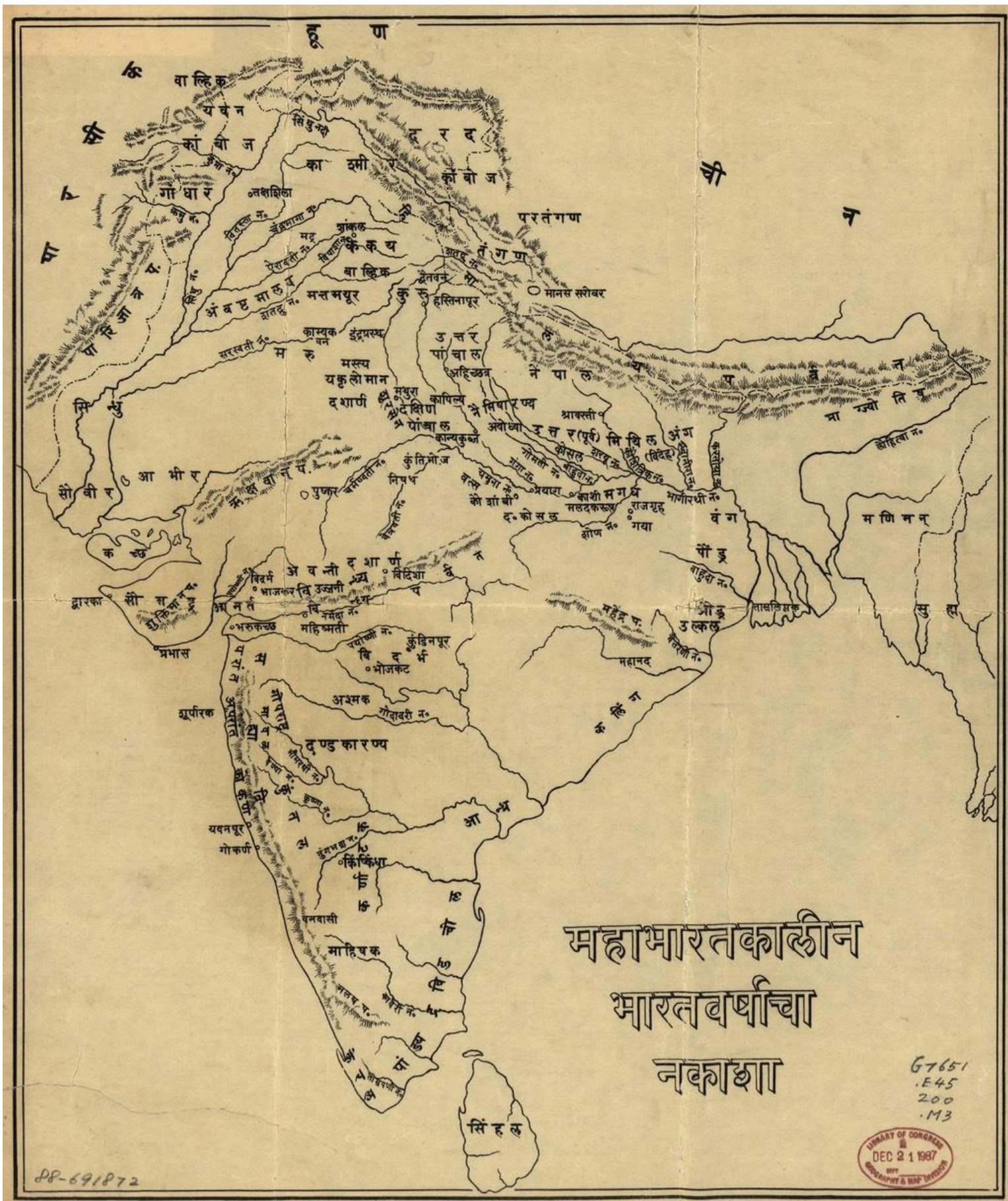
⁶ <https://jayarama.wordpress.com/2010/06/18/the-burning-of-the-khandava-forest/>



Figure 6. A stone slab depicting celestial gods, Garh



Figure 7. A street in Garhmukteshwar



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Figure 8. Map showing ancient cities and towns during Mahabharata period. Image source: World Digital Library

History of Garhmukteshwar



Figure 9. Inscription in Arabic

Garhmukteshwar is an ancient place that is mentioned in the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Mahabharata*. There are claims that it was a part of ancient Hastinapur, the capital of the Pandavas. An ancient fort, repaired by the Maratha leader Mir Bhawan, became, under the British, the headquarters of the tehsil. The name of the town is derived from the temple of Mukteshwar Mahadeva, dedicated to the goddess Ganga who is worshipped here in four temples. The town also has a mosque, built by Gays-ud-din Balban, that bears an inscription in Arabic dating to 682 Hijri (1283 A.D.)

It was the main center of trade with the Ganga water route. In those days, there was trade of timber, bamboo etc., which was imported from Doon and Gaharwal. Along with this, jaggery was a big market. The *Modha* industry is also very old. The *Modhas* made here are being exported to many countries. Garhmukteshwar was part of the Ghaziabad District till 2012 when it was attached to the newly carved out Hapur district and named as Panchsheel Nagar by the then Uttar Pradesh government. Garhmukteshwar was under Delhi administration of Akbar. It is situated southeast of Ghaziabad. During 1719, Muhammad Shah was seated on the seat of Delhi. According to historian Jadunath Sarkar, Muhammad Shah used to visit Garhmukteshwar to attend the Garhmukteshwar Mela.⁷

⁷ Sarkar, Jadunath, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Kolkata, 1971, pg 4

According to Thakur Deshraj⁸, during the period of Anangpal, Gaharwals were the rulers of Garhmukteshwar. One ancestor of Rajpal was a Jat chieftain named Mukta Singh, who constructed the Garhmukteshwar fort. When Prithvi Raj Chauhan became the ruler of Delhi, he attacked Garhmukteshwar. There was a severe war and the Gaharwals were able to repel the army of Prithvi Raj Chauhan but the circumstances of the time forced them to move out from there and to migrate to Rajasthan. At Talawdi, when there was war between Muhammad Ghori and Prithvi Raj, the Jats attacked the army of Afghans but they did not support Prithvi Raj Chauhan either. This was so because he had occupied their ancestral state. One Jat warrior, Puran Singh, became General of the Army of Malkhan. Malkhan had become popular due to the support of Puran Singh.

Thakur Deshraj writes, *"When Gaharwals lost Garhmukteshwar, they came to Rajasthan and occupied Ker, Bhatiwari, Chhawsari etc. near Jhunjhunu in 13th century. As per their bards, when these people came to this place, Johiya, Mohiya Jats were the rulers of this area. Bhats have mentioned them as Tomars. When influence of Islam increased in this area, they had to wage wars with them, but they were compelled to leave this place too. As a result, they started to scatter in various directions from there. One of their groups moved to Kuloth, which was ruled by Chauhans. After a war they occupied Kuloth. Sardar Kurdaram who was a descendant of Gaharwals of Kuloth had been tehsildar of Nawalgarh."*

It is also said that due to war from inside the fort they were called Gaharwals. Those who fought war from outside the fort were called 'Bahrola' or 'Barola'. Those who fought at the gate were called 'Falsa' (local name for gate). It shows that this gotra is title-based.

It is also possible that Gaharwals were Panduvansi or Kuntals. Bhats have mentioned them as Tomars, and Tomars were also Panduvansi. Garhmukteshwar has also been mentioned in the *Bhagvat Purana* and the *Mahabharata*. It is said that it was a part of the ancient city of Hastinapur (the capital of the Kauravas). There was an ancient fort here, which was repaired by a Maratha leader named Mir Bhawan. The name of the place is derived from the great

⁸ Jat History Thakur Deshraj/Chapter VIII, p. 558

temple of Mukteshwar Mahadeva, dedicated to the goddess Ganga who is worshipped here in four temples, two situated on a high cliff and two below it.



Figure 10. Meera ki Reti area on a map

Bridge Halt

1900, the British built an iron railway bridge at the present Braj Ghat as a halt point and named it as 'Bridge Halt' but gradually, 'aphabhransh' (appendage) by locals gave it the name of Braj Ghat.



Figure 11. View of the old iron bridge



Figure 12. INTACH ICH team documenting a resource person with the backdrop of 'Bridge Halt'

Clock Tower

The Famous Clock Tower at Braj Ghat, Garhmukteshwar, was built in 2004 by a Functional Committee (Sh. Dr. D.P. Singh, Sh. Devi Shankar Sharma and Sh. A.P.S. Raghav) under Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA). This 45-50 ft high clock tower was built under the State Sector Scheme of 2002-03. The core objective behind the Clock resembling the one at Haridwar was to bring back the lost glory of Garhmukteshwar as an ancient pilgrim site.



Figure 13. Clock Tower at Garh riverside

Marathon ka Qila

A historical structure which is believed to be sections of the fort repaired by a Maratha general, Mir Bhawan, is still there in Garhmukteshwar. A locally renovated dome-like structure on a plinth coated with cement and paint is all that remains. It is believed that the fort Garhmukteshwar was built by the Pandavas and later repaired by Mir Bhawan during the Anglo-Maratha war. Later, during British times, it was used as a district administration office. It is believed that Garhmukteshwar was the last Chowki and area of influence for the Marathas. The Marathas used to extract *Chauth* or a form of tax during their stay. More in-depth research on the matter will lead to some interesting findings.



Figure 14. Remains of Marathon ka Qila

Freedom Movement



Figure 15. Gandhi ji at a rally in Hapur. Image source: Dainik Hindustan

When the country was in the clutches of slavery and the youth of the country were fighting for freedom, Hapur was witnessing the spark for freedom among the youth of the area. Be it the Mutiny of 1857 or Freedom Struggle up till 1947, Hapur has been always involved. In the 'Do or Die' Movement of 1942, local freedom fighters like Mukaddam Ganga Sahay, Mahatab Singh, Ch. Kude Singh, Uma Dutt Vaidya, Swami Shrinivaas, Mange Lal Nagar, Ratan Rai Gautam, and Pandit Vishambhar Dayal contributed. When the British Tehsildar issued an order to loot the bastion market, it created panic. Frightened by the looting and persecution by the British army, the traders reached Chaudhary Prannath's mansion near the Ganga temple and took refuge there. According to Pandit Santosh Kaushik, Ganga Mandir, *"When Chaudhary Prannath, a rich landlord, came back to the mansion from his visit to Pundarwala in Punjab, the British arrested him to make a deal for his release. Mangla, daughter of Prannath, and his elder son, protested against this arrest and a scuffle broke out between them and the British. The British overpowered the brave Mangla and her brother and purportedly executed them with a cannon. The present building of the Nagar Pallika was once Prannath's haveli. Nobody is aware of this historical incident."*

Mahatma Gandhi visited Hapur in 1935 and urged the countrymen to participate in the freedom movement. He was aware of the significant role played by the people of Garhmukteshwar in the

Mutiny of 1857 as well. The place where Gandhi ji visited is known as Gandhi Colony today. The Non-cooperation movement started in Hapur from Asoda village, followed by Fafunda village, and the spirit continued on to Meerut and Ghaziabad, later on.⁹



Figure 16. Nagar Pallika building, erstwhile Haveli of Chaudhary Prannath and his daughter Mangla



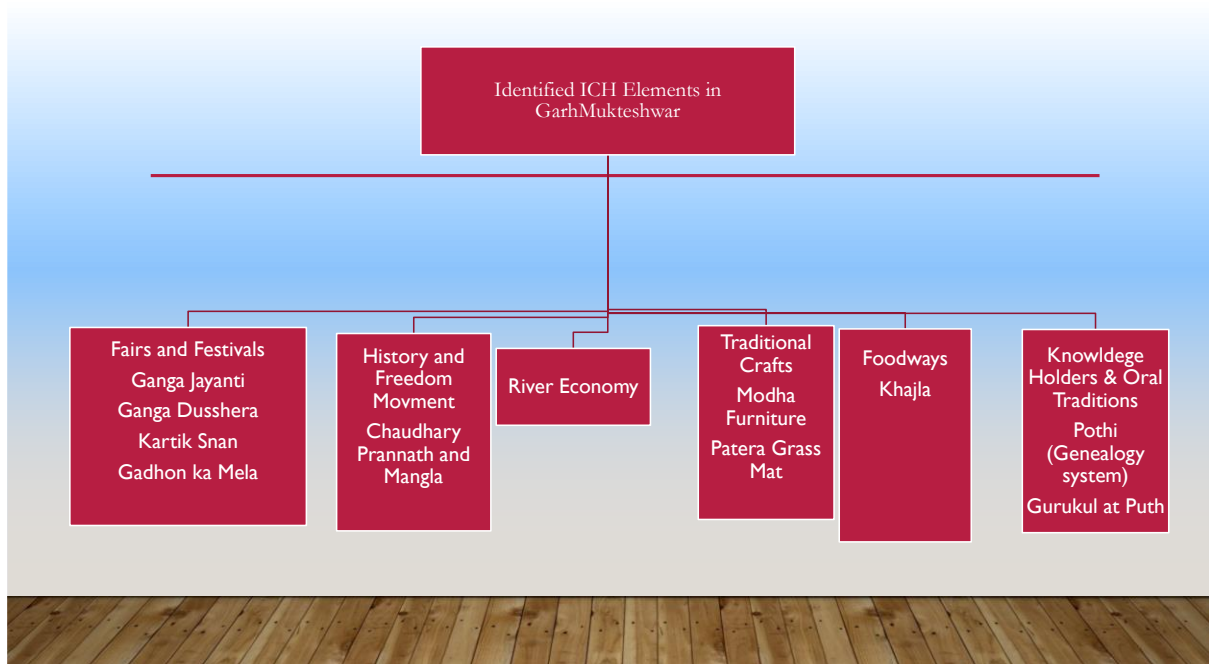
Figure 17. Gandhi ji visited Gandhi Colony in 1935

⁹ Dainik Hindustan <https://www.livehindustan.com/uttar-pradesh/hapur/story-gandhi-had-raised-independence-in-1935-in-hapur-and-garhmukteshwar-in-1946-2777284.html>

Identified Intangible Elements



Figure 18. Rosary beads are a popular item for sale at the ghats of Garhmukteshwar



Fair and Festivals



Figure 19. Tents are installed on the Khadar of Garhmukteshwar by the local administration during melas

Being an important pilgrimage centre, a variety of festivals and fairs take place in this city. Every year the **Garh Ganga Fair**, a bathing festival, is organized here on the day of full moon in the Hindu month of Kartik. This bathing festival is a symbol of tradition, faith and trust, and people from far and near come here to have a dip in the waters of the holy Ganga to cleanse their sins and purify themselves. Another bathing fair is organized in the Hindu month of Jyeshtha on the occasion of Dussehra. In a way similar to the festival held during Kartik, pilgrims flock to the city to take a dip in the Ganga.



Figure 20. Horses and donkeys are the highlight of the ‘Gadhon ka Mela’ at Khadar of Garhmukteshwar

A unique fair organized in this city is the **Gadhon-ka-Mela**, a kind of animal market where horses and donkeys are traded. This fair is attended by the residents of Hapur district and nearby places. Businessmen from all over the country, at times even neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, also take part in this animal fair. The problem in organizing these festivals is a lack of funds and support from both private individuals/business organisations and the state government.

One attraction during these events is a holy tree known as the **Kalpavriksha**, renowned as the ‘Tree of Heaven’. This holy tree is said to fulfil the wishes of visitors and is among the rare species of holy flora, said to hold religious, spiritual, environmental and medicinal significance. It is one of the sought-after tourist attractions of Garhmukteshwar.

Nahush Koop or Nakka Kuan is another major attraction of the town. It is said to be the place where King Nahush performed a yajna, and as it receives water from the river Ganga, it is considered to be a highly sacred area.

Shab-e-Barat, a major festival celebrated by the Muslim community, begins from the 13th or 14th day of Shaban, the eighth month of the Muslim year, and ends on the 15th day. This festival occurs fifteen days before the beginning of Ramadan. This festival is believed to be the “Night of Forgiveness” and the “Day of Atonement”, when Allah forgives the sins of the past and writes down everyone’s destiny for the coming year based on their actions in the past. In Persian, ‘Shab’ means ‘Night’, and ‘Barat’ means ‘The Night of Commission or Assignment’. In Arabic, however, the day is known as Laylatul Barat, meaning ‘The Night of Emancipation’. Others see Shab-e-Barat as the ‘Night of Good Fortune’. Some believe a popular legend that on the night of Shab-e-Barat, the Prophet visits each and every house and relieves the pains of those who suffer mental and physical anguish. The night of Shab-E-Barat also commemorates the entry of Muhammad into the city of Mecca. However, Shia Muslims associate this night with the birth of their last Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi. This festival is meant to be celebrated at night; Muslims are expected to perform Nawaafil, recite the Quran, Salawat, Kalima Tayyibah, and seek forgiveness; houses and streets are lit up and adorned with decorations; sweets like meethi sevaiyyan are distributed, and people are encouraged to engage in charitable acts.

Another major festival celebrated in Garhmukteshwar is **Gudi Padwa**. According to the *Brahma Purana*, Gudi Padwa marks the day on which Brahma created the universe after the deluge, and the notion of time began on this day. This festival is also believed to commemorate the coronation of Rama on his return to Ayodhya after slaying Ravana. Gudi Padwa also commemorates the commencement of the Shalivahana Calendar, named after the Emperor Shalivahana who vanquished the invading Hun warriors. Gudi Padwa is one among the three-and-a-half auspicious days (muhurtas) in the Indian Lunar Calendar—the special feature being that every moment during these is auspicious, which enables people to initiate new ventures on these days. On this particular day, a Gudi, believed to be Brahma’s flag (Brahmadhwaj), is hoisted outside every house as a symbol of victory and joy. In Maharashtra, it is reminiscent of the valiant Marathas returning home from their successful expeditions of the war. It is believed to ward off evil and bring good luck and prosperity into the homes of people. A unique custom that is part of the celebrations is the ingestion of neem leaves. These can either be eaten directly or ground into a paste and used in a special

preparation along with jaggery and certain seeds. The significance of this custom is to mark the commencement of the festivities. Another important activity people engage in during this festival is the making of a rangoli around the Gudi.



Figure 21. Devotees taking the holy dip in the Ganga during Kartik Snan

Ganga Jayanti or Ganga Saptami is an important Hindu festival which celebrates the rebirth of the River Goddess Ganga. In the myth regarding her descent from the Heavens, it is said that as a prank she flooded the ashram of Sage Jahnu, who in a flash of rage drank all the waters of the Ganga, trapping her in his body. A tearful King Bhagiratha begged the venerable sage to release Ganga so that his ancestors could attain moksha. Moved by Bhagiratha's plight, Jahnu made a cut in his left thigh and allowed Ganga to escape from there (essentially a rebirth of Ganga, which is why she is referred to in some texts as Jahnvi). As Ganga followed Bhagiratha, millions of people bathed in her waters to purify themselves and absolve themselves of their sins. The festival falls in the month of Vaisakh, according to the Hindu Calendar, and is celebrated in Saptami Tithi. On this day devotees light diyas,

offer prayers, and worship the river Goddess, and end the day by taking a holy dip in the waters of the Ganga.

Mawlid, Milad-un-Nabi or Barawafat is a sacred Islamic festival which celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in the month of Rabi-al-Awwal, the third month in the Islamic Calendar. On this auspicious day, Muslims are expected to engage in night-long prayers, decorate homes, buildings, and mosques, participate in religious processions, take part in communal meals in mosques and dargahs, and attend large-scale meetings where the teachings and virtues of Muhammad are elaborated upon and religious poems (nats) are sung.

Deep Daan is an auspicious festival dedicated to Vishnu and takes place during the Hindu month of Kartik, usually during the time of the Kartik Poornima. On this occasion, besides offering prayers to Vishnu and lighting diyas, many marriages take place as it is considered to be a highly sacred time of the year, ensuring that the couple will live a long, blissful life.



Figure 22. A devotee performing Deep Daan at Braj Ghat, Garhmukteshwar

It is said that, in this place, from Ekadashi to the Chaturdashi time of the Hindu Calendar, elaborate rituals and prayers were held for the liberation of the souls of people who died during the Mahabharata war. Later, at the end of Chaturdashi prayers, Deep Daan was done at river Ganga for the souls; to pay homage to these souls. Next morning, during Purnamasi, everybody took a holy dip in the Ganga and did pooja and conducted important rituals. It is believed that the Mela of Kartik Purnima at Garhmukteshwar began after this day. Every year lakhs of believers come here during Karthik Purnima to take a holy dip at river Ganga and do Deep Daan for the liberation of their ancestors. During this time, the river Ganga illuminates with the numerous deeps (lamps) floating on it and presents a peaceful and serene picture.

Ganga Aarti at Braj Ghat



Figure 23. Ganga Aarti at Braj Ghat

The Ganga Aarti at Braj Ghat is believed to be a very old custom but the form in which it is conducted now started in 2001. A dedicated committee was formed by Shri Deepak Singhal, and Jagadguru Shankaracharya Divyanand ji to look after the management and the Aarti at Braj Ghat. It is

one of the main attractions of Garhmukteshwar and attracts thousands of devotees here. During summer, the Aarti is performed at 6:45pm while in winter it starts at 5:30pm.

Ganga Jayanti

According to Shastras, Ganga ji reached Lord Shiva's hair from Swarglok on the day of



Figure 24. Idol of Ganga being bathed by priests during Ganga Jayanti

Vaishakh Shukla Paksha Saptami. Hence, this day is celebrated as Ganga Jayanti and Ganga Saptami. The day on which Ganga ji originated is known as Ganga Jayanti.

In the same way, the day on which Ganga ji reached the earth is known as Ganga Dussehra. Ganga ji is worshipped on this day. Bathing in the river Ganga and worshipping Ganga ji is believed to relieve a person from all sins and provide fame, happiness, and salvation. Ganga Saptami also sees the ceremony of Deep Daan—donation of *deep* or lamp. Huge fairs are also organized near the banks of the holy river on the day of Ganga Saptami.

Reciting *Ganga Sahasranam Stotram* and *Gayatri Mantra* is considered to be very auspicious on Ganga Saptami.

Folk elements during Ganga Saptami

Deep Daan: To bring salvation, peace and enlightenment to the deceased soul in the afterlife. Deep daan ritual is connected to the history of Ganga Mela. On the banks of river Ganga at Garhmukteshwar, every year during the time of Karthik Purnima, a holy Mela is held. This is the oldest and the most popular holy fair of Northern India. It is estimated that this Mela originated around 5000 years ago. Currently too the Mela is held with the same pride and honour; a large number of believers assemble in Garhmukteshwar to take the holy dip which is considered of supreme importance. It is said that after the disastrous war of the Mahabharata, Shri Krishna, Yudhishter and Arjun felt guilty upon seeing the horror and destruction caused by the war. They wondered what they could do for the liberation of the souls of the multitudes of people who died in this war.

They decided to go to Khandavi forest in which Lord Parashuram had established Shiv Ballabhpur, known as Garhmukteshwar now. On this bank, people worshipped Mukteshwar Mahadev, took a holy dip in the river Ganga and immersed in it the remains of their dead ancestors in the belief that this leads to the liberation of one's soul. Lord Rama's ancestor King Shivi understood the significance of solitary life, and had made Lord Parashuram establish a Shiv Mandir here. At that time, this place was one of the main centres of the Ballabh kingdom. This place was thus known as Shiv Ballabhpur, mentioned in the *Shiva Purana*.

It is said that, in this place, from Ekadashi to Chaturdashi in the Hindu Calendar, elaborate rituals and prayers were held for the liberation of the souls of people who had died in the Mahabharata war. Later, at the end of Chaturdashi, prayers and Deep Daan were done at river Ganga to pay homage to these souls. It is believed that the Mela of Karthik Purnima at Garhmukteshwar began after this day, visited by lakhs of believers every year.

Ganga in different holy books

In *Narada Purana*, verse 11, there is a beautiful shlok on the Ganga. The gist of the verse is that once the remains of a human are immersed in river Ganga, he or she would never be born again. If they are born again, then it would be as Lord Narayan himself.



Figure 25. Idol of Ganga

Similarly, in the *Skanda Purana* there is a beautiful verse on the Ganga. It says that any person on planet earth, if they recite the name of Ma Ganga, then they will get the assuredness of mukti.

In *Devi Bhagwat Purana*, Lord Vishnu's wife is said to be the incarnation of Ma Ganga. This is believed because Ganga is supposed to be emerging from the feet of Lord Vishnu. It is said that on the feet of the Lord, there is no place for daughters, only space for the wife. That is why Ganga is called the wife of Vishnu (Vishnupati). It is said that when Goddess Ganga descended from heaven in a tumultuous flow, she emerged from the matted locks of Lord Shankar.

There is also the legend of Jahnu Rishi and Ganga. After she emerged from the locks of Lord Shankar, she moved in a torrent from the Himalaya to earth. In this process, she

swept away the hut of the sage. The sage became furious and drank up the entire river. King Bhagiratha got worried as the salvation of his 60,000 ancestors was in jeopardy now. He prayed fervently to the Rishi. The Muni was very pleased with Bhagirath and decided to release Ma Ganga. He didn't want to release Ma Ganga from his mouth because he believed that it would make Ganga impure as anything coming out of your mouth is impure. So, he

released river Ganga by ripping his thighs apart. Since then, the other name of the Ganga is *Jahanvi*. It is also known as *Bhagirathi*. In another legend, associated with Agastya Muni, the river Ganga was given by Lord Shiva to the Muni in a kamandal, which led to the creation of the southern Ganga, the Kaveri.

Lord Krishna in the *Gita* said, *“amongst brajjo, I am peepal, amongst dhato, I am gold; likewise, amongst rivers, I am Ganga and amongst Gods, I am Vishnu.”* In the *Garud Purana*, it is said that after someone dies, if Ganga water is kept in their mouth, they will attain Mukti.

“Due to the presence of Ma Ganga in Garhmukteshwar, the Tirth has become even more holy and important. The Garhmukteshwar Pracheen temple is situated there. When Maharaj Parikshit was doing Ashvamedha Yagya for himself, he released a horse. The horse reached Maharaj Sandipini’s ashram, which is around six kilometers away from Garhmukteshwar. Raja Parikshit came here looking for the horse. He was impressed and inspired by this place and decided to rebuild Garhmukteshwar.”

Acharya Vineet, Bade Hanuman Mandir



Ganga Dussehra



Figure 26. The Pracheen Ganga Temple at Garhmukteshwar



Figure 27. Ganga Dussehra rituals being performed

The Ganga Dussehra in Garhmukteshwar takes place every year in the month of June and continues for 10 days. It is a religious festival, and also a fair which has been celebrated as 'Gangavataran' (the descent of the Ganga) on Earth. The festival is considered to be very auspicious and people keep fast on Ganga Dusshera. It falls on the Ekadashi Tithi of Shukla Paksh of Jyeshtha Month.

According to folklore, 'Gangavataran' or the descent of the Ganga happened at this time. Goddess Ganga, the eldest daughter of Himavan and Mena, and sister of Parvati, had been married in heaven but afterwards was brought down to earth by the great meditation of Bhagiratha, grandson of king Sagara of Ayodhya. Ganga came down to earth quite unwillingly; through Lord Shiva's matted locks in order to dilute her tumultuous form. She then came down in seven streams.

Places like Rishikesh, Haridwar, Varanasi, Garhmukteshwar, and Prayag where the river Ganga flows, hold unique connotations to this day. Devotees from all over the country congregate to these places. Garhmukteshwar is crowded during this festival and pilgrims comes here to touch the river water, bathe in it and take the river clay home to worship. A dip in the river Ganga is considered to absolve all sins, and to die on its banks is believed to be most fortunate.

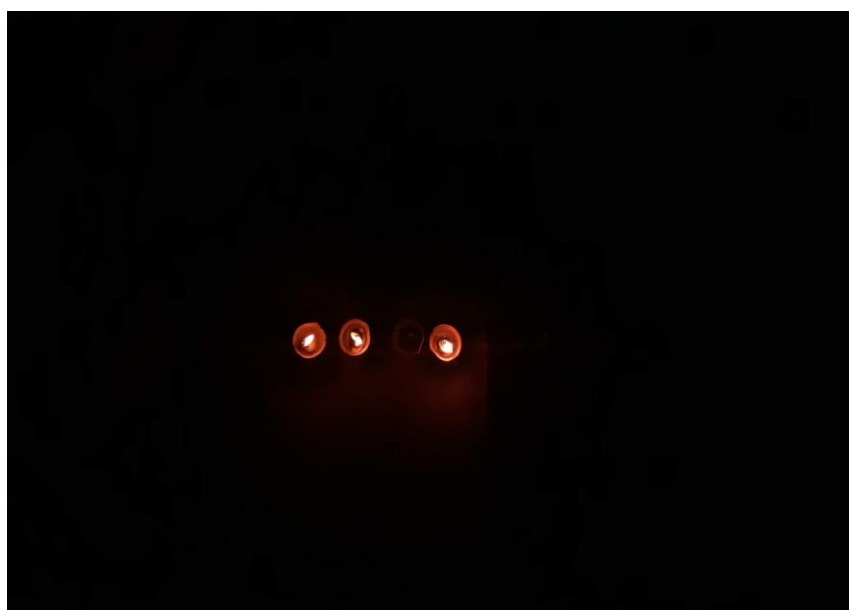


Figure 28. Lamps floated in the river during Ganga Dussehra



Figure 29. Stalls selling puja items and other knick-knacks during the festival season

Sacred Complexes

Ganga Mandir

The ancient Ganga Temple once had around 100 steps leading down to the river. 85 of these are still intact. Devotees from all around the country come to the temple to witness the Ganga and the marble idol of Brahma.



Figure 30. Ganga idol in the temple



Figure 31. 80 plus steps leading to the sacred complex of Ganga, Brahma and Ram Mandirs



Figure 32. The priest at the Pracheen Ram Mandir at Garh, close to the Ganga Mandir



Figure 33. Priests at Braj Ghat after daily Aarti

Brajghat

Brajghat is situated on the banks of the river Ganga at a distance of 5 km from the Garhmukteshwar town. This place has emerged as a new pilgrimage spot. A large, historic fair is held on Kartik Purnima at Brajghat, and in the surrounding area.

Ganga Arti was recently started here, and it is a centre of attraction for many daily pilgrims. The special feature of this Ghat is that it has many temple complexes featuring myriad gods and goddess of Sanatan Dharma. The Brajghat is also famous, other than Haridwar, for immersion of ashes of the deceased in a belief that a departed soul gets moksh after the remains are immersed in the holy water of the Ganga. On special occasions like Poornima (Full Moon), the place is crammed full of devotees trying to conduct special rituals, prayers and kirtans. Similarly, on Amavasya, people come to conduct Pind Daan for their ancestors. The purifying and spiritual qualities of Ganga Jal are considered essential in sacred rituals, in the healing of the frail and infirm, and to bless one in everyday life.

Shri Aman Pandey, Member of Ganga Sabha, says, “I do Ganga Arti every day at Brajghat. The importance of Brajghat is that if somebody’s take a bath in the Ganga here, all their desires get fulfilled. In Garuda Purana, it has been mentioned that our ancestors have got moksh from here. Also, first and foremost, Lord Krishna came here with the five Pandavas to do the last rituals of the Kauravas killed during the Mahabharata War. It is believed that immersion of ashes at Ganga gets Moksh. Bhagirathi mentioned shloka on the Ganga:

**“Hariom Bhagirathi cha Vidhmayi,
Vishnu patni cha dhimahi tanno Ganga Prachodayat”**

We chant this mantra every day after Ganga Aarti. It denotes that Ganga is associated with Bhagirathi who has great association with Bhagwan Shiva; she is also the wife of Vishnu and hence she is considered very special.”

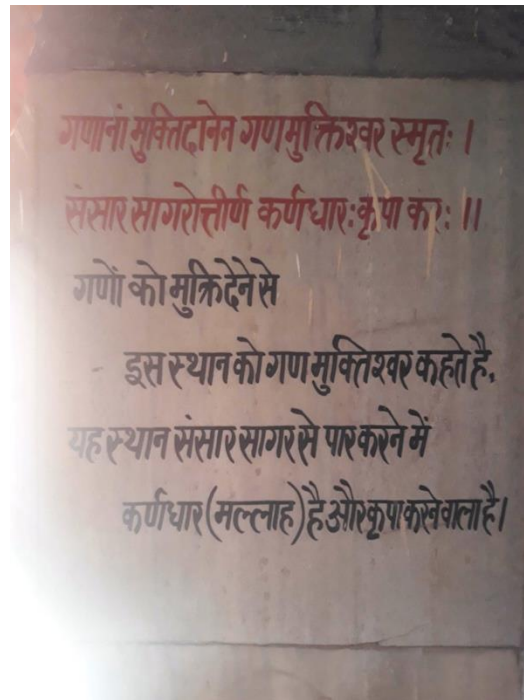


Figure 34. A plaque at the ghat

Hanuman Mandir



Figure 35. Hanuman Mandir, Garhmukteshwar

As Acharya Vineet Pandey mentioned, *“Ganga has the power to remove all the sins from this universe. The destruction of sins has always had a strong relationship with Hanuman Ji and the Ganga. Both Hanuman Ji and Ganga have great love, and it has also been said that Ganga is the mother of Bhisma, and Bhisma is meant to be a part avatar of Hanuman ji. One can see in Mahabharata Kala that Hanuman Ji played an important role in the Mahabharata. When the battle was happening, Ganga Jal was kept on hand and Hanuman ji was himself there so that he could act quickly if someone died in the war.*

Ganga means devi, one who is a supreme goddess, who can clean the universe, a moksh provider, and a powerful shakti to get rid of all sins—this temple lies on the tirtha of goddess Ganga. This Bade Hanuman is very old, and the love Hanuman ji has for goddess Ganga is very beautifully written in our literature. The love between Hanuman ji and Ganga, which we studied in literature, is unprecedented because Ganga is mother of Pitamah Bhisma and Bhisma is meant to be an avatar of Hanuman ji. Hanuman ji Maharaj has a great role in the Mahabharata; he participated in the whole war. The chariot where Arjun was seated, was the same chariot in which Hanuman ji was also seated, and in one of the pots, the divine Ganga Jal was kept with the aim to provide Ganga Jal to a deceased who died during the war.”

Shri Bhagirathi Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya



Figure 36. Entrance to the Sanskrit Vidyalaya

Sanskrit is a very ancient and world-famous language. It is a Vedic language and used for all religious purposes. All the Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata and other texts have been written in Sanskrit. This language is priceless and has been revered and preserved by our sages, priests and gurukuls. Not only in India but in other countries too, Sanskrit has been given a special place and people all around the globe are learning this language. The value of this language is immense as all religious material is originally available in this language.

However, in the present situation when people are more inclined towards modern



Figure 37. A student at the Sanskrit Vidyalaya

languages, Sanskrit has lost its value; the number of learners and speakers is dwindling. It is more and more confined to the Brahmin class. However, with the aim to promote, safeguard and provide access to the ancient and Vedic knowledge, Gurukuls play a vital role in preserving this age-old language. Saving the language is not just to save the *dialect* or *bhasha*, but to save the ancient knowledge which is available through this language.



Figure 38. A Yajna being performed by the students at the Sanskrit Vidyalaya



Figure 39. Top view of the courtyard of the Sanskrit Vidyalaya

Brahma Temple



Figure 40. Brahma idol in the enclosure next to the Ganga temple

Devotees from all around the country come to the temple to witness the Ganga and the marble idol of Brahma. The temple is adjacent to the Ganga Mandir at Garhmukteshwar.

Meera Ki Reti shrine

Garhmukteshwar has a large number of such ancient shrines which are associated with the unwavering faith of people of different sects. Meera Ki Reti or Meera Baba's shrine at the northern end of the city holds an important place amongst these shrines. Be it rituals of



Figure 41. Meera ki Reti shrine

newly married couples or the Mundan ceremony, Hindus make it a must to visit the shrine, especially during the Kartik Purnima fair. Thousands of children are also shaved for Mundan during this period. People of every sect come to offer *chadar* here. Meera Baba's tomb has remained a centre of unwavering faith for centuries. Every Thursday, a large number of devotees come to pay obeisance at Baba's tomb. As a traditional offering on the tomb, devotees prepare a dish made out of jaggery and rice, cooked in a clay pot. Later on, this is distributed to the poor and destitute in the form of Prasad. People of all religions are among those who offer their payers here. In the month of Kartik, during the large fair on the Garh

Ganga, a short distance away, there is also a display of equestrian species, believed one of the largest displays in the world.

Ghiasuddin Balban Mosque



Figure 42. Entrance to the mosque



Figure 43. Inscription in Persian on the mosque

In spite of its close proximity to Delhi, the references to this district in the Persian histories are few and insignificant. It is worth noting that the sole remaining Persian inscription, belonging to the reign of Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Balban, who reigned from 1265 to 1287, is still to be seen on the walls of the mosque at Garhmukteshwar. It simply records the fact that the building was erected by Balban in the year 682 Hijri or 1285 A.D.



Figure 44. Balban

Mukteshwar Mahadeva Mandir



Figure 45. Inside the Mahadeva temple

The shrine was first said to have been built by King Shibi. King Shibi was in the lineage of King Nahusha, six or seven generations down that line. The story of the King and the pigeon and the hawk is used to illustrate the compassion and generosity of the king. This story of Shibi appears in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

The story of Shibi in brief is as follows: The Gods, wanting to test the compassionate nature of King Shibi, took the form of a hawk and a pigeon. The pigeon chased by the hawk fell on King Shibi's lap seeking his protection. The hawk argued that the pigeon was its food. Shibi offered to compensate with his own flesh. He offered up himself to be eaten, and the Gods showed him their true form and blessed him. Garhmukteshwar's name came into existence after the name of this temple.



Figure 46. A stone/marble slab/plaque at Mukteshwar Mahadeva temple, Garhmukteshwar, with inscriptions in three languages (Hindi, Urdu and Sanskrit) about the year of construction of the temple.

Nakka Kuan



Figure 47. Nakka Kuan in a dilapidated condition

Nakka Kuan, originally known as Nahusha Koop, was, according to the locals, built by King Nahusha of the Mahabharata period. The step well is believed to have medicinal or healing properties and is adjacent to Mukteshwar (after which Garh Mukteshwar was named) and Jharkhandeshwar Mahadev temples. The local folklore about this is that the level of water is in sync with the level of the Ganga. Hence, when there is a rise in the river level, the well water also rises and when the water in the Ganga depletes, so it does at this well. It is currently in a dilapidated condition.

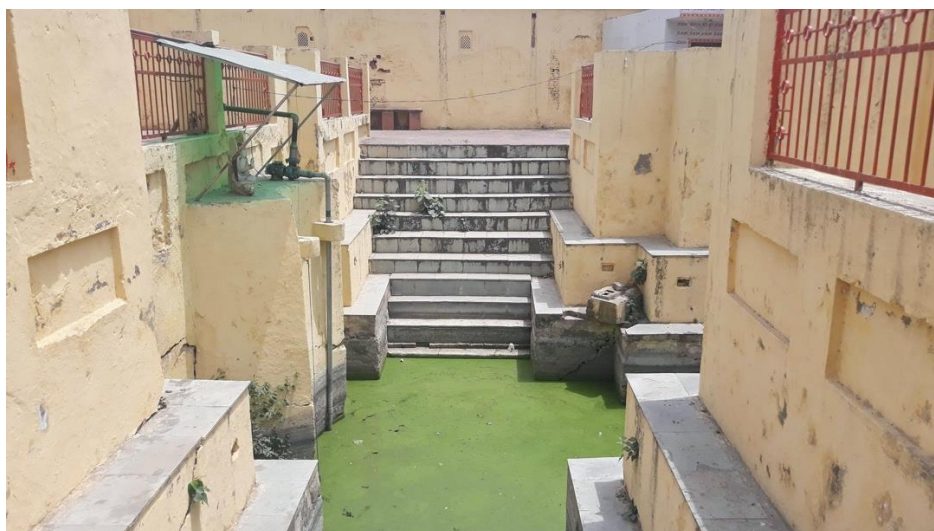


Figure 48. Nakka Kuan complex

Pothi (Genealogy records) system of Garh



Figure 49. Pothi (Genealogy) records at the residence of Pandit Santosh Kumar Kaushik

At Garhmukteshwar, genealogy registers of families are maintained by Brahmin pandits called 'Pandas' locally, who also work as professional genealogists. In several cases, these voluminous records called Vahis (Bahi), have also been used in settling legal cases regarding inheritance or property disputes, as these records are held sacrosanct both by the pilgrims and the Pandas themselves. In many instances, these records trace family history for over twenty prior generations, stretching across many centuries.

As Garhmukteshwar has traditionally been a site for death rites and *Shraad* amongst Hindus, it soon also became customary for the family pandits to record each visit of the family, along with their gotra, family tree, marriages and members present etc., grouped according to family and hometown or village. Over the centuries, these registers became an important genealogical source for many families, part of splintered families, in tracing their family tree and family history, especially after the Partition of India in 1947, and later amongst the Indian diasporas. According to Pandit Kaushik, they are hesitant to pursue their job now because people don't have the correct sentiment towards being a priest or the yajmani (one who sacrifices or gives money to conduct rituals etc.). He says that

people who come here to immerse the body, are not giving anything to them in kind or cash. They make excuses and give them very little money. However, they end up spending a lot of money from their pocket, due to their work like making records and taking care of them. He adds further, *“These 300 years old scrolls sometimes have handwritten data in both Devanagari and Urdu and some in our own Panda-developed script which only we can understand. Over the years, the custom of visiting Garhmukteshwar to update family ledgers is slowly dying. People are now moving abroad and forgetting about these centuries-old customs. Most of them do not even know the names of their great-grandfathers or their original ancestral village.”* In his words,

जब यजमान ही रुचि नहीं दिखा रहा अपने पुरखों और अपनी आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए पोथी की नामावली में नाम दर्ज करवाने में। जब उसकी इच्छा ही नहीं है अपने पंडों से मिलने की यहाँ (गढ़) में तो हम भी क्यों माथा खंपाएं इनको सहेजने में?

“When today's Yajman is not showing interest in getting his ancestors enrolled in Pothi records, when he does not have the desire to meet his pandas here at Garhmukteshwar, why should we take so much pain to preserve the records, and for whom?”

During field AV Documentation on Pothis done by the INTACH team about his views on the Ganga and Garhmukteshwar, Shri Kaushik started with a poem which he penned down years ago, which goes thus:

*चली मात, गिरी तोड़ कर, धैन् बदन से धार
जय गंगे, गंगोत्री, जो पुनः आयी हरिद्वार
पुनः आयी हरिद्वार, हस्तिनापुर करे पुकार
मुक्ति को गढ़ मुक्तेश्वर सार, पहुंची पूट धाम आहार...*



Figure 50. Pandit Santosh Kaushik, Pracheen Ganga Mandir

As stated by Shri Santosh Kaushik, *“It has been mentioned in the Skanda Purana, Garhmukteshwar pilgrimage was mentioned as Shiva Ballabhpur, which was later named as Garhmukteshwar. It was after the curse of Maharishi Durvasa that all the Ganas of Shiva*

got Mukti/ Moksha from here. They took bath in the Ganga and prayed at Garhmukteshwar near Shivpuja. And this Garhmukteshwar Shivlinga was established. People from all across India come here and pray. Here, in Garhmukteshwar, big festivals and fairs are held.

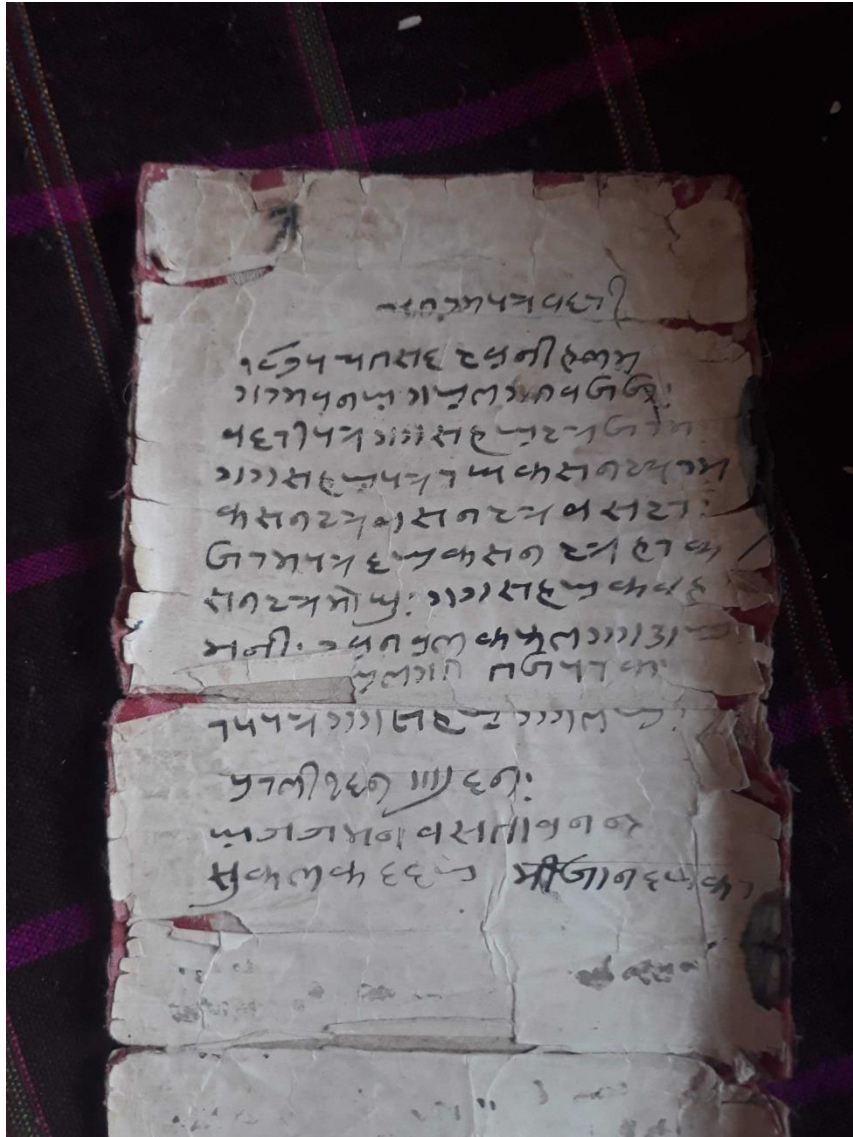


Figure 51. A page from an old Pothi

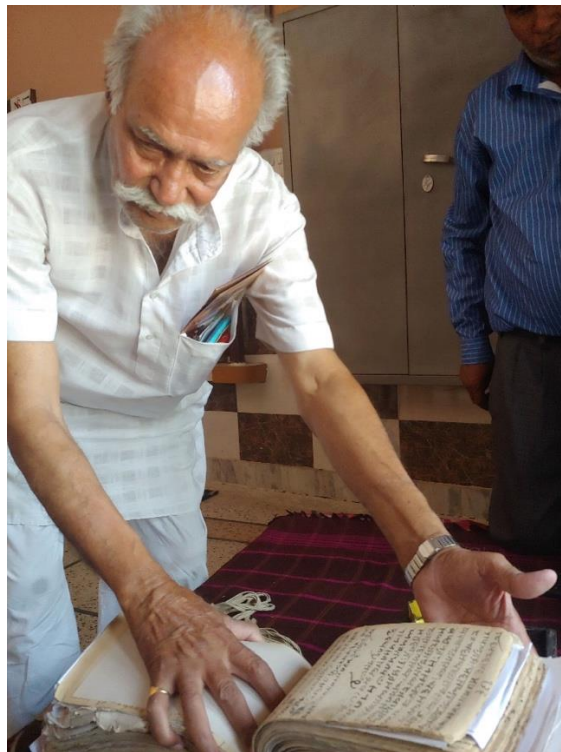
During the month of Kartik Shudhi Poornima, lakhs of people come from all across the country for the immersion of ashes of their ancestors. The reason is that it is a Tirtha which gives Moksh. From time to time, many rich businesspeople have come here for Tirtha Pooja. I am a Tirtha Purohit of Birlaji. All the Vaishya communities used to come here—like, Bansal gotri, Poddar, Tulsian, Jalyan, and Khaitan. But its importance has become less known, as after the partition, people came from Pakistan and gave importance to Haridwar, due to which the significance of Garhmukteshwar weakened.”



Figure 52. Pothis stored in the house of Sh. Santosh Kaushik



Figure 53.



Figures 53 & 54. A selection of very old pothis with the pandas of Garhmukteshwar

Challenges for Pandas and Bahi of Garh: Poaching Patrons

During AV Documentation work done by INTACH Team, Pandas of Gaya, Prayagwals of Prayagraj, and Pandas of Garhmukteshwar told the team that they fear poaching of their data the most, as they have preserved this with so much of hard work. According to Pt. Santosh Kaushik in Garh, “there is no common consensus, there have been incidents where Pandas from other regions have poached data from our bahis by sending decoy researchers and getting bahis photocopied. We have lost several of our Yajmans (patrons) and there have been cases where the link of genealogy of a particular gotra yajman has snapped due to this.”

There are about 100 panda families at Garhmukteshwar. When asked why they are not willing to digitise their bahis, Pt. Kaushik said there are many who are reluctant to do so because digitisation cannot replicate the ‘emotional connect’ that comes from say, looking at the handwritings of one’s elders, and the humane relationship between the Panda and the Yajman cannot be replaced by technology. In this regard, ace organisations such as National Mission for Manuscripts and Ministry of Culture can come out with policies, balancing the equation and the way forward for this age-old tradition.



Figure 55. Pandit Santosh Kaushik, Pracheen Ganga Mandir

Traditional Crafts of Garhmukteshwar

Modha Furniture



Figure 56. Colourful Modha furniture items on display



Figure 57. Sh. Arun Kumar at his Modha workshop

The Modha furniture of Garhmukteshwar is popular not only in India but throughout the world. The Modha furniture from here is exported to various countries. According to Shri Bhuteshwar Prasad Sharma, Amar Ujala Correspondent, "Once, Raja Man Singh, general of Emperor Akbar, came to Garhmukteshwar for a holy bath. His signature is found in the ledger book of Pandas of Garhmukteshwar. It is believed that Raja Man Singh got so fascinated with the intricate details of the Modhas that he gifted a few of them to Akbar."

Sh. Sharma wrote a book in 2001, *Garhmukteshwar Khandvi Van ka Pauranik Itihas* which talks about the various aspects such as history, culture, and mythology of the region.

During British time the Modhas used to adorn the guest rooms of the officials' bungalows. According to Shri Khemchand, son of ex-president of Garhmukteshwar Municipality, late Sh. Sukkhan Singh, their ancestors in the past 10 decades have been engaged in this work and from the population of 46077¹⁰, most of the people engaged in this work are poor and from what is considered the lower castes.

Garhmukteshwar Religion Data 2011

Town	Population	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain	Others	Not Stated
Garhmukteshwar	46,077	75.86%	22.45%	0.18%	0.22%	0.01%	0.04%	0.00%	1.24%

Modha has been an integral part of every household of Garhmukteshwar and used to be found in every house. It was used for guests and was a prized possession of the guest room.

The use of *Beend*, *Senta*, *Baan Moonj*, *Rexine*, is common in making the Modha furniture. The display of high craftsmanship has been unparalleled. Their expertise lies in creating baby chairs, Modha chairs, sleeping chairs, sofa, and so on. Creative designs and patterns made while weaving makes them eye catching items.

In a year the peak sale period observed for these Modhas is summer because the cane is vulnerable to moisture during the rains and winter.

The Garhmukteshwar-made Modha furniture is exported to around 25 countries including Denmark, Australia, etc.

¹⁰ As per the Census record of year 2011. Out of total population, 12,727 were engaged in work or business activity. Of this 11,370 were males while 1,357 were females. In census survey, worker is defined as person who does business, job, service, and cultivator and labour activity. Of total 12727 working population, 82.31 % were engaged in Main Work while 17.69 % of total workers were engaged in Marginal Work.



Figures 58 & 59. Modha furniture on display at roadside stalls in Garhmukteshwar

Table 3.7: Cluster Analysis - Ghaziabad

Sr. No.	Name of Activity	Approx Total Enterprises in Cluster	Approx. Employment Generated (Nos.)	Source of Raw Material	Estimated Turnover (₹ Crores)
1	Modha (Cane & Bamboo Products) Cluster	100	397	Garh Mukteshwar	1.61
2	Bone Accessories Cluster	200	648	Loni, Delhi, Mumbai	7.08
3	Textile Block Printing Cluster	190	958	Pilkhuwa, Meerut, Moradabad, Delhi	9.79

Source: Primary Analysis from Sampled Clusters

Figure 60. Modha Cane Cluster, Study on Micro and Household Enterprises in NCR, October 2015, NPCB



Figure 61. INTACH provided platform for the craftsmen from Garhmukteshwar to sell their products in the capital



Figure 62. *Senta*, the local name for the cane, is a highly durable eco-friendly material



Figure 63. Stems of the plant are used to make Modhas

Cane furniture, which is also known a kind of rattan or wicker furniture is basically made of the stems of the rattan plant. Cane is the raw material from rattan plant and it is tensile and durable. It is therefore considered to be ideal for both indoor and outdoor furniture. As it is quite versatile, it can be designed according to modern trends and styles to enhance both indoor and outdoor decors.

To make one single Modha, it takes 2 days of labour, with raw materials like cane, old cycle tyres, rexine, iron nails etc. It costs around Rs



Figure 64. Women are also highly skilled in Modha-making

200/- on an average to make it. Unfortunately, the craftsman earns only an average of Rs 250-300 per day, which is minimal, given the hard work that goes into the making of these. The features which make Modhas worth buying are outlined below:

Light Weight

One of the greatest advantages of rattan furniture is that it is light in weight. It can be carried around from one place to another quite easily as it is light and available in attractive varieties.

Low Maintenance

Unlike other wooden furniture which requires frequent polishing and maintenance, wicker or rattan furniture requires low maintenance. All that it requires is an occasional polishing to retain its charm and elegance.

Eco-friendly

Most people prefer to buy wicker furniture as it is environment friendly. It includes the use of natural materials which is derived from the stem of the large rattan plants. It is a climber palm which is found in tropical regions of Asia and Africa.

Versatile

Rattan furniture can be shaped and designed into different types of furniture items, for both indoors and outdoors. It has the power to transform the decor of a home or office space with its incomparable versatility.

Resistant to the adverse weather

It is often used in gardens and patios as outdoor cane furniture as it has the immense ability to resist all types of climatic changes. It is seldom affected by climatic changes although it should be placed away from direct heat and sunlight to avoid it becoming brittle. It is also water-resistant and rustproof.

The process of making a Modha is very tedious. As Shri Abdul Samad, Modha seller puts it, *“The making process is itself very time consuming...a lot of cleaning is required for the streaks of cane to make them smooth and shiny and the addition of designing aspect complicates the process further.”*

The Jatav community along with Muslim community is involved in this traditional craft work. The craftsmen residing near Mira Pehalwan ki Reti are generally the ones who are working on shaping the Modhas before they are sold at wholesale rate to shopkeepers on the National Highway near Brajghat.



Figure 65. *Senta* (Cane) and *Baan* (the nylon cord) are two base materials



Figure 66. Sh. Abdul Samad, displaying a Modha/stool

Patera Mat



Figure 67. Rolls of Patera mats

Patera is another traditional craft of Garhmukteshwar. Even today a considerable number of people are engaged in this labour-intensive craft. Patera is a local name for reed grass out of which temporary shades and overhead light sheds are crafted. Earlier the raw material used to be available in the Ganga Khadir¹¹ land or green areas closer to the river. But due to the deforestation near the water source, preference to agricultural land and disinterest among the upcoming generation, this traditional craft is on the verge of extinction in the coming years.

According to Shri Gyan Chand, a local Patera maker, *“This craft is a very labour intensive and is a primary source of income for the Jatav¹² community engaged in it. There are around 200 Jatav families which are dependent on this profession for their livelihood. But in course of*

¹¹ Khadir or Khadar and Bāngur are terms used in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi in the Indo-Gangetic plains of North India and Pakistan to differentiate between two types of riverplains and alluvial soils.

¹² According to Census 2011 data, the Jatav community is the largest scheduled caste community of Uttar Pradesh.

time other communities too have adopted this profession as a mode of living—like the Muslim community of Mirapur.”

The use of Patera is mostly in the agricultural fields as it provides temporary sheds or storehouses for grains and is purchased by the potato cultivators of Agra, according to Shri Gyan Chand. The other buyers of Patera are the Modha sellers near Brajghat who use Patera for making temporary sheds to store and showcase their products; the poultry farm owners are the other buyers of Patera. They purchase it at a cost of Rs 600 per mandal (‘mandal’ is the local unit of measurement which is equivalent to 10 sheets of patera).



Figure 68. Sh. Gyan Chand, a Patera mat maker talking about the process and his earnings

An elder from the community, Shri Chandan Singh, says, *“We spend a lot of time in the jungle to cut Patera. Everybody from the family works very hard to make these mats. However, we don’t earn that much money from it as we have to borrow money during sickness and marriage functions. Patera mats are easy to use and a low-cost item. People use this mat to sit on the banks of the river Ganga after they take a holy dip there. They use it to eat food and to carry out long prayers and sing bhajans also.”*



Figure 69. Diyas floating on the river on makeshift mats

He adds, *“Similarly, they use a 10/10-inch mat made of the same material to put diya on it. The diya is used in remembrance of their ancestors. They float this small mat on the Ganga; this denotes that Ganga herself has descended on earth from heaven.”*



Figure 70. Shades made with patera sheets on the bank of the Ganga, Garhmukteshwar



Figure 71. Shops along the route (NH 24) to Braj Ghat use patera mats as shade

The community purchases the bundles of pateras on a wholesale rate and then works on the process of cleaning and extracting fine streaks, laying them dry for a couple of days before they are woven and given the desired shape.



Figure 72. Bundles of Patera mats stacked on the roadside

Traditional Foodways



Figure 73. Namkeen vendors are plentiful

A specialty of Garhmukteshwar is its *kulhad ki chai* (tea in an earthen cup). This tea, served in an organic, earthen cup, instead of a plastic cup or mug, is an exquisite delight, since it retains more of its aroma and taste. This is also an eco-friendly way of drinking tea, since the cups (which are disposed of after consuming the tea) are biodegradable and will not harm the soil, unlike the so-called disposable plastic products.

Being a culturally rich city, Garhmukteshwar boasts a list of traditional foods and sweets. The traditional sweets include *Khajla*, *Mave ka Pedha* and *Mave ki Kheer* (which used to be a special sweet made during the Pitrapaksha and Navratri period; and is no longer made as often).

Khajla Pheni is regarded as one of the most popular of Pakistani cuisine which has made its way to Garhmukteshwar. It is meant to be eaten as an accompaniment during dinner. Mava

Pedas are another popular Indian sweet and are regarded as a delicacy by the residents of Garhmukteshwar. A peda is a traditional sweet made by cooking mava and adding ingredients such as saffron, cardamom powder and sugar. It can also be made by simmering milk till it reduces to the required consistency. Mava Kheer, a delicacy once enjoyed by the nobility of India, is now consumed locally. It is a rich, creamy dessert whose flavour can be enhanced with ingredients such as almonds, raisins and cashew.

Garhmukteshwar has been known for Khajla the most and it is believed that nowhere else is Khajla is made the way it is prepared here. The Khajla is considered to be the sweet of festivals like Ganga Dussehra, Kartik Mela, Deepavali and so on. There are a number of shops which hold expertise in making this traditional sweet here. The two oldest shops near the Brajghat area are Prem ji Sweet shop and Chhote Lal Pehalwan sweet shop.



Figure 74. Khajla, a traditional sweet of Garhmukteshwar

According to Shri Kapil Sharma, owner, Prem Ji sweets, “*Khajla is a traditional sweet which is sold during such festivals... you will see number of stalls during such occasions... the preparation process for 'Khajla' is similar to 'Jalebi', the mixture of wheat flour is prepared with other ingredients and later on dipped in a 'Chasni' or sugar syrup. In this way Khajla is made.*”

“*Khajla has been more popular among the rural people who come to Garhmukteshwar during the festival time and the demand during those time is so high that it's difficult to maintain the supply mentioned...you can call it a desi sweet*”, says Shri Harpal Singh, artificer at the Chhote Lal Pehalwan sweet shop.



Figure 75. Kachori, Sitafal ki sabzi and Methi ki Chutney

Besides this, the local traditional delicacies also include Kachori, Sitafal ki sabzi and Methi ki Chutney. This combination is one of the most sought after at Garhmukteshwar during the

festival season. According to Shri Kapil, the Prem ji sweet shop near the Brajghat is one of the oldest and was started by his grandfather, Late Shri Prem Chand Nagar in 1949.



Figure 76. Sh. Kapil, Premji Sweets

He credits the popularity of Kachori-Sitafal ki sabzi-and Methi ki Chutney to his grandfather. He says, *“At that time this flyover bridge was not there, only a railway bridge was there; the tourist inflow was not that huge. Our grandfather started this shop with delicacies like 'Aalu-Tamatar sabzi', 'Sitafal ki sabzi' and 'Methi ki chutney’; the same tradition is followed by us, not only by us, but by others also. Foodies from distant places come here to savour the traditional delicacies, primarily the 'Sitafal ki sabzi' and Methi ki Chutney'.”*

Mave ki Kheer was another traditional dessert of Garhmukteshwar which has now become almost extinct. The dessert, which has the complete goodness of coconut, almonds, walnuts, cashew nuts, pistachio and many other dry fruits, is as nutritious as delicious in taste. This is a perfect option for fasting as just one bite has sufficient potassium, minerals, vitamins and energy.



Figure 77. Mave ki Kheer

According to Pandit Santosh Kumar Kaushik, *“There used to be a family here in Garh (Mukteshwar) who used to make the best Mave ki Kheer, but the family quit the business and now there is no single authentic Mave ki Kheer maker in Garh.”*



Figure 78. A chole kulche vendor at the ghat

Ganga: For a Living



Figure 79. A young boy unloading fresh vegetables from his boat; Braj Ghat can be seen in the distance



Figure 80. A spate of different activities on the river

Being nearest to Delhi, for those who couldn't perform the last rites at Haridwar, Prayagraj or Varanasi, Garhmukteshwar eventually became popular as a site for asthi-visarjan (immersion of ashes), the final step in the last rites of a Hindu. 'Ganga nurtures all, even after death', such is the belief. The river is a source of livelihood to various communities, be it priests, boatmen, street hawkers, farmers and so on. The boatmen community is spread evenly across the state and constitutes nearly 13 per cent of the electorate of Uttar Pradesh. Some of the major sub-castes from the boatmen community include Nishad, Bind, Mallah, Kewat, Kashyap, Dhuria, Raikwar, Dheemar, Batham and Manjhi.

During any ritual performance on the Ganga, the role of boatmen increases manifold. Be it festivals such as Ganga Dussehra, Ganga Saptami or Kartik Mela, the boatmen serve the pilgrims. Also, during death rituals, such as immersion of asthi or mortal remains, the role of boatmen community is crucial.

During the field documentation, the INTACH team also met some boatmen at Braj Ghat with fresh vegetables grown on the fertile alluvial soil of the Ganga laden on their boats. Garhmukteshwar falls in the Upper Doab region and is blessed with fertile alluvial soil. It is an agricultural area. Mostly wheat, sugarcane, potatoes, peas and other edibles, fruits and vegetables are cultivated here.



Figure 81. The mortal remains of prominent leader, Late. Smt. Sushma Swaraj, being immersed in the Ganga at Garhmukteshwar by her daughter



Figure 82.



Figures 82 & 83. The riverbank of the Ganga is very fertile, and vegetables seller use boats to transport goods



Figure 84.



Figures 84 & 85. Religious and decorative items are very much in demand during festivals



Figure 86.



Figures 86 & 87. Balloons at the ghat; Children looking at religious books at a stall during Kartik Mela, Garhmukteshwar



Figure 88. Ingredients for puja or rituals are available in plenty at the ghat



Figure 89. Stall selling locally made items

Gurukul Mahavidyalaya, Pushpavati (Pooth)



Figure 90. Historical structure near the Ganga, at Pooth

In the Mahabharata period, this city was the main center of waterways trade. Hastinapur



Figure 91. Old image procured from the Gurukul shows a blindfolded boy demonstrating his archery skills

was a part of the state capital. North of Hastinapur and Pushpavati, today known as Gram Puth, was formerly the Khandvi forest area. There was a 35 sq km Khandvi forest between Hastinapur and Pushpavati. There was apparently a secret route to go from Hastinapur to Pushpavati, the signs of which were still present till a few years ago, but

which are now gone.

At this place, in the Mahabharata period, the Pandavas received education from Guru Dronacharya. The acting director of the present gurukul, Swami Akhilananda, Principal Shri Rajiv Kumar, and Admin Acharya Shri Dinesh Kumar, said that area being associated with the Mahabharata era, to educate the children at that time, the Vidyapeeth was established on the holy festival of Janmashtami in the year 1989 Samvat 2046. Since then, education is being imparted to students here. Acharya is now being taught in the Gurukul, which is equivalent to an MA. Gurukul Maha Vidyalaya is affiliated to Puth Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varanasi.



Figure 92. Screenshot from Google Earth showing the proximity of the Gurukul with the Ganga.

Figure 93. Below: Entrance Gate of Gurukul, Pushpavati, Pooth





Figure 94. A student from the Gurukul displaying his archery skills

Swami Akhilanand Acharya, the acting director of Gurukul College, says the focus is on preparing students to be Brahmachari, and also like Arjuna and Mahabali Bhima; to build character, and to read the Vedas. Education is imparted by nine teachers. The said college, which is



Figure 95. Students from the Gurukul performing Yoga, a routine exercise along with different arts

associated with the past of the Mahabharata, is still teaching hundreds of students from Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Baghpat, Shamli, Saharanpur, as well as Delhi and

Haryana, among other places, to whom, along with the Director Swami Swami Akhilananda, there are nine teachers who provide various types of education.

There is no shortage of people who have been educated in Indian culture after abandoning modern education. The number of students attending the Gurukul every year for Dharnurvidya, Vedpath, etc. is increasing continuously. Currently, 143 children are studying in the Gurukul. However, at present some children are studying online from their homes due to the Corona pandemic. Swami Akhilananda said that in the Gurukul, students are taught to use bows and arrows, and swords, practice rope asana yoga, education of Ved Purana, Mallakhamba, wrestling, Sanskrit with Brahmacharya, Literature, Sociology, Hindi, Mathematics, and English as well.

Pushpavati Pooth (First Ganga Gram)



The Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Sushri Uma Bharti at the Ganga Gram Yojana programme, at Village Pooth, District Hapur, Uttar Pradesh on January 04, 2016.

Figure 96. Union Minister Sushri Uma Bharti, and Late Sh. Dharmeshvaranand Acharya ji at the 2016 Ganga Gram Yojana programme

Puspavati Pooth was selected as the first Ganga Gram¹³ out of 1600 other villages in Uttar Pradesh in 2016. The project had the following Vision:

To develop a model village, that will exhibit itself as a comprehensive and harmonious package of economic, historic, cultural and sanitized units, on banks of Ganga, which is self-sustaining. Promoting brand “Ganga” in its handicraft, organic farm produce and tourism will be other spin offs.

Components of Ganga Grams:

1. Making village ODF
2. Proper management of village waste draining into river Ganga
3. Proper disposal of solid waste
4. Water conservation activities including rainwater harvesting/ground water recharge/maintenance of well and ponds, promotion of sprinkler irrigation
5. Encourage plantation of medicinal plants and promotion of organic farming
6. Construction of crematorium
7. Promotion of tourism
8. Coordination between various Central and State Governments sponsored schemes and their implementation on priority in Ganga Grams.

¹³ Ganga Gram Yojana at Village Puth in Hapur district of U.P. 1600 villages situated along the banks of river Ganga will be developed under this scheme. In the first phase of the programme 200 villages have been selected.



Figure 97. Acharyas at the Gurukul

According to Late. Swami Dharmeshvaranand Acharya (Coordinator and Founder, Maharishi Dayanand Gurukul Mahavidyalaya, Pooth), *“Here at Pusphavati Ghat at least one family of three dolphins is sighted near the ghat which has mythological value.”*

There is something special about the soil here that the knowledge of archery is easily accepted by the children here, till now we have created about 10-15 Brahmanchari who are capable of using the Shabd Bhedi Baan and the common practice of Baan is good for a lot of children. So, we are also giving lessons to students in archery here; Veda and Vedanga are also taught here. Everyday our schedule starts at 4 in the morning; from 4'oclock, after doing the reading of Vedas, the students go for a walk and then they do little exercises like yogasan, pranayam and running. Then they sit in meditation during the Sandhyayajya and learn with dedication and self-study. Then the regular teaching of the school starts. In the evening, for an hour the students meditate; in this they are particularly made to recite the Gayatri Mantra and the Mahamrityunjay Mantra.



Figure 98. Acharya Dinesh ji monitoring the daily exercise routine of the students

Even in Yoga, according to the Ashtang Yog, whatever are the practices, there is one which is most difficult called Deepak Assan, our children are proficient in that too. In this, one places a deepak or lighted lamp on one's forehead and then various asanas or poses are made, which our children do excellently. So, in this way, in the daily routine of this place, Ved-Vedanga are recited, Patanjali's Mahabhashya, Maharishi Panini's Ashtadhyayi are all read and recited here along with the Veda. In addition to these English, and other modern subjects are taught here, all those which are mentioned in the syllabus. But along with this we specially teach Character-Building (Charitra Nirman) to our children; for this in the regular schedule we also set up a character-building Camp.



Figure 99. The Varisht (Senior) varga students perform/demonstrate yoga asanas while the Kanisht (junior) Varga students look on. The Ganga can be seen in the backdrop



Figure 100. A student from the Gurukul performing on Malakhambh

For people the name of Ganga is sacred:

गंगा गंगेति यो ब्रूयात् योजनानां शतैरपि ।

मुच्यते सर्वपापेभ्यो विष्णुलोकं स गच्छति ॥

- Skandapurana, Brahma Khanda 3

The one who remembers Ganga even when hundreds of miles away from Her, and repeats 'Ganga' thrice, is cleansed of all his sins and goes to Vishnulok after death.

Pushpavati Pooth: Guru Dronacharya's place of penance

Pooth village is situated on the banks of river ganga and it is a place of historical relevance. It was known as Pushavati during the time of Mahabharat. This place was known to be the tapsthal (place of penance) of guru Dronacharya. Here Kaurvas and Pandavs undertook their training along with Eklavya. However, with the passing of time, the relevance of this place decreased and today it is even difficult to reach this place. Acharya Dharmapal Shastri established a gurukul college and old age home over here. In this holy city of Pooth there are more 2500 different castes and communities, yet all of them live here in peace and harmony. The places to visit here are the Pracheen Shiv Mandir, Ganga Mandir, Guru Dronacharya Ka Yagyasthal, Radhakrishna mandir and the Shiv Linga established on the banks of the river.





Figures 101, 102 & 103. Above: Pracheen Ganga Mandir, Pushpavati Pooth

Historical References to Pooth or Puth

PUTH, Pargana and Tahsil, HAPUR

This pargana occupies the extreme south-eastern corner of the district, lying between Garhmukteshwar, on the north and west and the district of Bulandshahr on the south. To the east flows the river Ganges which, as in Garhmuktesar, forms the chief physical characteristic of the tract. There is in this pargana the same low-lying khadir divided off from the upland by a steep cliff, underneath which runs a series of depressions in which the water collects, forming swamps. Beyond this line the khadir is dotted with patches of grass and tamarind jungle which separate the numerous channels, while in the centre the land stands high and above the ordinary flood-level, but for many years has been rapidly deteriorating owing to the increased presence of reh in the soil. At the same time the khadir forms a valuable grazing-ground for the cattle of the numerous Gujars who inhabit the pargana. Puth is a small village of no importance, while of the remaining villages Bhadsana alone has a population of over 2,000 inhabitants.

In 1819 Puth was the headquarters of a tahsil comprising the parganas of Puth-Siyana, Thana Farida and Ahar Malakpur. The last two were transferred to Bulandshahr in 1824, and in 1844 Puth was separated from Siyana and attached to the Hapur tahsil, Siyana being given to Bulandshahr. One village was added to Puth in 1853, and the number now stands at forty-eight.

Source: District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1904, Page 293

Ferries at Garhmukteshwar



There is only one ferry in the district included under provincial works. This is the bridge of boats at Garhmuktesar on the road from Meerut, Moradabad, which is replaced by a ferry during the rains. For military purposes the place of this bridge of boats can be taken by the railway bridge on the Oudh and Rohilkhand line. Those managed by the District Board include the bridge of boats over the Ganges at Puth; similar bridges at Baghpat over the Jumna and at Baleni over the Hindan; the ferry at Barnawa over the Hindan and at Abdullapur over the Kali Nadi on the road from Meerut to Parichhatgarh. There is a third ferry over the Hindan at Baparsi, a mile south of Malahra on the road to Shamli, under the management of the Meerut District Board, and another on the road from Baghpat to Muradnagar. The remaining ferries over the Ganges are managed by the District Board of Bijnor.

They are known as the Rauli, Daranagar, Jafarabad and Makhdumpur ferries. The management of the Garhmuktesar ferry was transferred from Moradabad to Meerut in the year 1844. Besides these, there are several private ferries in the district; the chief of these are those at Jagatpur in pargana Loni over the Jumna, called Ghat Wazirabad from the town of that name on the opposite side of the river, and in the same pargana at Badarpur and Chilla, known as the Barari and Okhliya ferries respectively, from the villages on the other side of the river.

Source: District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1904, Page 75

Poets of Garhmukteshwar

Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani'

Veteran poet and shayar, Shri Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani' was born in Siyana tehsil of Bulandshahr district. He came to Garhmukteshwar in 1974 in search of a job. Besides opening his bakery at Garhmukteshwar, he was passionate about writing poems and shayari but the environment at Garh during those days was, in his words, "barren for creative persons and creativity which always instigated the creative fire within." Soon he met a likeminded gentleman at Garh who told him about the rich cultural and literary environment at Garh before the partition of 1947. They then started the Mazhar Shayari Committee at Garh. Gradually, several cultural programmes were organised and even today at Nagar Pallika of Garhmukteshwar, cultural programmes such as Mushaira are held annually, the credit of which goes to Zameel sahab who has performed across India. In Mushairas conducted at Garhmukteshwar, famous shayars such as Rukhsar Balrampuri, Qari Altaf Faretta and Altaf Zia too have performed. One of Zameel sahab's shayari is as follows:

लाज़िम ही सही आस मगर आस लगी जो

कमज़र्फ़के वादे का विश्वास न की जो

और कर ली जियो सूली पर लटकना भी गवारा

लेकिन किसी कमज़र्फ़ से अरदास न की जो

और इस शहर से मुश्किल है तेरा बच के निकलना

इस शहर में रुकने का प्रयास न की जो



Figure 104. Sh. Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani'

Sh. Zameel not only writes in Urdu but also in local dialects such as Braj. The following poem by him was written years ago in Braj Bhasha. ¹⁴

रतियाँ बगिया में काट कर आवे
भोर होते सजनवा घर आवे
अपने मन की अगर कहूं तोह से
प्यारे नैनों में नीर भर आवे।
अंधी ऐनक चढ़ी हैं आँखियन पर
कौन तोबू भला नजर आवे?

और सगरी नगरी में एक फ़कत तू है
जा को देखूं तो कुछ सबर आवे है
और सिर्फ बकबक करो हो 'मज़हर' जी
शायरी का भी कुछ हुनर आवे है?

¹⁴ Braj Bhasha is the vernacular of the region, and is very close to Awadhi, spoken in the neighbouring Awadh region. Much of the Hindi literature was developed in Braj in the medieval period, and a substantial amount of Bhakti or devotional poetry is in this language.



Figure 105. Zameel Mazhar's library

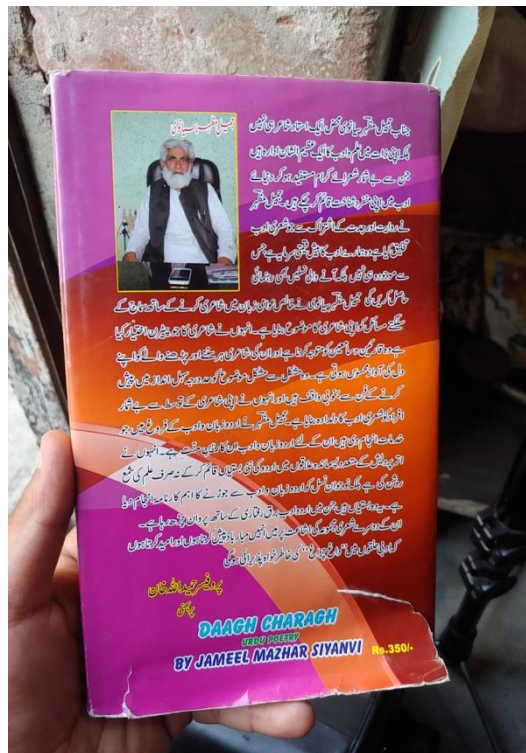


Figure 106. A book by the author

According to him, Garhmukteshwar has been a place of cultural harmony and Data Ganj Baksh's Mazaar is a testimony of this. He says, "there is a popular belief that devotees, who bring chadar and broom to the tomb of the donor, get relief from the disease of warts on the body. Due to this, a large number of devotees arrive on Thursday. As a result, people from both Hindu and Muslim community visit the shrine in large numbers."

During AV Documentation by INTACH, Sh. Zameel talked about how close the Ganga has been to the people of Garhmukteshwar irrespective of caste or creed, but still a lot needs to be done on ethical issues related to the Ganga, using its water, not polluting it and stopping others from doing this. He sums up with the following lines:

हाथ में जल है दिल में छल है
 इन्सां कितना पागल है
 अपनी जीवन नैय्या को
 खुद अपने आप डुबोवो है
 गंगा तेरे घाट पे जाने
 क्या क्या सामा होवे है?
 देख कर तेरे प्रदुषण को
 शायर का दिल रोवे ह।



Figure 107. Sh. Zameel Mazhar 'Siyani' performing in a Mushaira

Pilgrimage to Garhmukteshwar

Abode divine
Of God reliever,
From whirls worldly.

Resting on the banks of Ganga divine,
Celestial ghats with bathers' faithful rhyme.
Scene phenomenal of equality, brotherhood,
And classless society.

Devotees offering nectar to mother Ganga, sun,
And all near, dear, dead and alive.
Floating, twinkling, lamps to awake,
The inner consciousness, be one with higher consciousness.

At a distance, burning ghats, with moist eyes,
Mourners, bidding farewell to departed soul,
Putting dead in the pyre and giving the fire,
Immersing ashes with reverence in holy deep, to merge with the creator.

Cows, the national and symbol secular, moving merrily,
Faithfuls offering eatables to mother cow,
Monkeys, representative of Lord Hanuman,
Playing, eating with the devotees.

The endless sea of holy saints in saffron,
Color of sacrifice, love, devotion and purity,
Since the dawn of life, their ways are the ways of God.
Meditating to preserve wisdom and spiritual light.

For Hindus, in this land of miracles, from water to dust,
Everything, everywhere is God and His creation,
Water, sun, river, lamp, cow, monkey and saints.
This is unique riches in poverty, hunger and slum dogs.

Dr. Yogesh Sharma

Dr. Yogesh Sharma is a teacher at Garh, and an ex-NCC Officer. Apart from this, he is a poet, story writer, essayist, blogger and author. He believes in universal brotherhood. He loves humanity, social justice, secularism, women's empowerment and nature. His areas of interest are Education, Secularism, Environment, Human Rights, Women's Empowerment and Current issues.



नमामि गंगे का बनाया लेखाजोखा

गढ़मुक्तेश्वर। भारत सरकार की नमामि गंगे परियोजना के तहत भारतीय सांस्कृतिक निधि इंटैक के तत्वावधान में पूठ में दूसरे दिन रीति रिवाज परम्परा का लेखा जोखा तैयार किया।

भारतीय सांस्कृतिक निधि के वरिष्ठ शोधार्थी हरीश बेंजवाल एवं तृप्तासिंह ने टीम के साथ पुष्पावती पूठ में दूसरे दिन परियोजना का उद्देश्य गंगा नदी के उद्गम यानी गौमुख से गंगा सागर तक गंगा के किनारे पांच किमी के दायरे में मौजूद मूर्त व अमूर्त धरोहर परम्परा रीति रिवाज, तीज का दस्तावेजीकरण कर उनका मौलिक रूप उजागर करना है। हरीश बेंजवाल ने बताया कि क्षेत्र के रीति रिवाजों पर्वों की रिपोर्ट तैयार कर केन्द्र सरकार को सौपी जायेगी। निदेशक निरूपमा मोडवेल, मनु भटनागर, ने बारीकी से अध्ययन कर मसौदा तैयार किया है। गुरुकुल पूठ के संस्थापक स्वामी धर्मेश्वरानन्द सरस्वती, दिनेश आचार्य, प्रदीप आचार्य आदि रहे।



शुक्रवार को गढ़ पूठ में नमामि गंगे अभियान में सौदा लिए। • हिन्दुस्तान



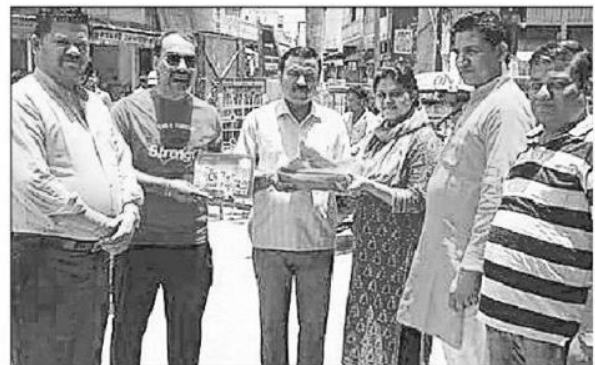
Figures 108, 109 & 110. Ganga Documentation: coverage in local newspapers

वैज्ञानिकों को किया सम्मानित

गढ़मुक्तेश्वर। नमामि गंगे परियोजना के तहत सांस्कृतिक कला निधि के वैज्ञानिकों की टीम ने गढ़ ब्रजघाट में पुरातन सांस्कृतिक रीति रिवाज परम्पराओं को डाक्यूमेंट्री फिल्म तैयार की गई।

गंगा विचार मंच व भाजपा कार्यकर्ताओं ने स्कन्द पुराण देकर सम्मानित किया गया। नमामि गंगे सांस्कृतिक कला निधि के वैज्ञानिक हरीश बेंजवाल, तृप्ता सिंह टीम के साथ नगर के सुभाष चौक पर पहुंचे तो गंगा

विचार मंच के अशोक शर्मा, भाजपा नगर अध्यक्ष योगेश वर्मा ने स्वागत करते हुए स्कन्द पुराण भेंट की गई। हरीश बेंजवाल ने कहा कि गढ़ ब्रजघाट पूठ में प्राचीन रीति रिवाज, परम्परा, तीज त्योहार, पर आधारित डाक्यूमेंट फिल्म तैयार की गई है जिसे भारत सरकार को देकर विकास कार्यों की रूपरेखा के रूप में होगी। इस अवसर पर योगेश वर्मा कुलदीप ने आभार प्रकट करते हुए तीर्थ नगरी के लिए अच्छी पहल बताया गया।



शनिवार को गढ़ में स्कंद पुराण देकर सम्मानित करते। • हिन्दुस्तान



Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Amroha District

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

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




Indian
National Trust
for Art and
Cultural Heritage
INTACH

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Introduction



Figure 111. Signage at Amroha railway station

Origin

District Amroha lies in the west of Moradabad District adjoining district Hapur, Sambhal and Bulandshahr, and Bijnor. The district came into being on 15th April 1997 in the memory of famous social reformer Sant Mahatama Jyotiba Phule by combining Amroha, Dhanora and Hasanpur Tehsils of Moradabad district vide UP Gazette no. 1071/1-5-97/224/sa-5 dated 15th April 1997. The head office of the district is situated in the ancient city of Amroha.

The district consists of 1133 villages, 4 Tehsils, 8 Blocks and 11 Police Stations. Its geographical area is 2470 Sq. Km., extending from Latitude 28° 54' North to 39° 6' North and Longitude 78° 28' East to 78° 39' East. The maximum and minimum heights from sea level are 240 ft. and 177ft. respectively. In the north of the district lies district Bijnor, district Sambhal is in the south, district Moradabad is in the east and in the west are situated

districts Hapur, Ghaziabad and Bulandshahr. The Ganga river separates it from districts Hapur, Ghaziabad and Bulandshahr.

Main Occupation

The majority of the population of the district depends on agriculture besides cottage industries like manufacturing of Dholak and Katholi. Handloom works and readymade garments are produced in Amroha, Beedi in Naugaon Sadat and cloth weaving in Bachraun. Milk and dairy products are attracting the attention of the people in villages and they are being associated with it through Cooperative Societies. The mangoes of this place are also famous.

Climate and Rivers

The climate of the district is similar to other districts of the state situated at the base of the Himalaya which becomes hot in summer and dry and cold in winter. Ganga, Baha and Krishna are the main rivers of the district.

History

District Amroha (called Jyotiba Phule Nagar) was created by the state Government on 15th April 1997 with its headquarters at Amroha. The district is comprised of erstwhile three tahsils viz Amroha, Dhanaura and Hasanpur of district Moradabad. It presently comprises 4 tahsils namely Amroha, Dhanaura, Hasanpur and Naugaon Sadat.

In the historical perspective, the present area of the district relates to being a part of the kingdom of North Panchala Desh with its capital at Ahichhatra, presently situated in Bareilly district. It is said that during the reign of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the governor of Sambhal, Rustam Khan, built a fort and compelled traders and agriculturists to settle around it. Raja Amarjodha, of the Bansi dynasty, was the ruler of the region around Amroha in 474 B.C. In *Tarikhi-Amroha*, it is mentioned by its author that Amroha was ruled by Rajputs

between 676 and 1141 A.D. Behram Shah (1240-42) appointed Malik Jalaluddin to the position of Hakeem of Amroha.

In ancient time Panchal rulers, who then held dominance over this region, were thrown out by the Kurus of Hastinapur but subsequently towards the middle of fourth century BC the entire Panchala region, including this district, was annexed to the Nanda empire and continued as such for a quarter of a century. The Mauryas ruled over this region for the next century and a half. After the downfall of the Kushans, the Nanda dynasty also occupied this region, but they were subdued by Samudra Gupta.

The dominance of the Gupta empire over this region remained for the next two centuries and then the district came under the control of Mukhari kings of Kannauj after the downfall of the Gupta empire and thereafter it remained under the reign of Harsha, from 606 to 647 A.D. After the death of Harsha, as in the whole of the northern region, in this district also, anarchy and confusion prevailed for quite some time. However, in later stages, the Tomars and the clans of the Gahadvalas also ruled over this region.

Again, after the defeat of valiant King Prithvi Raj and later Jai Chandra at the hands of Shahab-ud-din Gauri, there was a state of confusion and lawlessness. Ultimately, the Katehriyas, Bargujars, Gaurs, Tomars and some other clans of the Rajputs united with the sole objective of facing the Muslim invasion. They continued their efforts for quite some time, even after the establishment of Muslim outposts in some parts of the district. The Mughal invasion however, succeeded later on when Babar became King of Delhi in 1526. After the accession of Humayun to the throne, the region was captured by Afghans under the leadership of Sher Shah for a short while but again during the reign of Akbar, the district became part of Sarkar of Sambhal of Delhi subah under the Mughal Empire. The Rohillas also held their dominance in this region from time to time and Marathas too invaded this region quite frequently but were driven away by Shuja-ud-daula's troops. Later it came under the control of Awadh. In 1801, the administration of this territory was ceded to the British East India Company by the Nawab of Awadh.

जनपद-अमरोहा

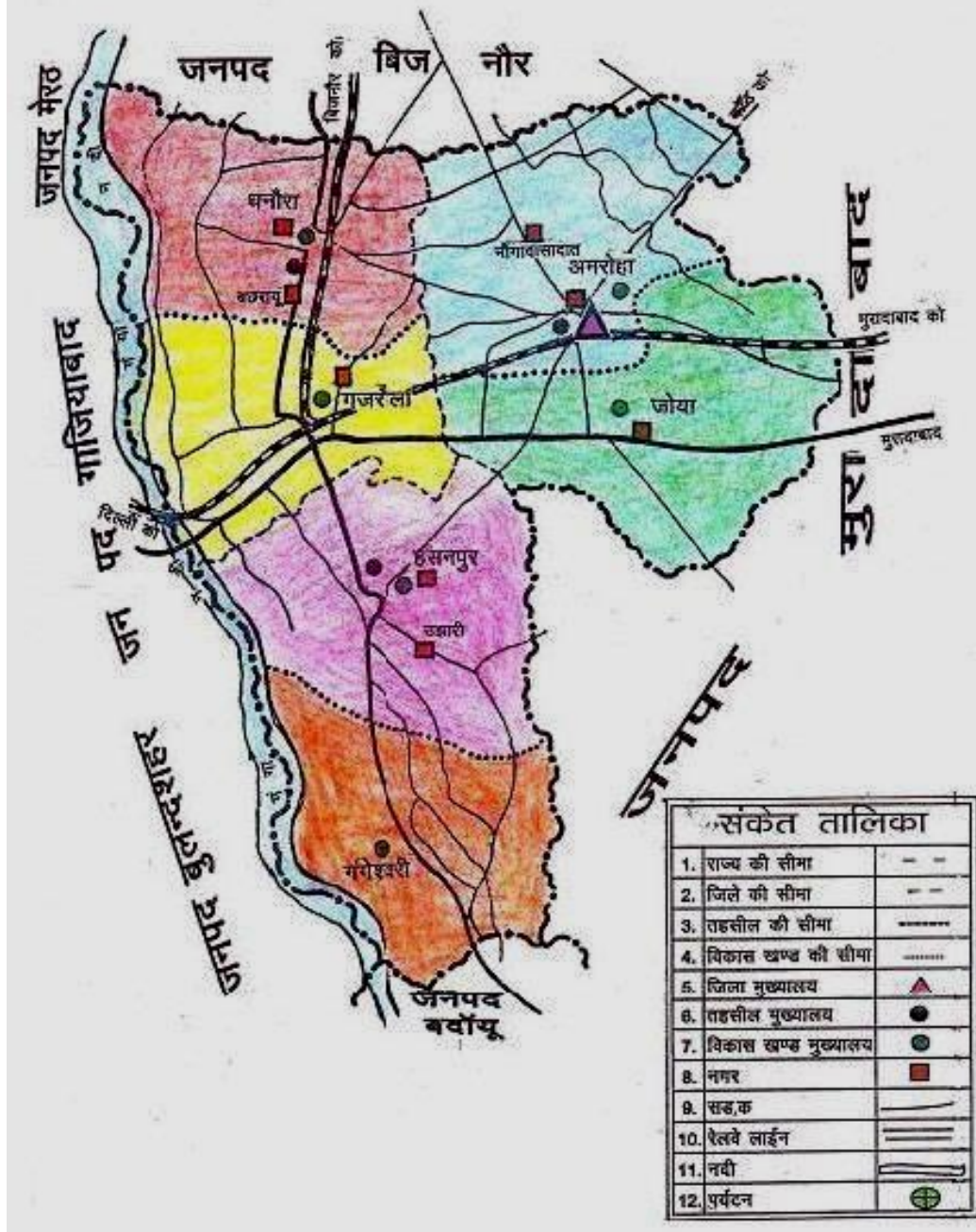


Figure 112. Map of Amroha

History of Amroha

Origin and Associated Myths

The present-day district of Amroha, formed a part of the North Panchala region in ancient times.¹⁵ Later, in the medieval period, the district was included under the Moradabad area. According to legend, the area was named Amroha somewhere in the fourteenth century¹⁶, following this, it was renamed Jyotiba Phule Nagar in 1997¹⁷ before being changed back to Amroha in 2012.¹⁸

The name “Amroha” is said to have been derived from *aam* (mango) and the *rohu* fish, both of which, according to legend, were offered to the 14th century general Sharf-ud-din (who, according to some sources, is believed to have founded the region,¹⁹) by the local people, who was then so pleased with the commodities that he named the place Amrohu, which later went on to become Amroha.²⁰

According to some other sources²¹, the place was founded by Amar Jodh, a ruler of Hastinapur. It is then said to have eventually fallen into ruin before being rebuilt by Prithviraj’s sister Amba Devi,²² after which Amroha became the seat of the Surajdhvaj dynasty before falling under the control of the Tagas until it became an *iqta* under the Delhi Sultanate and eventually the Mughal empire.

¹⁵ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 25. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

¹⁶ NIAZI, S., 2020. Sayyids and Social Stratification of Muslims in Colonial India: Genealogy and Narration of the Past in Amroha. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 30(3), pp.467-487.

¹⁷ 2020. [online] Available at: <https://amroha.nic.in/about-district/>

¹⁸ Hindustan Times. 2020. *UP Govt Changes Names Of Eight Districts*. [online] Available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/up-govt-changes-names-of-eight-districts/story-G06Uaa3Mi9k40dGlgVThWK.html>

¹⁹ NIAZI, S., 2020. Sayyids and Social Stratification of Muslims in Colonial India: Genealogy and Narration of the Past in Amroha. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 30(3), pp.467-487.

²⁰ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp. 312 Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

²¹ *Imperial Gazetteer of India vol. V(New ed.)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1908–1909. [eBook] pp 330-331. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/imperialgazette05hunt/page/n3/mode/2up>

²² Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp. 312 Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

Ancient History

A basic administrative history

The Puranic tradition that associates the founding of the region of Amroha to a raja of Hastinapur also mentions that somewhere around the middle of fourth century BCE, the area was annexed by the Nanda empire, after the fall of which it came under the Mauryas for the next century and a half.²³ According to the *Yuga Purana*, the region came under the control of the Yavana (Greek) rulers around the second century BCE. After that, somewhere around the first century CE, the region came under the control of the Kushanas and by 3rd century CE, it fell to the Nagas, who were then overthrown by the Gupta rulers. After the downfall of the Guptas, the overall region fell under the control of the Maukhari kings of Kannauj before coming under the administration of the emperor Harsha.²⁴ Post Harsha's demise, the region seems to have been controlled by various Rajput clans at different points until coming under the rule of the Surajdhvaj dynasty.²⁵

Associated archaeological finds from the region

As a result of some colonial excavations, the findings of which were documented by Alois Anton Fuhrer and F.H. Fisher, a large mound was found in the Bherabharatpur region, which is believed to be the site of an ancient temple; the area has also yielded life size statues in stone. The village of Garhi is also believed to have been the site of an ancient Kshatriya fortress near which numerous ruins of old buildings and temples were found. Another site from where ancient building materials that might have been used for temple construction have been excavated is Naubat Khana.²⁶

The Basdeo Talao tank and the Bah-ka-kuan baoli, both of which are believed to been constructed by Raja Kirpanath of the Surajdhvaj dynasty, are two most prominent ancient

²³ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 33. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 39. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

²⁶ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 28. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

architectural features of the site. The baoli is a structure made entirely out of *kankar*, except for the brick arches and vaults; adjoining the baoli, a reservoir with chambers and a well of considerable dimension was also found²⁷. Another important feature is the Saddu mosque, which is considered to have been the site of another ancient temple which is believed to have been built either by Amba Devi or one of the Surajdhwaj kings, which was then converted to a mosque in 1290.²⁸

In 2008-09, in a finding by the Archaeological Survey, a Chandela copper-plate charter belonging to the reign of Maharajadhiraja Vidyadharadeva was found. It contained the details of a grant which was written in Sanskrit with early Nagari characters, and is dated to 1011 CE. According to epigraphists, the object of the grant is to make a gift of land and exempt it from taxes, to twenty brahmana donees, for the merit of the king.²⁹

Medieval History

As mentioned, by the 11th century, the region came under the stronghold of the Surajdhawaj dynasty, but then the defeat of Prithiviraj by Ghori led to the eventual formation of outposts of the Sultanate at Amroha. Although, even while the region was under the control of the Sultanate officers, the Katehriya Rajputs continued to put up resistance against the rule, in an attempt to win back the region.³⁰ In 1265, Malik Amir Ali was appointed the *muqta* of Amroha, but because of the unrest, Balban³¹ once again took over the control of the region before violently controlling the unrest.

When the Mongols under Ali Beg invaded the region in 1304, Amroha was where they were defeated by the imperial troops of Alauddin Khalji under Malik Nair Akhurbak. A few years later, after a quarrel, Khalji exiled his son, Khizr Khan to Amroha. The defeat of the Mongols, incidentally, was also the last event of fame in the region before it once again lost its prominence to Sambhal.

²⁷ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 312. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

²⁸ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 28. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

²⁹ Tewari, R., 2015. Epigraphy. *Indian Archaeology 2008-09 - A Review*, p.139.

³⁰ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 39. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

³¹ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 40. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

Under the Mughal empire, specifically under Akbar, Amroha formed part of the Sambhal *sirkar* in the *subah* of Delhi. It gained fame as the *mahal* with the largest cultivated area, thereby yielding large *dams* of revenue. It was held by the Saiyids who contributed 1,000 cavalry, 5,000 infantry, and 50 elephants. Other mahals, such as Rajabur and Islampur Bahru, both of which form parts of present day Amroha, were also prominent centres of revenue collection.³²

In 1801, the *qasba* was ceded to the British East India Company by the Nawab of Awadh, after which Amroha continued to form a part of colonial India until its independence from the British Imperial rule. Once a part of the colonial rule, Amroha underwent certain prominent developments mostly relating to its social, cultural, and religious structures.³³

Modern History

Event of Note associated with the period

The 1857 revolt is an important part of the region's history. One incident from the time is of special interest. On May 20, 1857, Sayyid Gulzar Ali, a *muafdar* of Amroha, burnt the thana of the district, killed the thanedar, plundered around Rs.17,000 of the government revenue, and proceeded to declare himself the viceroy of the King of Delhi. He also sought to denounce the East India Company's rupee and bring back into usage the pre-British coins. However, upon the arrival of the British forces on May 25th, he fled, and his house was razed to the ground. The district was then handed over to Gur Sahai, under whose control Amroha remained till June 1858.³⁴

Social structure and developments during the period

By the eighteenth century, Amroha had developed as a centre of Muslim nobility with a rich legacy of vernacular literature (owing to the development of Amroha as a printing hub in

³² Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 44-45. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

³³ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 51. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

³⁴ Mukherjee, R., Singh, B. and Agarwal, V., 1968. *UTTAR PRADESH GAZATTEERS: MORADABAD*. [eBook] pp 52. Available at: <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/3625>.

the 1880s), of which the various Tarikh texts written as pieces outlining the genealogy of certain eminent families as well as the overall region are of particular interest.³⁵

For instance, the *Tarikh-i-Asghari*, provides not just genealogical information on the Sayyid family, but also details the important customs, traditions, and festivals celebrated by the people of Amroha, along with the major sites of worship. Taking information from various sources, including the colonial gazetteers, Asghari seeks to provide extensive information on the region.³⁶ This in turn, helps in noting the various social and cultural changes Amroha underwent during this period.

The Sayyids, who were the major and influential landowning class of Amroha, often used genealogical literature to trace their ancestry to Sharf-ud-din Ali, whose descendants are then said to have established the numerous *muhallas* (neighbourhoods) of prominence in Amroha. The Sayyids of Amroha were said to be more in number than in any colonial town in the United Provinces, except for Lucknow. Around this period, a major underlying current in Amroha's society was maintaining the elite, sharif, and pure strands of religious and cultural habits and rituals that were representative of the Sayyids.³⁷

During the colonial period, a large number of the Amroha Sayyid families claimed the Shia denomination of Islam, while the other few claimed to be Sunni or associated themselves with both the strands. Other than the Sayyids, Amroha also had distinguished Pathans and Shaikhs who had gained prominence through employment in either the Mughal or the colonial administration.³⁸

At the same time, despite having an Islamic majority (which in itself was largely divided), vernacular accounts also describe the diverse religious traditions that were part of Amroha society, which fell in line with the assimilatory and scholarly image of the qasba society. The colonial period saw Amroha undergo a constant dialogue with its diverse religious sections. The local religious life of Amroha was constantly evolving in a number of complex ways and

³⁵ JONES, J., 2009. The Local Experiences of Reformist Islam in a 'Muslim' Town in Colonial India: The Case of Amroha. *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(4), pp.871-908.

³⁶ NIAZI, S., 2020. Sayyids and Social Stratification of Muslims in Colonial India: Genealogy and Narration of the Past in Amroha. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 30(3), pp.467-487.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ JONES, J., 2009. The Local Experiences of Reformist Islam in a 'Muslim' Town in Colonial India: The Case of Amroha. *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(4), pp.871-908.

was reflective of the social structure of the qasba as part of the colonial township, which required a constant reconstruction and restructuring of identities.³⁹

Architecture and the social life of the period

Amroha consists of various old mosques, eidgahs, imambaras, dargahs, and mandirs belonging to the medieval period. They have defined the town's public space since the Mughal era and thus these architectural features determine the life of Amroha's populace. These institutions and functions, much like the social make of Amroha in the late 18th to 20th centuries, are marked by overlap of religious systems and are independent of the influences of the larger reformist or communal movements outside the town's sphere.

For instance, the annual functions associated with the local saints and pirs' shrines (Sharf-ud-din Ali) were attended by Muslims and Hindus alike. Similarly, despite the numerous sects within the town, all of them appeared to participate together in the rites of Muharram, despite it being grounded in Shia Islam. In fact, accounts of Muharram in Amroha often mention all religious communities attending the sermons.⁴⁰

Thus, despite the popularity of the reformist Islamic movement in the nearby regions in this period, Amroha's social structure and the changes that were brought into it weren't merely positive responses to the larger movement but were rather carefully thought out and locally effective processes.⁴¹



Figure 113. Moradabadi Darwaza

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

1642 AD—Moradabadi Darwaza, built by Saiyid Abdul Maajid, is the only extant gate of this period. The wall was constructed during the reign of Shah Jahan; it is fifty feet high with three parallel arches, covered with a roof. The gate has been rebuilt, but the structure is the same. One could find old rocks and stones before its reconstruction.

Battle of Amroha

The Battle of Amroha was fought on December 20 of 1305 when an army of the Delhi Sultanate crushed an invading Mongol army. For years the Mongols had been attacking India's northwest borders. In an effort to strengthen his defences, Sultan Alauddin Khilji had the forts along the border strengthened and equipped with larger garrisons. New, more effective, fortifications were built in the area. A whole new army, with its own special governor, was created, whose mission was managing and guarding the border areas.

Despite these measures, in 1305, a large Mongol raiding army under the leadership of Ali Beg and Tartaq suddenly appeared in the Punjab and the neighbourhood of Amroha. The Mongols had travelled advancing south-east, following the Himalayas and plundering all in their way until they reached Amroha.

Alauddin Khilji sent a strong army led by two of his toughest generals, Ghazi Malik and the famous Malik Kafur, to engage the invaders. They surprised the Mongols on their way back to Central Asia with their plunder. Kubak and other Mongol generals were captured and brought back to Siri Fort in Delhi, along with other prisoners. Alauddin Khilji had the generals trampled to death by elephants while the other prisoners were put to death and their heads hung from the walls of the fort.

Saiyid Salim was assigned Amroha and Sirsi as an iqta and after his death, the iqta was assigned to his sons.



Figure 114. An image of Mahmood Ghaznavi



Figure 115. A scene from the Battle of Amroha

Crafts of Amroha

Musical Instrument (Dholak)



Figure 116. Dholaks made in Amroha are very popular

Around 300 small units are engaged in producing the wood-based drum instrument, Dholak, in the district, which employs over 1000 artisans. The dholak is played using a stick, or with hands. Owing to social development, the scope of this unique musical instrument has expanded.

This small town is the hub of manufacturing dholaks and tablas. Numerous small-scale manufacturing units produce dholaks and other percussion

instruments. They use the wood from mango and sheesham trees to carve out the multiple

shapes and sizes of hollow blocks, which are later fitted with animal skin, mostly goatskin, to create the instrument. They distribute these instruments across the country and also export

them to all major locations abroad. Some of the major industries in Amroha include the production of cotton and textiles and the small-scale production of cotton cloth, handloom weaving, pottery making and sugar milling. The secondary businesses are related to carpet manufacturing, wood handicrafts and dholak manufacturing.



Figure 117. Dholak-making in progress

Ready-Made Garments



Figure 118. Clothes at a shop in Amroha

Amroha city is also recognized for the readymade garments manufactured here. This district has numerous units of readymade garment manufacturing. Readymade garments are manufactured here for children and all other age groups. The raw material is sourced from Kanpur, Delhi, Agra and Kolkata by the units engaged in this business. Products manufactured here are much in demand in nearby districts. This industry is being developed here as a small-scale industry. The products manufactured in this district are sent not only to the open market but are displayed in various exhibitions organized at the national level. Many people from the urban and rural sector of Amroha are connected with this industry in different forms.



Figure 119. Logo of the ODOP scheme

Sacred and Historical Complexes

Sri Vasudev Mandir



Figure 120. The tank and temple complex

The history of the ancient Sri Vasudev Tirtha temple of the city dates back hundreds of years. The Vasudeva temple has, according to local legend, witnessed the unknown exile of the Pandavas. In the Mahabharata period, Lord Krishna stayed in the temple with the Pandavas. On his way from Kurukshetra, he rested here for the night. After this, Lord Krishna prepared the Shiva Ling with his hands and worshipped it. The Shiva Linga made by him is believed to be present in the temple complex even today. After his arrival, the temple was named Sri Vasudev Tirtha. Kadam (Burflower tree) trees around the complex are believed to be testimony to that period that witnessed the arrival of Lord Krishna. During the holy month of Shravan, thousands of kanwadis from nearby regions offer kanvad and sacred water here.

Bayen ka Kuan



Figure 121. A view of the old well structure

The historical Bayen ka Kuan is believed to have been made by Amba Devi, sister of King Prithviraj Chauhan, in 12th century AD. This step-well is located in village Razzakpur on the Bijnor road in Amroha, near the spinning mill. The dilapidated well has no water in it at present and is lying abandoned.

Dargah Bhure Shah

Syed Khwaja Sadruddin Shah came to Delhi from Amroha near the end of the reign of Jahangir and settled down on a mound in front of the ruins of an Afghan fortress. When Shah Jahan chose the site for building his Qila-e-Mauala he asked the Pir to move to some other spot. But the saint refused despite threats. It is said that whenever the sepoy came to evict him, he would either vanish or throw them below the mound with his mystic

powers. The Emperor eventually gave up the idea of evicting Bhure Shah and allowed him to stay on undisturbed. Later, Aurangzeb tried to dislodge him but failed. However, the story that the puritanical Emperor sent the saint a dish of curry which was actually dog's meat topped with almonds and spices does not seem to be true. The remark said to have been made by Bhure Shah to Aurangzeb, after he had enquired whether the dish was tasty, "Haram tha ya halal, tu jaane/Achcha tha ya bura tu jaane" is, however, still quoted by many in a bid to prove that such an incident did take place⁴².



Figure 122. Entrance to the dargah

⁴² <https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/basking-in-solitude/article19444143.ece>

Mangoes of Amroha



Figure 123. Mangoes from Amroha

Amroha is one of the largest mangos producing districts of western UP. Even the name Amroha is said to be a combination of two words 'Aam' and 'Rohu'. 'Aam' means 'mango' in English and 'Rohu' is a type of fish. One type of mango may differ from others in color, taste, smell, size, price or looks. There are only six to seven varieties like Bombai, Langda, and Chausa which are popular and cultivated in huge quantities. The production of other varieties is very low and most of it is exported, self-consumed or gifted to relatives by the orchard owners.

The mangoes of Amroha are world famous. Every year mango exporters are expanding their reach to new countries. Lakra and Chausa mangoes of Amroha have reached the big mandis. The mangoes are shipped to some countries in Europe and elsewhere, including Dubai, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Japan, Singapore, Qatar, Oman, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. This time, due to the Corona virus, orders have not been received from countries in Europe. In such a

situation, about thirty percent of the exports will be impacted. However, mangoes will be supplied to the Gulf countries as before. Orders are being received continuously from there. In such a situation, the supply of outgoing mangoes is expected to decrease.

Amroha makes up a large portion of mangoes sold in the market. According to Sh. Nadeem Siddiqui, President of the State Mango Export Association, about 250 tonnes of mangoes are supplied from UP to other countries every year. Amroha holds sixty-seven percent stake in it. The rest comes from Lucknow and Saharanpur. ⁴³

⁴³ Amar Ujala <https://www.amarujala.com/uttar-pradesh/amroha/mango-in-amroha-jpnagar-news-mbd345686122>

Luminaries of Amroha



Figure 124. Kamal Amrohi

Kamal Amrohi, filmmaker, lyricist, actor, director, husband of Meena Kumari. Syed Amir Haider Kamal Naqvi (17 January 1918 – 11 February 1993), popularly known as Kamal Amrohi, was an Indian film director and screenwriter. He was also an Urdu and Hindi poet.

Jaun Elia, poet and columnist **Syed Hussain Jaun Asghar Naqvi**, commonly known as Jaun Elia (14 December

1931-8 -November 2002), was an IndoPak philosopher, biographer, and scholar. He was

the brother of Rais Amrohvi and Syed Muhammad Taqi, who were journalists and psychoanalysts. He was fluent in Urdu, Arabic, English, Persian, Sanskrit and Hebrew. One of the most prominent modern Urdu poets, popular for his unconventional ways, he "acquired knowledge of philosophy, logic, Islamic history, the Muslim Sufi tradition, Muslim religious sciences, Western literature, and Kabbala."

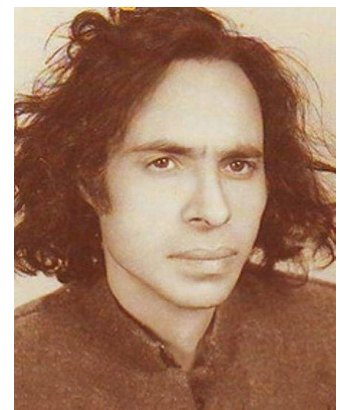


Figure 125. Syed Hussain










Figure 126. Syed Sadequain




Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi, Artist

Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi was born in Amroha and later on moved to Pakistan. Tamgha-e-Imtiaz, Pride of Performance, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, were terms used to refer to Sadequain Naqqash, the Pakistani artist, best known for his skills as a calligrapher and a painter.

Hindi *Tithi* Calendar 2020-21: Garhmukteshwar and Amroha

<p>JANUARY</p> <p>10th Jan: Paush Purnima</p> 	<p>Paush Purnima is a significant day in Hindu calendar. The full moon is the lunar phase when the moon appears fully illuminated from Earth's perspective. In lunar calendar, Magha month starts from the next day of Paush Purnima. During Magha Mahina people take holy dip at Triveni Sangam at Prayag; this is considered highly auspicious and important on Paush Purnima day. It is believed that the holy dip on the auspicious day of Paush Purnima liberates the soul from the continuous cycle of birth and death.</p>
<p>15th Jan: Makar Sankranti</p> 	<p>Numerous rituals are followed during Sankranti. These rituals vary from state to state and within a state, region to region. Following rituals are celebrated all over the country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ritualistic bonfire a day before Makar Sankranti • worshipping of rising Surya Deva, the Sun God • holy dip in sacred water bodies • making Pongal and distributing it as Prasad in Tamil Nadu • performing charity by giving alms to the needy
<p>24th January: Mauni Amavasya</p> 	<p>It is believed that the water of the most sacred and holy river in Hinduism, the Ganga, turns into the nectar on Mauni Amavasya day. Due to this belief Mauni Amavasya day is the most important day in Hindu calendar to take holy dip in the Ganga. According to the beliefs, Mauni Amavasya falls in the middle of Magha month and is also known as Maghi Amavasya.</p>

<p>29th January: Basant Panchami</p> 	<p>Vasant Panchami day is dedicated to Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music, arts, science and technology. Goddess Saraswati is worshipped on this day. This ritual of initiating education to children is known as <i>Akshar-Abhyasam</i> or <i>Vidya-Arambham/Praasana</i> which is one of the famous rituals of Vasant Panchami.</p>
<p>FEBRUARY</p> <p>9th Feb: Magh Purnima</p> 	<p>Magha Purnima is an important day in Hindu calendar. Religious texts describe the glory of holy bath and austerity observed during Magha Purnima. It is believed that every single day in month of Magha is special for doing charity.</p>
<p>21st February: Mahashivratri</p> 	<p>Shivaratri is a great festival of convergence of Shiva and Shakti. Chaturdashi Tithi during Krishna Paksha in month of Magha is known as Maha Shivaratri.</p>
<p>MARCH</p> <p>9h March: Holika Dahan</p> 	<p>Holika was a demoness in Hindu Vedic scriptures, who was burnt to death with the help of God Vishnu. She was the sister of King Hiranyakashipu and aunt of Prahlad. The story of Holika Dahan (Holika's death) signifies the triumph of good over evil. It is believed that all sorts of fears can be conquered by doing Holika Puja on Holi. Holika Puja bestows power, prosperity and wealth.</p>

<p>10th March: Holi</p> 	<p>Holi is a religious festival celebrated by Hindus all over the world. Holi is considered the second biggest festival in the Hindu calendar after Diwali. Holi is also known as Festival of Colours. The second day is known as Rangwali Holi, the day when people play with coloured powder and coloured water. Rangwali Holi which is main Holi day is also known as Dhulandi or Dhulendi</p>
<p>16th March: Sheetala Ashtami</p> 	<p>Basoda Puja is dedicated to Goddess Sheetala and is celebrated on Krishna Paksha Ashtami after Holi. Basoda is also known as Sheetala Ashtami. Usually it falls after eight days of Holi but many people observe it on first Monday or Friday after Holi. Sheetala Ashtami is more popular in North Indian states like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. According to Basoda customs families don't light a fire for cooking. Hence most families cook one day before and consume stale food on Sheetala Ashtami day. It is believed that Goddess Sheetala controls smallpox, chickenpox, measles, etc. and people worship her to ward off any outbreak of those diseases.</p>
<p>APRIL</p> <p>8th April: Hanuman Jayanti</p> 	<p>Chaitra month. Hanuman, who is also known as Vanara God, was born on this day and Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Hanuman. Celebrations at Lete Hanuman and Gore Hanuman temple at Prayag are very famous.</p> <p>Rituals during Hanuman Jayanti:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shodashopachara Hanuman Puja • visiting Hanuman temple • offering Sindoor i.e. red vermilion to Lord Hanuman

30th April: Ganga Jayanti



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

According to Hindu Mythology Ganga descended to the Earth on Ganga Dussehra day. Lord Shiva took her in His hairs to break Ganga's descent. Later Lord Shiva released Ganga. This is a big festival in Garhmukteshwar.

JUNE

1st June: Ganga Dussehra



Ganga Dussehra falls during Dashami Tithi of Jyeshtha Shukla Paksha and currently falls in month of May or June. Ganga Dussehra is also known as Gangavataran which means the descent of the Ganga. This festival is dedicated to Goddess Ganga, commemorated as the day when Ganga descended to the Earth to accomplish her mission to purge the cursed souls of Bhagiratha's ancestors. On Ganga Dussehra devotees worship Goddess Ganga and take bath in the Ganga. Taking bath in the Ganga and offering charity or Daan-Punya on Ganga Dussehra day is considered highly auspicious. It is believed that holy dip in Ganga on Ganga Dussehra day can purge all type of sins. This festival is celebrated with much fanfare in Garh Mukteshwar.




JULY

05th July: Guru Purnima



During the Ashadha month, full moon day is celebrated as Guru Purnima or Vyasa Purnima. Traditionally this day is reserved for Guru Puja or Guru Worship. On this day disciples offer Puja or pay respect to their Gurus. Guru refers to spiritual guide who enlightens disciples by his knowledge and teachings.

This day is commemorated as birth anniversary of Veda Vyasa. Veda Vyasa was the author as well as a character in the Hindu epic Mahabharata.

<p>AUGUST</p> <p>3rd August: Hariyali Teej</p> 	<p>Teej festivity is celebrated by women, especially in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. Hariyali Teej is celebrated by women during Sawan month. Hartalika Teej Vrat is observed during Shukla Paksha Tritiya of Bhadrapada month. On this day, makeshift statues of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are made with the sand and worshipped for marital bliss and progeny.</p> <p>Hartalika Teej is known by this name due to the legend associated with it.</p>
<p>5th August: Nag Panchami</p> 	<p>Nag Panchami is a significant day and is observed on Shukla Paksha Panchami during Shravana month. Nag Panchami falls in month of July and August and women worship Nag Devta and offer milk to snakes on this day. Women also pray for the wellness of their brothers and family. Nag Panchami is a traditional worship of serpent Gods observed by Hindus throughout India.</p>
<p>3rd August: Shrawan Purnima / Rakshabanadhan</p> 	<p>Rakhi, which is also known as Raksha Bandhan, is a Hindu festival which is celebrated across India. Raksha Bandhan is recognized and celebrated among Hindus for its symbolic significance. Raksha Bandhan draws its significance from a sacred thread which is known as Rakhi. It is believed that the thread protects the one who wears it, especially during the auspicious time of Shravana Purnima.</p>

11th August: Janamshtami



Devotees, who observe fast on Janmashtami, should have only a single meal a day before Janmashtami. On fasting day, devotees take Sankalpa to observe a day-long fast and to break it on the next day when both Rohini Nakshatra and Ashtami

Tithi are over. Rituals performed during Janamashtmi include:

- a day long fast
- worshipping Bal Krishna at midnight
- visiting Krishna temple
- cooking sweet dishes specially made of milk products

23rd August: Rishi Panchami



Rishi Panchami is not a festival but a fasting day observed by women to pay homage to the Sapta Rishis which means seven sages and to get purified from Rajaswala Dosha.

Hinduism gives highest priority to purity and there are strict guidelines to maintain purity of the body and the soul.

OCTOBER

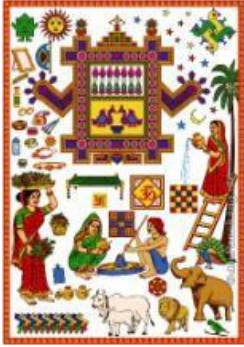
25th October: Dussehra



Vijayadashami is celebrated as victory of Lord Rama over demon Ravana and also victory of Goddess Durga over the Demon Mahishasura. Vijayadashami is also known as Dussehra and is famous across the country.

NOVEMBER

8th November: Ahoi Ashtami



Traditionally, on Ahoi Ashtami mothers used to keep fast from dawn to dusk for the wellbeing of their sons. Fast is broken during twilight after sighting stars in the sky.

That lore goes: Once upon a time, there lived a kind and devoted woman in a village situated near to a dense forest. She had seven sons. One day in the month of Kartik, just few days before Diwali festivities, the woman decided to repair and decorate her house for Diwali celebrations. To renovate her house, she decided to go to the forest to fetch some soil. While digging the soil in the forest, she accidentally killed a lion cub with the spade with which she was digging the soil. She felt sad, guilty and responsible for what had happened to the innocent cub.

Within a year of this incident, all the seven sons of the woman disappeared and they were considered dead by the villagers. The villagers assumed that her sons might have been killed by some wild animals of the forest. The woman was very depressed and correlated all the misfortune with the accidental death of the cub by her. One day, she narrated her woes to one of the old ladies of the village.

She discussed the incident, of how she had committed the sin of killing the cub mistakenly. The old lady advised the woman that as atonement for her sin, she should offer her prayers to the Goddess Ahoi Bhagwati, an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, by sketching the face of the cub. She was suggested to observe fast and perform puja for the Goddess Ahoi as She is believed to be the protector of offspring of all living beings.

13th November: Narak
Chaturdashi



Narak Chaturdashi is a festival celebrated in the month of Kartik, on the 14th day of the waning moon. It is also known as Narak Chaudas, Roop Chaudas or even Kali Chaudas. As per ancient Indian mythology, people revere the Lord of death 'Yamraj' with utmost devotion and adoration. As it is celebrated a day before Diwali, it is also known as Choti Diwali. On this day, people light up diyas at their homes after dusk. By lionising the god of death, people make sure that they are absolved from the clutches of untimely death as well as pray for a better health.

14th November: Deepawali



Diwali is the most significant religious festival among Hindus. The festival spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, good over evil and hope over despair. Diwali is traditionally celebrated for five days.

Being Amavasya day, people also perform Shradha for their ancestors at the river, and Garh witnesses hundreds of devotees on this day.

Traditionally, most Pujas are performed after keeping a day long fast. Hence, the devotees observe a day long fast on the day of Lakshmi Puja. The fast is broken after Lakshmi Puja in the evening.

20th November: Chhath Puja



The Sun God, Surya, the god of energy and of the life-force, is worshipped during the *Chhath Puja* to promote well-being, prosperity and progress.

Chhath Puja is also known as *Surya Shashti*, *Chhath*, *Chhathi*, *Chhath Parv*, *Dala Puja* and *Dala Chhath*.

26th November: Tulsi Vivah



Prabodhini Ekadashi, also known as Devotthan Ekadashi, is the 11th lunar day (ekadashi) in the bright fortnight of the Hindu month of Kartik. It marks the end of the four-month period of Chaturmas, when god Vishnu is believed to sleep. It is believed that Vishnu sleeps on Shayani Ekadashi and wakes on Prabodhini Ekadashi, thus giving this day the name '*Prabodhini Ekadashi*'. The end of Chaturmas, when marriages are prohibited, signifies the beginning of the Hindu wedding season. It is also known as Kartiki Ekadashi, Kartik Shukla ekadashi and Kartiki. Prabodhini Ekadashi is followed by Kartik Purnima, which is celebrated as Dev Diwali or Diwali of the gods.

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