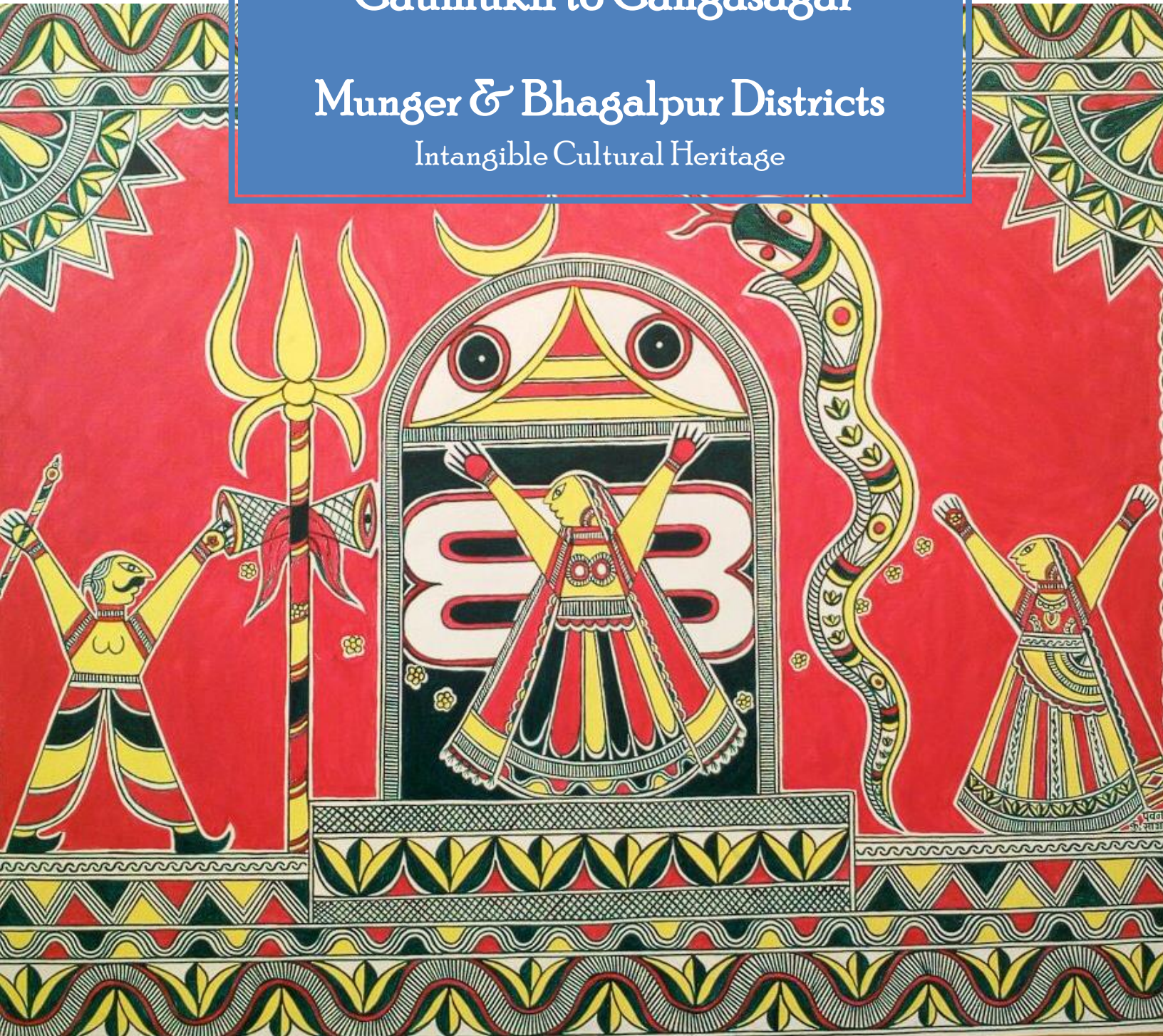


Documentation of Ganga from Gaumukh to Gangasagar

Munger & Bhagalpur Districts

Intangible Cultural Heritage



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Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

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Government of India




INTACH Indian
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Chapter 1

Introduction



Figure 1. The banks of the Ganga, Munger, Bihar

हरिपदपाद्यतरंगिणि गंगे हिमविधुमुक्ताधवलतरंगे ।
दूरीकुरु मम दुष्कृतिभारं कुरु कृपया भवसागरपारम् ॥ ३ ॥¹

The fortress of Munger was constructed on the bow of the Ganga. In the rainy season the fortress projected towards a vast sheet of water northwards. Thus, from this fortress, one could easily command both the overland route and the Ganga. **Munger** or, as the colonials called it, **Monghyr**, was on the east of the *madhya-desa* or mid-land of the first Aryan

¹ Ganga Stotram. *Oh Devi Gange! Your sacred and divine flow of water which comes all the way from Hari's pad (feet) has the power to wash away all my sins. Your water is white and pure like pearls and snow. Oh Maa Gange, help me to wash away all the sinful acts I have committed and push me to follow righteousness by crossing the mundane existence of this life.* Nupur Choudhary (Translation).

settlers.² The modern district of Munger was once an assimilation of Bhagalpur and a few other sites around, popularly known as the ‘Anga-Pradesh’.

It has been identified with Modagiri, a place mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, which was the capital of a kingdom in Eastern India near Banga and Tamralipta. A passage in the *Sabha-Parva* describes Bhima’s conquest in Eastern India and says that after defeating Karna, king of Anga, he fought a battle at Modagiri and later killed its top chief. It was also known as Modal after Maudgalya, a disciple of Buddha, who converted a rich merchant of this place to Buddhism.

Buchanan states that it was the hermitage of Mudgala Muni and this tradition of Mudgal Rishi still persists. Munger is called “Modagiri” in the Monghyr copperplate of Devapala. The derivation of the name Munger (Monghyr) has been the subject of much conjecture. Tradition ascribes the foundation of the town to Chandragupta, after whom it was called Guptagars, a name which has been found engraved on a rock at Kastaharni Ghat in the northwestern corner of the present fort. It is believed that Mudgal Rishi lived there. Tradition assigns the authorship of several sections of the 10th Mandala of the Rigveda to ***Rishi Mudgal and his kin.***

However, General Cunningham connects this original name of Monghyr with Muns, who occupied this part before the advent of the Aryans. C.E.A.W. Oldham, ICS, a former collector, suggests the possibility of Munigiha, i.e , the abode of the Muni, without any specifications, which was later corrupted to Monghyr and eventually became Munger. At the dawn of history, the present site of the town was apparently comprised within the kingdom of Anga, with the capital Champa near Bhagalpur.

According to Pargiter, Anga encompassed the modern districts of Bhagalpur and Munger commissionerate. The Anga dominion at one time included Magadha, and the *Shanti-Parva*

² L.S.S. O’ Malley. *District Gazetteer of Monghyr* (Logos Press New Delhi: 2007), 30.

refers to an Anga king who sacrificed at Mount Vishnupada. In the epic period, Modagiri finds mention as a separate state. The success of Anga did not last long and about the middle of the sixth century B.C., Bimbisara of Magadha is said to have killed Brahmadata, the last independent ruler of ancient Anga. Henceforth, Anga became an integral part of the growing empire of Magadha. As epigraphic evidence of the Gupta period suggests, Munger was under the Guptas. A copper plate of A.D. 488-9, originally found at Mandapura in the region, belongs to the reign of Buddhagupta (447-495 A.D).

Chapter 2 outlines the two major themes of the research; first, the historicity of the township and the district, and its ancient past. Second, how that tangible history contributed to the making of intangible heritage in modern times. Munger has a rich history and narrative tale tradition; the intersectionality of tangible and intangible heritage cannot be separated in this case. The various sacred sites and prominent historical places add research value to the place. ***Munger is the only living fort of the 21st century India*** as the town is bordered by four entry gates (Dwara) and the entire habitation resides within. The various mystical sites weave their own narrative which will be discussed in the second section of the second chapter.

Oldham traces Munger's antiquity back to the *Mahabharata* age, when warring Pandavas marched eastwards to kill a mighty king who lived in Modagiri. Elsewhere he ascribes the re-emergence of Munger, the ancient Modagiri, during Muslim rule, to the strategic advantages of its location. He observes that Munger commanded a narrow neck between the Kharagpur Hills and the Ganga, a major choke-point, on the only practicable east-west military route as we have mentioned above.³

³ C. E. A. W. Oldham, *Journal of Francis Buchanan: Kept during the survey of the district of Bhagalpur in 1810-11* (Patna: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1930), v-vi.



Figure 2. Munger Entry Gate

Chapter 3 discusses the **Kanwar traditions of Bihar** (and contemporary Jharkhand) which initiate from Sultanganj (Bihar). This is an integral part of the intangible documentation along the Ganga in Bihar as this place is a hub of ancient ritualistic and spiritual traditions. The Kanwar pilgrimage of Bihar first surfaced in the British writings of the 1770s and was possibly extant even as early as fourteenth-sixteenth century.⁴ Although little known outside Bihar and the adjacent regions, millions of people undertake this pilgrimage today in an annual, calendric cycle, carrying water from Sultanganj (Bihar) where the river Ganga bends north, to Shiva at the Vaidyanath temple in Devghar (Jharkhand, then Bihar and now Jharkhand). The site is in itself an intangible heritage site, considering both the Kanwar

⁴ Ruma Bose. *Walking with Pilgrims: The Kanwar pilgrimage of Bihar Jharkhand and Terai-Nepal* (Manohar Publication 2019). 14-15.

tradition and the **sculpture site at Sultanganj** which embodies the secular-religious nature of the land. This is discussed in this chapter through evident material culture of artefacts and monuments, and historic narratives.



Figure 3. On the banks of river Ganga, Sultanganj

Chapter 4 looks at another major site of Munger, Bhagalpur. Bhagalpur was once a part of Munger and shared both administrative and political boundaries. The **historicity of Bhagalpur shares a history with the river Ganga** and proclaims its own cultural importance, the major aspect of this being the **Bhagalpur silk traditions and the lost heritage of Angika Art**. Bhagalpur is a historic town situated on the banks of the river Ganga in eastern Bihar. Once regarded as the biggest trade center of eastern India, the city is renowned for its unique silk fabrics known as ‘Tussah or Tusser’. Silk weaving is an age-old

tradition in the city. Fabrics produced in the city are celebrated both in the domestic and international marketplace. The Bhagalpur cluster ranks the second highest, next to Karnataka, in the production and export of silk fabric. It has been named the ‘Silk City’ due to the popularity of Bhagalpuri silk. On a similar note, Angika or Manjusha is an art form of the region. It comprises temple-shaped boxes with eight pillars. They are made of bamboo, jute and paper. They contain paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses and other characters. These boxes are used in Bishahari Puja, a festival dedicated to the Snake God, celebrated in Bhagalpur and nearby regions.

Chapter 5 delves into the food culture of the region while **Chapter 6** looks at its literary traditions and a few notable personalities.



Figure 4. At the banks of the Ganga, Bhagalpur

Chapter 2

Charting the History of Munger

The fortress of Munger was built along a bend in the Ganga. In the rainy season the fortress projected towards a vast sheet of water northwards. Thus, from this fortress, one could easily command both the overland route and the Ganga. So, for the Mughals, it was natural to make Munger the seat of a high-ranking officer, and a military station. In the seventeenth century, Sultan Shuja strengthened the fortification and about a century later it became the centre for Nawab Kasim Ali Khan's (r. 1760–64) resistance against the English Company.

Indeed, Munger was of critical military and strategic significance, yet from time to time its strategic superiority was undermined by those familiar with the hill and jungle roads of the Kharagpur Hills descending southwards. After the British established the southern New Military Road in the second half of the eighteenth century, the strategic importance of the Ganga Route was undermined. Aside from its strategic importance, Munger functioned as an administrative center and customs post for the river and overland traffic.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Portuguese official Manrique witnessed the vigilance of the Mughal customs official in charge of the riverine traffic firsthand. When his boatmen tried to evade and bypass the customs office in Munger, they were severely reprimanded by the authorities.⁵ They were just as attentive to the land route. When John Marshall was passing through Munger town, he was asked his name and the official

⁵ Fray Sebastien Manrique, *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629–1643*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927), 136–37.

wrote it down. At Munger, Marshall wished to see the fortress but the authorities refused permission because two months earlier De Graaff and Cornelis van Oosterhoff had secretly tried to draw the plan of the fort, for which they were imprisoned and transported to the Nawab at Patna. But these examples of administrative alertness are from the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, the Ganga and the overland routes seem to have been less strictly controlled by the Mughal authorities, and many of the chieftains started asserting themselves on the river and overland routes in this region. De Graaff's description suggests that Munger was also a centre of handicrafts and a market for other merchandise as well. De Graaff informs us that before the East Gate, outside the chief customs house, there was a big market for foodstuff and other goods. In the seventeenth century, Munger was probably not a large commercial town. It seems to have become commercially more significant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to an estimate of the early nineteenth century, its population was roughly thirty thousand and Buchanan reported that the town was comprised of many markets such as Barabazar, Puranigunge, Faujdari Bazar, Garar or Goddard Bazar and Batemangunge. These markets handled the grain traffic as well as the commercial and cash crops produced in the area. Walter Hamilton writes that the place was famous throughout Bengal for its gardeners.⁶ Other workmen included tailors, carpenters, and blacksmiths. Trade and crafts seem to have picked up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as is evident from Bishop Heber and Major John Luard's travel accounts and Buchanan's survey report. Heber and Luard both comment on the metalwork and manufactures found in the township. Luard states that the water from the hot spring "is bottled and sent down in big quantity to Calcutta" where it was needed on

⁶ Walter Hamilton, *The east India gazetteer*, vol. 2 (London, 1828), 237–38.

board ships leaving for England to furnish drinking water to the passengers.⁷

DISTRICT - MUNGER

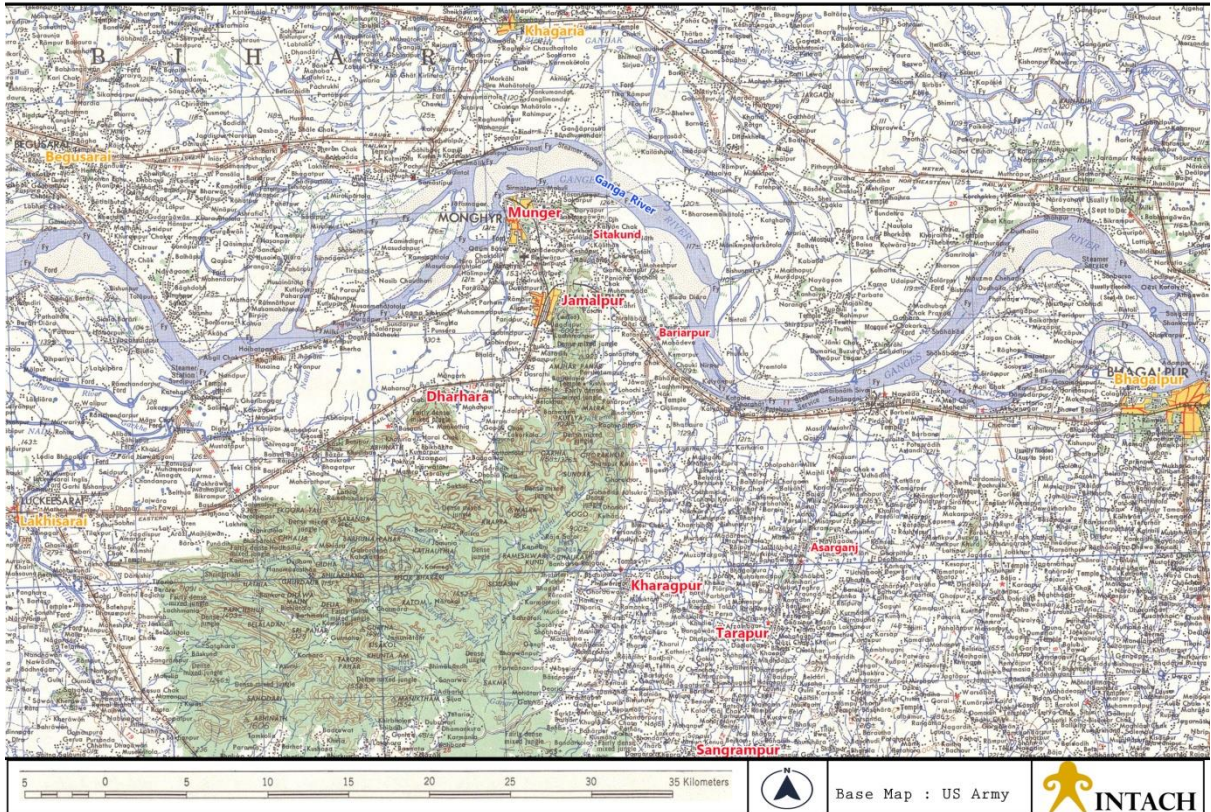


Figure 5. District Map of Munger (INTACH)

⁷ Major John Luard, *Views in India, Saint Helena and Car Nicobar, drawn from nature and on stone* (London, 1838), n.p

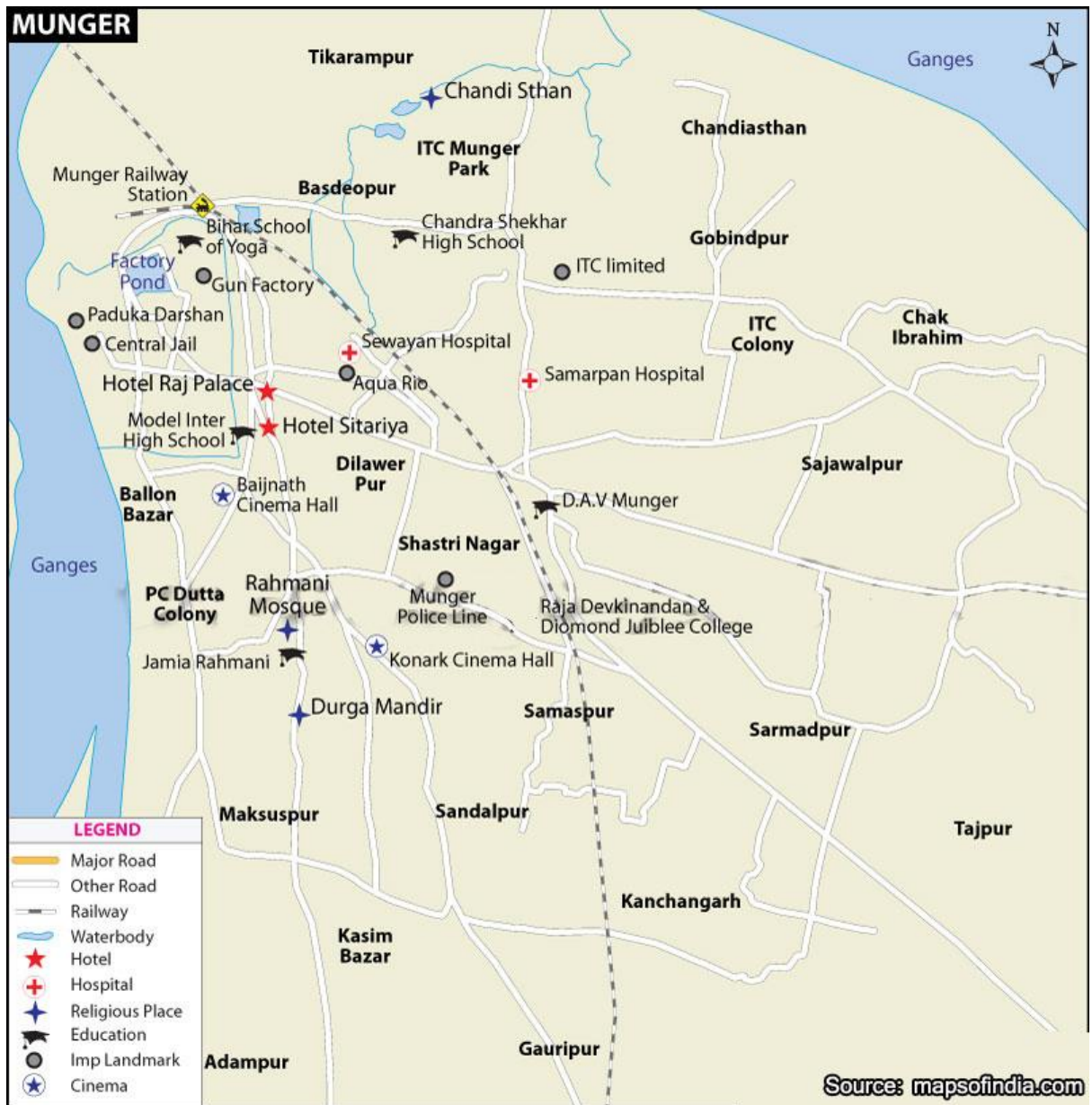


Figure 6. Munger City Map



Figure 7. Munger District Map

2.1. Ancient Past of the Region



Figure 8. Eastend view of the Munger Fort, The British Online Library

At the dawn of history, the present site of the town was apparently enclosed within the former Hindu kingdom of Anga, the capital of which was at Champa near Bhagalpur, while a portion in the west of the present district was included within the boundaries of the capital kingdom of Magadha. Anga was an independent kingdom till the sixth century B.C., and there are traditions of war between it and Magadha. During the lifespan of the Buddha it was annexed by Bimbisara, the ambitious ruler of Magadha in 519 B.C. and it appears never to regain independence. Thenceforth its history is merged with that of the Magadhan Empire.

The first historical account of the district appears in the Travels of Hiuen Tsiang, who visited this area towards the close of the first half of the seventh century A.D. Hiuen Tsiang observed, “The country is regularly cultivated and rich in produce, flowers and fruit being abundant, the climate is agreeable and manners of the people simple and honest. There are 10 Buddhist monasteries with about 4,000 priests and few Brahminical temples occupied by various sectaries.” The pilgrim’s “I-lan-ha-po-fa-to” (Hiranya parvata, the golden mountain) of which he left an account, is identified as this area. He had to pass through thick forest and strange mountains into the country of Hiranayaparvat. The capital, Hiranayaparvat, lay on the southern bank of the Ganga, and close to it stood mount Hiranya, which “belched masses of smoke and vapour that obscured the light of the sun and the moon.” The position of this hill is determined, from its proximity to the Ganga, to be Munger and though no smoke now comes from any peak, the numerous hot springs in the hills point to famous volcanic action.⁸ These hot spring are also mentioned in Hiuen Tsiang’s account. Other authorities refer to it as Uren in present Lakhisarai district.



Figure 9. A view of Munger Fort on the banks of river Ganga, British Online Library

⁸ L.S.S. O’Malley. *Bihar and Odisha District Gazeetter: Monghyr*. Logos Press, New Delhi. 31.

Unfortunately, there is a historical gap of almost two centuries when we find its fresh mention in the Munger copper plate of Devapala discovered in Munger. We learn from this copper plate about Dharampala (c. 770-810), who proceeded far and wide in his military campaigns. The tripartite struggle between the Palas, Rashtrakutas and Gurjar-Pratihars for supremacy over Kanauj was a predominant element in the history of north India. We see mention of Pala king Gopal, his sons Dharampala and Devapala. Munger's prominence is also corroborated by the Nawlagarh inscriptions of Begusarai. The Bhagalpur plate of Narayan Pala, at Munger, shows their policy of religious tolerance and their patronage to the worshipers of Shiva and Sakti cults.⁹

Due to the evident gap in history and evidences on the region, a lack of historical continuity is observed in the sources. We learn of the eventual conquest of the Turks in the Munger region followed by the tussle between the Hindu and Muslim rulers.



Figure 10. Munger copper plate of Devapala discovered at Munger, 1892. British Online Archive

⁹ Ibid., 45

Till the advent of Turkish rule in India, Munger was under the sway of the Karnataka dynasty of Mithila. However, Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded Bihar and took possession of the Territory of Munger towards the close of the 12th century and Munger came under the rule of the Muhammadan conquerors. After a tussle and in the aftermath of a peace treaty *Munger came under the control of the Sultan of Bengal between 1301-1322*, which is corroborated by the Lakhsarai Inscription. Munger then came under the possession of Muhammad Bin Tughlaq who annexed Munger to Delhi for some time. During this conflict between the Tughlaqs of Delhi and the Bengal Sultan, some portions of Munger came under the possession of the *Sharqis of Jaunpur*.

Later, the name of prince Danyal, who held the post of Governor of Eastern Bihar, appears prominently. *It was prince Daniel who had repaired the fortification of Munger and built in 1497 the vault over the shrine of Shah Nafah, the Muhammadan patron of the town*. This is also known by the inscription put up by Danyal on the eastern wall of the dargah...just within the southern gate of the fort.¹⁰

During Akbar's period, when the great Bengal military revolt started, Munger was for some time the headquarters of Akbar's officers in their expeditions against the rebels. It was in this period that Raja Todarmal took possession of Munger and tried to deal with three refractory, powerful, semi-independent zamindars, namely Raja Gajapati of Hajipur, Raja Puran Mal of Ghidhaur and Raja Sangram Singh of Kharagpur. The last two belonged to the district of Munger. After the final occupation of Bihar, Raja Man Singh was appointed as the Governor and on the basis of *Akbarnama*,¹¹ it can be said that Raja Man Singh succeeded well in his administration. Kharagpur at that time was a great principality extending from the south of

¹⁰ L.S.S. O'Malley. *Bihar and Odisha District Gazetteer: Monghyr*. Logos Press, New Delhi. 45

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31

Munger to the south of Bhagalpur and Santhal Parganas. Sangram Singh remained loyal to the Mughal rule till Akbar's death in 1605. But the accession of Jahangir and the rebellion of Prince Khusru led him to make a final attempt to recover his independence. He collected his forces, which, according to Jahangir's memoirs, consisted of about four thousand horses and a large army of foot-soldiers.

The Mughal army under Jahangir Kuli Khan Lala Beg, Governor of Bihar, valiantly opposed him and, in 1606, a gun shot killed Sangram Singh. Sangram Singh's son succeeded in gaining favour with Jahangir but had to wait till 1615 when, on his conversion to Islam, he was allowed to return to Bihar. He known in history as *Rozafzun* (ie. daily growing in power). He remained faithful to the Emperor and in 1628 when Jahangir died he was a commander of 1500 foot-soldiers and 700 horses.

We also find a mention of a devastating famine during the reign of Governor Ibrahim Khan, which continued from 1670-72. The Dutch traveller, De Graafe, who travelled from Munger to Patna in November 1670 gives a graphic picture of the horrible scenes witnessed. Marshall also mentions very interesting details about Munger. He inspected Shah Shuja's palace built on the west side of the fort. He describes it, "as a very large house where the king (Shuja) lived, walled next to the river, for about one and half *kos*, with bricks and stones, with a wall fifteen yards high." He entered the first gate but was stopped at the other, within which he saw two very large stone carvings of elephants.

The inside palace was so strictly guarded that two Dutch men, De Graafe and Oasterhoff, were imprisoned for their antiquarian interest, as they were taken for spies. They were imprisoned for drawing a plan of the palace and noting details regarding fortifications, and

were released after seven weeks of imprisonment in November 1670 by paying a fine of one thousand rupees to the Nawab of Patna. Marshall found a great garden at the north end of the town and, at the south end, he saw several thatched houses and many tombs and mosques. He further wrote, "The town stands upon an ascent, the river bank by it being eight or ten yards high. The brick wall by the river side at the south end of Monghyr was about 5 yards high and 20 yards long with a little tower at each end and each wall is a fortification to put guns in it." (Bihar Gazetteer, Malley).

We find mention in the travel account of R. Heber in his book *Narrative of Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India* (1827) that Munger was noted for its good climate and Warren Hastings also speaks of the delightful change of atmosphere from that of Bengal. Bishop Heber wrote, "Munger presents an imposing appearance.... the fort is now dismantled. Its gates, its battlements etc. are all of Asiatic architecture and very much similar to the Khitairagorod of Moscow." Miss Emily Eden was also much struck by the inlaid tables and boxes and expressed surprise on such curious workmanship (Miss Eden—*Up the Country*). The remark of Miss Eden is also corroborated in the writing of Fanny Parkes who wrote, "Among the articles manufactured here, the black vases for flowers turned into white wood, and lacquered whilst on the lathe with sealing wax are pretty." Joseph Hooker also speaks highly of Munger, "By far the prettiest town, Monghyr is celebrated for its iron manufacture, especially of muskets, in which respect it is the Birmingham of Bengal."

When we come down to the early Mughal period we get a few references to the district in the famous book *Ain-I-Akbari* by Abul Fazl. According to, it *Sarkar Monghyr* consisted of 31 mahals or parganas, paying a revenue of 10,96,25 981 dams (40 dams equal one Akbarshahi rupee). It is also mentioned that *Sarkar* Munger furnished 2150 horses and 50,000 foot-

soldiers. Raja Man Singh, who is said to have reconquered Bengal and Orissa, had for some time Munger as his residence.

During the reign of Aurangzeb we find mention of Munger in connection with the death and burial at Munger of the poet Mulla Mohammad Saiyad, who wrote under the *nom de plume* of *Ashraf*. The poet *Ashraf* stood in high favour with prince Azim-us-Shah, Aurangzeb's grand son, who was the Governor of Bihar. The poet *Ashraf* had also been for a long time the teacher of Zebunissa Begum, Aurangzeb's daughter, who was herself a poetess of repute. In 1704 while on his way from Bengal to Mecca, the poet died at Munger where his tomb is still pointed out. Nicholas Graafe, a Dutch physician who visited Munger in the beginning of the century, was struck with admiration at the sight of its white walls, towers and minarets. But by 1745, when Mustafa Khan, a rebellious general of Alivardi Khan, advanced against it in his march northwards, the fort was a ruinous fortification...the Governor and his little garrison tried to put up some defence but failed miserably.¹²

The besiegers got upon the wall and seized the fort but their leader was killed by a stone that fell upon him. Mustafa Khan, however, following the custom of those days, had music played to celebrate his success, he also took some guns and ammunition from the fort and after a halt for a few days marched off towards Patna. In the period of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, Munger witnessed new changes. Bihar came to be joined to the Subah of Bengal, which had become more or less independent of Delhi. Alivardi, who was the Fauzdar of Rajmahal, had now become the Deputy Governor of Bihar.

¹² L.S.S. O' Malley. *District Gazetteer of Monghyr* (Logos Press New Delhi: 2007), 133.

Munger was politically and strategically so important that it did not escape even the Maratha expeditions. The second Maratha invasion under Raghujee Bhonsla occurred in 1743. Balaji Maratha marched into Bihar and advancing through Tekari, Gaya, Manpur, Bihar and Munger, he reached Bhagalpur. It is also mentioned that during the fourth Maratha invasion in 1744, Raghuji passed through the hills of Kharagpur.

In 1757, when the British forces were pursuing Jean Law, the French adventurer and partisan of Siraj-ud-duala, who was flying northwards after the Battle of Plassey, Major Coote reached Munger late at night on 20th July, 1757, and requisitioned a number of boats which the Diwan of Munger supplied. But Munger Fort was in such a strong position that he was not allowed to enter the fort and when he approached the walls he found that garrison was ready to fire. Coote wisely resumed his march without any attempt to enter the fort.

Nearly three years later, in the spring of 1760, the army of Emperor Shah Alam passed through the district, pursued by Major Caillaud and Miran. The Emperor had been defeated by Caillaud and Miran at Sirpur on 22nd February, 1760. Johan Stables, who had succeeded Caillaud, was given charge of Munger. It was he who directed the attack on the Kharagpur Raja who had openly defied the authority of the new Nawab, Kasim Ali Khan.

The modern history of Munger came again into prominence in 1762 when Kasim Ali Khan made it his capital instead of Murshidbad in Bengal. The new Nawab removed his treasure, his elephants and horses and even the gold and silver decorations of the Imam Bara from his old capital. The army was reorganised and equipped after the English model. An arsenal for the manufacture of fire-arms was established and it is from this time that Munger can trace

back its importance in the manufacture of guns. Even today that glorious tradition is being carried on by hundreds of families who specialize in the manufacture of guns.

A picturesque account of the Court of the Nawab at Munger has been left in the *Sair-ul-Mutakharin*. Two days a week the Nawab sat in a public hall of audience and personally dispensed justice. He listened patiently to the complaints and grievances of everyone and gave his impartial order. The Nawab was a terror to both to his enemies and to wrong doers. He also honoured learning and the learned, and welcomed scholars and savants to his court. He thus earned the respect and admiration of both friends and foes alike. Unfortunately, destiny did not favour him and Mir Kasim Ali soon came into confrontation with the English.



Figure 11. The Old Shuja Palace building within Munger Fort, British Library Archive

The first quarrel appears to have been caused by the tactless conduct of Mr. Ellis, who was in charge of an English factory at Patna. Mr. Ellis had received a vague report that two English deserters were concealed at Munger. A long dispute followed and it was finally resolved by Lieutenant Ironside, the Town Major of Calcutta, who conducted the search of the fort with due permission of the Nawab. No deserters were found inside the fort, the only European in the place being an old French invalid. In April, 1762 Warren Hastings was sent from Calcutta to arrange the terms between the Nawab and Mr. Ellis. The Nawab received him well but Ellis refused to meet Warren Hastings and stayed in his house at Singhia, 15 miles away from Munger.

Beside this personal rancor, serious trade disputes arose between the Nawab and the East India Company. The East India Company had been enjoying exemption from the heavy transit dues levied on inland trade. After the battle of Plassey, the European servants of the Company began to trade extensively on their own account and to claim a similar exemption for all goods passing under company's flag and covered by a *dastak* or certificate signed by the Governor or any agent of the factory. Further misuse followed when the English in some cases lent their names to Indians for a consideration and the latter used the same *dastak* over and over again or even began forging them.

Warren Hastings in 1762 said that every boat he met on the river bore the company's flag and was aware of the oppression of the people by the *gumashtas* and the Company's servants. Mir Kasim bitterly complained that his source of revenue had been taken away from him and that his authority was completely undermined. Eventually in October, 1762, Mr. Vansittart, the Governor, left Calcutta in order to try and conclude a settlement between the two parties. He found the Nawab of Munger smarting under the injuries and insults he had received. But at

length it was agreed that servants of the Company should be allowed to carry on the inland private trade, on payment of a fixed duty of 9% on all goods, a rate much below that paid by the other merchants. The *dastak* also remained, with a new provision that it should also be countersigned by the Nawab's collectors. Mir Kasim unwillingly agreed to these terms. *Sair-ul-Mutakharin* gives a detailed account of the visit of Vansittart. The Nawab travelled six miles to meet Vansittart and arranged for his stay in the house which Gurghin Khan had erected on hill of Sitakund (Pir Pahar).

Vansittart returned to Calcutta in January 1763 after a week long stay at Munger, only to learn that the agreement concluded with the Nawab had been repudiated. [The Nawab, however, had in good faith sent the copies of the Governor's agreement to all of his officers for its immediate implementation.] The result was that English goods, then in transit, were stopped and duty claimed upon them. The English Council reacted sharply and wanted the English *dastak* to pass free of duty. The Nawab on the other hand protested at this breach of faith and passed orders abolishing all transit duty and thereby throwing open the whole inland trade. The English regarded this as an act of hostility and preparations for war began but the English decided to first send a deputation headed by Messrs. Amyatt and Hay to arrange fresh terms with the Nawab. Mr. Ellis was also informed of this development and was warned not to commit any act of aggression even if the mission failed until Amyatt and Hay were well out of the Nawab's power.

The members of the mission reached Munger on 14th May, 1763, and opened negotiations, but it was soon found that they were not welcome. The Nawab, who was offended at the rough and overbearing manner in which he was addressed by the English linguist, refused to speak to him. At subsequent interviews also the Nawab tried to avenge the English insult and

refused to come to any terms. The envoys were kept under strict supervision and when some of the party wished to ride out from Munger they found their way barred by the Nawab's soldiers with lighted matches ready to fire. Just at this tense juncture, English cargo boats for Calcutta were detained at Munger and five hundred muskets intended for the factory at Patna were discovered hidden under the cargo. The Nawab became suspicious of the English move which might have been to seize the fort and the city of Patna. He wanted, therefore, a thorough check by his own troops otherwise he would declare war. In the meantime he permitted Mr. Amyatt and others of the party to leave for Calcutta, but detained Mr. Hay and Mr. Gulston as hostages for the safety of his officers who had been arrested by the English.

The final break between the English and the Nawab was precipitated by the actions of Mr. Ellis who, believing that war was in any case inevitable, seized the city of Patna on hearing that a detachment was advancing from Munger to reinforce the Nawab's garrison. The Nawab also retaliated promptly, reinforcements were sent and the fort quickly recaptured. This news of success gave Kasim Ali a lot of satisfaction. Even though it was the middle of the night, he immediately ordered music to strike and awaken the whole town of Munger. At daybreak the doors of the public halls were thrown open and every one hastened to offer him congratulations. He now proclaimed the outbreak of war and directed his officers to put the English to sword wherever they were found. In pursuance of this general order Mr. Amayat was killed at Murshidabad and the factory at Cossim (Kasim) Bazar was stormed. The survivors surrendered and were sent to Munger to join their unfortunate companions from Patna.

The British force under Major Adams quickly advanced against the Nawab and defeated his troops at Suti. On hearing of his defeat, he sent his Begums and children to the fort at Rohtas and set out himself accompanied by Gurgin Khan to join his army that was now concentrated on the banks of the Udhua Nullah near Rajmahal. Before leaving Munger, however, he put to death a number of his prisoners including Raja Ram Narayan, till lately Deputy Governor of Bihar, who was thrown down into the river below the fort with a pitcher filled with sand bound to his neck. Gurgin Khan, not satisfied with this butchery, also urged the Nawab to kill his English prisoners but the Nawab refused to do so. Jagat Seth Mahtab Rai and Sarup Chand, two rich bankers of Murshidabad, who had been brought from there by Mir Kasim Ali as they were believed to favour the British cause, also appear to have escaped, although it is believed they were also drowned at the same time. This story is, however, contradicted by the author of *Sair-ul-Mutakharin* who says that they were hacked to pieces at Barh. The exact location of the tower in the castle of Munger from where Jagat Seth and others were thrown has not yet been confirmed.

Before the Nawab could join his army at Udhua Nullah he heard of a second decisive defeat that he had sustained and thereafter returned to Munger. He stayed there only for two or three days and marched to Patna with his prisoners like Mr. Hay, Mr. Ellis and others. On the way Mr. Kasim halted on the bank of Rahua Nullah, a small stream near Lakhisarai. It was here that Gurgin Khan met his end, killed by some of his own troops who were demanding arrears of their pay. A scene of wild confusion followed. Makar, another Armenian General, fired off some guns, the army thought that the English were upon them and fled in terror, Mir Kasim himself trying to escape on an elephant. There was great confusion in the army because of this false alarm but Mir Kasim marched on to Patna the next day.

In the meantime the British army moved on rapidly towards Munger, placed then under the command of Arab Ali Khan by Mir Kasim. On the first of October, 1763, the main body of the army arrived. For two days heavy fire was maintained but in the evening the Governor capitulated and surrendered himself and his garrison. The English at once set to work to repair the breaches and improve the defences.

The subsequent history of the district is uneventful. With the extension of the British dominions, the town of Munger ceased to be an important frontier post. There was no arsenal, no regular garrison was kept up and no attempt was made to bring the fortification up-to-date. Munger, however, was still important for its fine location and salubrious air, and was used as a sanatorium for British troops. It was considered so great a resort that the journey up the Ganga followed by a stay here was regarded as healthy as a sea voyage. A trip to Munger was prescribed for Warren Hastings' wife when she was in ill health. In 1781, when Hastings was on his way to meet Chait Singh at Banaras, he left her here, believing that the surroundings would be of immense benefit to her.

2.2. Prevalent Sacred Sites

Practically surrounded by the river Ganga and Kharagpur hills, Munger town boasts a beautiful landscape. Nestled in the beautiful lap of nature, Munger has many sites which are connected to historic lore; this also paves the way for many intangible narrative traditions around it. To start with, the **Kashtaharini Ghat** on the Ganga has an interesting story. The Ganga river that runs in front of Munger fort twists in its flow towards the north; it is 'uttara vahini' which in Sanskrit means 'north flowing'. At this location, a ghat was constructed, which has a legend linked to it. An inscription at Kannauj records that Govind Chandra of Kannauj, a Gahadvala King, granted land on the riverbank to build a gate, after bathing in the Ganga river at Mudgagiri (Munger) on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Akshaya Tritiya.

There are several antiquities that have been unearthed at this ghat such as an inscription of around the 10th century A.D. on the wall of the gateway that refers to king Bhagiratha and the construction of a Shiva temple, the discovery of carvings and sculptures by archaeologist Bloch in 1903, and an inscribed image of Dhyani Buddha (Buddha in meditation pose) describing the Buddhist doctrine (preserved now in the Indian Museum at Kolkata). Hence, this location is venerated by Hindus.¹³ The name itself, which is *kashta+harini*, signifies the meaning of the location, which is that anyone who falls on this bank, will be liberated from all kinds of problems or troubles (*kashta*) and goddess Ganga will help him/her to transcend the sorrows of this universe. The popular legend associated with this site is that in the *Ramayana*, Lord Rama and Goddess Sita along with Lakshmana came to this particular spot

¹³ Munger Fort. Directorate of Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India. Retrieved 2009-10-12

to stay here and rest after their encounter with the legendary *asura* (demon) Taraka. This gave it the name Kashtaharani Ghat. The place is also associated with the Hindu sage, Mudgal Muni.



Figure 12. West view of Munger depicting the Kashtaharani Ghat, Moffat James, 1775-1815, British Online Archives



Figure 13. The ghats of Munger; Kashtaharani Ghat



Figure 14. The entrance of Kashtaharani Ghat



Figure 15. Small temple at the ghat

There are various Hindu artefacts of ritualistic purpose here, mostly Shivalingas and a few sculptures of Hindu gods and goddess, showing the era of Hindu ruling kingdoms of the region. Several antiquities have been unearthed at this ghat such as the 10th century inscription, archaeologist Bloch's discoveries, and the Dhyani Buddha image.



Figure 16. An image of Vishnu at Kashtaharani Ghat

Chandika Sthan is a temple situated in Munger. It is one of the Shakti Peethas that are places of worship consecrated to the goddess *Shakti*. Located in the northeast corner of Munger, the Chandika Sthan is just two kilometers away from the town centre.



Figure 17. Chandika Sthan sanctum image, Bihar State Government Archive



Figure 18. The entrance gate of Chandika Sthan, Munger

It is traditionally believed that the left eye of Sati fell in Munger, which subsequently became a place of worship in popular themes of Maya Chandi. Amongst the various shakti peethas, this enshrinement is a Siddhapith as well and it is widely known for curing eye problems. Thousands of devotees come to the place with their varied wishes and *manats*, specifically during Durga Puja or the Navaratri. Chandisthan (meaning place of goddess Chandi) is the location of the shrine, where resides a deity of goddess Chandi (Chandi or Caṇḍīka is the name by which the Supreme Goddess is referred to in *Devi Mahatmya*). It is considered as one of the 64 shakti peethas in India, and is considered one of the most sanctified temples in the region. The conjecture that it could be part of an ancient temple that existed here is yet to be established by an exploration of the area.¹⁴

A natural rocky hillock dated to the ancient Raja Karna is named after him as the **‘Karnachaura’** or **‘Karan Chabutara’** (meaning the slab of Raja Karan). It is the highest point in the fort. Since the location commands a fine view of the surroundings, Raja Karan (said to be a contemporary of Vikramaditya, the famous king of India) had built a house on the hill, which was later converted by the British to a saluting battery. In 1766, this base on the hill was crucial in subduing a rebellion by some European officers of the garrison. Further refurbishing of the fort occurred during General Goddard’s time when it was converted for use as the large residence (as it exists now) of the Commanding Officer of the British garrison. This building later came under the ownership of the Maharaja of Vizianagram and then of the Raja of Murshidabad. Since 1978, it is under the ownership of the Bihar School of Yoga. Swami Satyananda Saraswati, founder of the Yoga School, has renamed it ‘Ganga Darshan.’ The Yoga School is now renowned as a world centre for

¹⁴ Munger Fort”. Directorate of Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India. Retrieved 2009-10-12

modern yogic/tantric renaissance. An old platform near the hill, in front of the bungalow, is also linked to the period of King Karna and his wife.

The **Mir Kasim Tunnel** is another important site in Munger. It is said that Princess Gul and Prince Bahar used to hide under the tunnels by the riverside in order to wreak vengeance upon the British officers. They would clothe themselves with tiger skins during the night. Once Bahar, on his rounds in the dark of the night was sighted by a British officer who instantly shot the Prince dead. The truth was revealed the next morning and the Prince was said to have been buried by the dargah of Pir Shah-Nafah-Gul. The Princess was later found dead in a man's attire by the side of her brother's tomb, where she was also buried. The officer, responsible for Bahar's and, indirectly, Gul's death, ordered for a daily salute of guns in the evening to mourn the loss of the children.

Figures 19 & 20. A distant and close image of Mir Kasim's Surang (tunnel) which extends to the banks of the Ganga



Figure 19.



Figure 20.

Pir Pahad is one of the heritages sites of Munger district, existing from the 13th century onward. The site is around 4 kms away from Munger and the fertile land of the Ganga near the hillocks is easily seen from the top of the hill. When Shah Jahan's son Shahshuja came here, there was said to be a Pir Sahab on this hill. After the death of Pir Sahab, his tomb was built here, and it came to be known as Dargah of Shah Nafah, *nafah* being a Persian word meaning 'pod of musk'. According to Shri J.P. Paul, an expert in the field, the hill has been named after Pir Sahab. Today, the historic building, the mausoleum of Pir Pahar, is in a state of disrepair. Despite this, people come here to visit. There has always been talk of sprucing it up but till date no concrete step has been taken in this direction.

Mughal emperor Shah Jahan sent his son Shahshuja to Munger to rule the region. Shahshuja used to govern Bihar, Bengal and Orissa from the Pir hill. After this, when Mir Qasim made Munger his capital, his commander Gurgin Khan lived on this site. Later, the English resident also lived here. Indigo cultivation was also done here. In 1890, Prasanna Thakur, a zamindar of Kolkata, took the Pir Pahad from the last Nilkar Sahib, Herschel. Shri Paul says that after him, Akshay Kumar Mandal, a landowner from Kolkata, took over Pir Pahad. Later, when Santhu Da, grandson of Akshay Kumar Mandal, was moving to Kolkata, he expressed a wish to offer Pir Pahad as a national heritage. But this did not happen, and he sold Pir Pahad to local Banarasi Yadavs.

It is said that some parts of *Gitanjali* were composed here. In 1905 Rabindranath Tagore came to Munger to live with his uncle, Prasanna Kumar Thakur. He made this Pir mountain his residence and composed parts of *Gitanjali* during his stay here.

Pir Pahad seems to have been quite important strategically. Shah Jahan's son Shahshuja used it as a base for his operations, and the commander of Mir Kasim made it his place of residence so that the whole city could be monitored from here. Later, the British Residents also lived here. Shri Paul says that the tunnel built near Kusharani Ghat inside the Munger Fort complex had direct contact with Pir Pahad. The tunnel built on the hill was used by the king and his generals for mutual contact. Mir Kasim used these tunnels for his protection.



Figure 21. Tomb of Pir Sahab at Pir Pahadi, Munger



Figure 22. Rabindra House and property adjacent to Pir Pahadi, Munger



Figure 23. A view of the fertile, white lands of the Ganga from Pir Pahadi, Munger



Figure 24. The right side entrance to Munger Fort



Figure 25. The exit from Munger Fort



Figure 26. Carving of Hindu God(s) on the walls of the fort, 13th-14th Century

Sitakund, a village close to Munger, contains a hot spring known as Sitakund, after the famous episode from the *Ramayana*. When Sita entered a blazing fire to prove her chastity after she was rescued from Ravana, she came out of the ordeal unscathed but imparted to the pool in which she bathed the heat she had absorbed from the fire. The pool, enclosed in a reservoir, is visited by many pilgrims, especially during the full moon of Magh. This pool was also recorded by Tieffenthaler in 1765.

Chapter 3

Sultanganj

Sultanganj is located in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar, on the south bank of the Ganga river, 25 km west of Bhagalpur city. The place was once a part of the larger Munger administration and later came under the Bhagalpur Division which was again an offshoot of Munger. Its riverine location added to its **importance for river borne trade**, with Munger on one side and Bhagalpur on the other. Large cargo boats stocked with merchandise used to anchor at Sultanganj. In the early part of the British administration, European merchants, writers and soldiers would take river cruises as a prescription for convalescence. Records of such cruises to Colgong, Sultanganj and Munger are available. Thriving European indigo planters built their *kothis* (mansions) here.

In north India, there is a tradition of Kanwariyas taking Ganga water from Haridwar and carrying it back home to perform the ritual at their local Shiva temple. In Bihar, during the same month of Sravan, the **Kanwariyas take the holy water from Sultanganj**. Sultanganj has a special significance since the Ganga turns northwards here. This water is carried by the devotees from here and offered at the nearest Jyotirlinga, which is Devghar or Deoghar in Jharkhand. This chapter looks at *the intangible and ritualistic significance of the place* and how tangible heritage connects here to offer one of the most prominent Kanwar pilgrimages of the country.

Sultanganj was also famous during the rule of the Pala and Sena kings (from 730 A.D. to 1199 A.D.). It is said that Dharmapala, the first king of the Pala dynasty, laid the foundation of the **Vikramshila University** at Sultanganj in the latter part of the 8th century A.D. It was situated on a hill on the right bank of the river Ganga. While some identify the spot with Sultanganj, others locate it at Patharghatta Hills, also in in Bhagalpur district. Whatever its

exact location, the university was said to have been endowed generously by King Dharampala. The university buildings were said to accommodate over a hundred professors, and staff. A big monastery with a large Buddhist temple was also part of the premises. The controlling authority which administered the affairs of the Vikramshila University also looked after the Nalanda University near Patna. It is said that the walls of the university buildings were painted with the images of learned *pandits*, either alumni, or professors. Distinguished scholars from here visited foreign lands, particularly Tibet, to share their knowledge.

Buddha Jnana Pada, the first President or Chancellor of the university, developed the study of *Mantra* and *Vajrayana*; his works may have been lost in Sanskrit but are preserved in Tibetan languages. Grammar, Metaphysics, Logic and Rituals were all subjects of study at the university. Accounts of the university, unlike the information available on Nalanda and Valabhi, are only to be gleaned from Tibetan texts and biographies of Vikramshila scholars preserved there. The university, according to the *Tabakat-i-Nasari*, was completely destroyed, probably by the Muhammadan invader, Bakhtiyar Khilji, in about 1202 A.D.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

Figures 27 & 28. Ruins of Vikramshila University

During the rule of the **Mauryas, Guptas and Palas, many works of art and architecture** were raised at Sultanganj. The area has yielded ancient relics like stupas, seals, coins, terracotta and Hindu and Buddhistic images. Many carvings can still be seen in the Sultanganj hills. A number of small images along with a copper image of Lord Buddha about seven feet high were excavated here. A Buddha image found in Sultanganj is now in Birmingham Museum. A large number of antiquities recovered from Krishnagarh at Sultanganj have been preserved in Patna Museum. They indicate a very evolved standard in the portrayal of Hindu religious belief and culture. The fact that some of the images and other antiquities are Buddhist reiterates that the area was very important from the Buddhist point of view as well. Most of the antiquities have been identified with the medieval period. Through various vicissitudes Sultanganj continued in importance in the later centuries. It is peculiar that a place which has the famous Shiva temple, Ajgaivinath, which is quite old, should have a name with a clear non-Hindu connotation. This is also interesting when it is seen in the context of Ajgaivinath temple being one of the three famous Shiva temples in Bihar and Jharkhand, the other two being Basukinath and Baidyanath.



Figure 29. Road to Sultanganj riverbank on the Ganga

3.1. The Kanwar Pilgrimage of Bihar



Figure 30. A view of the Ganga river bank and ghat where ritualistic ceremonies are performed, Sultanganj

The pilgrimage begins at Sultanganj with the first rite—the drawing of Ganga Jal. In the **Kanwar pilgrimage**, the waters of the Ganga at Sultanganj constitute the sacred offering. The Ganga ghat at Sultanganj is very special for pilgrims and people from the surrounding areas, for here the river bends northward in its generally southward course to the Bay of Bengal. In Hinduism the direction south is associated with Yama, the god of death, and wherever the river turns north, it is deemed very auspicious. Pilgrimage places along a north bend of the Ganga occur only at a few places like Varanasi and Prayag. *The discovery of several ancient Buddhist, Jain and Hindu sculptures around Sultanganj, suggests that it has been a place of religious importance since antiquity.*

As the waters of the Ganga at Sultanganj are central in this particular pilgrimage, the story of the Ganga becomes significant. Born in the heavens, Ganga dwelt in the celestial sphere in Brahma's (the God of creation) *kamandal* or sacred pot. In the Satya yuga, King Sagara performed the Ashwamedha Yagna, a royal sacrifice in which a horse would be let loose and the land over which it wandered unchallenged would be claimed by the king who sponsored the sacrifice. King Sagara's horse had wandered into the hermitage of Kapil Rishi, situated today near the mouth of the Ganga.

The rishi tied the horse to a post. When Sagara's son reached here, they found the horse tied and Kapil Rishi deep in meditation. As they boldly untied the horse, the rishi's mediation was disturbed. In anger, he cursed the sixty thousand sons of Sagara, who all disappeared underground. Sagara was devastated by the loss of his sons and even more so because of the belief that they would not be able to enter heaven without cremation. Kapil Rishi advised that only the regenerative waters of the Ganga could restore their bodily remains for the rites to be carried out. King Bhagiratha (Sagara's grandson) undertook severe penance to request Ganga's descent upon earth. But Ganga residing in celestial sphere was not ready to do so. After much pleading and prayers to Shiva (who could hold Ganga's turbulent waters in his matted locks), Ganga agreed to descend in Shiva's hair, where she wandered for years until her torrents were subdued.

Finally, King Bhagiratha drew up the chariot in the Himalayas and the Ganga followed, crashing and thundering behind. *As they passed the rocks of Sultanganj*, where stood Jhannu Rishi's ashram, the thunderous tumult of the waters shattered his meditation. In a fit of rage he swallowed the Ganga. King Bhagiratha meditated again, calling upon Shiva. Shiva appeared to Jhannu Rishi, whereupon he released her from his thigh (jhang).¹⁵ To release her

¹⁵ Skanda Purana Kashi Kanda 27. The sanctity of Jhanvi Ganga is mentioned in Bhagvata Gita Chapter 0 shloka 31.

from any other orifice of his body would have made her impure. At Ganga Sagar, where the river joins the sea, her waters ‘washed’ over and retrieved King Sagara’s sons who then attained release following their cremation. *This is also the story of how the Ganga came to have her second birth at Sultanganj.* An old name associated with Sultanganj is *Jhangira* which is derived from the term Jhang (thigh) from the incident related to Rishi Jhannu.



Figure 31. Devotees at the banks of the Ganga, Sultanganj



Figure 32. Kanwariyas resting in their tents during Sravan Mela by the side of the Ganga, Sultanganj

The evening before an auspicious day for the pilgrimage, pilgrims start to arrive on tractors, buses and train, with most sleeping in the shelters across the banks of the river. In the early hours of the morning, people take a dip in the Ganga and draw Ganga water in their pots. The hereditary pilgrimage panda for the specific village or *gotra* clan is sought for the initial rites of the *sankalpa*, in which one's intention or vow to undertake the pilgrimage is stated. Only upon completion of the *sankalpa* can the journey begin. The group decides to then move on foot (*paidal yatra*) from Sultanganj towards Deoghar Jyotirlinga where the holy water will be offered to Shiva. The journey takes days for the 108 kms to be traversed by these devotees. Vaidyanatha Jyotirlinga temple, also known as Baba Baidyanath Dham or Baidyanath Dham, is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the most sacred abodes of Shiva. It is located

in Deoghar in the Santhal Parganas Division of Jharkhand. It is a temple complex consisting of the main temple of Baba Baidyanath, where the Jyotirlinga is installed, and 21 other temples.

According to Hindu beliefs, the demon king Ravana worshipped Shiva at the current site of the temple to get boons that he later used to wreak havoc in the world. Ravana offered his ten heads one after another to Shiva as a sacrifice. Pleased with this, Shiva descended in order to cure Ravana who was injured. As he acted as a doctor in this instance, he is referred to as *Vaidya* (doctor). The temple derives its name from this aspect of Shiva. Kanwar Yatra is thus an annual pilgrimage of the devotees of Shiva, known as Kanwariyas or 'Bhole', to the Hindu pilgrimage place of Sultanganj to fetch holy waters of the Ganges river. Millions of participants gather sacred water from the Ganga and carry it for miles to dispense as offerings in the Baidyanath Temple in Jharkhand.

As per Shiva *Mahapurana*, once Brahma (the Hindu God of Creation) and Vishnu (the Hindu God of Preservation) had an argument in terms of supremacy of creation. To test them, Shiva pierced the three worlds as a huge endless pillar of light, the Jyotirlinga. Vishnu and Brahma split downwards and upwards respectively to find the end of the light in either direction. Brahma lied that he had found it, while Vishnu conceded defeat. Shiva appeared as a second pillar of light and cursed Brahma that he would have no place in ceremonies while Vishnu would be worshipped till the end of eternity. The Jyotirlinga is the supreme partless reality, out of which Shiva partly appears. The Jyothirlinga shrines, thus, are considered to be the spots where Shiva appeared as a fiery column of light.¹⁶

¹⁶ Eck, Diana L. (1999), *Banaras, City of Light* (First ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 117.

Originally there were believed to be 64 Jyothirlingas but 12 of them are considered to be very auspicious and holy. Each of the twelve Jyothirlinga sites take the name of the presiding deity—each considered a different manifestation of Shiva.



Figure 33. Kanwariyas preparing to take an early morning dip in the holy waters of the Ganga, Sultanganj, Bihar State Archive



Figure 34. A participant of the Kanwar Yatra taking an early morning dip in the Ganga,
Sultanganj



Figure 35. Female devotees in their orange attire signifying the element of Yatra, Sultanganj



Figure 36. The Kanwars starting their Yatra from Sultanganj towards Baba Dham in Deoghar

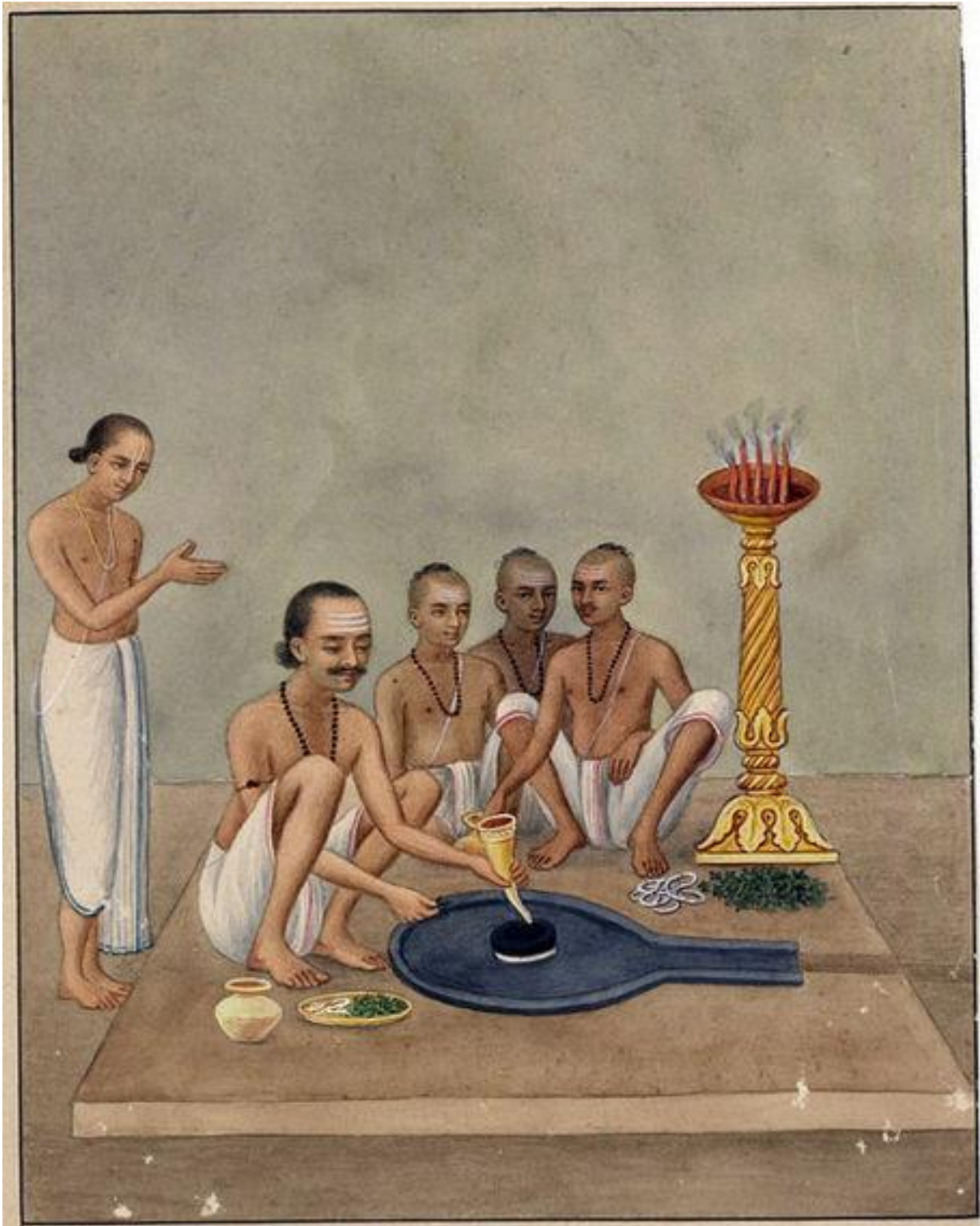


Figure 37. Priest conducting the ritual rites inside Baba Dham Temple, Deoghar, 1870, Columbia Online Archive



Figure 38. The temple of Baba Dham at Deoghar, Jharkhand



Figure 39. The arrival of the devotees from Sultanganj



Figure 40. The sanctum of Deoghar Temple

3.2. The intersectional sites of Hinduism-Buddhism and Islam

Sultanganj today is a small agricultural town boasting an administrative complex and several associated modern-day embellishments. The economic life of Sultanganj closely mirrors the rhythm of the pilgrimage. *Old sculptures, mostly Buddhist and Jain in origin, lie scattered at the base of both the hills as reminders of the long history of Sultanganj.* Here we discuss the intersections between different religions which make the intangible nature of this ‘Hindu’ land of pilgrimage more compelling. British archaeologists differed over the date of the carvings found here. Some dated them between the 17th and 18th centuries while some considered them older, from the age of the Gupta empire. There are three major religions (Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism) associated with the sites at Sultanganj.

The **Ajgaivinath Temple** situated in Sultanganj is devoted to Lord Shiva. The origin of this temple is shrouded in mystery. Locals claim it to be a Swayambhu temple that appeared on the rock. Later, it was given an abode. The temple is built on a rock protruding out from the river Ganga. It can be reached by hired boat, which is available at Murali Hills in Sultanganj.



Figure 41. Pilgrims arriving at Ajgaivinath Temple



Figure 42. Ajgaivinath Temple, Bihar State Archive

The temple, also known as Gaibinath Mahadev, is popular for the sanctity of the idol of Lord Shiva. It has a series of rock sculptures and some inscriptions. Some of the rock panel sculptures at this temple are one of the best known specimens across India. The sculptures could belong to the later Pala period. During the rainy season, the swishing waters of river Ganga wash the base of the temple. The pilgrimage to Ajgaivinath temple is considered to be holy due to the presence of the river Ganga. A part of the river here is seen washing the temple rock. The rock sculptures, inscriptions and Hindu, Buddhist and Gupta images are spectacular. According to the legend, Lord Shiva was given his *Ajgav* bow here, and hence the place is known as Ajgaivinath. Originally, this place was known as Jahngira which was derived from the name of Jhannu Muni. Jahngira is now a small village within the Sultanganj town. According to a local belief, Kala Pahar wanted to destroy the Ajgaivinath temple in his quest against the Hindu temples but didn't succeed. He, however, destroyed the Parvati temple on a nearby hill. Ram Navmi, Vasant Panchmi, Bhadra Purnima and Ganga Dussehra

are the major festivals celebrated at Ajgaivinath temple. The month-long fair, the Shravani Mela, has great importance and is celebrated on a grand scale in the temple. Shravani mela starts in the month of *sawan* or *shravan*. Lakhs of devotees flock to Sultanganj to collect holy waters of Ganga river. After collecting water in their *kanwars*, they lift these on their shoulders and walk 108 km to the Baba Baidyanath temple at Baba Dham in Deoghar.



Figure 43.



Figure 44.

Figures 43 & 44. Kanwars enroute to Baba Dham in Deogarh



Figure 45. Ajgaivinath Temple



Figure 46. The base with the Gupta style of sculpture on the walls of the Ajgaivinath Temple,
Sultanganj

Figures 47 & 48 below. A closer image of the sculptural art on the walls of the temple; the site defiled by trash and dirt



Figure 47.



Figure 48.

The various remains around the banks of the river Ganga in Sultanganj are in a poor condition and largely ignored by the authorities. The annual Kanwar pilgrimage assembles a huge number of people here, which leads to definite misuse of the historical landscape. If one were to travel along the Ganga from Munger to Bhagalpur, a prominent rocky island, seen in the close vicinity of a rocky hill on the banks, is quite visible. Enigmatic in appearance with remnants of sculptures from the distant past, which are seen even from a distance, it stands as a silent witness to the vagaries of time, located as it is near the remains of an ancient city. Now known as Sultanganj, it perhaps serves as one of the best examples of continuity of tradition and belief, since it has managed to retain its ancient status as a favoured pilgrimage destination, due, in part, also to its association with the legend of Ganga's rebirth.

On an initial look, it was felt that the **sculptures** appeared more plastic than those at Pattharghata (referred in the text on Vikramshila), dating them thus to the early **Gupta period**, considering an increase in elasticity and better depiction of emotions on stone in the later art. However, most scholars who had initially ascribed all the sculptures to the Gupta period later dated some to the Gupta period and others to the post-Gupta period, with only the Sheshashayi and Varaha Vishnu together with a few small figures in the rock being assigned an early attribution. In such a case, it may not appear surprising as to why the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims Fa Hian and Hieun Tsang failed to mention this prominent site. Although there is a large but again unmentioned Buddhist monastery in the vicinity, the reason for skipping the site by them could have been that this was an almost exclusively Hindu monument. The numerous sculptures include only two representations of the Buddha, of which, according to Cunningham, one may represent the Buddha incarnation of Vishnu. Cunningham assigned it to the 2nd or 3rd century A.D., while later, Bloch assigned a date around the 7th or 8th century A.D.

From the nearby remains at Kherhi Hill, it is evident that artists in the region were quite active during the late 5th to 6th century A.D., and have left behind various ancient sculptures including that of a superbly carved Narasimha Vishnu in dark grey stone on the west side of the hill. Singh opined that even as Jahngira was adorned with a few carvings in the Gupta period, it was elaborately embellished probably in the 8th century A.D., to such an extent that hardly any part of the surface remained without sculptures. As one looks at the boulder facing the river, attention is immediately drawn to what looks like a victory procession in which a king riding a horse is seen with a set of musicians leading his way and followed by two attendants, one carrying an umbrella or canopy signifying the royal presence, followed by another attendant seemingly carrying some object. Two dogs are also noticed as closely following the procession, thereby indicating a scene post hunting in which the hunt (probably a boar) is being carried by the attendant, while the king and other attendants appear in a mood of rejoicing.

The mysterious sculpture was initially misunderstood by Cunningham as representing Kalki, the last incarnation of Vishnu, probably due to the attribute of riding on a horse. However, Dr R. C. P. Singh rightly identified it as Revanta, mentioned in the Puranas as the son of Surya, whose interesting story starts with his mother Surenyu, the daughter of Vishwakarma, who initially delivered two sons, Yama and Manu, and a daughter Yami (Yamuna), for her husband, but, however, gradually started avoiding his company due to excessive heat and glory associated with his persona and subsequently fled in disguise as a mare towards the colder regions of the north. Before departure, however, she left her *Chaya* (shadow-like appearance) as a deception which was soon discovered by Surya, who thereafter followed her in the form of a horse. Then upon conjugal union, three more sons, namely the twin Asvins, the celestial physicians, and Revanta, the lord of horses and horsemen, were born.



Figure 49. Surya Depiction

Close to the four-armed figures of Vishnu, one notices a standing four-armed image of *Ardhanarisvara* Shiva in the *tribhanga* pose, with the right lower hand carrying a rosary and the upper holding a battle-axe trident intertwined with a serpent. The front left hand of the female half is bent and placed on the waist holding a mirror, while the lower probably holds an object which appears to be a lotus. With a halo behind the head, a *Jata* on the right side and properly groomed hair on the left side, a well-wrought necklace adorns the neck. The male half of the body is draped from the waist to the knee only, while the female one from the waist to much below the knee. The figure has been assigned to a comparatively later date in the Pala period; but Dr Singh, on stylistic consideration, has mentioned that it seems to belong to the Gupta tradition and may be safely placed in the **post-Gupta epoch**.



Figure 50. Rock sculpture on the banks of the Ganga, Sultanganj



Figure 51.



Figure 52.

Figure 51 & 52. Sculptural confluence of Hinduism-Buddhism, hills of Sultanganj

Atop Murali Hill, on a brick-built platform, there is an old **Jami Masjid**, with the platform supported by a retaining wall facing the river. From its conspicuous position amidst Hindu ruins, it is supposed to represent the site of another ancient Hindu Temple or Buddhist Stupa. Cunningham assigned it to around 1500 A.D. from its Pathan style of architecture. Bloch, who referred to the mosque with “*the curved Bengali battlement, the only instance of this style which I know of outside Bengal proper,*” mentioned that underneath the mosque was once the site of “*a large Buddhist stupa*”; however, no grounds for such a conclusion were documented.



Figure 53. The mosque at Murali Hill, Sultanganj

Chapter 4

Bhagalpur

About 58 kilometres east of Munger lies Bhagalpur. The Dutch boat journals of the early eighteenth century make frequent mention of Bhagalpur as a city, but they otherwise shed little light on the source or extent of its commercial strength. Given the fertile flood plains in its immediate hinterland and the town's **location on the Ganga highway**, Bhagalpur must have been an **important trading centre**. Here the pilgrims assembled "in great numbers from many parts of India" during the month of February to worship Vasu Paduka.¹⁷ The English East India Company's army officer and orientalist scholar, William Francklin, assumed this pilgrimage to have great antiquity. At the time of his survey in the early nineteenth century, this pilgrimage centre was maintained by the maharajas of Jaipur, in western India, and the royal patronage would have had some connection with appeasing the west Indian merchants such as the Jains and Marwaris.

Buchanan Hamilton who surveyed Bhagalpur in the early nineteenth century, reports that in the *Thana* Kotwali division there were 69 dealers who controlled capitals of between 300 and 2000 rupees and were active in the **retail and wholesale trade of cotton cloth and chintz**. In the district town of Bhagalpur the total number of such traders was 117. These merchants also exported Bhagalpuri clothes to Calcutta and other places. Apart from them, there were four "Mogul merchants" with a total capital of one hundred thousand rupees who dealt in Bhagalpuri cloth and left Bhagalpur after purchasing their cargoes.¹⁸ The instances of the commercial activities and the adequate amount of capital

¹⁷ William Francklin, *Inquiry concerning the site of ancient Palibothra, conjectured to lie within the limits of the modern district of Bhaugulpur, according to researches made on the spot in 1811 and 1812* (London, 1815), 13–15.

¹⁸ James Heitzman, *The city in south Asia* (London: Routledge, 2008), 77; Eaton, *The rise of Islam*, 149

in the hands of these merchants indicate the degree of trade which the town and routes sustained well into the early nineteenth century.

Pirpanti, 30 miles east of Bhagalpur, is a small village, but was a place of commercial and trade importance. Commodities like jute, wheat, linseed, castor seed etc. were exported to other parts of the state. Bidi-making seems to have been a big activity too. The village enjoyed a good turnover of river borne trade which declined following the shifting of the river 3 miles away from the village.

According to traditions preserved in the epics and puranas, the descendants of Anu, the great grandson of Manu, founded the Anava kingdom in the east. Afterwards, this kingdom was divided among the five sons of King Bali, known as Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Pundia and Sumha. Among the kings of Anga about whom there is some reference, was Lomapada, a contemporary and friend of king Dashrath of Ayodhya. His great-grandson was Champa after whom the capital of Anga, till then known as Malini, was renamed as Champa. Anga, along with Magadha, first finds mention in Vedic literature in the *Atharvaveda Samhita*. Buddhist scriptures mention Anga among the different kingdoms in northern India.

According to a tradition, Brahmadata, the king of Anga defeated Bhattiya, the king of Magadha. But the latter's son, Bimbisar (C.545 B.C.), avenged his father's defeat and subjugated Anga. Ajatshatru, the next king of Magadha, is said to have transferred his capital to Champa. Subhadrangi, the mother of Ashoka, was a poor Brahmin girl of Champa who was given to Bindusar in marriage. Anga remained a part of the Magadhan Empire under the Nandas, the Mauryas (324-185 B.C.), the Sungas (185-75 B.C.) and the Kanvas (75-30 B.C.). During the rule of the Kanvas, King Kharavela of Kalinga invaded Magadha and Anga.

The history of the next few centuries upto the coronation of Chandragupta I (in 320 A.D.) is rather obscure. Anga was a part of the great Gupta Empire (320-455A.D.). This was an epoch of great material and cultural progress. With the decline of the Guptas, the Gaud King Sasanka gained control over the area in 602 A.D. and maintained his dominion till his death in 625 A.D. His death marked the decline of Gaud power and later the area came under Harsha's domain. He installed Madhav Gupta as king of Magadha. His son Adityasena has left an inscription at Mandar Hill indicating the installation of Narsimha or Narhari temple by him.

Hiuen Tsang visited Champa in the course of his travels. He has left a description of the town in his travel accounts. The Palas of Bengal came to power in 755 A.D. with the election of Gopala as the king. He conquered Bihar. Dharmapala succeeded him. Vighrapala established his authority in Anga. A copper plate ascribed to his son Narayanpala has been found at Bhagalpur. Vikramshila, the seat of the famous University, was said to have been founded by Dharmapala. The Senas also ruled over Anga after the fall of the Palas.



Figure 54. Remains of Vikramshila University

4.1. Silk Traditions

The Gangetic plains are very fertile and the main crops include rice, wheat, maize, barley, and oilseeds. The economy of Bhagalpur is dependent mainly on agriculture and small businesses. **Bhagalpur has been associated with the silk industry** for hundreds of years, and is famous all over India for its Tussar silk and Bhagalpuri saree. Silkworms are cultivated to produce the renowned **Tussar silk** from which the Tussar saree is made. The Silk Institute and Agricultural University are located in the city and are handled by the state government but are functional only partially, probably due to a lack of financial support.

The Tussar silk industry is an indigenous industry that is most closely associated with this district. Around 1810, Buchanan Hamilton estimated that there were about 3275 looms at work in the district. According to him, all castes were permitted to spin, with mostly women engaged in the work, and the cloth spun was coarse. By the time J. Byrne, I.C.S., compiled his Gazetteer a century later, he reported that this number had reduced although the industry was still considered an important one; the process of manufacture had not progressed too much and the looms were as basic as they would have been in the past, being little more than bamboo frames.



Figure 55. The generational making of Bhagalpuri silk is seen in every household of Champa Gali, Bhagalpur

According to him, the kind of cloths now, as then, are mostly *dariyas*¹⁹ in which the warp consists of three parts of cotton and two parts of tussar of a different colour. *Charkhanas* are about 18 cubits long and eight-seventh of a cubit wide. Different size looms can produce from six to eight pieces in a month. *Baftas* are pieces of a uniform colour, dyed after being woven. *Khasaris*, which are produced chiefly for home use, are like *dariyas*, but of inferior size and firmness. He goes on to elaborate that the pure tussar silk is called *tul*; the *Lahan Gowal* is a figured silk worn only by Brahmans, Kayasths and Rajputs.

¹⁹ J. Byrne, Bhagalpur District Gazetteer, 125.

The winding of the silk from cocoons is effected by a very simple instrument, a *tariya*. The process of cultivating the silk worms on the Mulberry tree, and extracting the silk thread onto the spinning reels is quite painstaking. Machines are now making the same task happen at a faster pace in almost all places in Bhagalpur. The images below capture the process of making silk.



Figure 56. Swathes of coloured cotton, ready to be mixed with the Tussar silk, Bhagalpur

Figures 57 & 58. The combination of cotton and silk to make the product, Bhagalpur



Figure 57.

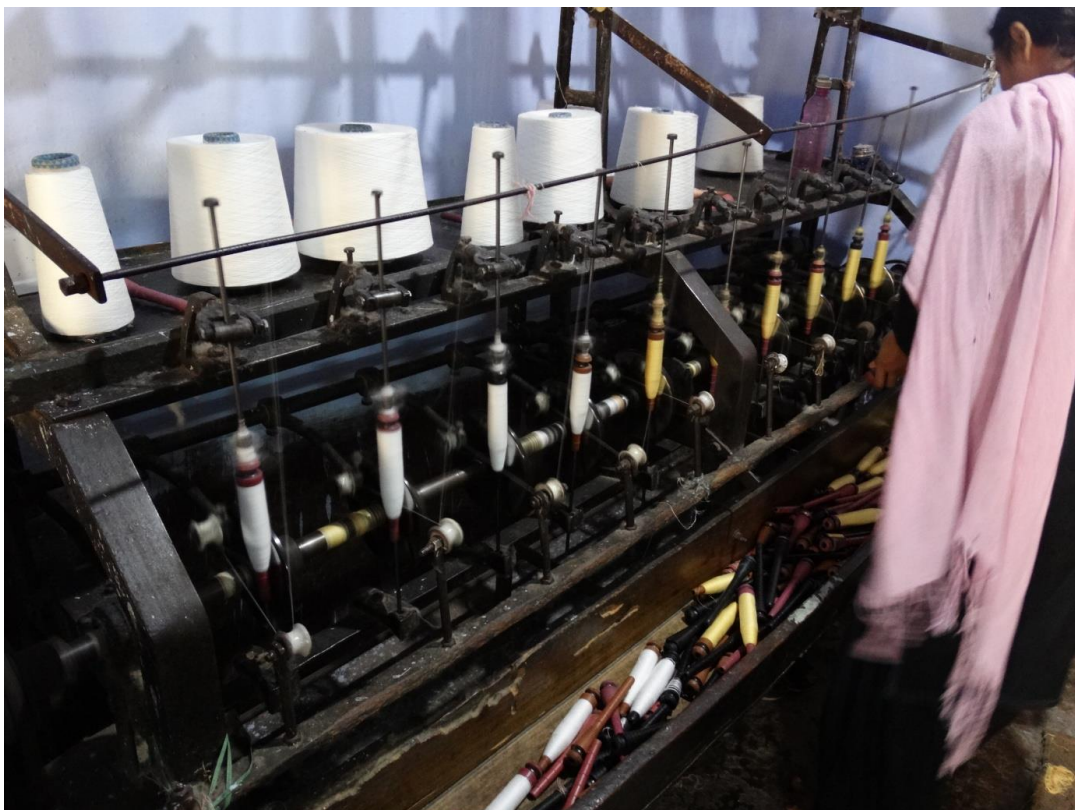


Figure 58.



Figure 59. A closer look at the silk spinner, Bhagalpur



Figure 60. A saree on the loom, Bhagalpur



Figure 61.



Figure 62.

Figures 61 & 62. A Mulberry tree where the silkworms are cultivated; Tussar silk, Bhagalpur



Figure 63. The Bihar state government initiated a handloom centre for manufacturing of silk,

Bhagalpur

4.2. Manjusha/Angika Art



Figure 64. Manjusha/Angika Art at the railway station in Bhagalpur

Manjusha Art is an ancient and historically significant art form, considered on par with Madhubani art. Manjusha art or Manjusha *kala* is often referred to as Snake Paintings by foreigners as swirling snakes in the art depict the central character Bihula's tale of love and sacrifice. A recent study on Manjusha art provides an excellent analysis of how this art reflects the history of ancient Anga Mahajanapada.²⁰

²⁰ Kossak, Steven (1997). Indian court painting, 16th-19th century. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 65. Majusha art, sometimes referred to as snake paintings



Figure 66. Depiction of the 'Bihula-Bishahari Gatha'

Manjusha art is believed to be the only art form, in the history of art forms in India, which has a sequential representation of the story and is displayed in a series. This is also known as a scroll painting. Manjusha art comes from Bhagalpur, and has been dated back to the 7th century. The name *manjusha* is also associated with an elaborate story, a goddess as well as a festival celebrated in Bhagalpur. The Sanskrit word *manjusha* means a box; manjushas are temple-shaped boxes, made of bamboo, jute-straw and paper in which the devotees keep their ceremonial materials. These boxes are, however, illustrated with paintings that tell a tale. The tale is that of Bihula who saved her husband from the deity's wrath and a snakebite; they also relate the story of Bishahari or Mansa, the snake goddess known for her anger when displeased but also her fierce protectiveness when propitiated. Earlier the story, 'Bihula-Bishahari Gatha', had an oral tradition of being sung. Not many people sing it now, but in Assam and Bengal the tradition is still continuing and songs are sung with the story of Bihula.

In 1984, in an attempt to save this art form from extinction, the Bihar government set up a 'Jansampoorna Vibagh' where they went to the villages of Bhagalpur region, put up slideshows of Manjusha art and educated people about this traditional art form, encouraging them to revive this age-old tradition. This initiative has led to other government and non-government organisations coming up with unique plans to promote this art by using them as a mode of communication in various schemes.

Manjusha Art is based on the folk tale of Bihula and Bishahari, and although the oral tradition of singing this tale is not popular anymore, an effort is being made to revive this. The narrative in Manjusha art's folklore goes that one day while Lord Shiva was bathing in Sonada lake, 5 hairs from his plait broke and fell into the water. These 5 hairs become 5 lotuses on the banks of the river. As Shiva continued with his bath, he heard a sound coming from the

lotuses; the lotuses were requesting Lord Shiva to accept them as his daughters. Shiva replied that he could not accept them without seeing their true form. All 5 lotuses transformed into their true forms—five sisters, whose names are:

- Jaya Bishahari; symbols—bow and arrow, and the Amrit Kalash
- Dhothila Bhavani; symbols—the rising sun in one hand and in the other hand, a snake
- Padmavathi; symbol—a lotus in one hand
- Mynah Bishahari; symbol—the mynah bird in one hand
- Maya Bishahari/Mansa Bishahari; symbols—in both hands are snakes.

Lord Shiva accepted these five women as his ‘Mansa Putri’, his daughters in human form. They are also known as ‘Datta Putri’, daughters who have been adopted.

The sisters then went to Goddess Parvati and asked her to accept them as her daughters, which she refused to do. The sisters got agitated and turned themselves into their snake form and hid amidst the flowers. When Goddess Parvati went flower-picking, the snake bit her and she became unconscious. Lord Shiva came and requested them to revive her and promised that she would accept them. Jaya Bishahari then fed Goddess Parvati *amrit* from her Amrit Kalash and revived Goddess Parvati. A grateful Parvati granted them a boon that enabled them to get rid of the snake’s poison, which is why they are known as ‘Bishahari’.

One day, the sisters were playing a game called *Jhingri* in their snake form when they were approached by Vasuki Nag. The sisters told him that, being a part of Lord Shiva’s family, they should be worshipped. Vasuki Nag replied that in Angpradesh Kingdom, in Champanagar, there was a Lord Shiva Devotee by the name of Chando Saudagar. If he agreed to worship them, everyone on earth would follow. On hearing this, the sisters asked Lord Shiva’s permission to approach Chando Saudagar and head towards Champanagar. Chando

Saudagar, a very strong Lord Shiva devotee, was a successful businessman who conducted business all over the country and beyond. He had six sons. The Bishaharis approached him and asked him to worship them, promising boons of wealth and power. Chando Saudagar refused time and again, despite threats from them. Once when Chando Saudagar was travelling with his sons in the gold boat 'Sonamukhi', his wife Sonka Sahund requested him to worship the Bishaharis, but he again refused. The Bishaharis were furious and drowned the entire family, only realizing later that their wish of being worshipped would not be fulfilled by drowning Chando Saudagar. So the sisters prayed to Lord Hanuman, who pulled out Chando Saudagar from the sea, who still refused to worship the Bishaharis.

Later, Chando Saudagar and his wife had another son Bala Lakhendra, whose marriage, when he grew up, was fixed with Bihula from the nearby village of Ujjaini. Chando Saudagar, aware of the Bisaharis curse, wanted to make sure the girl whom his son married would be able to stand up to the Bishaharis. There are many other small stories here, which claim that Bihula had been cursed by an old woman that she would become a widow on her wedding night. It is said that Chando Saudagar tested Bihula's intelligence by asking her to prove herself through some tasks he set her. After he was satisfied, the proposal was accepted and the wedding took place with a lot of pomp and celebration.

Always aware of the threat of the Bishaharis, an iron house was constructed for the wedding night by 'Daivashilpi' Bishakarma himself. The Bisaharis had intercepted this plan and had requested him to leave a small hole as fine as a hair in the wall of the room. The night of the marriage, the house was surrounded by a lot of people, and mongooses, guarding it. The Bisaharis managed to get Lord Shiva's snake 'Maniyar' to enter the house and kill Bala Lakhendra. Bihula was distraught and undertook to approach 'Nethula Devin' to revive him.

Bihula ordered the same Bishakarma who had constructed the house to construct a boat for her, in which she would take her husband's body, with a drape or *manjusha* to cover the body.

She also requested an artist to draw the story of her tribulations on the *manjusha* in which all her family members were depicted. She requested him to portray all the flora and fauna of the Ang Pradesh. The colours used were to portray sacrifice, determination and happiness. As Bihula took her husband's body, they passed Sonapur ghat, Godha ghat, Jwari ghat Jokaseni ghat, Sahushanka ghat, Bhojaseni ghat, and finally reached Galantri ghat, where the water was acid-like and dissolved the flesh of Bala till only the skeleton remained. (Even today the water there, on the way to Katihar, is not used; it is said to cause death for animals). Undeterred, she put the skeleton into a potli and continued on her journey.

En route, she saw the form of Nethula dhobin, who cut her husband into a 'koota' and her son into a 'paat', washed her clothes on them, and brought them back to life. Bihula approached her too for help in reviving her husband. After a lot of trials and tribulations, Bihula managed to approach Lord Shiva in heaven, concealing herself behind her *ghoongat* or veil. She requested Lord Shiva to restore the wealth that Chando Saudagar had lost, and requested all the other gods and goddesses to give back the happiness of Champanagar. She also asked that her six sisters-in law who were widows become *suhaagan* again, and that she would be blessed with children.

All her boons were granted, at which point she removed her *ghoonghat* and Bishahari recognised her as Bihula. Bishahari told her to ensure that Chando Saudagar would worship her and her sisters. Bihula agreed and Bala was brought back to life. The entire family with

the Sonamukhi boat and their wealth headed back to Champanagar. Bihula stopped them and reminded them of the condition that Chando Saudagar had to do pooja for Bisahhari. He refused, and Bisahari asked Bihula with her power to create an *aandhi* or storm. Bihula did so, and the seven brothers again fall into the water. Chando Saudagar still refused to do pooja; rather, taking out his sword to kill himself, and offer himself to Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva appeared and revealed that Bishahri was his daughter. Chando Saudagar said that he reserved his right hand to offer pooja only to Lord Shiva, so Shiva offered the compromise of doing pooja with his left hand. Chando Saudagar accepted this and henceforth worshipped Bishahari using his left hand during the pooja.



Figure 67. Mansa Bishahari Pooja

Colours

The paintings are done using a brush and paints.

The main colours used are green, yellow and pink/red. Yellow signifies peace or *samriddhi*, Pink/red stands for sacrifice and green denotes happiness. Black and blue cannot be used as they are not considered holy for religious purposes. Earlier the colours used were natural colours made from indigenous plant materials, dyes extracted from various parts of the plants. Later, *kaccha* colours, which are powdered colours normally used for holi, began to be used. These colours are temporary and not fixed, and thus will fade over time. Currently, fabric paints are in use. Once the artists started working on fabric, they found fabric paints the most convenient, and the same paints are used even for painting on paper. If the painting is meant for religious purposes then some of the traditional artisans still use the powdered colours. Of late, the artists have started drawing with permanent markers.

Brushes

Earlier, bamboo sticks sharpened to form brushes were used, followed by brushes made out of squirrel hair/camel hair, easily available in the market. But since the use of fabric paints, the brushes get ruined if not washed immediately, so cheaper and durable plastic brushes have found favour with the Manjusha artists.

Process

The outline is first drawn and then filled in. Scales and other implements for drawing are not used as it is felt that lines drawn in free hand add value to the painting, as opposed to drawing them symmetrically. The little imperfections and the fact that the lines are not straight, is, according to the artists, a part of folk art. When painting on fabric, the more skilled artists draw directly on the material whereas others first sketch an outline and then start painting.

Rituals

Before starting a painting meant for religious purposes, the artist arranges a small pile of rice in the room, places a beetel leaf with a beetle nut on top of this, and prays for permission from the goddesses to start painting. The moment the leaf shifts a bit or falls, it is taken for a sign that permission to start the work has been given. Even before the start of a regular painting, traditional artists utter a mantra in the name of Goddess Bishahari. All the characters in the story are differentiated by certain symbols. In the Bishaharis, they can be differentiated by what they hold in their hands. In Manjusa art, all the characters, and any human form, are depicted in the form of the English letter 'X' with limbs drawn in linear and uniform, bold lines. Other features include portraying Bishahari along with snakes. The main characters in the art form are projected without ears and with big eyes. For decoration, wavy lines are used.

Just as Madhubani painting is the folk art of Darbangpradesh, Manjusha art belongs to Angpradesh. This art was earlier the domain of two castes, the Kumbhakar and the Malakar. The Kumbhakar made the pots on which the art is painted and which are worshipped during the festival, while the Malakar made the actual *manjushas* on these. There is another caste known as the Kashira, who made the pots out of brass. There are only two families left who still practice this art. Earlier the Pandit families, Cheddhi and Basant Pandit, made manjusha art for the temple; for this service all their expenses were taken care of by the village.

This art has been prevalent in Bhagalpur for a long time but between 1931-1948, it was brought to the forefront by an ICS officer, W.G.Archer, who along with his wife started finding out more about Madhubani painting and Manjusha art. He so liked this art that he put together a collection and held an exhibition at The India Office Library in London, which

later became a part of the Archer Collection. It was at this time that Manjusha art gained international recognition. Still, the artisans could not really flourish. Manjusha art seemed to fade away once again and was being practiced, even long after independence, by very few people.

In 1984, the Bihar government started an initiative under a 'Jansampoorna Vibagh' to educate the local people about this traditional art form in the hope of reviving it. After this, Smt. Chakravathy Devi and Shri Jyothi Chand Sharma helped revive this craft. Smt. Chakravathy Devi was one of the most traditional of artists and belonged to one of the two families who practiced this art. She worked tirelessly on this art form. At about the same time, Smt. Nirmala Devi also started working in this field and has come to be known and honoured for her efforts to revive the art.

In 1992, an artist, Shri Manoj Pandit, started experimenting with different materials and started painting on silk and other fabrics which helped take this art to the next level. From being an art solely for religious purposes, the artists were able to use it in products more suited to the market.

The Bihar government has been making efforts to revive this art and many skill-upgradation training programmes have taken place both in Bhagalpur as well as in the nearby villages. They have made an effort to bring about awareness of this form. All the local Zilla Parishad banks have a manjusha painting hanging on their walls, providing immediate visibility to the artists. Recently the Bihar government put together a committee of 11 people, which includes 4 artists, to apply for a patent for the manjusha art form, as Bhagalpur folk art.

Figures. 68-72 depict the scroll narrative of Angika art, each depicting the popular story associated with the art form, Bhagalpur



Figure 68.

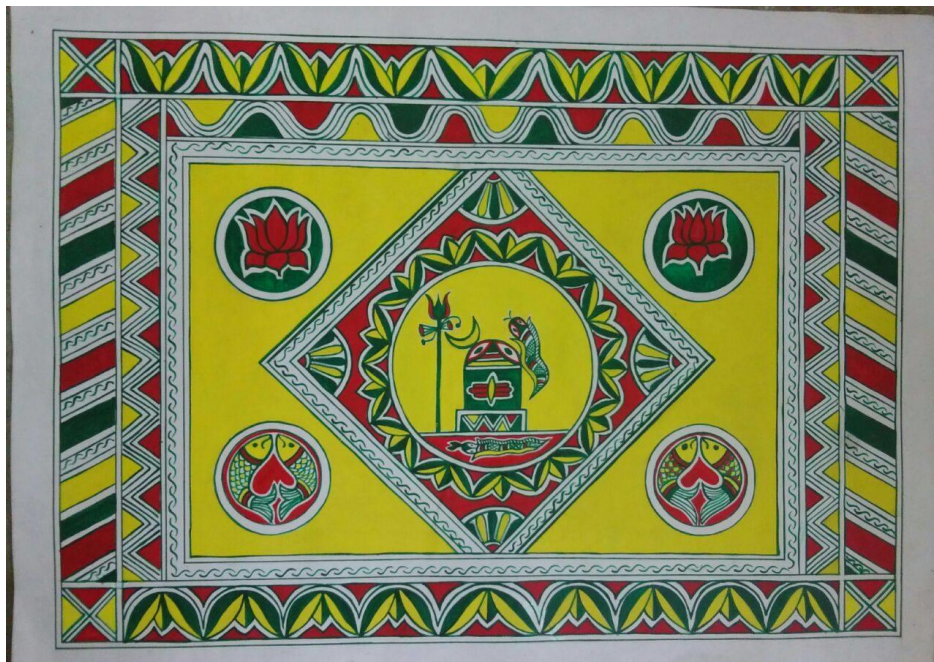


Figure 69.

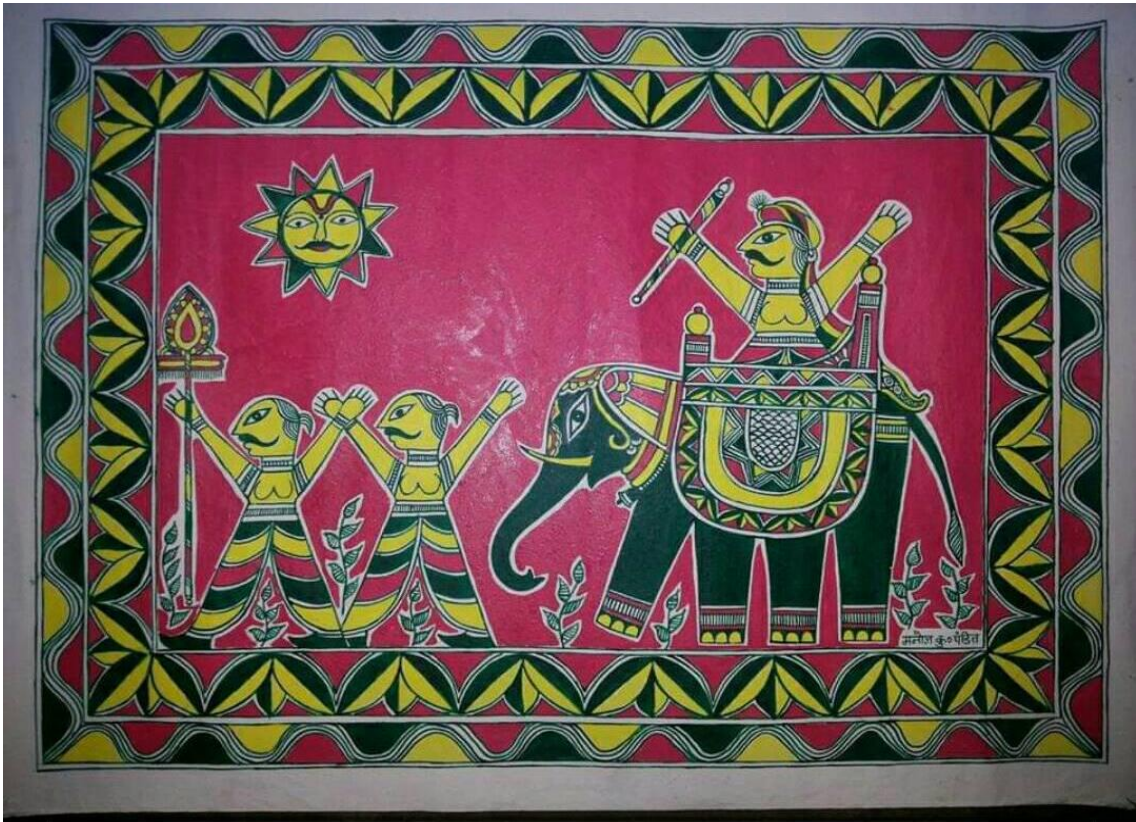


Figure 70.



Figure 71.



Figure 72.

Figures 73 & 74. Recent adaptations of Manjusha art for Covid-19 masks



Figure. 73

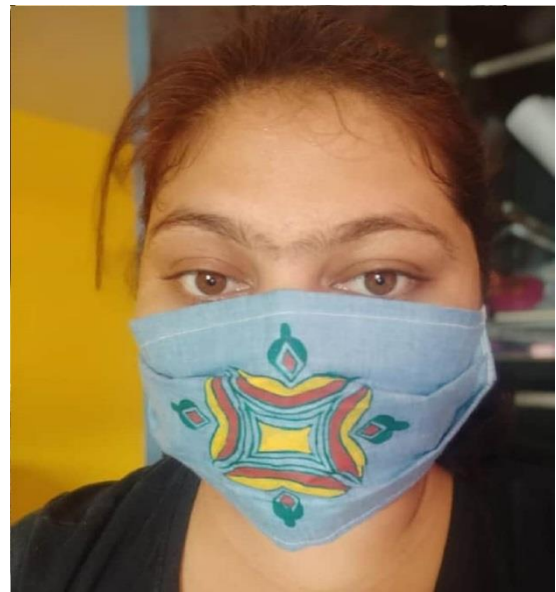


Figure. 74

Chapter 5

Food Culture

The food culture of Bihar is mostly uniform, but it varies slightly in geographical and cultural attributes, from Bhojpur to Maghi to Maithil. Munger is a cultural amalgamation of Bhojpur and Anghika and hence the food culture is like the rest of north and central Bihar. As most people here are vegetarian, one can find the largest selection of vegetarian delicacies. Lentils, rice, *roti*, pickle are items that constitute a daily meal. Another major dish preferred by the largely vegetarian population of the region is soaked, uncooked sprouts mixed with *bhunja*, *choona* and *makhna*. Dairy products are largely enjoyed in the region and items such as yoghurt or *dahi*, buttermilk or *mattha*, and *ghee*, butter, and *lassi* play a major role in the daily intake of people.



Figure. 75. A basic vegetarian thali from Munger serves rice, roti, dal, brinjal and curd

Some non-vegetarian cuisine comprising dishes prepared with various birds and fowl are, however, relished. There are special Bihari *kebabs*, while Butter Chicken and mutton are other major items that are found on non-vegetarian menus in the region. Traditionally, mutton and chicken were enjoyed with boiled rice and *roti*, but now they are also used as stuffing in *paranthas* and served as the famous ‘Stuffed Rolls’. There are also a few non-vegetarian dishes that are cooked with gravy and curry and enjoyed with bread. Seafood dishes using prawns are seasoned with spices to add flavour.

Sweets form a major part of tempting delicacies served in Munger. The fact that they are different from sweets—Bengali and Oriya—served in other parts, is that most of them are made without using sugar syrup and are, thus, dry. Balushahi, Laktho, Khurma, Motichoor ka Ladoo, Khaja, Anarasa, Kesaria Peda, Kala Jamun, Khubi ka Lai, Parwal ki Mitahi, Tilkut, Belgrami, Chena Mukri and Thekua are some major sweets one can find in the region. Almost all these dishes are dry yet extremely delicious. They are cooked by local *halwais* with pure *desi ghee*. One can find a variety of authentic sweet shops in the city.

A large variety of traditional snacks are also enjoyed in Munger. Pua, made with powdered rice, ghee, milk and sugar is served in variant forms. Pittha, another dish made with powdered and steam-cooked rice, is enjoyed in the region. Makhna is prepared with sugar and lotus seeds. Sattu is another snack that is also an energy-generating food, and is used in making *chapattis*, stuffing for *paranthas* and even mixed with milk to form a refreshing drink at breakfast. Litti/Choka is an easy to prepare item that is made with Sattu mixed with wheat flour and eaten with brinjals or mashed potatoes.



Figure 76. Peetha, top left; Gur ki kheer (Jaggery sweet rice) on the top right; Pua in the left bottom corner and Gulab Jamun on the right

Chapter 6

Literature and Notable Personalities

Munger oscillated between the Empire of Delhi, kingdom of Bengal and the States of Sasaram and Jaunpur, and finally the British. Its riverfront encouraged a flourishing trade. The Buddha and Buddhist culture, too, had an impact on the region, as did Bengali, Muslim and Christian culture. This influence and amalgamation of several cultures is seen in the observance of different religious festivals. A fair amount of Tantric heritage is also seen in the region.

Munger also finds many references in Bengali and English literature. The Bengali poet Vijaya Ram Sen Visharad referred to Munger in his work *Tirtha Mangal* in 1769. The great Bengali dramatist Dinbandhu Mitra beautifully described Munger in his poetic work, *Surodhini Kabya*. Other greats like Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Sarat Chandra, and Bibhuti Bhushan Mukherji have also described Munger in their writings. Foreign travelers like Hiuen Tsiang, Nicolas Gref, Rev. H. Martyn, Buchanan Hamilton, Bishop Heber, Emily Eden, Fanny Parkes, Sir Joseph Hooker, and Edward Lockwood—all give various accounts of Munger. The Hindi writer, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's writings have made Munger familiar to many readers. Sanskrit, too, continued to find its scholars in the district.



Figure 77.



Figure 78.

Figures 77 & 78. The home of the famous Bengali author Sharat Chandra

Amongst the several notable figures from Munger, **Nandalal Bose** counts as a prominent one. Born and raised in Munger, Bose became a leading figure in the world of Indian Modern Art and played a key role in contextual modernism. A pupil of Abanindranath Tagore, Bose was known for his "Indian style" of painting. He became the Principal of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, in 1922. He was influenced by the Tagore family and the murals of Ajanta; his classic works include paintings of scenes from Indian mythology, women, and village life.



Figure 79. Nandalal Bose; Source: World Digital Library

Nandalal Bose was born on 3 December 1882 in a middle-class Bengali family of Kharagpur, in Munger district. His father, Purna Chandra Bose, was at that time working in the Darbhanga Estate. His mother Khetramoni Devi was a housewife with a skill in improvising toys and dolls for young Nandalal. From his early days Nandalal began taking an interest in modelling images and later, decorating Puja pandals. In 1898, at the age of fifteen, Nandalal moved to Calcutta for his high school studies at the Central Collegiate School. Keen to study

art, Nandalal was not given permission by his family. After repeated failures at other subjects, he persuaded his family to let him study art at Calcutta's School of Art.

As a young artist, Nandalal Bose was deeply influenced by the murals of the Ajanta Caves. He had become part of an international circle of artists and writers seeking to revive classical Indian culture; a circle that already included Okakura Kakuzō, William Rothenstein, Yokoyama Taikan, Christiana Herringham, Laurence Binyon, Abanindranath Tagore, and the seminal London Modernist sculptors Eric Gill and Jacob Epstein.²¹ To mark the 1930 occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's arrest for protesting the British tax on salt, Bose created a black-on-white linocut print of Gandhi walking with a staff. It became the iconic image for the non-violence movement. His genius and original style were recognised by famous artists and art critics like Gaganendranath Tagore, Ananda Coomaraswamy and O. C. Ganguli. These lovers of art felt that objective criticism was necessary for the development of painting and founded the Indian Society of Oriental Art.

He became Principal of the Kala Bhavana (College of Arts) at Tagore's International University, Santiniketan, in 1922. He was also famously asked by Jawaharlal Nehru to sketch the emblems for the Government of India awards, including the Bharat Ratna and the Padma Shri. Along with his disciple Rammanohar, Nandalal Bose took up the historic task of beautifying/decorating the original manuscript of the Constitution of India.

²¹ Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, "The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System", *Modernism/modernity* Volume 18, Number 1, January 2011, 27–42

Figures 80 & 81. Decoration of the original manuscript of the Constitution of India by Nandalal Bose. Source: dl.wdl.org

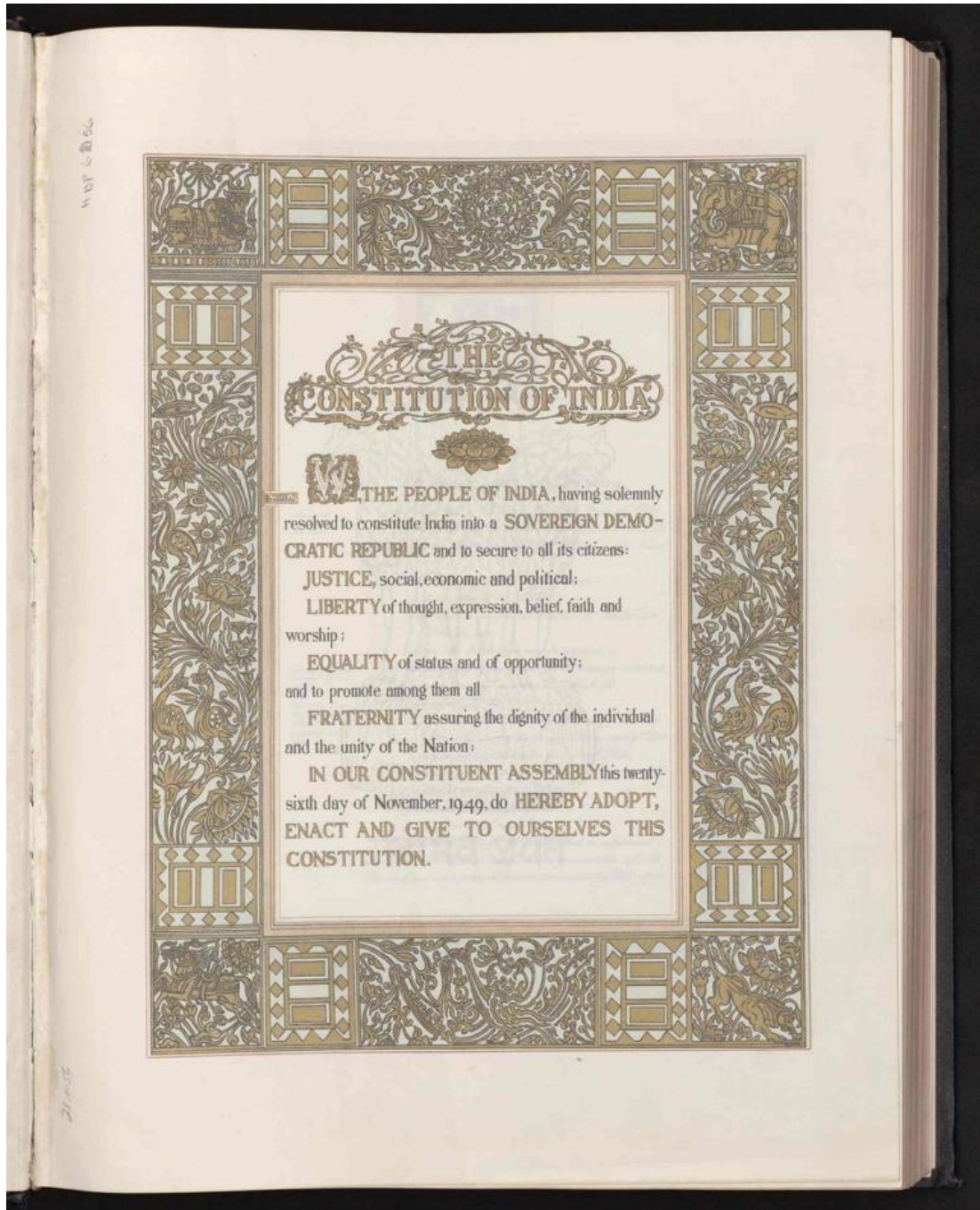


Figure 80.

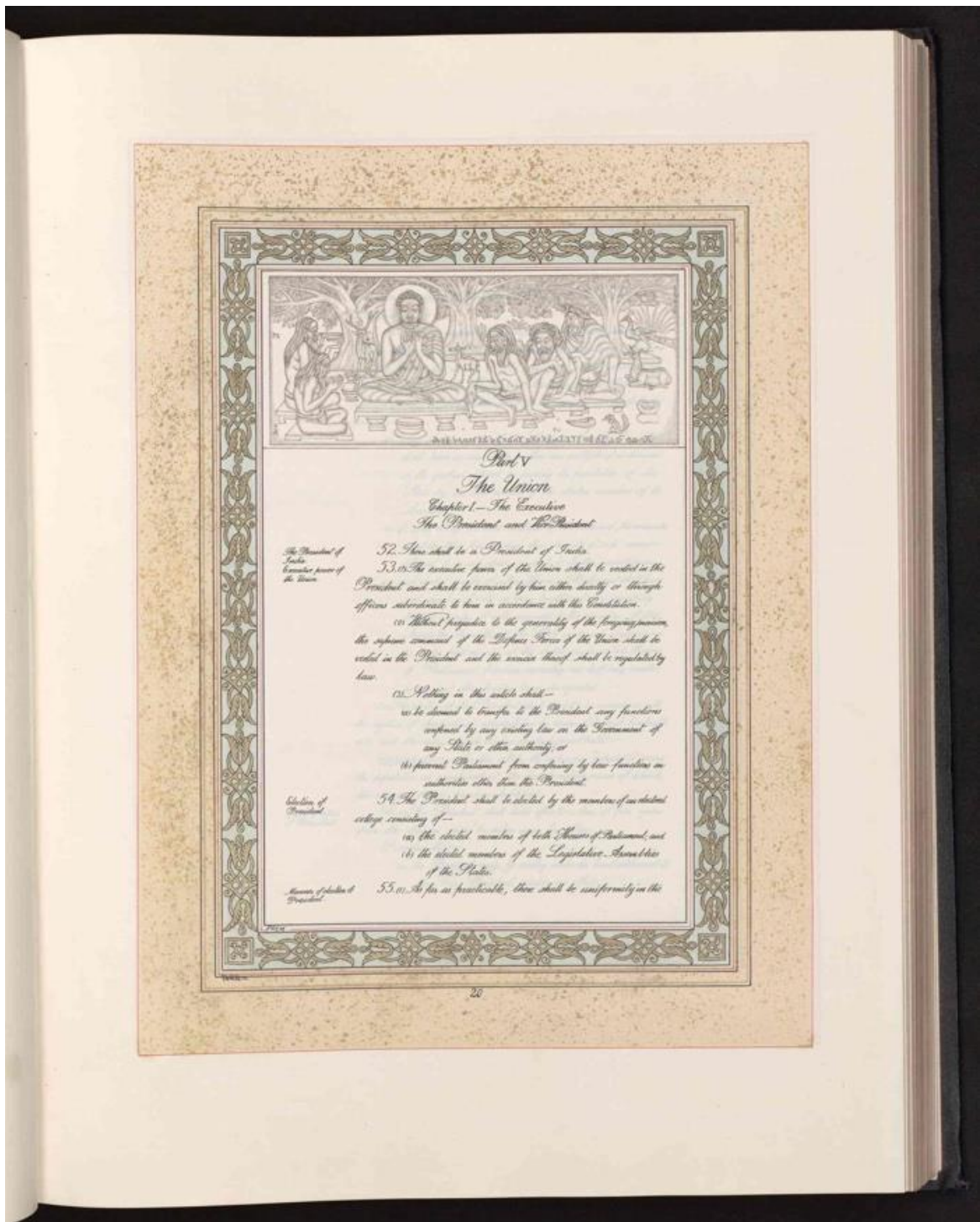


Figure 81.

Bose died on 16 April 1966 in Calcutta. Today, the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi holds 7000 of his works in its collection, including a 1930 linocut of the Dandi

March depicting Mahatma Gandhi, and a set of seven posters he later made at the request of Mahatma Gandhi for the 1938 Haripura Session of the Indian National Congress.



Figure 82. Iconic Linocut of Mahatma Gandhi by Nandalal Bose. Source: Wikiart.org



Figure 83. Yama and Savitri, Nandlal Bose; Source: Wikipedia

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (born 14 February 1960) is the successor of Satyananda Saraswati, founder of Satyananda Yoga, who passed on the worldwide coordination of Satyananda Yoga to Niranjanananda in 1988. Born in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, India, Niranjanananda is considered by his followers to be a yogi from birth. He was named 'Niranjan' (the Untainted One) by his guru Satyananda. He began his training at *Bihar School of Yoga* at the age of four through the use of *yoga-nidra* and practice of other yoga techniques. At the age of ten, he was initiated as a *sanyasi* and thereafter for eleven years he

lived overseas. From 1971, he extensively toured Europe and North and South America. This experience gave him an understanding of the Western mind and society. In 1983 he returned to India and was appointed the Head of the Bihar School of Yoga. For the next eleven years, he spearheaded the research and development activities at Ganga Darshan, Shivananda Math and the Yoga Research Foundation.²²

In 1990, he was initiated in the tradition of Paramahansa and in 1993 he was chosen as the spiritual successor of Satyananda. In 1993, he organised a World Yoga Convention on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the *sanyasa* of his guru. In 1994, he established the Bihar Yoga Bharati as the centre for higher studies in the field of yoga. He founded the Yoga Publication Trust in 2000. In 2009 he relinquished all administrative and public duties. He was given the third-highest civilian award of the country, Padma Bhushan, in 2017, for distinguished service of high order in the field of Yoga.



Figure 84. Swami Ji at his center in Munger; Source: Wikipedia

²² Saraswati, Swami Niranjanananda (2015). *Yoga Chakra 2: Cultivating Spiritual Samskara*. Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India. p. 51.

Baba Tilka Majhi (or Jabra Paharia) was the first Adivasi leader to take up arms against the British. He organized the Adivasis to form an armed group to fight against the resource grabbing and exploitation of the British.

Due to a famine in 1770 and the consequences of Court of Directors orders influenced by William Pitt the Younger, there was little chance to negotiate between local Zamindars and Santhal villagers. Baba Tilka Majhi attacked Augustus Cleveland, the British commissioner with a weapon similar to a slingshot, resulting later in Cleveland's death. The British surrounded the Tilapore forest from which Majhi operated but he and his men held them at bay for several weeks. When he was finally caught in 1784, he was said to have been tied to the tail of a horse and dragged all the way to the collector's residence at Bhagalpur. There, his lacerated body was hung from a Banyan tree.

After India gained independence, a statue to honour him was erected at the spot where he was hanged. The Bhagalpur University was renamed after him in 1991.



Figure 85. The great warrior Tilkha Majhi

Ramdhari Singh, known by his *nom de plume* **Dinkar**, was a Hindi poet, essayist, patriot and academic, who is considered one of the most important modern Hindi poets. He emerged as a poet of rebellion as a consequence of his nationalist poetry written in the days before India's independence. His poetry exuded *veer rasa*, and he has been hailed as a *Rashtrakavi* ("national poet") on account of his inspiring patriotic compositions. He was a regular presence in Hindi kavi sammelans and is held to be a very popular Hindi poet.



Figure 86. Rashtrakavi Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar'. Source: Google image

Dinkar initially supported the revolutionary movement during the Indian struggle for independence, but later became a Gandhian. He, however, considered himself not true to the principles of that philosophy because he supported the feelings of indignation and revenge amongst the youth. In *Kurukshetra*, he accepted that war is destructive but argued that it is necessary for the protection of freedom. He was close to prominent nationalists of the time such as Rajendra Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Sri Krishna Sinha, Rambriksh Benipuri and Braj Kishore Prasad. Dinkar was elected three times to the Rajya Sabha, and was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1959. He was also the Vice-Chancellor of Bhagalpur University in the early 1960s. During The Emergency, Jayaprakash Narayan, addressing a

gathering of over a lakh at the Ramlila grounds, recited Dinkar's famous poem: *Singhasan Khaali Karo Ke Janata Aaati Hai* ("Vacate the throne, for the people are coming").²³

His works are mostly of 'Veer Rasa', or the 'brave mode', although *Urvashi* is an exception to this. Some of his greatest works are *Rashmirathi* and *Parashuram ki Prateeksha*. He is hailed as the greatest Hindi poet of 'Veer Rasa' since Bhushan.²⁴

Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi wrote that he was also very popular among people whose mother-tongue was not Hindi and was also a symbol of love for one's own mother-tongue. Harivansh Rai Bachchan wrote that, as a mark of proper respect, he should get four separate Bharatiya Jnanpith Awards—for poetry, prose, languages and for his service to Hindi. Rambriksh Benipuri wrote that Dinkar gave voice to the revolutionary movement in the country. Namvar Singh praised him as the 'sun' of his age.

Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav, whose novel *Sara Akash* also carried a few lines of Dinkar's poetry, has said of him, "He was always very inspiring to read. His poetry was about reawakening. He often delved into Hindu mythology and referred to heroes of epics such as Karna." Well-known Hindi writer Kashinath Singh calls him a poet of anti-imperialism and nationalism. He also wrote social and political satires aimed at socio-economic inequalities and exploitation of the underprivileged. A progressive and humanist poet, Dinkar chose to approach history and reality directly and his verse combined oratorical vigour with a declamatory diction. The theme of *Urvashi* revolves around love, passion, and relationship of man and woman on a spiritual plane, distinct from their earthly relationship.

²³ Vijendra Narayan, Singh (2005). *Bharatiya Sahitya ke Nirmata: Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar'*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 34

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46

His *Kurukshetra* is a narrative poem based on the *Santi Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. It was written at a time when memories of the Second World War were fresh in the mind of the poet. *Krishna Ki Chaetavani* is another poem composed on events that led to the Kurukshetra war in the *Mahabharata*. His *Rashmirathi* is considered one of the best versions of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. His *Samdheni* is a collection of poems reflecting the poet's social concern transcending the boundaries of the nation.

Dinkar was born and brought up along the river Ganga and his poetic skills portray the true essence of the Ganga. In one of his verses he has depicted this image of the river, standing witness to history, very skilfully:

संध्या की इस मलिन सेज पर
गंगे ! किस विषाद के संग,
सिसक-सिसक कर सुला रही तू
अपने मन की मृदुल उमंग?
उमड़ रही आकुल अन्तर में
कैसी यह वेदना अथाह ?
किस पीड़ा के गहन भार से
निश्चल-सा पड़ गया प्रवाह?

मानस के इस मौन मुकुल में
सजनि ! कौन-सी व्यथा अपार
बनकर गन्ध अनिल में मिल
जाने को खोज रही लघु द्वार?

चल अतीत की रंगभूमि में
स्मृति-पंखों पर चढ़ अनजान,
विकल-चित्त सुनती तू अपने
चन्द्रगुप्त का क्या जय-गान?

घूम रहा पलकों के भीतर
स्वप्नों-सा गत विभव विराट?

आता है क्या याद मगध का
सुरसरि! वह अशोक सम्राट?
सन्यासिनी-समान विजन में
कर-कर गत विभूति का ध्यान,
व्यथित कंठ से गाती हो क्या
गुप्त-वंश का गरिमा-गान?

गूँज रहे तेरे इस तट पर
गंगे ! गौतम के उपदेश,
ध्वनित हो रहे इन लहरों में
देवि ! अहिंसा के सन्देश।

कूहक-कूहक मृदु गीत वही
गाती कोयल डाली-डाली,
वही स्वर्ण-संदेश नित्य
बन आता ऊषा की लाली।

तुझे याद है चढ़े पदों पर
कितने जय-सुमनों के हार?
कितनी बार समुद्रगुप्त ने
धोई है तुझमें तलवार?

तेरे तीरों पर दिग्विजयी
नृप के कितने उड़े निशान?
कितने चक्रवर्तियों ने हैं
किये कूल पर अवभृत्थ-स्नान?

विजयी चन्द्रगुप्त के पद पर
सैल्यूकस की वह मनुहार,
तुझे याद है देवि ! मगध का
वह विराट उज्ज्वल शृंगार?

जगती पर छाया करती थी
कभी हमारी भुजा विशाल,
बार-बार झुकते थे पद पर
ग्रीक-यवन के उन्नत भाल।

उस अतीत गौरव की गाथा
छिपी इन्हीं उपकूलों में,
कीर्ति-सुरभि वह गमक रही
अब भी तेरे वन-फूलों में।

नियति-नटी ने खेल-कूद में
किया नष्ट सारा शृंगार,
खँडहर की धूलों में सोया
अपना स्वर्णोदय साकार।

तू ने सुख-सुहाग देखा है,
उदय और फिर अस्त, सखी!
देख, आज निज युवराजों को
भिक्षाटन में व्यस्त सखी!

एक-एक कर गिरे मुकुट,
विकसित वन भस्मीभूत हुआ,
तेरे सम्मुख महासिन्धु
सूखा, सैकत उद्भूत हुआ।

धधक उठा तेरे मरघट में
जिस दिन सोने का संसार,
एक-एक कर लगा धहकने
मगध-सुन्दरी का शृंगार,

जिस दिन जली चिता गौरव की,
जय-भेरी जब मूक हुई,
जमकर पत्थर हुई न क्यों,
यदि टूट नहीं दो-टूक हुई?

छिपे-छिपे बज रही मंत्र ध्वनि
मिट्टी में नक्कारों की,
गूँज रही झन-झन धूलों में
मौर्यों की तलवारों की।

दायें पार्श्व पड़ा सोता

मिट्टी में मगध शक्तिशाली,
वीर लिच्छवी की विधवा
बायें रोती है वैशाली।

तू निज मानस-ग्रंथ खोल
दोनों की गरिमा गाती है,
वीचि-दृगो से हेर-हेर
सिर धुन-धुन कर रह जाती है।

देवी ! दुःखद है वर्तमान की
यह असीम पीड़ा सहना।
नहीं सुखद संस्मृति में भी
उज्ज्वल अतीत की रत रहना।

अस्तु, आज गोधूलि-लग्न में
गंगे ! मन्द-मन्द बहना;
गाँवों, नगरों के समीप चल
कलकल स्वर से यह कहना,

"खँडहर में सोई लक्ष्मी का
फिर कब रूप सजाओगे?
भग्न देव-मन्दिर में कब
पूजा का शंख बजाओगे?"

** Through this narrative poem Dinkar has summarized the essence of the Ganga as a flowing entity of Bihar. He describes the Ganga as a living expression of a Goddess, and her relationship with the human race around her. The poet asks several questions of the Ganga and reminisces over the rich historicity the land presents—the various powerful rulers, the teachings of the Buddha and the many stories which revolve around the river. He highlights the fact that it is the Ganga which has witnessed everything about Bihar/Patliputra and therefore it is a mystical embodiment, above any ruler or the state.

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