



## Documentation of Ganga from Gomukh to Gangasagar



**Report submitted by:**  
**Intangible Cultural Heritage Division**

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## INTRODUCTION:

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### CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

**Namami Gange Programme**, is an Integrated Conservation Mission, approved as ‘Flagship Programme’ by the Union Government in June 2014 with the twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga.

**The key achievements under Namami Gange programme are:**

- a. **Creating Sewerage Treatment Capacity:-** 63 sewerage management projects under implementation in the States of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. 12 new sewerage management Projects Launched in these states. Work is under construction for creating Sewerage capacity of 1187.33 (MLD). Hybrid Annuity PPP Model based two projects has been initiated for Jagjeetpur, Haridwar and Ramanna, Varanasi.
- b. **Creating River-Front Development:-** 28 River-Front Development projects and 33 Entry level Projects for construction, modernization and renovation of 182 Ghats and 118 crematoria have been initiated.
- c. **River Surface Cleaning:-** River Surface cleaning for collection of floating solid waste from the surface of the Ghats and River and its disposal are afoot and pushed into service at 11 locations.
- d. **Bio-Diversity Conservation:-** Several Bio-Diversity conservation projects are namely: Biodiversity Conservation and Ganga Rejuvenation, Fish and Fishery Conservation in Ganga River, Ganges River Dolphin Conservation Education Programme has been initiated. 5 Bio-Diversity center’s at Dehradun, Narora, Allahabad, Varanasi and Barrackpore has been developed for restoration of identified priority species.
- e. **Afforestation:** Forestry interventions for Ganga through Wildlife Institute of India; Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute and Centre for Environment Education has been initiated. Forestry interventions for Ganga have been executed as per the Detailed Project Report prepared by Forest Research Institute, Dehradun for a period of 5 years (2016-2021) at project cost of Rs.2300 Crores. Work has been commenced in 7 districts of Uttarakhand for medicinal plants.
- f. **Public Awareness:** A series of activities such as events, workshops, seminars and conferences and numerous IEC activities were organized to make a strong pitch for public outreach and community participation in the programme. Various awareness activities through rallies, campaigns, exhibitions, *shram daan*, cleanliness drives, competitions, plantation drives and development and distribution of resource materials were organized and for wider publicity the mass mediums such as TV/Radio, print media advertisements, advertorials, featured articles and advertorials were published. [Gange Theme song](#) was released widely and played on digital media to enhance the visibility of the programme. NMCG ensured presence at Social Media platforms like [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) etc.
- g. **Industrial Effluent Monitoring:** The number of Grossly Polluting Industries (GPIs) in April, 2019 is 1072. Regulation and enforcement through regular and surprise inspections of GPIs is carried out for compliance verification against stipulated environmental norms. The GPIs are also inspected on annual basis for compliance verification of the pollution norms and process modification, wherever required

through third party technical institutes. First round of inspection of GPIs by the third-party technical institutes has been carried out in 2017. Second round of inspection of GPIs has been completed in 2018. Out of 961 GPIs inspected in 2018, 636 are complying, 110 are non-complying and 215 are self-closed. Action has been taken against 110 non-complying GPIs and is issued closure directions under Section 5 of the E (P) Act. Online Continuous Effluent Monitoring Stations (OCEMS) connectivity established to CPCB server in 885 out of 1072 GPIs.

- h. **Ganga Gram:** Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MoDWS) identified 1674 Gram Panchayats situated on the bank of River Ganga in 5 State (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal). Rs. 578 Crores has been released to Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MoDWS) for construction of toilets in 1674 Gram Panchayats of 5 Ganga Basin States. Out of the targeted 15, 27,105 units, [MoDWS has completed construction](#) of 8, 53,397 toilets. Consortium of 7 IITs has been engaged in the preparation of Ganga River basin Plan and 65 villages have been adopted by 13 IITs to develop as model villages. [UNDP](#) has been engaged as the executing agency for rural sanitation programme and to develop Jharkhand as a model State at an estimated cost of Rs. 127 Crore.

[National Mission for Clean Ganga](#) (NMCG) endeavors to deploy best available knowledge and resources across the world for Ganga rejuvenation. [Clean Ganga](#) has been a perennial attraction for many international countries that have expertise in river rejuvenation. Countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Israel etc. have shown interest in collaborating with India for Ganga rejuvenation. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed with various Central Ministries viz.- Ministry of Human Resource Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Shipping, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Ayush, Ministry of Petroleum, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation and Ministry of Agriculture for synergizing the Government schemes.

#### **Why we need "Namami Gange" programmes?**

- a. River Ganga has significant economic, environmental and cultural value in India.
- b. Rising in the Himalayas and flowing to the Bay of Bengal, the river traverses a course of more than 2,500 km through the plains of north and eastern India.
- c. The Ganga basin - which also extends into parts of Nepal, China and Bangladesh - accounts for 26 per cent of India's landmass.
- d. The Ganga also serves as one of India's holiest rivers whose cultural and spiritual significance transcends the boundaries of the basin.

#### **Aim & Objective of NMCG**

The aims and objectives of NMCG are to accomplish the mandate of National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) are:

1. To ensure effective abatement of pollution and rejuvenation of the river Ganga by adopting a river basin approach to promote inter-sectoral co-ordination for comprehensive planning and management and
2. To maintain minimum ecological flows in the river Ganga with the aim of ensuring water quality and environmentally sustainable development.



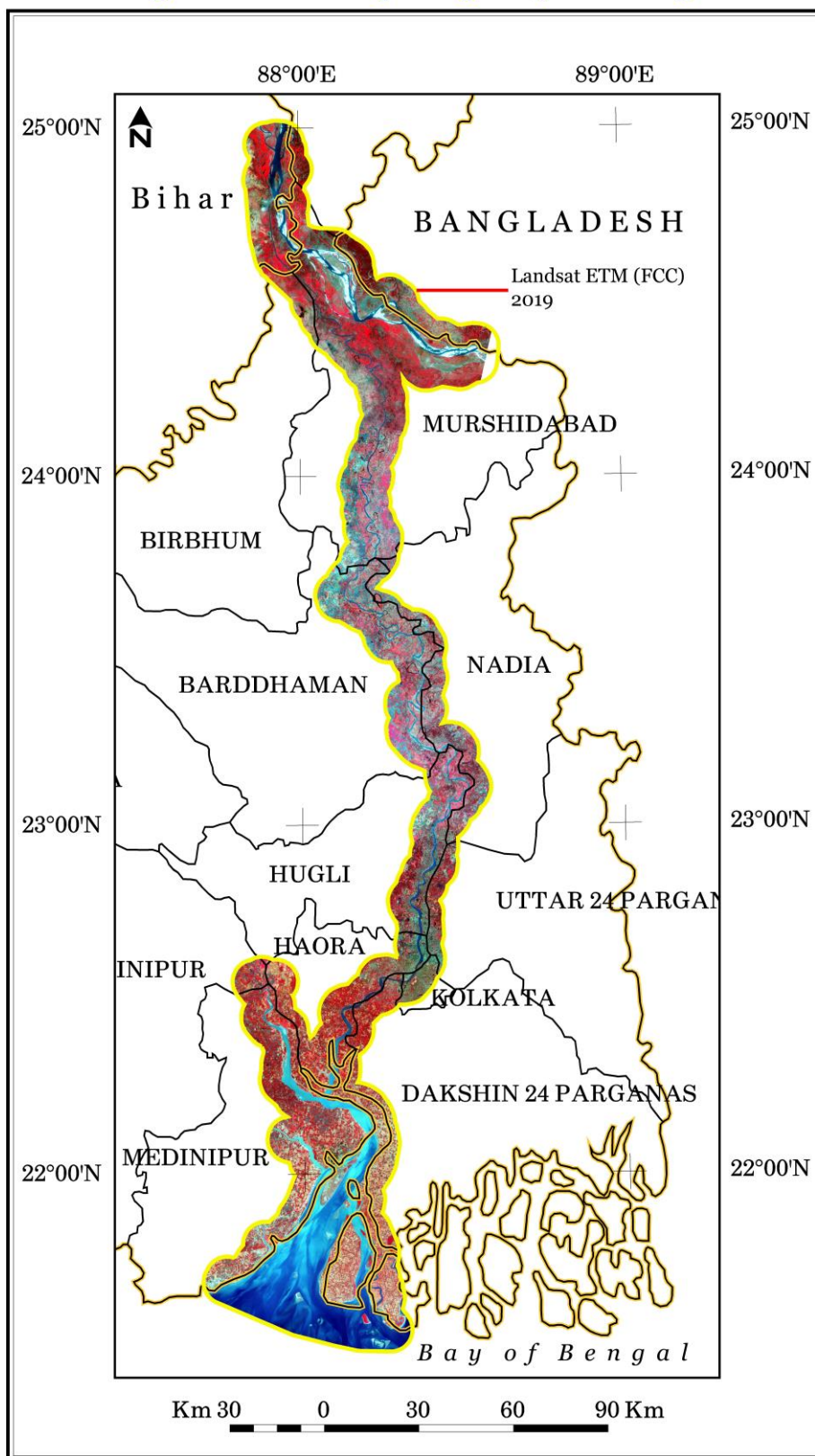
## 2. GANGA CULTURAL DOCUMENTATION

India is endowed with rich water resources with approximately 45,000 km long riverine systems criss-cross the length and breadth of the country. The Ganga river basin is the largest of the basins of India with an area of 8,61,452 Sq.km in India, draining into the 11 states of the country, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. The Ganga river has many tributaries, both in the Himalayan region before it enters the plains at Haridwar and further downstream before its confluence with the Bay of Bengal. The basin has a total drainage length of about 624235.73 Sq.km. The Ganga basin lies between east longitudes 73°2' to 89°5' and north latitudes 21°6' to 31°21' having maximum length and width of approx. 1,543 km and 1024 km. The average water resource potential of the basin has been assessed as 525020 Million Cubic Meters (MCM).

Sl.	Head Details		Quantitative Information		Remarks
1.	State Name: West Bengal		-	-	
2.	Geographical Extension of Bhagirathi-Hugli		N	E	
			N	E	
3.	Areal coverage in 5km Buffer				
4.	Areal coverage in 10km Buffer				
5.	Total Number of Districts coverage		10		
6.	District wise Police Station & Ward coverage	<b>District</b>	<b>Number of PS/ Wards</b>	<b>Length of Hugli River</b>	
		A Malda	04	88 Km	
		B Murshidabad	13	520 Km	
		C Nadia	09	112 Km	
		D Barddhaman	04	138 Km	
		E Hugli	09	91 Km	
		F Haora	09	69 Km	
		G Uttar 24 Parganas	09	42 Km	
		<b>H Dakshin 24 Parganas</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>110 Km</b>	
		I Kolkata	144 Wards	20Km	
J Purba Medinipur	06	92 Km			
7.	Total Length of the Bhagirathi-Hugli River in the Lower Part		1282 Km.		

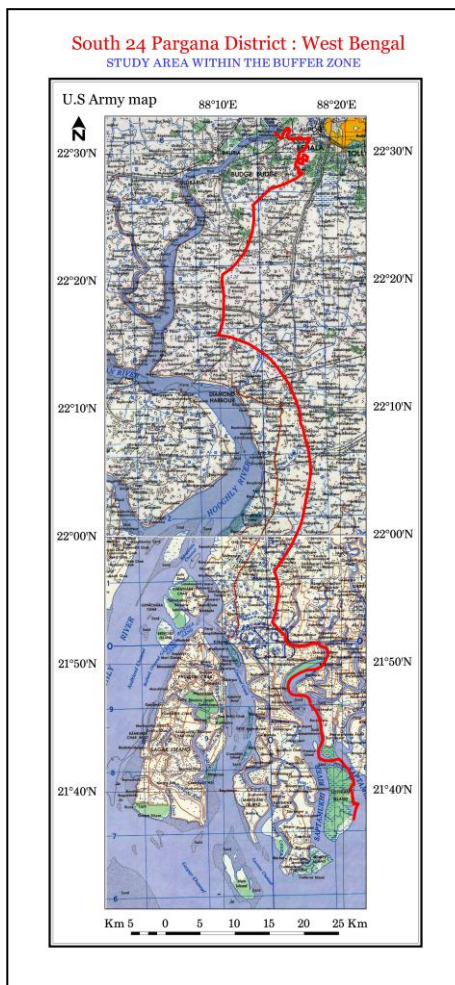
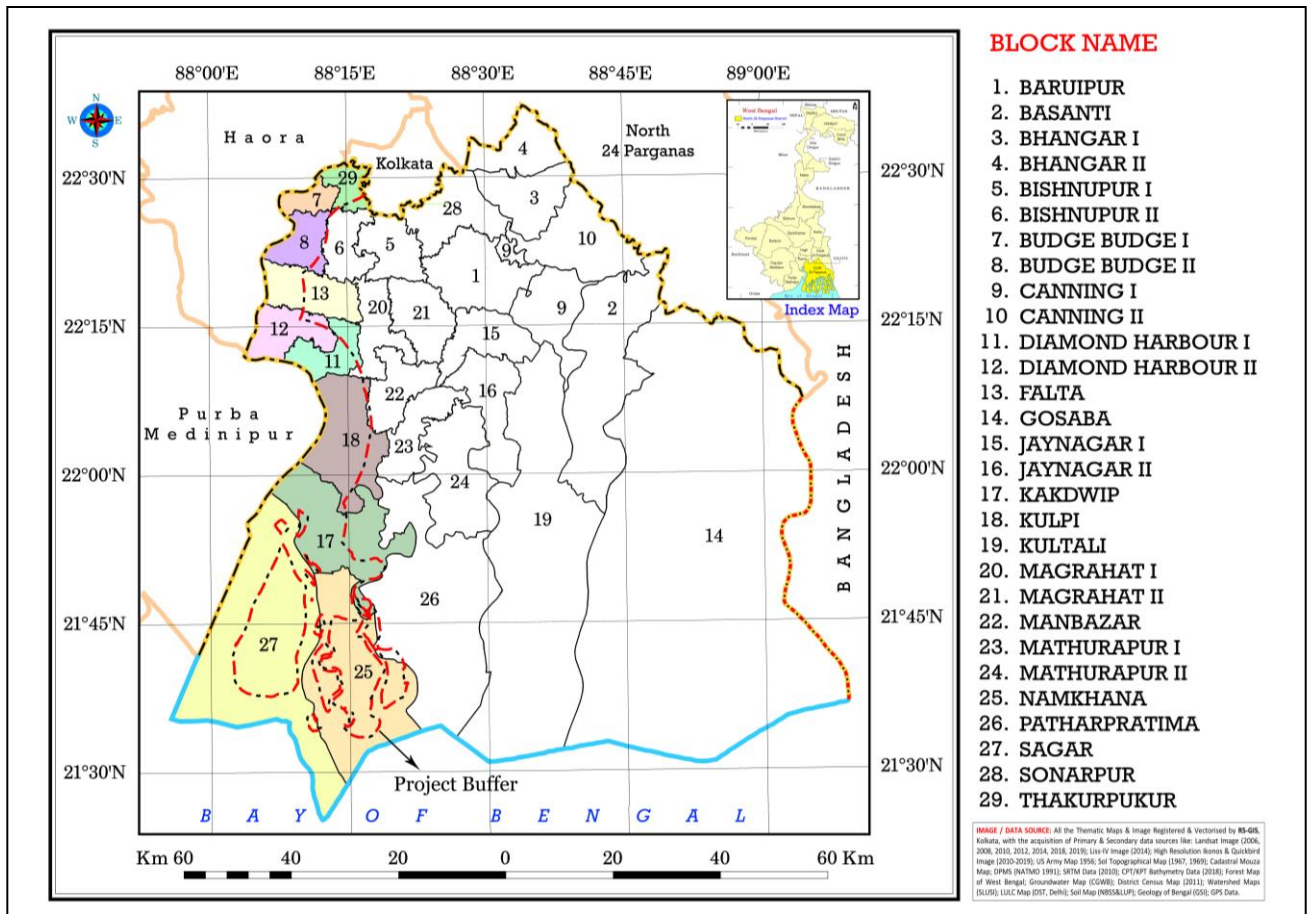
## WEST BENGAL

Showing the area of study along Bhagirathi-Hugli River



Map 1- Study area , FCC, Landsat Image draped on the Map of West Bengal showing Bhagirathi-Hugli River covering all the districts





Map 2 & 3 : South 24 Parganas administrative map showing study area. Plate : 1 Maa Ganga Puja , Sagar

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Capacity Building:**

- a. Training arrangement:** Two phases of training have given to the Field Coordinators, Field survey staff and the Project Resource persons. First phase of training has conducted by the Project Funding Authority i.e. INTACH, Delhi and second phase of training will be conducted by the Project Implementing Agency i.e. RS-GIS, Kolkata.
- b. Development of Project Team:** A Project team has formed according to the need of the objective of the present Project. It is formed headed by the Co-ordinator and the Social Scientist. Other members of the Project team are the GIS-Remote Sensing Expert, Field assistant (Geography background), Local Resource persons, Camera person and Hydrologist, Soil Scientist, Botanist, Zoologist & Agriculture scientist.
- c. Acquisition / Procurement/ Purchase of Gadgets /Equipments / Analysis:** Following Gadgets/Equipments have been purchased for the implementation of the Project work: GPS machine, Satellite Image (Two seasons, Recent Data), Soft / hard copy Cadastral maps, Soil / Water storage Kit, Measuring Tape/ Compass/ Dumpy level, Topographical / DPMS, Laboratory Test / Analysis, procurement of other secondary Data / Information / Maps from Census, Irrigation, Ground water, Soil, Agriculture, Forest etc. Purchase of Books, Reproduction of Survey formats & Stationeries etc.

### **Pre-Field Survey:**

- a. Literature review:** Library work, Study of published and unpublished reports, News paper articles, Journals and Research papers.
- b. Collection of Secondary Data/ Information (Maps) from Govt. Departments:** CGWB, NBSS & LUP, IMD, SWID, PHED, Municipality Office, Survey of India, Port Trust of India, Irrigation & Waterways, PWD, Census, AISLUS etc.
- c. Satellite Data Acquisition (Real-time):** University of Calcutta (Deptt. of Geography), USGS Earth Explorer,
- d. Base-Map Preparation (for whole Project area):** Consulting Topographical maps, Cadastral maps, DPMS & Recent Satellite Image

### **Field Survey:**

- a. Data-Information Collection & Measurements:** Collection of detail information with GPS locations, related to- Surface Morphology/Relief/Physiography, Geology, Climatic conditions, Bank erosion, Embankment condition, Depth of river Bhagirathi-Hugli, Shifting river course & Paleo-channels, Status of Confluence & Off-take points of rivers, Canals, Flood events & Tide levels, Heritage water structures, Wetlands, Ground water regime, Soil, Water quality, Riparian Flora-Fauna, Sacred trees, Landuse-Land cover types, Impact of Dams/Barrages/Mining, Utilization of Flood plain, Riparian Rights etc.

- b. **Photo & Videography:** Professional photographers having enough experience of Physical, Social, Ecological & Environmental issues will be engaged for Digital documentation of different events related to the Natural phenomenon.

#### Post Field Analysis:

- a. **Collection & Scrutinization of Field Data/Survey sheets:** Region / Block/ PS/ Mouza wise *Proforma for Listing the Natural Heritage* survey sheets will be checked / verified with the concern persons.
- b. **GPS Data analysis:** Collecting the Ground Control Points (GCP's) & GPS-Tracks of Land surface & Waterbodies, the database will be processed through Map-Source Software
- c. **Water & Soil Sample data analysis:** Sample will be supplied for analysis in reputed Govt. Departments or Private agencies.
- d. **Preparation of Theme Maps:** Location, Administrative, Relief, Geology, Geomorphology, Drainage, Waterbody, Canals, Groundwater, Soil, Rainfall-Temperature, Vegetation, Tidal fluctuations, Landuse-Land cover, Shifting of Rivers, Embankment status, Population growth, Flood condition, Watershed divisions, GPS locations of specific units, Urbanization level etc.

#### Validating Field & Analised Data

- a. **Landuse Land cover units:** Physical & Cultural units on land surface to be verified after revisit the area with recent Satellite Image.
- b. **GPS locations:** After Overlaying the data on Satellite Image (Google Earth Image) Cross-checking will be done
- c. **Soil Sample data:** Chemical composition, Textural class to be analysed for Fertility Status of the Soil
- d. **Water Sample analysis data:** COD, BOD, pH, EC, DO, Turbidity analysis of Water samples.
- e. **Flora/Fauna:** Riparian, Sacred Species with their environment.

#### Preparation & Submission of Report

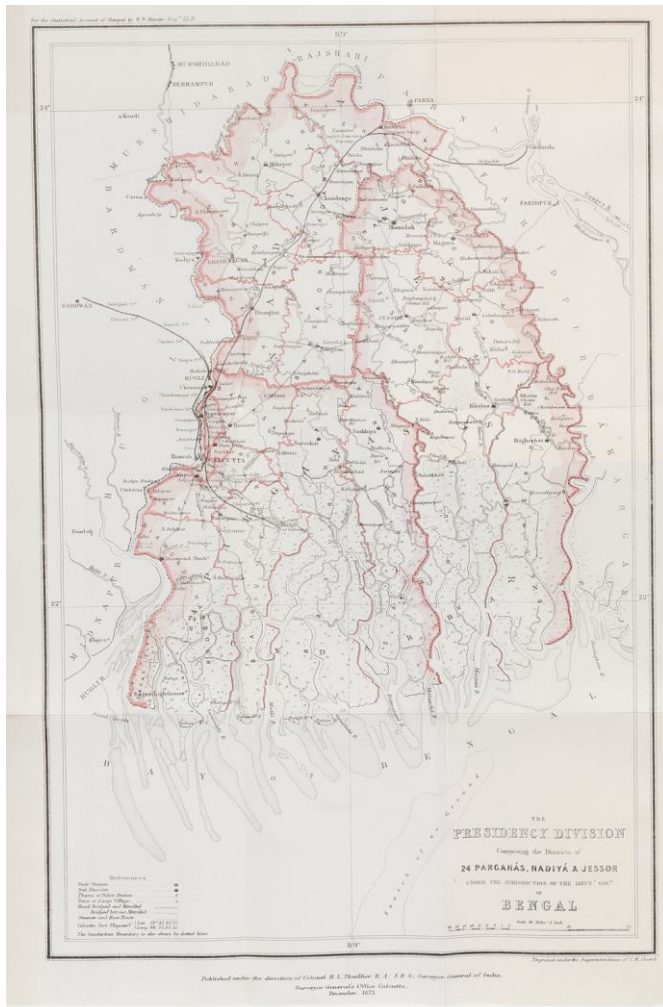
- a. **Preparation of Draft Report :** Preliminary Draft Report in Soft & Hard copy mode (1 Colour Printed) of each District will be submitted to INTACH, Kolkata Convener for Verification / Correction
- b. **Report Correction:** Any corrections made by the funding authority will be incorporated judiciously into the Final Report.
- c. **Final Report Submission:** Final Report in form of Soft Copy will be submitted District wise and Hard copy Report will be submitted after completing the all Districts in three phases.



## CHAPTER 2 : LOCATIONAL SETTING

**2.1.** The district of South 24 Parganas came into existence on March 1, 1986. Prior to that date, it was a part of undivided 24 Parganas. The large undivided district of 24 Parganas was bordered by the Bhagirathi channel in the West, Bangladesh in the East, the district of Nadia in the North and the Bay of Bengal in the South. This huge and populous landmass was under the same administrative jurisdiction from the beginning of the British rule in Bengal.

**2.2.** After the fall of Nawab *Siraj-ud-Daulah*, Mir Jafar, the new Nawab, concluded a treaty with the English East India Company on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1757, by which the former ceded to the Company the Zamindari rights of 24 mahals. It was recorded that ‘all the



Map 4 : Undivided 24 Parganas

land lying to the south of Calcutta as far as *Kulpi*, shall be under the Zamindari of the English company; and all the officers of this Zamindari shall be under their jurisdiction.’ These 24-mahals, or 24 parts, were given the name 24 Parganas.

By the time of the Permanent Settlement in 1793, the Sundarbans had been included in the 24 Parganas’ administration. Finally, in 1986, the district of 24 Parganas was divided into two separate parts mainly for reducing the administrative burden. The southern part came to be known as South 24 Parganas.

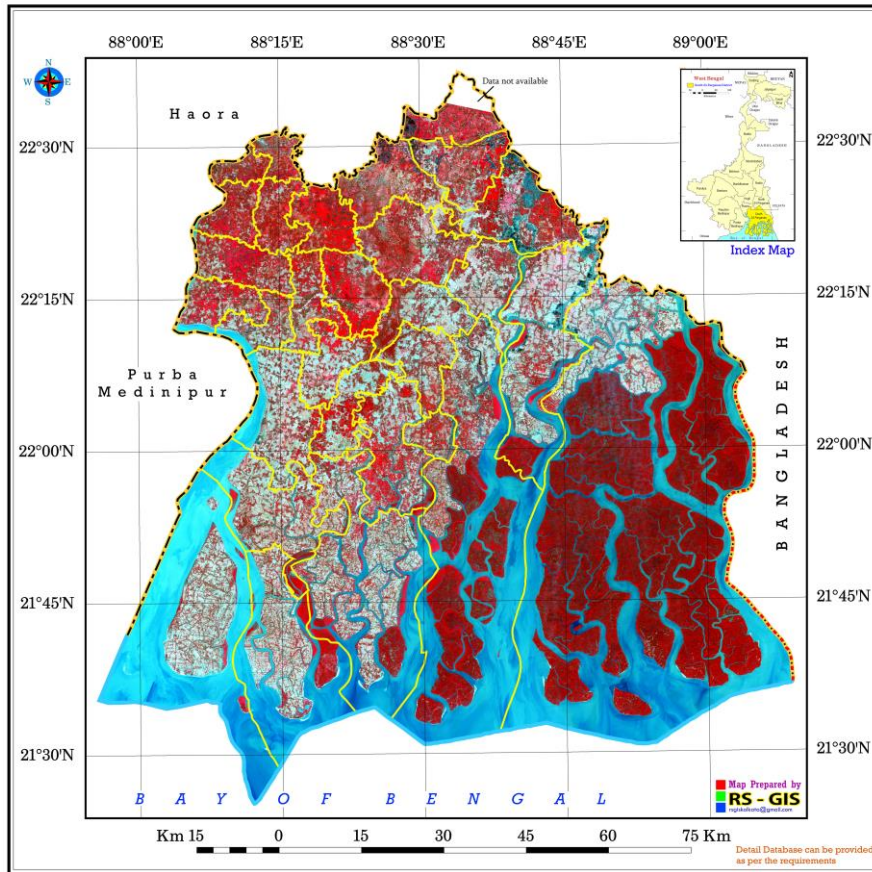
### 2.3. Study Area:

River Ganga in form of its most important distributary , Bhagirathi - Hugli covers about **110 km stretch** bordering this mighty district . For our Study area ( 7km along the bank of the river ) we have 9 Blocks – 1.Sagar- 32930.01 ha 2.Kakdwip- 38774.6 ha 3.Namkhana- 40523.25ha 4.Kulpi-24580 ha 5.Falta -13591.67 ha 6.Diamond Harbour- 1 9086.38 ha 7. Diamond Harbour II -11553.51 7.ha Budge Budge II- 8762.56 ha 8.Budge Budge 1 -4791.9 ha 9. Maheshtala - 5562.40 covering about **190157 ha area**. However, since many historian think that the Adi Ganga was the main flow of River Ganga (Bhagirathi-Hugli) during 15<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> century many large Hindu villages are situated on the banks of the old stream. The Hindus still consider the route of the channel sacred, and burn their dead on the sides of the tanks dug in its bed (Hunter 1998: 14–15).” Though this route is not within the 7 km buffer area , but still for some cases we have included Jaynagar-Majilpur sites from the old course.

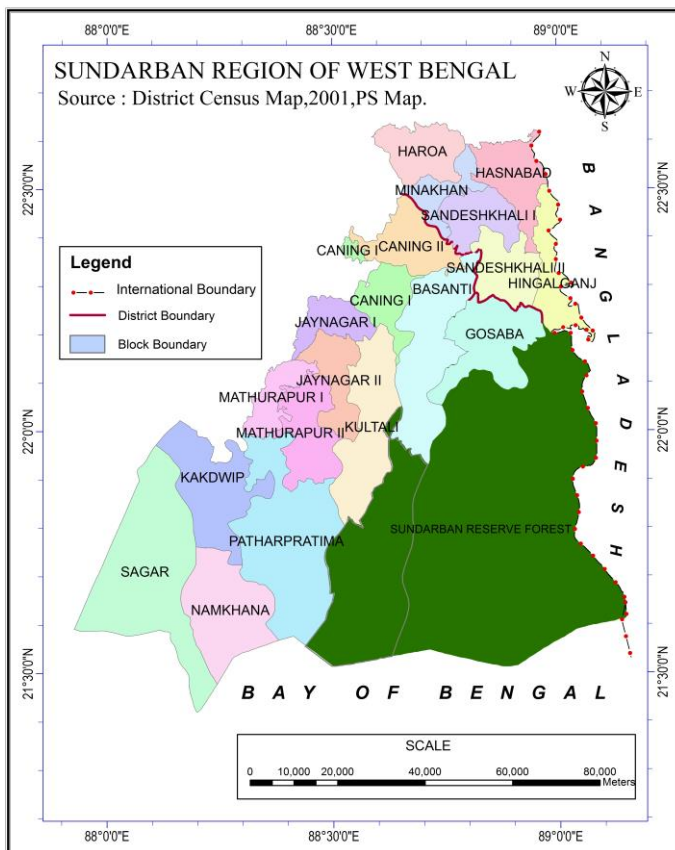
District	Block	Area
South 24 Parganas	Sagar	32930.01 ha
	Kakdwip	38774.6 ha
	Namkhana	40523.25ha
	Kulpi-	24580 ha
	Falta	13591.67 ha
	Diamond Harbour-1	9086.38 ha
	Diamond Harbour II	11553.51 7.ha
	Budge Budge II-	8762.56 ha
	Budge Budge 1	4791.9 ha
	Maheshtala	5562.40
	Total	<b>190157 ha</b>

Amongst the blocks, Sagar Block with Ghoramara Island is completely detached from the main land of South 24 Parganas. It is the largest estuarine island with habitation in West Bengal . Kakdwip , Namkhana and Sagar Blocks in our study area also falls under the Sundarban Region of West Bengal. Sundarban delta is one of the most mysterious landscapes in the world, which has successively evolved due to sediment accumulation by the great Ganga and Brahmaputra river system. The area is characterized by low-lying islands and a flat topography coupled with macro-tidal activities, powerful surges, and seasonal cyclonic events. All these conditions put together this landscape defenseless to frequent flood and erosion.

Landsat Image (8th March 2015): South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal



Map 5 – The 7 km Buffer Line on South 24 Parganas district



Map 6- Sundarban Region

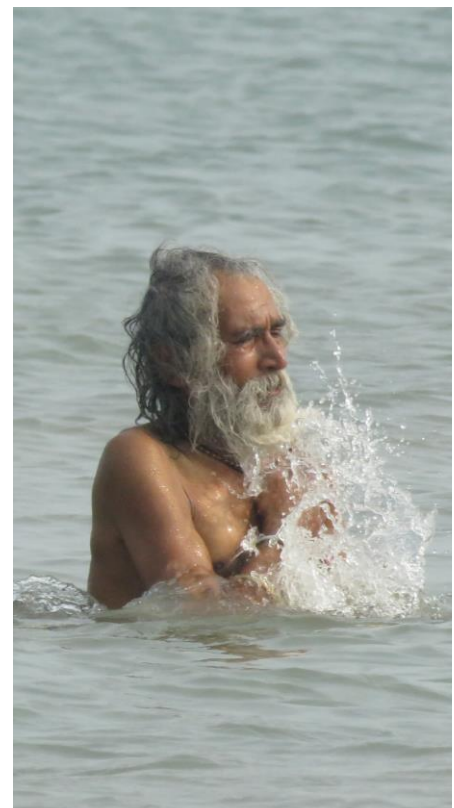
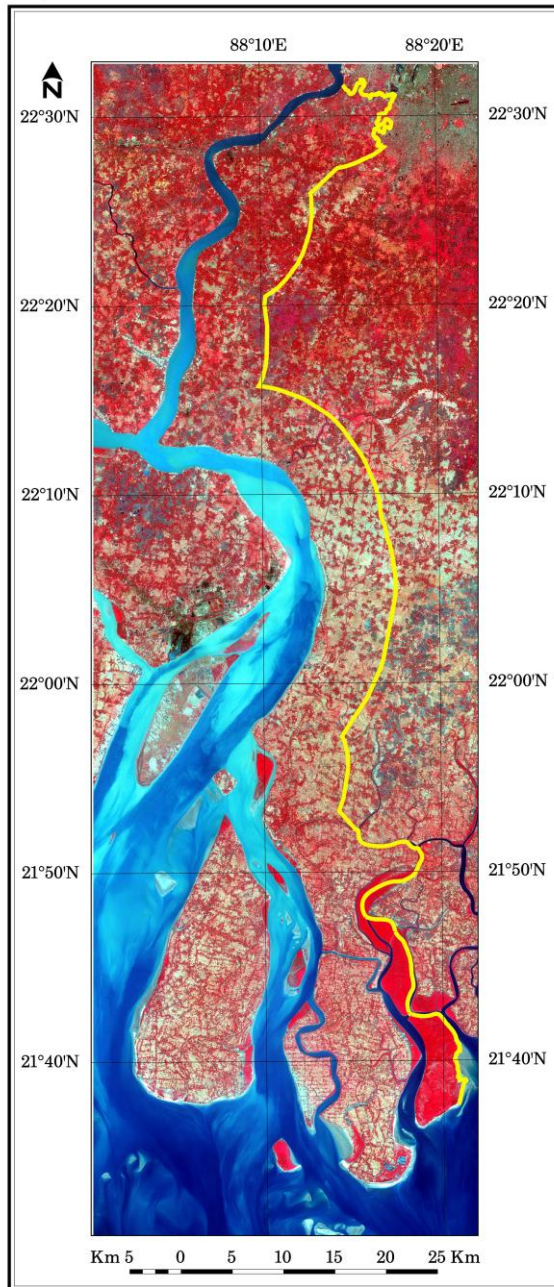


Plate 2– Holy dip at Ganga Sagar

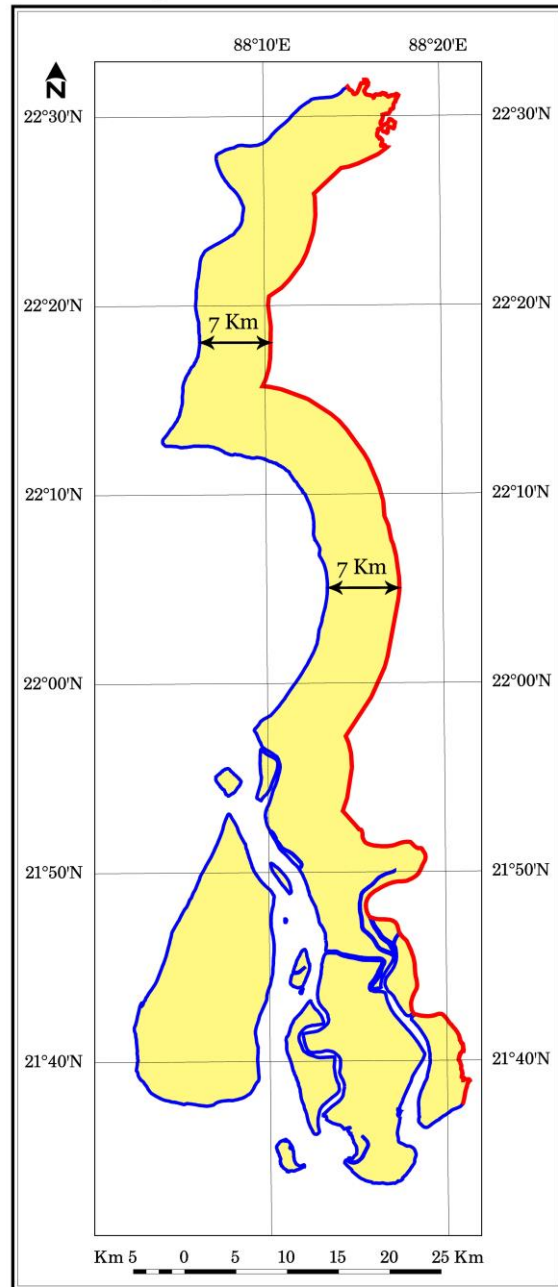


DOCUMENTING NATURAL HERITAGE ALONG RIVER BHAGIRATHI - HUGLI

Study area within the Buffer overlaid on Landsat 2019



Study area within the Buffer Zone



**IMAGE / DATA SOURCE:** All the Thematic Maps & Image Registered & Vectorised by **RS-GIS**, Kolkata, with the acquisition of Primary & Secondary data sources like: Landsat Image (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2019); Liss-IV Image (2014); High Resolution Ikonos & Quickbird Image (2010-2019); US Army Map 1956; Sol Topographical Map (1967, 1969); Cadastral Mouza Map; DPMS (NATMO 1991); SRTM Data (2010); CPT/KPT Bathymetry Data (2018); Forest Map of West Bengal; Groundwater Map (CGWB); District Census Map (2011); Watershed Maps (SLUSI); LULC Map (DST, Delhi); Soil Map (NBSS&LUP); Geology of Bengal (GSI); GPS Data.

Map 7- Landsat Image , FCC showing the study area -7km Buffer line

## **2.4. Understanding South 24 Parganas through Ages -**

The outline of the history of the 24 Parganas in West Bengal remains, to a large extent, shrouded in mystery. However contemporary historical studies and research, along with some recent archaeological findings from this region, throw some light on the matter.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the popular belief was that before the British colonisers cleared the forest and created a settlement here for a group of *Adivasis* who were brought from the mainland, the area was uninhabited. However there has been a revision of this view of the early settlement of the South 24 Parganas, from the 1920s. Tanay, the Zamindar of Majilpur village under Joynagar Police Station, shared the findings of the noted scholar Kalidas Dutta, whose research on the cultural traditions of the lower regions of the Gangetic basin in West Bengal suggested that during the rule of the Pala dynasty 1000 years earlier, the Sunderbans had developed into an advanced, urban civilisation. The 100' high Deul temple in the middle of the forest in Jata village and other artefacts discovered there are proof of this. At some time during the subsequent rule of the Senas, this civilisation was destroyed due to a natural calamity and soon the area was covered with trees and forests.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the late Paresh Chandra Dasgupta, who was the first Director of the Dept. of Archaeology, West Bengal stated that 4 implements belonging to the stone age had been recovered from the dry bed of the Adi Ganga or one of its tributaries at Hariharpur, near Baruipur; this is the only such extant evidence of dwellers from the Stone Age in this region. He assumed that during their nomadic journey, these prehistoric people had left behind their stone tools at this place. This theory can only be validated by more concrete evidence from archaeological excavations.

Later Paresh Chandra Dasgupta also stated that a few miles north of Diamond Harbour, in Deulpotay, situated on the banks of the river Hooghly, tools from the late Stone Age had been found. It may thus be deduced that early man belonging to the Stone Age, had settled here on the banks of the river. Though in modern times the waters of the Ganga and Bhagirathi flow through this region, earlier the river Saraswati flowed along its banks. Sri Kalidas Dutta has alluded to the fact that possibly after the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Ganga and Bhagirathi began to flow through the ancient river bed of the Saraswati, from Sankrail in Howrah. He also referred to an alternative theory that during the reign of Aliwardi, around 1740- 1756, to facilitate the navigation of the British merchant ships, the river bed from Kolkata to Sankrail was widened to divert the flow of the waters of the Ganga and Bhagirathi. Despite this, the Hindus



continue to treat the river Ganga at this point as being sacred and cremate their dead on these banks and collect its waters from here for their rituals. At the beginning of the 1960s, both Kalidas Dutta and Paresh Dasgupta report the discovery of tools belonging to the Late Stone Age in Harinarayanpur, which is situated to the south of Diamond Harbour, on the banks of the river Hugli; other findings included terracotta dolls like those belonging to the Late Stone Age. This too is an indication that early man resided here in the stone ages.

Kalidas Dutta in his excavations carried out in the 1960s also discovered many stone, metal and terracotta sculptures and statues, ancient artefacts, ruins of ancient temples and dwellings and bricks belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC. This civilization, he concluded therefore flourished during the age of the Mauryas, Sungas, Kushans, Guptas, Palas and extended till the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

From the available evidence one can deduce that prehistoric man lived here from the middle to the late Stone Ages. Prior to that a group of people of Negrito descent may have come here but did not settle down for any continuous period of time. Later, many other races came here bringing their own unique culture with them such as people from the Mediterranean, speakers of the Dravid tongue, Mongolian and Kirat tribes people and people of Aryan, Alpine and Nordic descent. At the beginning of this urban civilisation Jainism and Buddhism were the predominant religions; later Tantric Buddhism, the Nath sect, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity made inroads in this region. Thus we find in the Sunderbans an amazing confluence of divergent cultures, giving rise to a rich folk heritage which is peculiar to the region. Similarly we find an influx of various cultures and traditions, starting from the Stone Age, in towns along the river Hugli.

Our objective is to investigate the influence of these cultures on the folk traditions and aesthetic and religious practices of the region and study the intricate patterns that emerge from it.

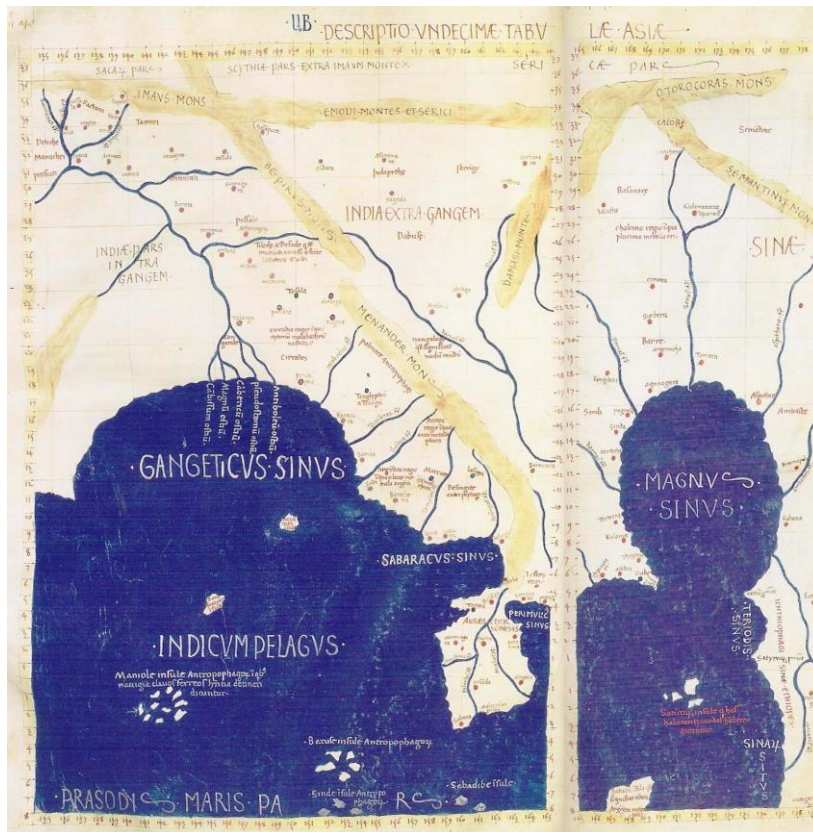


Plate 3,4,5,6 - Antiquities of Sagar Island , a collection of archaeological remains by Anil Kumar Khara in Bamankhali , Sagar Island

**Pre-History-**The present South 24-Parganas district forms the southern-most part of the deltaic plains of Bengal. This is a relatively new land, emerged from the alluvial deposits of the Ganges and its various tributaries. In the very recent period, the archaeologists have found some pre-historic artefacts from the surface of this region. But these evidences are still not sufficient to write a definite pre-history of this particular area. This is also true for the early historical period of this region. From the first century B.C. we have found some foreign literary accounts about this region, which indicate the existence of a land of prosperous people in this part of Bengal. But this is a land where there have been constant shifts in the courses of rivers. Therefore, it is unlikely to find the supportive detailed archaeological evidences, in absence of which the early history of this part of Bengal remains speculative.

**From the accounts of Greek writers** -The Greek writers, from the first century B.C. onward, mentioned the people of this region, often referred to as the *Gangaridae*, *Gangaridai*, and *Gangaridi* etc. According to Ptolemy, the famous second century geographer, the country near the mouth of the Ganges was occupied by the

*Gangaridai*. He also mentioned that they were different from the people of the territory of *Tamralipta*, called Tamalites. It may be assumed that the whole deltaic Bengal between the Bhagirathi-Hooghly in the west, the Padma-Meghna in the east and the Ganga-Padma in the north became the land of the *Gangaridai* people. The



Map 8 – Ptolemy 's Map showing Ganga Delta

district of South 24 Parganas as of now falls within these limits. From the Greek sources, we know that the country of the *Gangaridai* was a prosperous one and this prosperity was largely depended upon its profitable foreign trade. There was a famous port-city, called *Ganges*. This city was situated on the confluence of the Ganges with the sea. Through this port, according to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a travelogue written by an anonymous Greek sailor of the first century A.D., a considerable amount of trade used to be carried out in betel, spikenard, pearl and *maslin*. In this profitable foreign trade, gold coins were used as the medium of exchange. Where was the city of *Ganges* located? Historians are confused. It might have been in the present **Sagar island**, or at **Chandraketugarh of Deganga** (Deganga means *dwi* or *dwitya* Ganga, second mouth of Ganges) which presently is in the

district of North 24 Parganas. Another possible place is **Atghara** near Baruipur, situated on the east bank of the old course of the Bhagirathi, called Adiganga.

**4th century CE** : This part of Bengal remained outside the effective hegemony of the Gauda kingdom of Sasanka. It was under the sway of the Pala Empire. During the reign of Gopala II and Vigrahapala II (circa A.D. 940-988) the Palas lost a large portion of their territory in Vanga to the Chandras, who started their career as a feudatory of the former. There is still a brick temple, popularly known as Jatar Deul, standing at the village of Uttar Jata of Mathurapur, which was constructed by a certain king named Jayanachandra in 975 A.D., which confirmed the fact that this area was under the sway of the Chandra rulers.



Plate 7– Jatar Deul , Mathurapur

**15<sup>th</sup> Century CE**- From the ancient times till the sixteenth century at least, there were many janapadas which emerged on the banks of old Bhagirathi channel. **Kalighat, Boral, Rajpur, Mahinagar, Baruipur, Bahadu, Joynagar, Majilpur, Chatrabhog** were some among them. Bipradasa Pipalai's *Manasavijaya*, composed in A.D. 1495, provides us with a list of names of some important villages and towns of this region. Chandsadagar, a merchant character of *Manasavijaya*, reached Baruipur, from Kalighat, through the old **Bhagirathi channel**. From there he proceeded towards Chatrabhog, and then traveling through Hatigarh pargana reached the open sea. Chaitanyadeva (1486-1534), according to his contemporary biographies, also went through this route. In his journey towards Puri, through the Bhagirathi channel, he halted at the village of Atisara, near Baruipur. His last stoppage in 24 Parganas was at Chatrabhog, now a village within the jurisdiction of Mathurapur police station. Chatrabhog seems to have been an important river-port on the old Bhagirathi Channel. The zamindar of Chatrabhog, Rama Chandra Khan, helped Chaitanyadeva in his onward journey to Orissa. Chaitanya's journey along the east bank of Bhagirathi, and



this kind of association with the influential landlords boosted the spread of *Gaudiya Vaisnava Bhakti* movement, at least on the riparian tracts of the 24 Parganas district.

**16<sup>th</sup> Century:** A retrogressive process might have been started from the middle of the sixteenth century onward. These hitherto burgeoning centres of northern Sundarban areas and the Bhagirathi-Hooghly received setbacks. There were two reasons. The first was the rampant activities of the Portuguese freebooters and others. The second was geographic, the eastward trend of the Ganges dramatically intensified after the late sixteenth century, and hence it gradually abandoned the old Bhagirathi channel, presently known as **Adiganga**. So long as the river flowed smoothly, the life of the surrounding areas also flowed. When the river became moribund, the thriving centres of life were affected by the diseases associated with the stagnant water.

**Portuguese and South 24 Parganas :** In 1538, the Portuguese had obtained from Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud, the last Ilyas Shahi king of Gaur, the permission to build settlement in Santgaon on the confluence of the river Saraswati and Bhagirathi-Hooghly. From this time onwards, the Portuguese slowly but steadily became the masters of the water of these riparian tracts. They had a secondary naval station at **Tardaha** on the confluence of Bidyadhari in South 24-Parganas. In this period Bengal's political geography was dominated by the so-called *Baaro Bhuniyas* (twelve landed Chiefs). The Portuguese free-booters became the allies of these independent *Bhuniyas* against the Mughals and in return got freedom of action in this lower part of Bengal. They went on with their business of piracy with impunity. For nearly a century or so this part of region remained under the effective control of the Portuguese pirates and free-booters. As a consequence, the hitherto populated centres of this region of Bengal got depopulated and jungles of the Sundarbans extended.





Plate 8 – Diamond Harbour , Chingrikhali Fort

***Baaro Bhuniyas and Pratapadditya*** : The present district of South 24-Parganas was within the kingdom of Pratapaditya (1590-1612), one of the most powerful Bhuniyas of Bengal. In 1612 he was defeated by the Mughal army. The Mughals established a fauzdari at Jessore and the present district of South 24-Parganas came under this jurisdiction. Now, the Mughal Subadar of Bengal turned their attention towards the problems created by the Portuguese. They sacked Hugli in 1632. It is not clear when the Portuguese were forced to give up *Tardah*. But, with the waning of the power of the Bhuniyas the Portuguese had lost an important source of patronage. By this time the Portuguese menace was controlled, but not finally ended, especially in the areas of the southernmost part of Bengal, which were full of rivers, creeks and tiger-infested jungles.

***17<sup>th</sup> Century CE:*** The arms of the Mughal Emperor or of the Nawab of Bengal did not effectively reach these areas. Besides the Portuguese, there were Magh or Arakanese pirates operating in the same areas. They would come all of a sudden and swoop down on a river side mart on a market day and looted the merchandise brought for sale. This lawlessness, uncertainties and insecurities became the part of everyday life of the people living in this area throughout the seventeenth and for the better part of the eighteenth centuries.

**18<sup>th</sup> Century CE:** Then the English appeared. The 24-Parganas were one of the earliest places of their colonial subjugation. The treaty of 1757 between Mir Jafar and the East India Company ceded to the Company the Zamindari rights of 24 Parganas. The British colonial rule continued uninterrupted till India's independence in 1947.

**Present time :** The district of South 24 Parganas came into existence on March 1, 1986. Prior to that date, it was a part of undivided 24 Parganas.

**Administrative Location :** South 24 Parganas or sometimes South Twenty Four Parganas is a district in the Indian state of West Bengal, headquartered in Alipore. It is the largest district of West Bengal by area and second largest by population. It is the sixth most populous district in India (out of 640). On one side is the urban fringe of Kolkata and on the other, the remote riverine villages in the Sundarbans. The district comprises five subdivisions: Alipore Sadar, Baruipur, Diamond Harbour, Canning and Kakdwip.

Alipore is the district headquarters. There are 33 police stations, 29 community development blocks, 7 municipalities and 312 gram panchayats in the district. The Sunderbans area is covered by 12 CD blocks, viz. Sagar, Namkhana, Kakdwip, Patharpratima, Kultali, Mathurapur I, Mathurapur II, Jaynagar II, Canning I, Canning II, Basanti and Gosaba. The district contains 37 islands.

Other than the municipality areas, each subdivision contains community development blocks which in turn are divided into rural areas and census towns. In total there are 118 urban units: 7 municipalities and 111 census towns.

## CHAPTER 3 : CELEBRATED PERSONALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE STUDY AREA

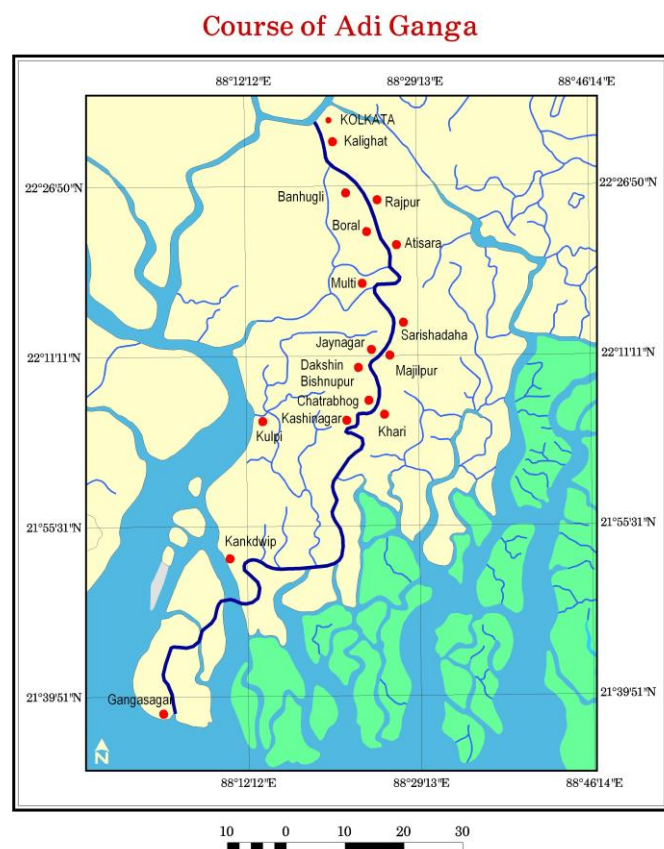
a. As the present district of the South 24 Parganas is adjacent to Kolkata, the capital of early colonial rule in India, it had received some enlightening touches of the British rule, like the spread and extension of modern education, and social and religious reform movements etc.

However, it has to be remembered, the present South 24-Parganas has a rich cultural heritage which mostly developed along the old course of Ganga ( Adi Ganga ). **Boral, Rajpur, Mahinagar, Baruipur, Bahadu, Joynagar, Majilpur, Chatrabhog** were the major renowned centres of Sanskrit learning in the *medieval* and late *medieval* periods.

Majilpur was called the ‘**second Navadvip**’ for its profound studies and culture

of the Hindu *sastras*. Harinavi, Rajpur, all were famous centres of learning. So, when in the 19th century the modern western education was beginning to penetrate in this region, a complex interaction was going on between the old and the new.

According to the Annual report on the Public Instruction for 1871-72 by Mr. Woodrow, Inspector of Schools, quoted in W.W. Hunter’s *Statistical Account of Bengal*: ‘Nine-tenths of the education given in this district are found on the banks of



Map 9 : Course of Adi Ganga

the old Ganges. The country thus favoured with schools extends from Halisahar to Rajpur, Baruipur, Boral, Govindapur, Bahru, and Joynagar, all populous villages with flourishing English schools under Hindu management.’

There were many important journals published within the district in the nineteenth century. Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan’s *Somprokas* held the foremost place among them. This weekly journal, published regularly on the morning of every Monday, first appeared from Calcutta in 1858 and from April 1862 from Harinavi. Mohanlal Vidyabagish and Sibnath Sastri also edited the journal for some times respectively between 1865 and 1874. The journal discussed literature, philosophy, science, politics and social matters. It agitated on the cause of the peasants and expressed itself boldly against the zamindars, and indigo-planters. Many of the stalwarts and leading men

of nineteenth-century Bengal were either born or had worked in this district at one

time or the other. Rajnarayan Basu was born in Basu family of Boral. He was one of the leading figures of the *Brahmo* movement and was the forerunner of the *swadesi* movement of later days. Rajnarayan formed a secret society on the *Italian Carbonary* model also, although nothing much came out of it till his grandsons Arabinda and Barin Ghose and nephew Satyen Bose appeared on the scene. Sibnath Sastri had his ancestral home at Majilpur, but was born in the maternal home at Changripota (now Subhasgram). At an early age he joined the social reform movements. He formally



Plate 9: Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan



Plate 10 : Sibnath Shastri



joined in Keshab Sen's *Brahmo Samaj* in 1869. From 1873 he shifted his centre of activities to Calcutta. In 1878 Sibnath Sastri parted ways from Keshabchandra and established *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*. One of his compatriots, Umesh Chandra Dutta had established *Harinavi Brahmo Samaj*, and the big figures of the Brahmo movement, like Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Keshabchandra Sen, Rajnarayan Basu, Dr. Protap Majumder, had frequent contacts with this Samaj. South 24-Parganas was one of the active centres of *Hindu Mela* also. The first ever Hindu Mela in rural Bengal, was held in Baruipur in 1870. The concept of *Swadeshi* was an outcome of the activities of Hindu Mela, though the ideas of *Swadeshi* attained a commanding height at the time of the Anti-Partition movement in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century. During this time secret revolutionary movements gained momentum as well. The present district of South 24- Parganas was a fertile soil of the revolutionary nationalist movement.

**b.Achipur , Budge Budge - The legend of Tong Atchew, the 'first ancestor of the Chinese in India' –**

There is still a red coloured horse shoe shaped graveyard in the banks of Bhagirathi Hugli . Myth says , *Tong Atchew, the first Chinese ancestor* lies here Well, he doesn't really lie there. The original grave is believed to have been



Plate 11 : Achipur , Tom Achew's Graveyard

washed away years ago by the river, which is broad and strong here, 33 kilometres south of Kolkata and about to enter the Bay of Bengal. But like most things about Atchew, the legend is more powerful than the history. So powerful that the village around the tomb is named after him – **Atchewpur**, later modified to Achipur.

The Indian Chinese community in Kolkata believes that in late 18th century a Chinese tea trader by the name of Tong Achew or Yang Da Zhao landed on the banks of Hugli, somewhere near present day Budge – Budge, never to return again. The then Governor General Warren Hasting granted land to Achew to set up a sugar cane plantation and sugar factory. According to records to British East India Company “Achew was granted 650 bighas of land about 6 miles south of Budge – Budge for an annual rent of Rs 45.” After acquiring the land Achew set up a sugar – cane plantation along with a sugar mill. He brought in a band of Chinese workers to work in his plantation and factory and thus forming the first Chinese settlement in India. But Achew died soon after and his sugar factory was abandoned. His workers left for the city of Calcutta, where their descendents still continue to live.

**c.Swami Ishtananda , Rakhal Maharaj** - Swami Ishtananda was a monk with Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He was born in the village of Bilaspur, near Contai or Kanthi town, in the district of East Medinipur. His parents named him Rakhal. In his college days he joined the freedom movement and even participated in the non-cooperation movement, called by Gandhiji. As a freedom fighter, he met luminaries like Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Bidhan Chandra Roy.

Rakhal had joined the freedom movement; because he was dissatisfied being a mere student and desired to contribute to the society in a meaningful way. He kept asking himself, the purpose of his birth. Freedom fighters like Netaji and Bidhan Roy impressed him but could not touch his heart; his soul needed something more. He kept searching for that elusive something. Rakhal could not explain what he was searching but he was not completely peaceful. As a child, Rakhal had heard stories of Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramhansa. When he was alone, he became contemplative; the karmayogi in him arose by Swami Vivekananda’s words, “They only live; who live for others.” After his college education was over, his



Plate 12 : Srimat Swami Ishtanandaji

parents tried to get him married. He knew he had to take a decision or else he would end up being a much married man and that was the last thing in his mind. In the year 1926, he decided to join Ramakrishna Mission. He left his home and took a vow of celibacy and became a ‘Sannyasi’ (monk). He joined the monastic order as Swami Ishtananda.

As a young monk, Swami Ishtananda, was sent to Sagar Dweep, to look after the activities of the Ramakrishna Ashram and also to look for land to expand the Ashram and its activities. When he came to Sagar, few people lived there. Life was very difficult. The backwaters were infested with crocodile and attacks from Royal Bengal tigers were frequent. These difficulties could not deter Swami Ishtananda. He remained calm and had an ever smiling face. Soon he became popular amongst the few local people who resided in Sagar. They called the monk Rakhhal Maharaj (the head monk of the Mission is called a Maharaj). he befriended the people of Manasadeep and started a small school with 10-15 students. Later, in the year 1928, 26th April, he constructed a small room and inaugurated a school; this was the first school in Sagar deep.

He soon had people joining the school as teachers; they were people who had been inspired by the ‘karmayogi’ Rakhhal Maharaj. In his untiring mission, Swamiji’s words always rang in his ears, “When you serve men, you serve God,” and “Shiva lies in the common man.” Rakhhal Maharaj always believed that when he was serving God with all his heart, God would provide him with all that was needed to make his mission successful. He had no funds to pay fees for the teachers, though the people who had joined were willing to work without pay but Rakhhal Maharaj knew they were needy people and the salary he would provide might help them run their family. So, he decided to go begging for one fist of alms. The villagers were touched with the humility in this gesture of Rakhhal Maharaj. They came forward in hordes with their meagre means in answer to his appeal. With the joint effort of the villagers and the undivided dedication of Swami Ishtananda, the work for the Ramakrishna Mission School progressed slowly but steadily. He made a beautiful song which he sang whenever he went begging for alms to the mothers in every house, the lyrics goes like this,

**d.Swami Vivekananda and Budge Budge** - Swami Vivekananda had travelled to America to be a part of **Parliament of the World's Religions** in **Chicago** in the year **1893**. This was possible for the very first time that a global platform had been created to have an interfaith dialog. Representatives from most of the world religions were represented out here and Swami Vivekananda had represented Hinduism as a monk. The conference lasted from **11<sup>th</sup> to**



Plate 13 : The memorial of Swami Vivekananda.

**16<sup>th</sup> of September** at the **Art Institute of Chicago Building** (World's Congress Auxiliary Building). His journey to Chicago started from Bombay (Mumbai) on 31st May 1893. He took the SS Peninsular ship that made stops at Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canton (Guangzhou), and finally to Yokohama. In Japan, after spending a few days he took another ship RMS Empress of India to Vancouver (Canada) and reached on 25th July 1893. From there he took a train to Chicago to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions.

Parliament of the World's Religions was supposed to start earlier in August but got delayed till September. The event in Chicago lasted from 11th to 16th of September. Perhaps the most famous speech of the entire event which still resonated today was that of Swami Vivekananda when he opened his speech with the words "Sisters and brothers of America!". He also presented a paper on the ninth day of the event on Hinduism.

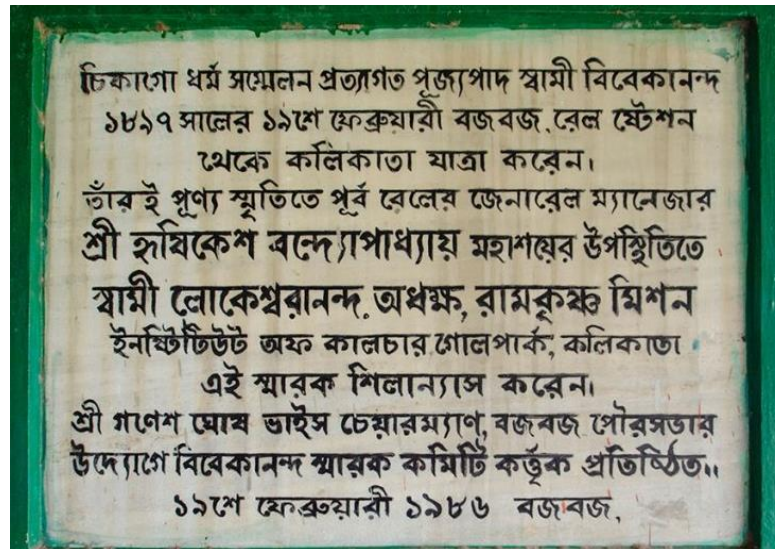


Plate 14 : The plaque near the memorial .

In America, Swami Vivekananda managed to impress

by his knowledge and his wisdom and quickly started gaining popularity. He left America on 15th April 1896 from New York to England on board SS Germanic. He reached England via



Ireland on 19th April. Swami Vivekananda would spend some time across Europe visiting many countries. Finally starting his return journey in December 1896 from Naples (Italy) and reaching Ceylon on 15th January 1897. After that, he would go to Madras (Chennai) and continue with his lecture tour there. Swami Vivekananda reached Budge Budge on 19th February 1897 on a steamer from Madras (Chennai) onboard SS Mombasa. He had reached the night before at Budge Budge and the entourage had to wait as the train was next morning to Kolkata.

**e. Andrew Frazer and Frazerganj :** On the Western edge of Sundarban lies the three Beach Resort of Frazerganj, Bakkhali & Henry's Island. The history of Frazerganj dates back a century ago when Andrew Frazer the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (1903 - 1908) fell in love with a small stretch of beach at the Western edge of Sundarban, at the village of Narayanitala. He built a bungalow, complete with coconut grove, which became a talking point of English men in Calcutta. But sadly Frazer's dream of turning Narayanitala into a beach resort was never fulfilled. His bungalow was soon abandoned and has long been swallowed up by the sea. So apart from the Anglican name nothing remains of Frazerganj's colonial past.

**f. Henry's island:** Located on the western edge of the Sundarban, Henry's Island is fast developing into in West Bengal's favorite Beach Resort. Named after a British surveyor, who survived the area about a century ago, Henry's Island is one of the numerous island that form the Ganga – Brahmaputra delta, the largest in the world. Crisscrossed by numerous rivers and rivulets Henry's island offer an interesting mix of beach and mangrove forest. A place, where tourist can laze on the beach and spot wildlife simultaneously. During 1980s the West Bengal Fisheries Department took the initiative of turning Henry's Island into a tourist spot. Several ponds were dug and a forestation project taken up. It also led to the construction of the two resorts of Mangrove & Sundari.



Plate 15 – Henry’s Island Beach , a mix of mangrove and sandy beach.

Plate16 - Wind Mill and Red Crabs of Henry’s Island.

**g.Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose and Falta** - Acharya J.C. Bose's bungalow of Falta Experimental Farm is situated just on the bank of the river Ganges. It is a beautiful place and maintained regularly throughout the year. The white building of bungalow is an example of English architecture. Acharya J.C. Bose lived in this building when he visited Falta. At present living room of Acharya J.C. Bose in the first floor has been conserved and the attached hall is converted to a museum. The replica of posters of main museum of Bose Institute at Rajabazar Campus and some books on J.C. Bose have been displayed in the museum. The ground floor hall is presently used as lecture hall for conducting training during the training programme of Rural Biotechnology Programme. Department of Physics used their cosmic studies in this building using high power telescope. The Environmental Science Section installed instruments on the roof of this building for all season weather studies. The office of the Farm is situated in the bungalow beside the entrance.



**Plate 17 : Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose's house near Falta**

**h. Tilman Henckell** - System of reclamation changes the scenario of the Sunderbans, particularly of wildness inclusive briefing of the natural habitat of the tigers and crocodiles and as a result, introduction of human habitation within the reclaimed land. Collector of Jessor, Tilman Henckell was the pioneer of such system of reclamation in the Sunderbans during his tenure of 1781 – 1790. He played a very positive role in taking initiative of reclamation clearing the dense jungle of mangroves and tried an utmost effort for the welfare of the molungees who were responsible for salt preparation. His scheme failed as the members of the Board were not convinced with his proposal. But ultimately progress of reclamation has been going on steadily for about forty years after the tenure of Collector, Tilman Henckel. Further, he took initiatives for the welfare of the molungees of tribal origin namely Chandabandas, from which the name of the Sunderbans supposed to be denominated

**i. Mr. William Dampier & Lt. Hodges** - **Mr. William Dampier** was Commissioner and **Lt. Hodges** was the Surveyor of the Sundarbans Commission. Mr. William Dampier, who had held charge of the Sundarban office for some five months in 1827, was again appointed to it in February 1828, when the revised scheme was promulgated. During the early months of 1829, Mr. Dampier defined and Lieutenant Alexander Hodges surveyed the boundary of the Sundarban forest, carrying it from the river Jamuna, at the junction of the Shura khal opposite Pranpur, as far as the river Baleswar, at its confluence with river Jeodhara. The line of the forest in Morrieson's map was taken to be the Sundarban boundary, and Hodges copied it into his own secondary maps on smaller scales. By themselves they convey no vivid impression; they must be taken with Hodges' maps which were drawn *pari passu*, and exhibit his route and the limits of the forest; and the boundary then becomes clear and definite. Dampier-Hodges line is an imaginary line drawn in 1829-1830 to mark the northern boundary of Sundarbans delta. It passes through 24 Parganas South and North districts of West Bengal.



## CHAPTER 4 : FAIRS & FESTIVALS

*“SAB TIRTHA BAR BAR,GANGASAGAR EK BAAR” One of the most popular mela after Kumbh Mela is the Ganga Sagar Mela. It is India's biggest fair held in Sagardwip, West Bengal and witnesses a large number of people pouring in. Celebrated with great vigour and enthusiasm, the festival has a cultural and spiritual significance where pilgrims dip themselves in the holy waters of Ganga to purify their souls. Held during the winters, the Mela is an annual gathering of pilgrims which see a number of rituals, lit lamps and chanting in and around Sagardwip, the confluence of River Ganga with Bay of Bengal.*



Plate 18 : Ganga Sagar Mela , Source : WBTC

### 4.1. THE LEGEND OF GANGASAGAR – KAPIL MUNI

Kapil Muni was the son of Kardam Muni and Debhayuti. It is written in the old book that he was part of Lord Vishnu. After the birth of nine daughters of Kardam Muni, he is preparing to go to the forest for austerity. Then the grandfather Brahma admonished him to go to forest and said he would have a son, who is part of Lord Vishnu. Then Kardam Muni's had a son whose name was Kapil Muni. After the birth of Kapil Muni, Kardam Muni went to the forest for austerities. Kapil Muni stayed with his mother and preached Saankhya Yog to her. Devahooti got Moksh after that preaching.

Kapil Muni Bert is the son of King Sagar's: Once he was sitting in the tomb of his monastery, that 60,000 sons of King Sagar's came there in search of his father Yagya Horse, they tied it with a tree near it, so they thought that Kapil Muni had stolen it. They started talking to him something bad. Kapil Muni opened his eyes and looked at them and saw that they were all ashes. Actually, Indra had been stolen from King Sagar's and hid it in the shelter of Kapil Muni. Then the King Sagar's sent his grandson Anusham to search for his 60,000 sons and Yagya Horse. He followed the footsteps of his uncle and appeared at Kapil Muni's

Asaram. He saw a mound of shelter near his monastery. He understands everything. He greeted him and asked how his uncle could get salvation. Kapil Muni proposed to him to bring the Ganges to Prithvi and organize his rituals there so that his water could release him.



Plate 19 : Kapil Muni's image at Ganga Sagar Temple

Through deep meditation, King Bhagiratha induced Shiva to order Ganga down from heaven and the 60,000 sons were freed (moksha) and ascended to Heaven, but the river Ganges



Plate 20 : Holy Dip at Ganga Sagar

stayed on the Earth. The date of the descent of Ganga was the date, as is at present the 15th Day of January of the Gregorian Calendar which coincides with that of Makar Sankranti (when Surya enters Makar Constellation, i.e. "Uttarayan" of Hindu Panchangam).

## 4.2. GANGA PUJA –GANGASAGAR

### Ganga mantra in Bengali

দেবি গংগে ত্রিভুবনতারিণি তরলতরংগে !ভগবতি !সুরেশ্বরী !  
শংকরমৌলিবিহারিণি বিমলে মম মতিরাস্তাং তব পদকমলে || 1 ||  
ভাগীরথিসুখদায়িণি মাতস্তব জলমহিমা নিগমে ঋষাতঃ |  
নাহং জানে তব মহিমানং পাহি কৃপাময়ি মামঞ্জানম || 2 ||  
হরিপদপাদ্যতরংগিণি গংগে হিমবিধুমুজাধবলতরংগে |  
দূরীকুরু মম দুষ্কৃতিভারং কুরু কৃপয়া ভবসাগরপারম || 3 ||  
তব জলমমলং যেন নিপীতং পরমপদং খলু তেন গৃহীতম |  
মাতর্গংগে ত্বয়ি যো ভক্তঃ কিল তং দ্রষ্টুং ন যমঃ শক্তঃ || 4 ||  
পতিতোদ্ধারিণি জাহ্নবি গংগে খংডিত গিরিবরমংডিত ভংগে |  
ভীষ্মজননি হে মুনিবরকণ্ঠে পতিতনিবারিণি ত্রিভুবন ধন্যে || 5 ||  
কল্পলতামিব ফলদাং লোকে প্রণমতি যস্ত্বাং ন পততি শোকে |  
পারাবারবিহারিণি গংগে বিমুখযুবতি কৃততরলাপাংগে || 6 ||  
তব চেন্মাতঃ স্রোতঃ স্নাতঃ পুনরপি জঠরে সোপি ন জাতঃ |  
নরকনিবারিণি জাহ্নবি গংগে কলুষবিনাশিণি মহিমোত্তুংগে || 7 ||  
পুনরসদংগে পুণ্যতরংগে জয় জয় জাহ্নবি করুণাপাংগে |  
ইন্দ্রমুকুটমণিরাজিতচরণে সুখদে শুভদে ভৃংয়শরণে || 8 ||  
রোগং শোকং তাপং পাপং হর মে ভগবতি কুমতিকলাপম |  
ত্রিভুবনসারে বসুধাহারে ত্বমসি গতির্মম খলু সংসারে || 9 ||  
অলকানন্দে পরমানন্দে কুরু করুণাময়ি কাতরবংদয়ে |  
তব তটনিকটে যস্য নিবাসঃ খলু বৈকুণ্ঠে তস্য নিবাসঃ || 10 ||  
বরমিহ নীরে কমঠো মীনঃ কিং বা তীরে শরটঃ ক্ষীণঃ |  
অথবাস্থপচো মলিনো দীনস্তব ন হি দূরে নৃপতিকুলীনঃ || 11 ||  
ভো ভুবনেশ্বরী পুণ্যে ধন্যে দেবি দ্রবময়ি মুনিবরকণ্ঠে |  
গংগাস্তবমিমমমলং নিংয়ং পঠতি নরো যঃ স জয়তি সৎয়ম || 12 ||  
য়েষাং হৃদয়ে গংগা ভক্তিস্তেষাং ভবতি সদা সুখমুক্তিঃ |  
মধুরাকংতা পংঝাটিকাভিঃ পরমানন্দকলিতললিতাভিঃ || 13 ||  
গংগাস্তোত্রমিদং ভবসারং বাংছিতফলদং বিমলং সারম |  
শংকরসেবক শংকর রচিতং পঠতি সুখীঃ তব ইতি চ সমাপ্তঃ || 14 ||



Plate 21 & 22 : Maa Ganga Idol in the beach.





Centering Maa Ganga, there are many pujas performed in Gangasagar of Sagar Island. Based on the interview with Nimai Majaraj ji of Bharat Sevashram, Gangasagar we have documented the following Pujas.

**a. Dasa-Hara Ganga Puja**, which is known as Ganga Dussehra, Ganga Gangavatara or Jeth Ka Dussehra in other parts of India. It is believed that Mother Ganga descended on the earth on this day, to rid the souls of King Bhagirath's forefathers of a curse. The Hindu solar-lunar calendar is well designed and the tenth day of the Shukla Paksha (waxing Moon) of the Jyestha month is fixed for this holy day. From the month of Jaistha (May-June), the heat of summer reaches the upper Himalayas and ice and snow start melting. This is when the pilgrim sites up in the mountains start opening up.

This melting ice of glaciers means that large amounts of fresh pure water are released into the parched summer river. Ganga is this in its most pristine form — before muddy monsoon waters change its colour and composition. This explains the religious dictum “that the earth gets purified and attains heavenly status after Ganga descended”. We have to read between the lines.

This festival is different from **Ganga Jayanti** which is celebrated to mark her rebirth. Ganga Dussehra is celebrated over ten days, the last day being most important. It is extremely popular in the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal through which the river passes, and cities like Rishikesh, Haridwar, Varanasi, Patna, Prayagraj and Garhmukteshwar observe these 10 days with enthusiasm. In the evening, the lit up diyas that are released into the river offer a wonderful sight. Incidentally, many Bengalis make it a point to bathe in the Ganga on this day, though I doubt if any of the clear glacial water reaches so far. What most Hindus do not remember is that in the ancient post-Christian era, there were intense rivalries among the cults — between Shaivas, Vaishnavas, Shaktas. The Bhagavata Purana states that Vishnu's Vamana avatar pressed the nail of his big toe to make a hole from which sprung the divine Brahma-water, the Causal Ocean, which then flowed to the Universe as the River Ganga. Ganga is also thus known as Vishnupadi, and thus the monopoly of Shiva is contested. The most popular legend is that Shiva ultimately brought the mighty waters to the earth through his locks of hair. Each of these tales has some meaning in very practical terms — beyond the spiritual explanations given by religious people. We need to understand both to appreciate how different ethnic groups who inhabited or entered India over several millennia were settled peacefully and absorbed into the heart and body of India.

**b. Ganga Jayanti** - The festival falls in the month of Vaisakh and is celebrated in Saptami Tithi. Ganga Saptami is also observed as Ganga Jayanti or Ganga Puja. This is considered as one of the important festivals in the Hindu calendar.

According to Hindu beliefs, devotees chant the Ganga Saptami mantra while taking a holy dip in the river.

*Om Namo Gangayai Vishwarupini Narayani Namoh Namah.  
Gange Ch Yamune Chav Godavari Saraswati.  
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri Jale Asmin Sannidhim Kuru.  
Ganga Vari Manohari Murariacharanchayut.  
Tripurarishiraschhari Papahari Punatu Ma ..  
Ganga Gangeti Yo Bruyat, Yozhanam Shatarapi. Muchyte sarvapapebhyo, Vishnuloke se  
gachti*

### **c. Makar Sangkranti ( Holy Dip in Maa Ganga ) and Gangasagar Mela –**

Gangasagar Fair is the second biggest congregation of Hindu pilgrims after the Kumbha Mela. The Gangasagar Mela is observed annually and only on Sagardwip (Sagar Island). Every year during Makar Sankranti pilgrims from all over the country come to take a holy dip at the confluence of the river Ganges and Bay of Bengal, followed by offering prayers at the Kapil Muni Temple. This temple is immersed in legendary tales and is highly revered among devotees.



Plate 23 – Each year on Makar Sankranti (mid-January), large number of devotees from all over the nation, congregate at Gangasagar for a sacred dip at the convergence of the river Ganga and the Bay

The holy river Ganges, after originating from Gangotri and traveling through plains of Rishikesh and Haridwar, reaches Bengal, where it is named Hooghly. In Bengal, this sacred river merges with the sea. Legend has it that, before combining with the sea, the Ganga watered the mortal remains of King Bhagirath's grandfather King Sagar's 60000 sons, liberating their soul from the cycle of life and death forever. After a dip into the holy river here, people generally visit Kapil Muni Temple situated nearby, to worship the idol enshrined there, as a mark of respect.





Plate 24 & 25- Bengal witnesses a large number of people pouring in during Mela time. Celebrated with great vigour and enthusiasm, the festival has a cultural and spiritual significance where pilgrims dip themselves in the holy waters of Ganga to purify their souls. Held during the winters, the Mela is an annual gathering of pilgrims which see a number of rituals, lit lamps and chanting in and around Sagardwip.





A large number of festivities take place in this state throughout the year. Amongst them, one of the most famous is the Gangasagar Mela. It is held in the month of January-February, on the Ganga Sagar Island, at the mouth of the river Hooghly in Bengal. It is attended by thousands of pilgrims every year. A dip in the water at this place, during Gangasagar Mela, is considered to be extremely sacred. On the day of Makar Sankranti (January 14), when the sun makes a transition to Capricorn from Sagittarius, it is said that the bath becomes a holy source of salvation.



Plate 26 – Puja offerings to the Shiva Linga , located just opposite to Kapil Muni Temple

Every year, a long fair is arranged at Ganga Sagar Island, in January and February. The fair becomes highly crowded on the Makar Sankranti day. It is assumed to be the largest annual gathering of devotees in India. The popularity of this fair can be understood from the fact that without any formal or informal invitation, advertisement and organizing authority, more than a million pilgrims come here every year, from different parts of India, just to take a holy dip in the Ganges. Apart from the general pilgrims, the assemblage of Naga Sadhus here gives a unique identity to this fest.





Plate 27 & 28 – Naga Sanyasis in Gangasagar Mela Plate – In the Mela , occurs huge congregation of Vaishnavites.







Plate 29 & 30 - The entire Gangasagar beach area becomes colourful with people performing different music and danceforms.







Plate 31& 32 : Different facets of Ganga Sagar Mela







Plate 33 & 34 : Different facets of Ganga Sagar mela





Plate 35 & 36 : Different facets of Sagar Mela



## CHAPTER 5 : TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

### 5.1. SANKHYA DARSHAN AND KAPIL MUNI -

Kapil Muni was the founder of one of the major Philosophy called Sankhya Darshan or Samkhya Darshan. Sankhya is also one of the six types of Indian philosophy which was very popular and famous in ancient times. It is a philosophy with absolutely opposite beliefs from *Advaita Vedanta* . The literal meaning of 'Samkhya' is 'numerical' or analysis. Its most prominent impression of having made the creation of nature and men, on the nature (ie Pancmahabhuton made) root and I animate (ie, soul). Energy sources of Yoga Shastras ( Eda-Pingala ), Shiva-Shakti of the Shaktas The principles of this look parallel to this.

Sankhya philosophy once held a very high place in Indian culture . The lofty minds of the country used to think through the method of Samkhya. The Mahabharatakara has even said that in the light of knowledge, if there is little numerology, Tach Mahanmahatnam (Shanti Parva 301.109). In fact, in the Mahabharata , the background of philosophical thought has an important place in numerology. The ideas of Samkhya Darshan have been mentioned in many poetic and interesting ways at many places of Shanti festival . The influence of Sankhya philosophy is sufficiently existing on the philosophical background propounded in the Gita .

Still now in Sagar Island there are numerous Ashram where “ Sankhya Darshan” is taught and propagataed.



Plate 37: Sankhya Darshan Ashram , Sagar .





Plate 38 & 39: Kapil Kutir - Sankhya Yoga Ashram (Boro Ashram)



## **5.2. SOME MAJOR ASHRAMS OF GANGASAGAR**

### **a. Onkarnath Temple, Ganga Sagar (Sagardwip)**

Born as Probodh Chandra Chattopadhyaya, 17 February 1892, Keota Village, Hooghly district, West Bengal, India, Sri Sri Sitaramdas Omkarnath was a preeminent Indian Vaishnav Saint, 19th century Bhakti cult spiritual luminary and an unequalled humanitarian from the state of West Bengal, India. Addressed as Sri Sri Thakur Sitaramdas Omkarnath, where "Omkar" signifies the supreme cosmic enlightenment and attaining supreme consciousness, he was heralded as the Divine Incarnate (Avatar) of Kali Yuga and espoused the doctrines of Sanatan Dharma and Vedic spiritual path to countless devotees from across the world, with central theme and paramount importance on the beneficence of Divine Chanting Naam of Hare Krishna Hare Ram - regarded as the omnipotent "Tarak Brahma Naam" the chant of soul deliverance in Kali Yuga and "Moksha" liberation from cycle of birth and death.

The Onkarnath Temple is another very sacred temple at Gangasagar. The temple is dedicated to Lord Onkar and his teachings. Set amidst trees and marshes, the temple has a very peaceful atmosphere. It is rarely crowded and you can pray here, at your own pace.



Plate 40 : Onkarnath Ashram

## b. Swami Pranavananda and Bharat Sevashram-

Swami Pranavananda , also known as Yugacharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda Ji Maharaj, (29 January 1896 – 8 February 1941) was a Hindu yogi and saint who founded an organization known as the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. He is remembered for his pioneering efforts to bring the modern Hindu society into the new age without compromising the essential values of ancient traditions of Hindu spirituality. Swamiji was one of the greatest spiritual leaders of modern India. He is still revered very much for his message of universal love, compassion for all humanity and social reform without giving up the nationalist zeal, the love of mother land. Bharat Sevashram Sangha (BSS), which he created, combined inner sadhana seamlessly with national resurgence and social emancipation.



Plate 41 : Swami Pranabananda Hall , Bharat Sevashram

Already the great scientist Acharya P C Roy had seen and appreciated the organising abilities of Pranavananda during the cyclone and famine relief. As chairman of the Famine Relief Committee, P C Roy marvelled that “hundreds of workers he recruited in no time” and “the management of a competent leader that made the famine relief successful”. When after famine relief work, Rs 60,000 remained with the committee, a princely sum those days, the visionary in Pranavananda suggested to P C Roy that they could be used to create new cottage industries.

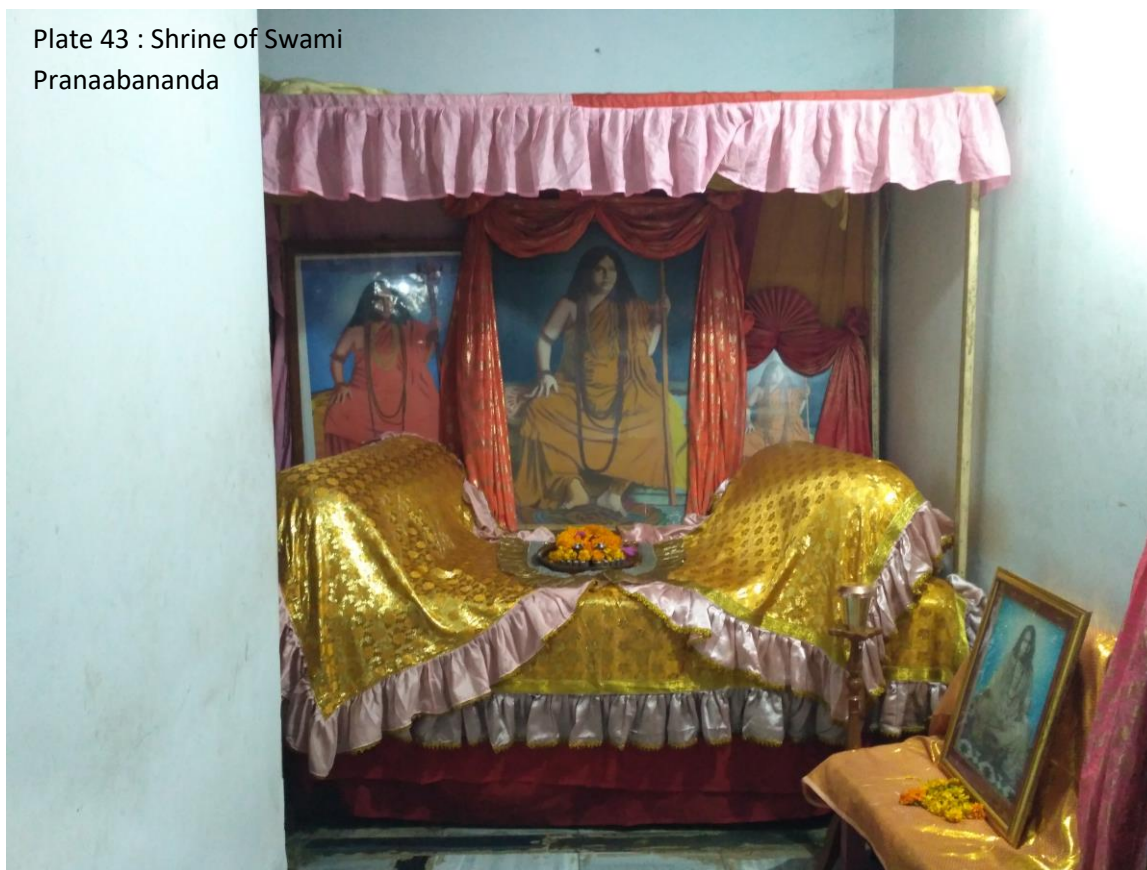
In Gangasagar , there is a huge ashram and Atithi Niwas of Bharat Sevashram . When the calamities like cyclones and flood breaks out in this area , Bharat Sevashram always comes forward to provide relief and assistance to the vulnerable communities. This year during Amphan , Bharat Sevashram gave shelter to more than 3000 people of the island only, who all had lost their homes .



Plate 42 : Bharat Sevashram , Gangasagar



Plate 43 : Shrine of Swami Pranaabananda



### **c. Late Swami Ishtanandaji Maharaj and Ramkrishna Mission –**

The Ramkrishna Mission Ashrama of Manasadwip is located in Sagar Island which was rather a flourishing area till the end of the Moghul period as is found in historical records. Rev. Rakhal Maharaj (Swami Ishtananda) of Contai Centre of Ramkrishna Mission was sent to Sagar Island for the educational and cultural development. He stayed in the Island against many odds. By his constant endeavour he inspired some local people to realise the basic need of education of the people around mostly local people. With their co-operation and help he started to teach some local boys from alphabet level in his dwelling Kuthia (hut) which thereafter shifted as primary school in the residence of Late Gobinda Prasad Gayen of village Purusottampur. It was subsequently, after the foundation of Mission centre at Manasadwip in April 1928, shifted in a cottage for the purpose on a piece of land donated to the centre by Late Karnakar Jana of the same village.

Late Swami Ishtanandaji Maharaj is regarded as initiation guide in the field of Education and culture as due to his diligent effort and dedicated service only, the Sagar Island presently stands at par with the mainland.



Plate 44 : Ramkrishna Mission





**d. Kriya Yoga Ashram Gangasagar** - The KRIYA YOGA ASHRAM in Gangasagar welcomes sincere seekers to learn the ancient Yoga technique called Kriya Yoga, which have been revived in modern times by Mahavatar Babaji through Lahiri Mahasaya in 1861. Kriya Yoga became well known by Paramahansa Yogananda when he introduced it in 1920 through his book **Autobiography of a Yogi**.

Kriya Yoga is an ancient science of Self-realization, knowing your inner Self and living in harmony with body, mind and soul, which has been practiced by saints and sages since time immemorial. Kriya Yoga is non-sectarian and meant for householders too. Practicing the ancient Yoga will generate a constant awareness of the soul i.e. Liberation. An introduction will be given by contacting the Ashram. Initiation and meditation camps are organized at the ashram or at your place on demand.



Plate 45: KriyaYog Ashram

**e. Loknath Mission, Ganga Sagar** - Lokenath Brahmachari, who is called Baba Lokenath or simply Sri Lokenath, was an 18th-century saint, yogi and philosopher in Bengal, most notably preached by Nityagopal Saha. Disciples believe he was born on or about 31 August 1730 (according to the Bengali calendar 18th Bhadra, 1137) on the holy day of Krishna Janmashtami in Kachua Dham (in present-day North 24 Parganas of West Bengal state). His father was Ramnarayan Ghoshal and his mother was Kamala Devi.

Plate 46 & 47 : Loknath Mission





**f. Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math, Ganga Sagar Ashram-** Srila Bhakti Raksak Sridhar Dev Goswami Maharaja is the founder Acharya of the Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math in Nabadwip, West Bengal, India. The Math was founded in 1941, in line with the Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya, a monotheistic tradition within Vedic/Hindu culture. Our worship centres around the chanting of the Holy names of our Sri Sri Radha-Govinda deities.

Srila Sridhar Maharaj was the foremost disciple of Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Thakura - founder of the *Sri Gaudiya Math* with sixty-four branches throughout India. In Gangasagar , there is also a very important branch of **Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Math**.

**g. Gangasagar Nigamananda Saraswata Savashram- Swami Nigamananda** Paramahansa (born Nalinikanta Chattopadhyay; 18 August 1880– 29 November 1935 is a Sadguru,yogi, guru and mystic well known in Eastern India. He is associated with the Shakta tradition and viewed as a perfect spiritual master of tantra, gyan, yoga and prema or bhakti. His followers idealized him as their worshipped and beloved thakura.

Nigamananda was born into a Bengali Brahmin family in the hamlet of Kutabpur in Nadia district (at present Meherpur district Bangladesh). He was a sannyasi from Adi Shankar's dashanami sampradaya. After his ordination as a sannyasi, he came to be known as Paribrajakacharya Paramahansa Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Deva.



Plate 48 : Nigamananda Ashram

Plate 49 : Arya Rishi ashram



**i. Biswa Hindu Parishad , Madhab Ashram-**

Plate 50 : Madhab Ashram





### **5.C.NAGA SADHU AT GANGASAGAR MELA (NAGA SADHU LIFE)**

Naga Baba or Naga Samadhi, in real sense, 'Nude Yogi' means a part of the Shaivite Sadhus. Their physical appearance of ash-covered bodies and matted dreadlocks resembling Lord Shiva comes from being Shaivites or followers of Lord Shiva. They take vows of celibacy, leave social norms and live in the Himalayas. Having control of their basic intentions by spreading under their heads, having the ability to stay cool without the cover, makes Naga Baba a very respected group of saints. Naga Baba did not agree so much at night and went to different levels, to become the father of Naga Baba, to leave the final state from initiation. The life of Naga life style is thought to be about to return to the tertiary era established by Dattatreya, but they were assembled by Adi Shankaracharya. They are sometimes called 'Warrior Volunteers' and are considered to be the ultimate laborers of Hindu traditional religion. Even today Naga Baba gets a train on the train.

[Gangasagar Mela](#) is an important event for Naga Baba's, because it is the only time when he comes down from the Himalayas. There is a time when there is a time when the initiation ceremony of saints is held in the house. Because of the state of pursuing austerities and knowledge they followed, Naga Sadhus earned the respectable rights to take the first holy landing during the devastation. The entire schedule of every Kunalpanthi is designed in such a way that Naga Baba always bathed in holy water of the Ganges, Godavari, Jamuna and Shipar. Naga Sadhus 'Akhtar' part, or a camp. Naga Saints can be any of Shaivit Akhtar - Zuna Akhoro is considered to be the oldest and most lasting person, which includes Naga Baba and several saints and saints. They often show smoking marijuana using 'Chilean'. Media and fair participants are passionate about Naga Baba's, and many love their attention too. There is the 'Rudraksh wale baba' who wears a huge 20-25-kilogram headpiece made of rudraksh beads; the 'Jata wale baba' who has grown hair on his head as well as beard extremely long to put on display. 'Goggle wale baba' always sunglasses don; And 'Nails wale baba' who have cut their nails in a really long time, among others.



Plate 51 & 52 : Naga Sannyasis



#### **5.4. PRESENCE OF VILLAGE DEITIES (GRAM DEVETA) -GODDESS BISHALAKSHMI, MANASA , SHITALA AND MANY MORE.**

Village Deities or type of folk deity widely worshiped in rural West Bengal they continue to be propitiated with animal sacrifices as a way of warding off and removing epidemics, crop failures, and other natural disasters. They are worshiped in the form of earthenware icons or shapeless stones, established in simple shrines or on platforms set up under a village tree. Their beliefs stood apart from mainstream Hinduism and Islam. Folk religion here, as represented by local syncretic cults, had a distinctive aura of its own. There are Gods and Goddesses of woodcutters, honey gatherers, beeswax gatherers, boatbuilders and most desperate cultivators. There are deities with whom man in the forest could identify himself. Throughout our study area from Kakdwip, Diamond Harbour to Namkhana to Sagar, we find the prominence of Tiger Gods and Goddesses.

– Bishalakshmi . Bishalakshmi is the ancient Tribal Goddess. From the ancient times she was mostly worshipped by the forest clearing community. Bishalakshmi protects these people from snakes, wild animals and most importantly tigers. In the earlier times, Devi Image was either a piece of wood or stone. The lower castes like Kaibartya, Moule, Baule, Farmers, Poundra, Bagdi, Hanri mostly used to worship this Deity. The worshipping method was very simple. The priest was Non-Brahmin. The ingredients were local green leafy vegetables, jaggery, beetle leaves etc

At a distance of just 50- 70 feet from the river Hugli in Mandirtala stands the beautiful temple to Bishalakshmi Shitala with colourful portraits carved on the walls, in the style of the Mednipur permanent constructions. The temple faces the east while behind the idols on the west lies the river. It is estimated that prayers have been offered to the goddess Bishalakshmi Shitala for hundreds of years. The image of the goddess within the temple is beautifully adorned. Concerts of ‘Mangalik’ songs dedicated to Bishalakshmi Shitala are held here. Outside the grill gate of the temple is the replica of a small, crouching tiger. This reminds the visitor of the fact that these islands were earlier jungles which was also the habitat of the tiger. It will not be wrong to conclude that to escape from the tiger the people prayed for protection to Bishalakshmi/ Shitala. The priest at the temple at the moment is the Odiya Brahmin Jibananda Mahapatra (58 years of age) who had settled down in Mednipur. In front of the temple is the ‘Tulsimancha’ constructed in the celebrated style of Mednipur, with beautiful carvings; it is apparent that this style is also popular in the region. Close by on a low



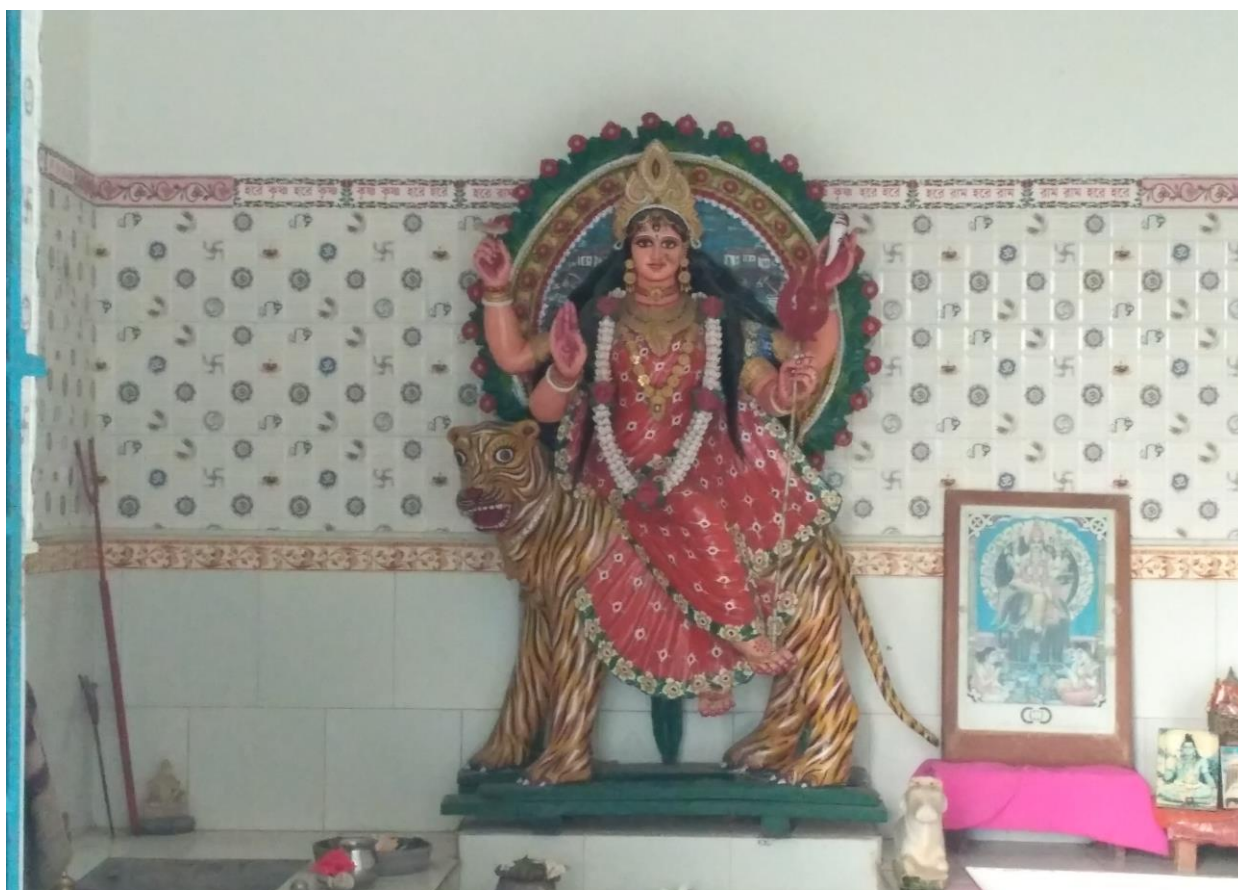
stage can be seen two mounds made of cement. Upon enquiry it was revealed that Muslim Maulvis from neighbouring villages come here to pray to these symbolic representations of the Hindu deities. However among those present there- Panchanan Mohapatra (55), Gurupada Mondal (34) and Asim Mohapatra (25), none could clarify which gods and goddesses the mounds represented nor the names of those who performed the 'Puja'. The researcher could not verify whether the traditions of the Sagar islands which were part of the south 24 Parganas continued alongside the cultural traditions of Medinipur. However with time Bishalakshmi Devi got an image form. The Non-Brahmin Priest was replaced by Brahmin Priest. There are 2 major ancient Bishalakshmi Idols in Sagar Island. One inside the Kapil Muni Temple, Gangasagar and another in Bishalakshmi Pur, Dhoblat. Beside these 2, there are several earthen Bishalakshmi Devi idols all over Sagar Block. In Ghoramara Island also there is an ancient Bishalakshmi Temple.



Plate 53 & 54 : Gram Devata , Bishalakshmi



Plate 55 & 56 : Different forms of Bishalakshmi Devi





The other female deities - The worship of the snake goddess Manasa, popular in rural Bengal, belongs primarily to the domain of the womenfolk and is part of their daily struggle against adversity through a plea for divine intervention. Simple domestic worship to Manasa forms part of the large repertoire of rituals, chanting and narration through which rural women seek to placate rural goddesses who, on the whole find little mention in Vedic Hinduism. Though the snake does occupy an important supportive role in Hindu myths as part of Shiva's girdle, the crown of his matted locks or in Vishnu's canopy, Manasa as a snake goddess may be traced back to pre-Aryan goddess mythology. Literary historian, Asit Kumar Bandopadhyay, believes that goddesses like Manasa, Chandī, Sheetala, Shashti and Bashuli, are, even today, worshipped by rural women within their homes with simple non-Vedic rituals. He argues that this form of worship may be traced back to the tribes of Proto-Australoid origin who inhabited the plains of eastern India before Aryan settlement. Vestiges of this culture and form of worship lingered on amidst the lowest castes of the Hindu hierarchy who mingled easily with the tribes even after the Aryan influence swept the region.

**Manasa devi** - Manasa was originally a Adivasi (tribal) goddess. She was accepted in the pantheon worshipped by Hindu lower caste groups. Later, she was included in higher caste Hindu pantheon, where she is now regarded as a Hindu goddess rather than a tribal one. Bhattacharya and Sen suggest that Manasa originated in South India as a non-Vedic and non-



Plate 57 : Manasa Devi



Aryan goddess and is related to the Kannada folk snake-goddess Manchamma. According to Tate, Manasa as Jaratkaru was initially recognized as a daughter of sage Kashyapa and Kadru, the mother of all Nāgas in the Hindu epic Mahabharata



Plate 58 : The influence of the goddess Shitala is found in Basanti, Gosaba and throughout South 24 Parganas. The same may be applicable for the goddess Manasa. The worship of Manasa is prevalent among people of the Bagdi community, especially in Joynagar, Barasat and Neempith. On the other hand, worship of goddess Shitala is prevalent among the Rajbangshis residing in Basanti and Gosaba.



**Shitala Devi-** Shitala is represented as a young maiden crowned with a winnowing-fan, riding a donkey, holding a short broom (either to spread or dust off germs) and a pot full of pulses (the viruses) or cold water (a healing tool). Among low-caste Hindus and tribal communities, she is represented with slab-stones or carved heads. Sometimes, she is said to be carrying a bunch of neem (*Azadirachta indica*) leaves, a medicinal herb used throughout India since ancient times that is believed by some to be an effective remedy to most skin diseases to this day.

Shitala is the form of folk demi-goddess Katyayani. She gives coolness to the patients of fever. According to Devi Mahatyam, when a demon named Jvarasura gave bacterial fever to all the children, goddess Katyayani came in the form of Shitala to purify children's blood and to destroy the bacteria of fever in blood. In Sanskrit 'jvara' means "fever" and 'shīṭala' means "coolness". Shitala is sometimes also depicted with Jvarasura, the fever demon; Ghentu-debata, the god of skin diseases; Raktabati, the goddess of blood infections and the sixty-four epidemics; and is often worshiped with [Oladevi](#), another disease goddess (some say of cholera).

She is also depicted enthroned in an 8 handed form



Plate 59 : Shitala Devi

holding trident, broom, discus (cakra), jar of abrasia or pot full of water, branches of neem, Scimitar, conch and vard mudra. She is also flanked by 2 donkeys. This depiction has established her as a goddess of protection, good fortune, health, and power.



Plate 60 : Jaratkaru is a rishi (sage) in Hindu mythology. He is the husband of the serpent-goddess Manasa (sister of Vasuki) and father of their son Astika. Husband and wife has same name as Jaratkaru. But here Jaratkaru Muni is seen with Shitala Devi.



The second most important fair after Gangasagar Mela in Sagar Block is Naga mela at Manasadwip. This fair or mela started about 30- 40 years ago after a local doctor, Shibendu Roy, is to have been bitten by a snake; it continues for 8- 10 days in the month of Agrahan. Potters, blacksmiths, craftspeople and artisans come with their wares to this ‘mela’ according to Ramkrishna Bera. Swarnagopal informed the writer that on RasPurnima, Manasa Puja with the attendant mela, is organised in Dhablat. It is here that in the past the subterranean tributary of the Ganga used to meet the Bay of Bengal and the Gangasagarmela is held to the west of this region. In the month of Bhadra, Manasa Puja is held and Asim Mahapatra informed the writer that Shitala-Bishalakshmi Puja is performed during the months of Phalgun, Chaitra, Baisakh, Joistho in Chakalphuldubi. People of the older generation such as Panchanan Mahapatra, aged 55 year, of Mandirtala referred to the deity in the temple as BishalakshmiShitala and this is also mentioned on the plate outside the temple. However those in the age- group of 25- 35 years like Asim Mahapatra referred to the deity as Shitala Bishalakshmi. This may be an indication that in the ancient past both was forest deities. But due to social and economic changes, the importance of goddess Shitala is gaining in ascendancy among the younger generation.



Plate61 : Naga Mela

**Bindubasini Devi** The practice of chewing Paan (Betel leaf) with Betel nut is widespread in India. It is not only intimately connected with social but with religious life too. Its utility is proved by being in every ritual and worship. It is an item which is inevitable in religious ceremonies or functions. The name of the Betel vine, Piper Betel, is derived via the Portuguese, from the Malayalam or Tamil 'vettile'.

In our study area , particularly in the southern blocks of Sagar , Namkhana & Kakdwip , one of the major occupation of the people is centred around Betel Vines. **Bindubasini Devi** is considered to be as the Betel Vine Devi.

**Chileswari Devi-** There is a unique Goddess worshipped in the Majher Para of Abdalpur Village of Parulia Gram Panchayet of Diamond Harbour 1 block. Her name is Chileswari Devi.. According to Dinesh Pathak (48/49years) ,he is worshipping here for 25/26 years. Before him , there were 3 generations of priests who all were worshipping Goddess Chileswari. According to the local resident Nepal Purokayet (43) this puja is going on for 140 years . According to Tapan Haldar ( 59) this puja is going on for 5 generations . He informed us that according to Bengali calendar , in every Tuesdays and Saturdays of Magh /Falgun month the Puja is conducted. The women folk keep fasting till the puja is conducted. There is no temple of Devi Chileswari. She is worshipped under a Tamal Tree along with Shiv,Manasa, Sheetala , Lakshmi and Kali in a raised cemented platform. Chileswari Devi is worshipped as Devi Durga. According to the local dwellers, many years before this area of Abdalpur along Hugli River became inundated . One kite (CHIL) took shelter in this Tamal Tree (*Cinnamomum tamala*) for certain time. From that incident this place became Chileswaritala. The priest however indicated Chileswari Devi as Devi Durga. She is worshipped in the Durga Mantra. It is very unique incident where a local deity turns into Brahmanical Deity , Devi Durga but still worshipped in an open ground only under a tree. Beside this platform there is a huge hall where Rakkhe Kali is worshipped. Charak and Gajan are also performed in this place in the Chaitra month of Bengali Calender ( March/April) .





Plate 62– Chileswari Than ( Raised Platform) where Devi is worshipped under the Tamal Tree.

Plate 63– Adjoining Hall where Rakkhe Kali is worshipped.



Plate 64– Bindubasini Devi Idol



## 5.6. THE TRADITION OF COMMUNAL HARMONY THROUGH BONOBI, DAKKHIN RAI AND OTHERS...

**Bono Bibi and Dakkhin Rai** -The Sundarban forest lies in the vast delta on the Bay of Bengal formed by the super confluence of the Ganges, Hooghly, Padma, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers across southern Bangladesh. Sundarbans is the largest marshy forest in the world. Sundarbans in Bangla language means beautiful forest. There are hundreds of islands in the Sundarbans spread over 10 thousand square kilometres. The dense forest spread over the marshy area has a wide variety of animals. Here 50 species of mammals, 315 types of birds and 315 types of reptiles are found. However, the Sundarbans are most famous for the **Royal Bengal Tiger**. Many times, it attacks the people living here and takes life too. Every year around 60 people fall prey to the Royal Bengal Tiger. Nevertheless, humans and these ferocious animals have lived together in the Sundarbans for centuries. Their faith unites the villagers of Sundarbans against all these dangers. This faith is towards a goddess. In the Sunderbans there are 4 ‘tiger’ deities. Even in the more recently constructed temple, one finds tigers placed outside its walls. There are

Plate 65 : BonoBibi



Hindus as well as Muslims. All the people of Sundarbans bow towards this goddess before they travel towards the jungles. This goddess of the Hindu-Muslims of Sundarbans is known as Bonbibi. When animals attack, they do not differentiate between Hindus and Muslims. That is why people of both the communities worship **Bonbibi** here. She is called the patron goddess of the Sundarbans. She teaches them that when your need is fulfilled in the forest, then you return. Do not be tempted too much. Both Hindus and Muslims believe that Bonbibi was sent from heaven to the earth

for their protection. It is also famous in the Sundarbans that Bonbibi was born in a Muslim family. When she went to Mecca for Haj, she got divine power. After this, she travelled 5 thousand kilometres and came to Sundarbans from Saudi Arabia. Then Bonbibi reached Sundarbans. At that time, the deep dark jungle, known for its dangerous man-eater tigers, was ruled by a ghostly shrewd tyrant named 'Dakshin Rai' (the god of South). He is the one responsible for human sacrifices to tigers. Bonbibi defeated Dakshin Rai. Then he begged for forgiveness and promised that he would prevent tigers from attacking humans. Since then, Bonbibi became the ruler of Sundarbans. Dakshin Rai is believed to have fled into the jungles. He now takes the form of a tiger and attacks people. Dakshin Ray, known as the supreme lord of tigers, is widely worshipped throughout the whole of the Sundarbans in both parts of Bengal even today. He is usually seated upon a tiger and is often accompanied by his brother or companion Kalu Ray. Dakshin Ray is worshipped not only as the god of tigers but also as a divine curer. In the Sundarbans, where death can come quickly, its inhabitants have worshipped Bonbibi and Dakshin Rai for centuries to seek protection from the dangers of the forests.

Plate 66 & 67 : Bonobibi & Dakkhin Rai



The name Bonbibi literally means lady of the forest. Since the appellation bibi is used by Muslim women as an all-purpose surname, that makes it a unique name for a Bengali

goddess. Daughter of a sufi fakir, Bonbibi is the great adversary of Dokkhin Rai, literally southern lord. Rai is a zamindar who takes the form of a tiger to prey on the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. Allah chooses Bonbibi to end Dokkhin Rai's tyranny – a task accomplished easily enough after a short trip to Mecca and Medina. The Bibi, however, decides not to kill Rai and instead makes him promise that he will not harm anyone who worships her. In the Sundarbans, where death can come quickly, its inhabitants have worshipped Bonbibi for centuries as protection from the jungle's many dangers. However, the worship of Bonbibi is receding now as modernity intrudes into the jungle. In Bokkhali, and even in Gangasagar, Bono Bibi is translating into Bono Devi .



**Gazi Pir (also called Ghazi Pir, Gaji Pir, Barkhan Gaji or Gaji Saheb)** was a Bengali Muslim pir (saint) who lived in the 12th or 13th century during the spread of Islam in Bengal. He was known for his power over dangerous animals and controlling the natural elements. As the new local Muslim population of southern Bengal were settling in the dense forests of the Ganges delta, these were important qualities. His life is shown on the "Gazi Scroll", a scroll with 54 paintings from circa 1800, which is currently in the British Museum in London, England.

In the villages of the Sundarbans jungles, Gazi Pir is worshiped alongside the Bonbibi and the Hindu Dakshin Rai, to ask for protection from tigers. According to the legends, Bonbibi taught that everyone is equal, no matter the caste or religion that one has, and that they should live in harmony with nature.



Plate 68 : Pir Gazi and his tiger in Sundarbans, Bengal, India, around 1800 CE



**The Tale of Gazi, Kalu, and Chompabati** - The tale of Gazi Zinda Pir (Gazi) or Bara Khan Gazi, starts when Gazi refuses his father, King Shah's command to inherit Kingship. Furious King Shah punished Gazi by throwing him into flames. Gazi fled to the Sundarbans with his adopted brother, Kalu, where Gazi learned to tame the Royal Bengal Tiger. This made him renowned as the "Tiger God". Gazi, Kalu and many tigers (which were follower of Gazi) travelled through different Kingdoms and spread Islam. Eventually they reached at a region name Brahmannagar – where all inhabitants were Hindu. Gazi fell in love with Chompabati – daughter of Hindu King Mukut Rai. Gazi sent his brother Kalu to Mukut Rai with a proposal to marry Chompabati. Mukut Rai, however, imprisoned Kalu. Gazi became furious and attacked the Kingdom of Mukut Rai kingdom with his tigers. After the defeat Mukut Rai and the local inhabitant accepted Islam as their religion. Gazi finally got to marry Chompabati. At present, Gazi, Kalu and Chompabati are recalled by the locals for safety and anticipation of spiritual interventions into the problems they face in life.



Plate 69: Crocodile demon of Gazi Kalu Champabati, Bengal, India, around 1800 CE

### **The worshipping of Baba Panchanan, Saat bibi , Gazi baba...**

In Doltala of Parulia Village , Diamond Harbour 1 block, there is a raised platform with small cement mounds venerating SaatBibi and Gazibaba have been constructed outside the temple sanctum sanctorum. They line the wall that has been newly constructed around the courtyard where the offerings of fruit, flowers etc. are arrayed. Brahmin pandits offer Puja, or worship in the main temple, while RaziaBibi, aged 50 years, of Bhushana village, offers worship at the shrines of Saat Bibi and Gazi Baba. This practice has continued for the last 30- 40 years and prior to this her paternal grandmother and father would perform the Puja. She mentioned that she was also the Priest of another 10 shrines dedicated to Saat Bibi and Gazibaba in Diamond Harbour. This was a clear indication of the fact that communal harmony was a way of life in this district. A large congregation gathers for the Pujas at this temple. The worship of Panchanan is also found in Tollygunge and Behala, in Kolkata; the locality named Panchanantala, in Dhakuria in Kolkata, bears witness to the worship of Panchanan having taken place there in the past. In South 24 Parganas, in places situated on the shores of the Bay of Bengal such as Namkhana, Kakdwip, Patharpratima, Maipith, from where people had to relocate to other areas in the past due to severe natural disasters, and among the later settlers from Mednipur, we do not find evidence of the worship of Panchanan or SaatBibi. It is the worship of the goddesses Manasa and Shitala that is prevalent here. The worship of Panchanan, SaatBibi and Gazi Baba is found in the areas where the Adivasis live.



Plate 70 : Baba Panchanan , Saat Bibi & Gazi Babab





Plate 71 & 72 : Rituals & Bhog during pujas

In the forest, to the left of the temple stands a banyan tree devoid of branches or roots. Approximately 40 women and men, mainly of middle- age, had gathered there for performing the rites of burning of the “dhuna” or incense, for fulfilment of their intentions. This is a very interesting practice and certainly worth watching. In an open space in front of the temple are seated the novices in 2 or 3 rows and they are assisted in the performing of the ritual by their relatives or volunteers. The novices sit cross- legged on the ground and on their heads, shoulders, the palms of their hands which are placed on their knees- in seven parts of their body, are placed burning earthen ware lamps or lit vessels made of burnt clay. These lamps are first placed on straw binders or on wet towels so that the fire does not come into direct contact with any body part. The vessel placed on the head of the devotee rests on a wet towel and thorny spikes of the “kul” or Indian plum are ignited; if a man throws incense on these thorns they burst into flames. After this is done a few times, the volunteers remove the pots to indicate that the devotee has successfully completed the ritual. Many people gather to watch this ceremony. The “dhunoporano” ceremony is also organised during the worship of the local deities, in the areas where the original settlers of the Sunderbans live. In the evening, after the worship of Panchanan, Manasa, Shitala, Bibi Ma is over, when the full moon rises, the “chanchor” festival begins. The narrator had visited the area during “Dolmela” a festival that is as famous in the region as is the place where it is held- “Doltala”. However when he reached there he found a permanent temple constructed for Panchanan, Manasha and Shitala and a ‘pucca’ room for Bibi Ma but there was no designated space ear- marked for “Dol”. Some distance away from the temple a medium- sized pandal had been erected and a low, mud platform with many steps had been constructed there for placing a swing with Radha- Krishna idols in it. The fair consisted of shops selling a variety of goods, there were 2 shops selling traditional Indian sweets made from flour- “khaja”, “gaja”etc. along with a few other food stalls. A total of around 20 stalls had been set up. The visitor also saw 2 stages, where he was told that ‘jatra’ and ‘gajan’- the popular folk plays of South 24 Parganas, were performed. Stick or rod puppet shows also took place at the festival. It is said that earlier the fair continued for a month or a month and a half but now it lasts for 8 days.





Plate 73 , 74 & 75 : Baba Panchanan



### **The worshipping of Chinese God Khuda Khudi**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century a Chinese tea trader by the name of Tong Achew landed on the banks of Hugli, somewhere near present day Budge – Budge, never to return again. The then Governor General Warren Hasting granted land to Achew to set up a sugar cane plantation and sugar factory. According to records to British East India Company “Achew was granted 650 bighas of land about 6 miles south of Budge – Budge for an annual rent of Rs 45.” It is said that when Tong Achew came here, he brought 2 idols with him. These idols are still worshipped in Chinese Temple near China man tala of Budge Budge. The temple houses the male & female deity of Khuda & Khudi. Although distinctively Chinese in appearance their head gears are predominantly Islamic. Although legends says that the Temple was established by Achew himself, but historians doubt about its authenticity. It is quite likely that the Temple was established at a later date but the idols of Khuda & Khudi are quiet likely to be brought in by Achew himself. The Chinese however refer to these as Tudigong / Thu Tai Kung (Khuda / Dharti Pita) and Tudiphow / Thu Tai Phow (Khudi / Dharti Mata). Tudigong is revered as the “Lord of the Soil and the Ground” while Tudiphow is his consort. In the main temple compound, you will also find a large table which during Chinese New Year festivities are filled with offerings like whole roasted pigs, fruits, alcohol, etc. Families coming from Kolkata bring them as offerings.



Plate 76: Chinese God & Goddess

All year Achipur remains a quiet, sleepy village, transforming into a fairground in the weeks following the Chinese New Year. This is when thousands of Chinese descend on the village, to pay their respects to Tai Pak Kung, as Atchew is known to the Chinese community, which roughly translates to the ‘biggest grandfather’ or ‘godfather’. Many Chinese who have migrated out of Kolkata, visit the city from as far away as Canada and the United States for this annual pilgrimage. At Atchew’s tomb, symbolic paper money is burned and incense sticks are offered. At the temple incense sticks burn continuously, filling the sanctum sanctorum with white smoke. In front of the sanctum, offerings of food and wine are made. These often include roasted suckling pigs as well as whole fish and chicken along with Chinese wine.

## 5.7. THE CONCEPT OF POT WORSHIPPING –

Throughout our study area we find there is a custom of worshipping pots ( heads ) in different forms. The heads are either made up of metals or of clay. Amongst these iconography , the most interesting one is Bara Thakur Puja. **Barathakur-** Another very interesting idol which is worshipped throughout South 24 Parganas is the Bara Thakur . The earthen pot with only the head . Many believes that this head is actually of Dakkhin Ray that is it is actually the worshipping of Dakkhin Ray. According to Bengali calendar the entire Magh Month ( January –February ) this Bara Thakur Puja takes place. A pair of idols are worshipped during this Puja. The idols are really spectacular in appearance. Both of them have huge spade shaped throne decorated by red and black ornamental motifs. The eyes are big and resembles some ancient African features. One idol has huge moustache demarcating it as the male God and the other is devoid of it. They are worshipped as Dakkhin Roy or Bonobibi , sometimes Dakkhin Roy and his mother Narayani Devi or Bara-Jhara or Lakshmi –Narayan.



Plate 77 , 78 & 79 : Pot Worshipping tradition





Plate 80 & 81 : Different forms of Bara Thakur



Plate 82 : In Namkhana area , Lakshmi Ganesh pots are also worshipped widely . But these are not so widely found in other areas.



Plate 83 : Throughout Sagar Block , we find the deities worshipped in metal pots. The full image of Deities are mostly made of clay and are immersed after every Puja .







Plate 84 : Metal Pots of Kali , Bishalakshmi , Ganesh , Plate 85 : The full images are also found during occasions. They are immersed after puja





## **5.8. BELIEFS AND RITUAL PRACTICES OF ARTISANAL COASTAL/MARINE FISHERS**

The brackishness/salinity of the Sundarbans waters, as mentioned earlier, renders the soil only selectively fit for the usual crops. This accounts for the considerable attraction of the Sundarbans rivers, and the pressure on them. The present fishing population in the Sundarbans area consists broadly of three categories—migrants from Purba Medinipur, migrants from present Bangladesh, and fishers who are descendants of the first fisher settlers in the region and, who, more often than not, are fishers by family tradition. The migrants from Bangladesh (mostly Khulna, to some extent from Barisal and Chittagong) who have taken up fishing are also largely from traditional fishing families. Sundarbans fishers who are migrants from Purba Medinipur (perhaps the largest demographic component), however, are mostly cultivators turned fishers.

Artisanal fishers (riverine and coastal) have unique worldviews comprising perceptions, traditions, beliefs, orientations, attitudes, and rituals. The beliefs and rituals of fishing communities could be divided into pre-voyage rituals, first setting of nets and catching of fish, and then various rituals prior to winding up from the sea.

**Rituals observed by Hindu fishers :** Before a voyage, fishers prepare the boat through



painting with a black coating of alkatra (bitumen-based paint) and sun drying. The process is repeated few times. Fishers also sun-dry the nets, it is believed that tanning makes the nets sacred and free from evil forces. Fishers usually start preparing the boats and nets from the 1st day of Ashwin (mid-September) and start their voyage on the 1st day of Kartik (mid-

October). Fishers eat “water-rice” offered at “dhanya purnimar brata” (paddy-moon ritual)

Plate 86 : The boats are worshipped before fishing voyage



before starting a fishing trip. Fishers believe starting fishing from late Kartik (first two weeks of November) would ensure conservation of marine resources. They have experienced that if started during early Kartik (late October) massive amount of immature fishes are caught in nets.

Fishers worship the deity **Ganga**, who has two different interpretations, firstly, the deity (with four hands, who travel on an imaginary marine animal Mokor), and secondly, the water body (sea/coast = gaang) . It is believed that Ganga wanders in the sea; She blesses fishers with catches and protects them from danger. Before a voyage, a ceremony for worshipping the Ganga is organized following the almanac. The priest performs the worship uttering hymns and lyrics while fishers and their family participate. Then the priest performs “fire sacrifice” (homa jaggya) by igniting dry mango woods. The priest then mixes ash with butter to put imprint of the paste on the forehead of the sea-going fishers. For the safety of the boats a process of “humanisation” is conducted. In an earthen pot Holy water of the river Ganga is mixed with some coconut water. A mango twig with five green leaves is placed on the top of the pot which is kept on baran dala (a flat plate, usually made of bamboo). This holy water is



sprinkled on the boat, nets, and goje (anchors) by the fisherwomen while the fishermen beat drums and loudly chants the name of the Ganga. Fisherwomen throw eggs into the seawater to divert evil forces of the sea. Fishers keep the baran dala prepared during the humanisation of the boats and tools during the whole time they fish in the sea. The baran dala is usually filled with dried paddy, vermilion, oil, candles, few green belpata (leaves of Bengal Quince/ Indian Bael), five mango leaf in a twig, durba gash (grass), sesame and mustard seeds till the end of the voyage. All these ingredients are sacrificed into the sea on the day of homecoming. Fishers keep images of different deities and saints inside boat. Once the fishers identify a fishing spot, the majhi (steerer) anchors the boat and sanctifies the spot by sprinkling holy water in anticipation of “good luck”. From the first catch, fishers usually sacrifice one fish of every varieties caught back into the water for Ganga and other deities. Fishers do not set up their nets in certain “sacred areas” as it would be disliked by the deity Ganga (see Deb 2018).

These sites are known as the breeding sites of fish and prawn, and hence, the belief contributes in conservation of fishery resources. Once fishing is completed, Hindu fishers sprinkle holy water and offer a plain prayer with rice, banana and sugar to the deity Ganga for her supports and blessings to pull off the goje (bamboo or iron anchor/ nail) from the sea floor as anchoring nails sometimes get stuck due to silting. While returning, fishers become emotional chanting hymns for deity Ganga and sacrifice the preserved baran dala on the seawater.



Plate 87 : Ganaga deity worshipped in different forms , Tapovan , Ganga sagar

There are other rituals that fishers, their family members and villagers perform. They worship Lord Shani in the early dark night of Saturday (Saturn=Shani) to get rid of “misfortune” in the sea. Mongal Chondi worship is performed on Tuesday evenings (especially during Jaistha

- late May to mid-June) for “good order” of family members at sea. Bipodnashini is worshipped on Tuesday, Saturday, and especially on the 3rd lunar day of the full moon fortnight in Ashar (late June to mid-July) to keep away all sorts of “disasters”. Newly married fisherwomen remain totally devoted to the worship events of Ganga/Durga/Shiva fearing that any mistake might render them to “cyclone widow” in future.



Plate 88 : Shani Dever Mandir ,  
Namkhana

**Rituals observed by Muslim fishers** Having monotheistic faith, Muslim fishers observe relatively few rituals. Prior to voyage, they clean the boat and nets with three buckets of clean water, and then cover up boat’s front with a large piece of clean cloth. An Imam/ Moulana (priest) from the local mosque conducts Milad (prayers) requesting overall safety during the voyage. Owner of the boat, fishermen and their family, and elderly people from the locality participate in the prayers. During prayer, the Imam recites verses from the Quran (the verses may vary). Similarly, few verses are hymned when fishers face any problem in the sea. The priest recites verses from the Quran and blows air into a glass of water. This water is sprinkled on the boat, nets, hooks, traps, etc. Muslim fishers usually start on Friday after performing Jumma prayer. After the prayer shinni/ firni (sweet dish made with rice, sugar,



and milk) and sweets are distributed among the attendees. Before stepping into the boat, fishers together pray seeking blessings from Allah. Similarly, before setting the nets for the first time in the season, the Majhi (steerer) gargles with “in situ” water (sea water) and says “bismillahir rahmanir rahim” (“we are starting in the name of Allah”).



Plate 89 : A typical fishing trawler used for bulk fishing

## **5.8. TRADITIONAL & MODERN LITERATURE**

A. Punthis - Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries there thrived in lower deltaic Bengal *punthi* literature in Bengali versed devoted to the Gods and Goddesses of Sundarbans. This literature reflected elements of the surroundings in which it emerged. Its theme was struggle between humanity nature. Punthi literature arose to cater the most marginal section of the population. Their beliefs stood apart from mainstream Hinduism and Islam. This literature came into existence much before the British became fully hegemonic in Bengal, and was therefore not surprisingly free from colonial influence. In fact, punthi in particular, is a literature of transition prevalent during late pre-colonial and early colonial period in Bengal.

The population of Sundarbans consisted entirely of marginalized people. The Hindus were mainly of the following Sudra Castes; Napit, Kaibarta, Kapali, Pod, Chandal, Jalia, Bagdi, Tior, Dhoba, Jogi, Suri and Kaora. Among them the and Chandals are “most numerous” and Bagdis are “rather numerous”. All of them pursued a mix occupations, such as cultivation, wood cutting and fishing as means of subsistence. The largest muslim population of our study area are the Shaikhs (cultivators, woodcutters) followed by Sayyids and Pathans. Hunter also noted that Mirshikaris (hunters and fishermen), Sapurias (snake charmers and catchers) and Bediyas, all outcastes or gypsy tribes, had ‘professed Muhammadanism’. The tribes like Santhals, Mundas and Oraons were brought to reclaim the forests and then settled here. All these people dependent on forests and rivers of this region for their livelihood and had to perpetually struggle against the hazards of nature. As their weapons were inadequate, the people found recourse in divine intervention. Here are few texts originating from this conjecture which also reflects on the woes of the people.

**a. Raimanagal** – The Raimangal eulogizing the tiger God Dakshin Ray was written in 1686 by Krishna Ram Das. Later it was edited and published by Satyanarayan Bhattacharya on behalf of Calcutta University. There is also an incomplete undated manuscript of the Raimangal by Rudradev.

**b. Gazi Kalu Champavati Kanyar punthi** – was composed by Abdur Rahim. The date of composition is unknown. But it is presumably a late 19<sup>th</sup> century punthi.

**c. Bonobibi Jahuranama** – It is about Mother Goddess Banabibi. This was composed by Banayuddin in 1877. There is another version of the tale by Marhum Munshi Muhammad Khater entitled Banabibi Jahuranama written in 1880.



The three major focussed deities of these texts were –Dakshin Ray , Barakhan Gazi and Banabibi. At a first glance these texts would appear to be fantastic narratives about gods , goddesses and their interactions with humble men and women. Taken as documents of social reality , such texts would be poor in factual content. But these texts were meant not to depict reality , but to transform it magically.

### **B. The Sundarbans in Modern Bengali Fiction**

The Bengali prose literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave a new meaning to the idea of the Sundarbans in Bengali consciousness. In contrast to the earlier punthi literature , which had reflected elements of popular local beliefs , the new stories were expressions of an emerging middle class. Here stories have definite structures , social messages. Most of the stories depicted the life of the settlers in Sundarbans while continuing to draw on the old and intimate relationship between man and nature. Nature shaped their life and religious practices, human bondages and it explained their social dependence on the jungle for livelihood.

Some of the major Bengali Fictional works are –

- a. Damaru Charit by Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay - It is one of the earliest fictional works that describes the kind of fantasies created in the middle class middle class mind about Sundarbans.
- b. Mahesh Sardar by Jogindranath Sarkar – It is about the famous hunters of Sundarbans.
- c. Sundarbane Sat Bachhar by Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay romanticized the enchanting Sundarbans where human and animal lives entwined in a struggle for survival.
- d. Sundarbane Arjan Sardar –More than Mahesh Sardar , it was Sundarbaner Arjan Sardar by Shib Shankar Mitra that reflected the newly emerging preoccupation with realistic account of the Sundarbans and the notion of adventure and sport in form of hunting.
- e. Ban kete Basat by Manoj Baru is also a revealing account of the disappearing forest cover in Sundarbans.
- f. Bhu a story by Shankar Baru , deals exclusively with the rising social discontent of the peasantry in Sundarbans.

**g. The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh** - The Hungry Tide (2004) is the sixth novel by Indian-born author, Amitav Ghosh. It won the 2004 Hutch Crossword Book Award for Fiction. The novel explores topics like humanism and environmentalism, especially when they come into a conflict of interest with each other.

**h. Forest of Tides: The Untold Story of the Sunderbans** - Perhaps the most enigmatic of India's landscapes, the Sunderbans is a land where dense mangrove forests, a sprawling delta and rare wildlife come together to form one of the most biodiverse regions on earth. Till date, it remains amongst the most difficult terrains to live in. The locals lead precarious lives, battling not only nature - in the form of cyclones and animal attacks - but also an indifferent government that provides little infrastructural support. In Forest of Tides, Manisha Sobhrajani recounts her experience of living and working in the Sunderbans supervising the construction of a charitable hospital - from adjusting to a life without basic amenities to trying to build permanent structures with fishnet and plastic bottles, while navigating the pitfalls of local politics. Interwoven with stories about the people she encounters - honey-gatherers, wood-collectors, forest officials, even a former poacher - this deeply personal account paints a richly nuanced picture of a challenging yet extraordinary land.



## CHAPTER 6 – GHATS IN THE STUDY AREA

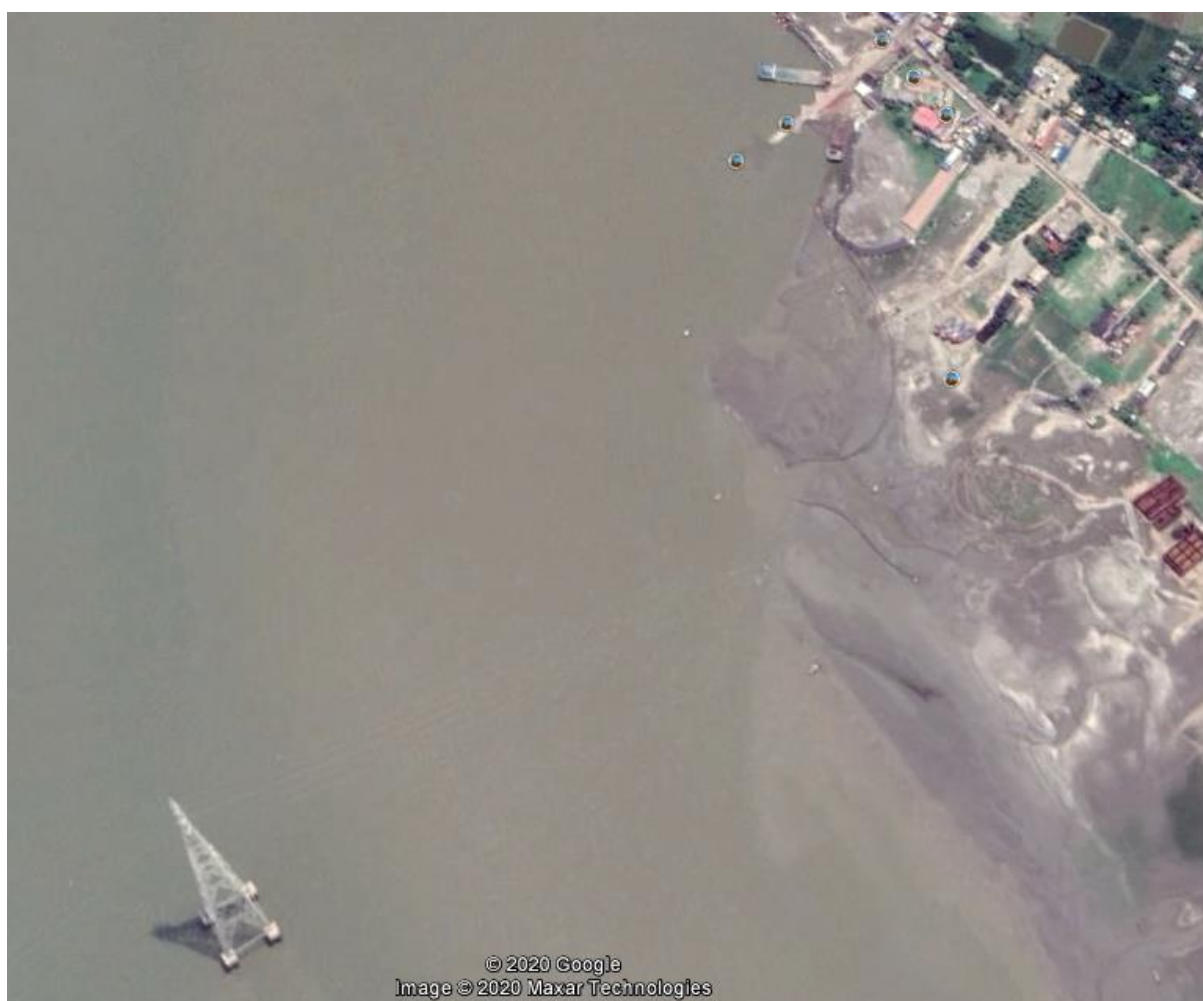
**6.1. GHATS IN THE STUDY AREA** –Hugli River in South 24 Parganas has comparatively less number of Ghats than that of the Adi Ganga which moves out through Joynagar , Majilpur, Chatrabhog and ultimately joins with Bay of Bengal through Bartala Creek or Saptamukhi Creek.

Our study area includes –Thakurpukur , Budge Budge I & II Block , Falta, Kulpee, Diamond Harbour I & II Block, Kakdwip , Sagar , Namkhana . Thukurpukur, Budge Budge , Falta, Kulpee are heavily industrialised and from Kakdwip onwards the characteristics are completely different . River becomes very wide after receiving Rupnarayan River and Damodar River near Falta at HugliPoint . Domestic usage is rare . Jetties and harbours ( fishing harbours ) are more found. There are innumerable brick Kilns along the river.

The List of Ghats and Jetties are as follows-

Sl.no	Ghats	Location
1.	Santoshpur Ferry Ghat	22°31'43.80"N 88°14'47.25"E
2.	Akra Ferry Ghat	<b>22°31'33.65"N</b> <b>88°14'42.00"E</b>
3.	Batanagar Ferry Ghat	22°30'53.03"N 88°12'46.14"E
4.	Budge Budge Ghat	22°29'42.13"N 88°11'17.05"E
5	Jhautala Ghat	22°28'59.23"N 88°10'27.75"E
6	Pujali Ghat	22°28'28.59"N 88° 8'37.85"E
7.	Achipur Ghat	22°28'10.85"N 88° 7'42.82"E
8.	Birlapur Ghat	22°25'14.44"N 88° 8'51.25"E
9.	Raipur	22°23'56.98"N 88° 8'23.00"E
10.	Burul	22°21'44.80"N 88° 6'16.38"E
11.	Boragachi-kantakhali Ferry Ghat	22°19'47.43"N 88° 6'8.78"E
12.	Falta Ferry Ghat	22°18'5.34"N 88° 6'19.69"E
13.	Falta Jetty	22°15'16.74"N 88° 5'18.49"E
14.	Noorpur Ghat	22°13'32.45"N 88° 4'41.42"E
15.	Noorpur Ferry Ghat	22°12'39.46"N 88° 4'17.72"E
16	Bhabanipur Ghat	22°12'34.64"N 88° 6'4.23"E

17.	Raichak Ferry Ghat	22°12'27.38"N 88° 7'9.54"E
18.	Raichak Ganga Kutir	22°12'21.85"N 88° 7'23.86"E
19.	Diamond Harbour Ghat	22°11'30.38"N 88°10'50.73"E
20.	Diamond Harbour Jetty	22°11'1.02"N 88°11'24.26"E
21.	Sultanpur Fishing Jetty	22°10'11.58"N 88°12'2.82"E
22.	8 No. Lot	21°53'26.55"N 88° 9'56.04"E
23.	8. No. Lot Jetty	21°52'51.34"N 88° 9'50.95"E



MAP 10 - 8 No. Lot , Kakdwip, Gateway to Sagar Dwip, Last point of Main Land



Plate 90 – 8 No. Lot Ghat , Kakdwip 21°53'26.95"N 88° 9'56.82"E

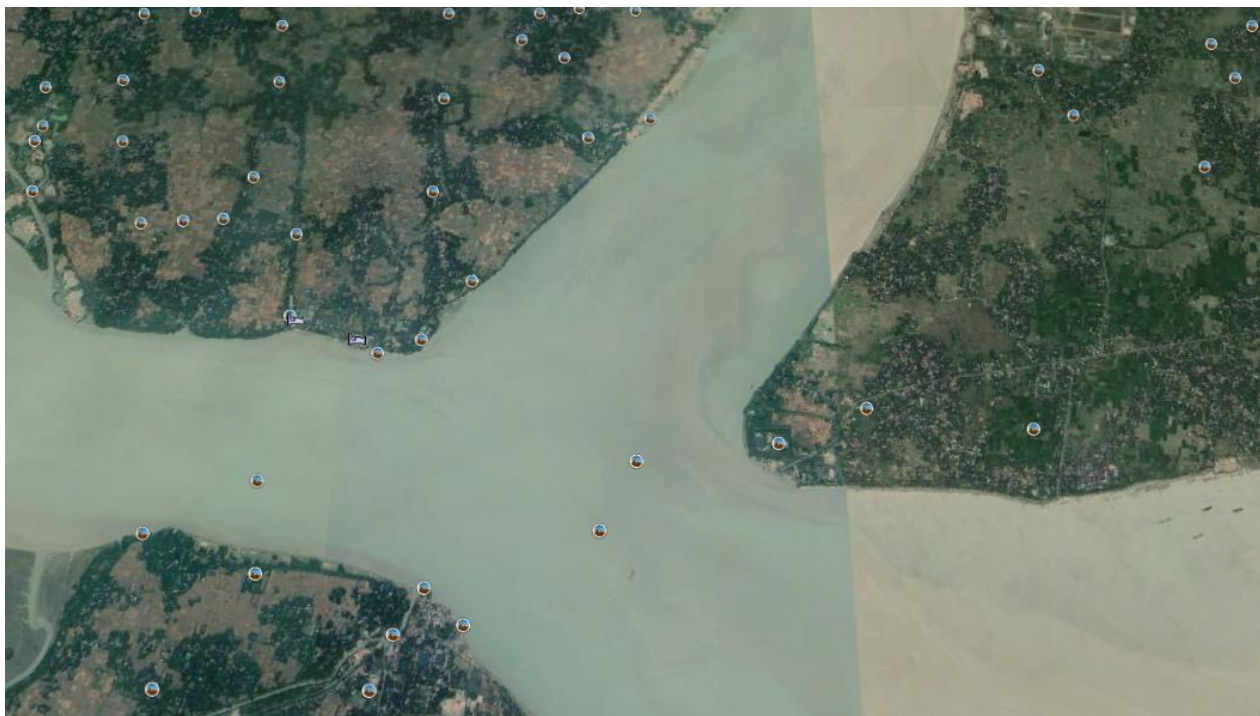


Plate 91 – Kochuberia Jetty, 21°51'32.13"N 88° 8'41.80"E





Map 11 - Kochuberia Ferry Ghat , Sagar



Map 12- Hugli Point , Confluence of Rupnarayan and Hugli River

**1. Budge Budge Ferry Ghat -** Swami Vivekananda landed at Budge Budge ferry ghat in 1897 when he returned from his Chicago visit. The anniversary is still celebrated on 19 February with great zeal. The old railway station from where he boarded the train to Calcutta is decorated with flowers on this day. The waiting room where he rested for a while is preserved.



Plate 92 : Budge Budge Ferry Ghat renamed as Komagata maru

Budge Budge was the site where the ship Komagata Maru was allowed to land following its return from Vancouver. The ship was chartered by a group of Sikhs to challenge the exclusion laws enacted by Canada to restrict Indian immigration. Upon entry into the harbour, the ship was stopped by a British gunboat, and the passengers were placed under guard. The government of the British Raj saw the men on the Komagata Maru not only as self-confessed lawbreakers, but also as dangerous political agitators. When the ship docked at Budge Budge, the police went to arrest Baba Gurdit Singh and the 20 or so other men that they saw as leaders. He resisted arrest, a friend of his assaulted a policeman and a general riot ensued. Shots were fired and 19 of the passengers were killed. Some escaped, but the remainder were arrested and imprisoned or sent to their villages and kept under village arrest



for the duration of the First World War. This incident became known as the Budge Budge Riot. Historically the oldest people of this city were the 'Haldars' who came here to guard a fort near the bank of the River Ganges. A British writer who had come with Clive around 1740-50 chronicled this event. Maniklal was the main person at the fort and his soldiers lost to Clive's troops.

Plate 93 : Budge Budge Ghat





**2. Achipur Ferry Ghat** - Achipur, a hamlet on the banks of the Hugli, is just like any other Bengal village. But 300 years ago, this village, 30 km from Taratala, bustled with activity and was dominated by the Chinese people. This was the first Chinese settlement in the country. On every Chinese New Year's Day and for the rest of that month, Achipur turns into a mini Chinatown. Thousands gather at the Chinese temple here, especially on Sundays, to celebrate the new year. Recently the members of Kolkata's Chinese community have pooled in nearly 50 lakh rupees to restore the temple and build boarding and lodging facilities for the community. East India Company documents show that a Chinese trader called Atchew Tong sailed into the village in the second decade of the 18th century and settled down. Others soon followed him. Atchew started a sugar plantation attached with a mill in the village. The Chinese temple which was built long ago by the Chinese people is the main attraction of this place. The temple has typical Chinese wooden carvings and Chinese deities, Khuda and Khudi, are worshipped here. The place offers a grand view of the river. A walk along the bank of the river lined with banyan trees to enjoy the river view to the fullest.



Plate 94 : Achipur Ferry Ghat



**Plate 95 : The grave of Tong Achew on the bank of the Hooghly (Ganga) river.**

The road lies through a brick kiln. Little is known about the strange-looking grave — a red horse-shoe shaped structure. Here too pilgrims follow the same routine of offering prayers, incense sticks and food, albeit on a smaller scale. The scenic river bank trills with the laughter of people as they pose for family pictures. The Chinese pilgrims are not averse to non-Chinese people visiting the temple or the grave, subject to maintaining discipline and not disrupting the rituals.

**3.Batanagar** - Batanagar is a neighbourhood of Maheshtala of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is a part of the area covered by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA). Batanagar was established to start the first shoe factory in India by Czechoslovak industrialist Tomáš Baťa. The Bata brand was established on 24 August 1894 in Zlín, then in Austria-Hungary (now in Czech Republic). The company first established itself in India in 1931 by renting a building to start an experimental shoe production plant in Konnagar with 75 Czechoslovak experts. Jan Antonín Baťa then built up an industrial manufacturing city called Batanagar in 1934, as well as other factories in

Delhi and Patna and elsewhere in India, employing



Plate 96 : Bust of Thomas J. Bata, son of Tomáš Baťa, at Batanagar Sports Club

more than 7,000 people. Later Batanagar became one of the bigger suburban cities near Kolkata. It is one of the places named after the multinational shoe company Bata. There is a plant of the Bata company here. The employees mostly reside in Batanagar. Not only the Bata India Shoe factory, another very remarkable feature of Batanagar, is that shoe-making is a predominant cottage industry in Batanagar. Countless houses and families are dedicated to manufacturing shoes of various makes - leather, PVC, jute, etc. for some of the leading shoe brands in India. For example - Khadim's, SreeLeathers, Titas and Liberty which are some of the most renowned shoe makers in India, have outsourced a major portion of their shoe making process to the various entities in Batanagar. Every alternate home in Batanagar houses a small unit which is manufacturing shoes. This feature was born out of necessity, as most of the families residing in Batanagar are dependent on the Bata factory for their livelihood, hence whenever the factory gets locked-out, these families are very severely affected. Hence shoe making from their homes has given them an alternate source of earning.

**4.Birlapur** - Birlapur is a census town within the jurisdiction of the Budge Budge police station in the Budge Budge ICD block in the Alipore Sadar subdivision of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. Birlapur was founded by M.P. Birla. He



Plate 97 : Birlapur Ghat

established different factories here. It is famous for the **Birla Jute Mill**. There are one calcium carbide factory, one linoleum factory, one jute fibre factory and auto trim factory also. There is a co-educational high school named Birlapur Vidyalaya with both Hindi and Bengali medium.

There is a permanent market also. The factory has its power

house. Most of the employees stay in company provided quarters. It is a place for many Birla employees and their children who spent most of their childhood in this serene and peaceful urban area.



In the recent years, Birlapur has experienced a financial crisis as most of the factories are closing down. It needs an eye of a new investor to return to the prosperity it had in the 1990s.

**5.Falta-** Falta is a village and a gram panchayat within the jurisdiction of the Falta police station in the Falta CD block in the Diamond Harbour subdivision of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. Falta was an old human settlement of pre-British India. When Siraj-ud-Daulah sacked Kolkata in 1756, the English residents moved to



Plate 98 : Falta river side

Falta temporarily. Dutch had a factory here long before Indian Independence. But much before the British or the Dutch, nearly 1000 years ago Tamruk near Falta was a flourishing Buddhist centre. Falta is a true river town, few kilometers to the south of Falta, River Damodar meets River Hugli (River Ganges is called by this name here) and few kilometers to the north River Rupnarayan meets River Hugli. Apart from its riverside beauty, Falta is also known for the beautiful farmhouse of the famous Bengali scientist **Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose**. Falta also plays host to business guests and it falls under SEZ (Special Economic Zone).



Plate 99 : House of the famous scientist Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose

**6.Raichak** - Raichak is a village within the jurisdiction of the Diamond Harbour police station in the Diamond Harbour II CD block in the Diamond Harbour subdivision of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. The Raichak Fort, as it was originally called, was built by the British in 1783 to ward off pirates taking the river route to Kolkata. A British commander, General Watson, resided here with his wife Mary and daughter Caroline, and 65 soldiers. Post-independence, the fort lay in ruins, till the late 90s when it was made into a hotel. The Hugli here is wide and vast, the bank verdant with trees. Some portions, however, are muddy and treacherous. The luxury resort constructed along the lines of an 18th-Century fort looks almost magical against this backdrop.

The structure has been constructed in the Anglo-Indian style that is hardly seen nowadays. The recreation was the handiwork of architect Prabir Mitra. The bricks used were brought from the demolished State Bank of India building on Calcutta's Strand Road. Like in an actual fort, a moat runs around the structure. The grand arches, made of the old bricks, and the huge wall facing the river lends authenticity to the look. The resort has been given a fictional history to make it more exotic. The account dates back to 1783, when a General Watson of East India Company was supposedly despatched to the citadel along with wife

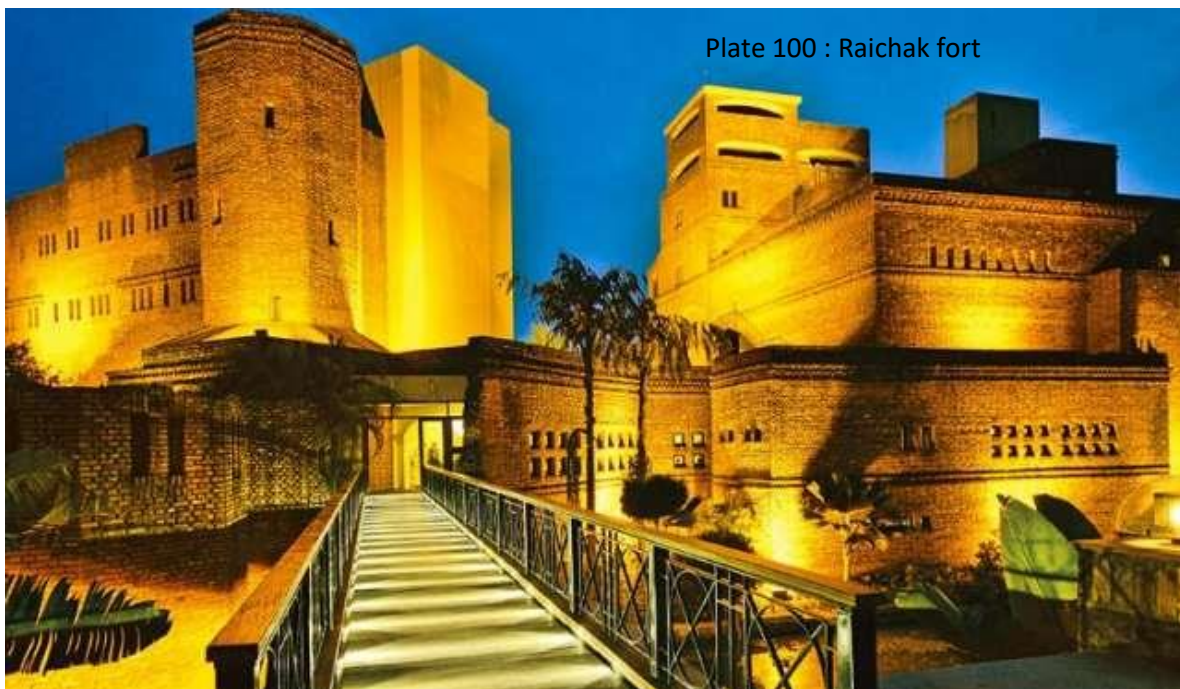


Plate 100 : Raichak fort

Mary, daughter Carolina and 65 soldiers. Some memorabilia of the period is exhibited inside. This includes a grand piano, glass perfume bottles, a clock and a sword. There are some photographs that have been retouched to give them a dated look. According to the history invented for the fort, it was abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century and was reduced



to a rubble by Japanese bombing during World War II. The magic of the river and the sky is more captivating than this account. The sky is a slate wiped clean, while the river flows gently. The lapping of the water on the bank at high tide is almost musical. Rows of country boats can be seen sailing down as birdsong fills the air. Take a boat ride in the morning. Afternoons are ideal for a walk along the bank. The beautiful sunset is best enjoyed from the terrace of the fort or the river bank. The sky becomes a riot of colour as the sun goes down, turning the river into liquid gold. The scene is beautiful enough to justify the trip.



Plate 101 : Raichak on the Bank of River Hugli

**7. Diamond Harbour** - The British renamed a settlement called Hajipur as Diamond Harbour. It no longer has a harbour, but there are a few bricks to designate the location of an old fort. It used to be a safe resting spot for ships and even today offers a spectacular view of the river. Prior to the British, Portuguese pirates had a major influence in the region. The ruins of the fort of Chingrikhali (locally known as Purano Kella) cannot be seen any more. It is uncertain whether the fort was built by the Portuguese or the British. There used to be an old lighthouse, which has now been eroded by

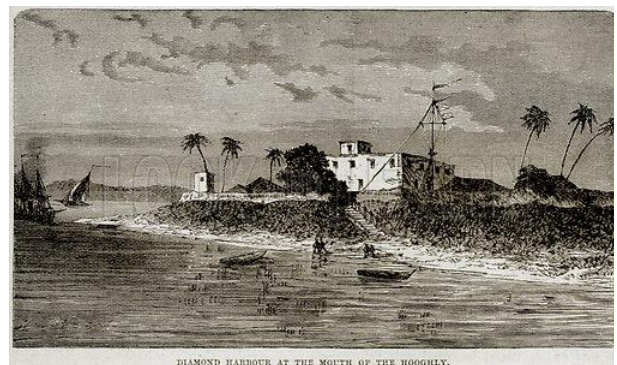


Plate 102 : Diamond harbour



the river. This small town with a picturesque setting is the gateway to the south-western part of the district, leading to such places as Gangasagar, Kakdwip, Namkhana and Bakkhali. Jetties at Diamond Harbour, Raichak and Mirpur provide steamer services to the other bank of the wide river estuary.

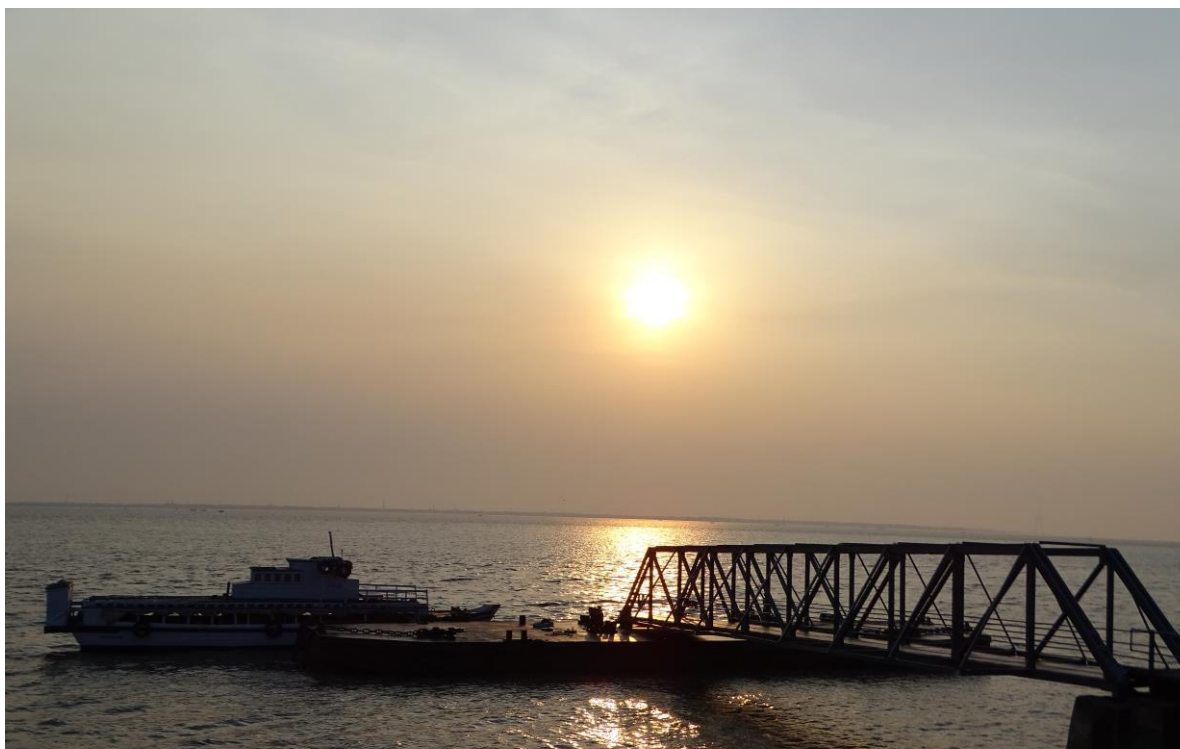


Plate 103 – Diamond Harbour Jetty , 22°11'6.07"N 88°11'21.25"E



Plate 104 – Batanagar Ferry  
Ghat 22°30'53.39"N  
88°12'45.68"E



Plate 105 – Nungi Ferry Ghat , 22°29'42.20"N 88°11'16.91"E



Plate 106 – Water Pumping Station , Budge Budge , 22°29'25.80"N 88°10'56.69"E

**8.Kakdwip** - Kakdwip is a city of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is situated on the eastern banks of the Hugli River. It is the headquarters of the Kakdwip subdivision and Sundarban police district. When the Tebhaga movement broke out in 1946, the peasant movement affected several areas of what is now South 24 Parganas. Kakdwip and Namkhana were the storm centres of the movement. Kakdwip fishing port is located at Kakdwip in south twenty-four Parganas in the coastal district of West Bengal, India. It is an important full-fledged fishing port. The port is developed in the left-front period. Every coastal area and deep seas in this port from the fish trawler anchor.

**9.Hard Wood Point Jetty ( 8 No. Lot Jetty)** in Kakdwip - Trawlers, ferries and old boats, with a constant stream of people who live on the islands in the Sunderbans — the Hardwood Point jetty is a glimpse into another side of Kolkata. Harwood Point, or Lot 8, is the jetty where people take a ferry to Ganga Sagar or Sagardwip, and to Ghoramara — two islands on the Sunderbans delta in the Bay of Bengal.



Plate 107 – Kakdwip Hardwood Point Jetty , connecting Sagar & Ghoramara Island



**10. Namkhana Jetty** - Namkhana is a village and a gram panchayat within the jurisdiction of the Namkhana police station in the Namkhana CD block in the Kakdwip subdivision of the South 24 Parganas district in the Indian state of West Bengal. When the Tebhaga movement broke out in 1946, the peasant movement affected several areas of what is now South 24 Parganas. Kakdwip and Namkhana were the storm centres of the movement.

**11. Kochuberia Jetty** - Sagar Island is about 80 km south of Kolkata, cut off from the main land by Muriganga river. At present there is no road bridge to connect the island to the main land. The Muriganga river can be crossed by ferry service to reach the Sagar Island. After crossing, the confluence of Sagar (bay of Bengal) & Ganga (holy river Ganges) can be reached via private taxis also which generally charges around INR 700 and it takes about 40 minutes to reach the confluence area from Kachuberia. To reach Sagar Island one must cross the Muriganga river/creek by ferry service to reach 'Kachuberia jetty' on the Sagar Island. Ferry service is available in both Harwood point and Namkhana and controlled by West Bengal Surface Transport Corporation. Frequency of crossings are more in Harwood point and it is once in every half an hour. The fare for a single crossing for a person is Rs. 8 as in 16 March 2013. The fare increases at the time of Ganagasagar Mela (The Fair; Rs. 40,- during 2008 Mela).



Plate 108 – Kochuberia Jetty in Sagar Island , 21°51'29.02"N 88° 8'37.14"E

## CHAPTER 7 - ARTS AND CRAFTS IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS

**1. Rod Puppet of Diamond Harbour II Block** – The antiquity of Indian puppetry is an established fact and it has been long been one of the primary forms of traditional entertainment. Instances of various kinds of performing puppets are found in ancient and medieval Indian texts. Folk puppetry in West Bengal is called Putul Naach. Putul is a word that describes both a doll and a puppet in Bengal while naach means dance. There are references to puppetry in the medieval folk ballads of undivided Bengal. Traditional forms of puppetry found in West Bengal are Rod ( Dang), Glove ( Beni or Bene) and string ( Taar or Suto). Both Rod and Glove Puppets are indigenous to Bengal while string puppetry was an import. In fact , South 24 parganas is the original home of the Rod Puppets. From here only now many artists have gone to Haora and Hugli to set up their own Puppet Dance Troupe .



Plate 109 : Rod Puppet, Diamond Harbour II



In our study area of **Khagrakona Village of Khordo Panchayet of Diamond Harbour II block** , we found the “**Jadunath Haldar Putul Natch Opera**” . It is the oldest active rod puppet group in West Bengal and performs stories from the epics and *Puranas*, *Panchatantra* animal stories, and works on social issues. This group has performed at Festival of India, USSR, and national festivals in India. In 1987, Jagadish Halder from this troupe , displayed the Puppet Show in Leningrad , Russia as a part of Indian Festival. He and his team also performed the Puppet Dance in France and many other foreign countries. At present his 2 sons , Ashim Halder and Alok Kumar Haldar continues this tradition.

According to them this hereditary art form has been bestowed on them from his grandfather Jadunath Halder. He started “Jadunath Haldar’s Puppet Dance Organisation” in 1907. At that time this dance was colloquially known as “পোঁদে বাড়ি পুতুল নাচ”. Actually in this form of puppet a rod is used at the back of the puppet which is why it is also called as Dang ( Rod /Stick ) puppet dance.



Plate 110 : Ashim Halder , Puppeteer

The rod is generally formed of Shimul Tree wood or *Clusia fig (Clusia racemosa)* wood . These puppets usually are made of 3 joints. The head of the puppet is supported by the main rod and is joined at the neck and both hands are attached to the rods at the shoulder.

The main rod is hidden by a robe or costume of the puppet. The action rods are connected to the hands of the puppet. The hands are manipulated by the puppeteer to show action. The body and the hands of the puppet are made using bamboo, rice husk, hay. All are mixed and molded into the necessary shape. There are no legs for the puppets. Puppets are draped in dhoti or sari as per the requirements of the characters.

At present Ashim Babu’s team has 30 members including 2 women artists. The entire Puppet Dance ( theatre ) Show has 5 segments . They all need individual artistry and skill. These segments are-



a. Dialogue    b. Musical  
Instrument Playing    c. Puppet  
Song    d.Puppet Dance    e. Light  
arrangements    f. Backdrop  
creation.

The instruments required for the performance are generally - Harmonium, Keyboard, 2 types of flutes ( Cornet and bamboo flute),Dugi Tabla,Jhanjhar, Violin,Mridanga etc.

Ashim Babu's team has performed almost in every part of India except Punjab and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.



Plate 111: Jagadish Halder , the master pupeteer



Plate 112 & 113 : Performance photograph of the troupe as depicted in print medium , Source : The Telegraph .



**ii. Bamboo Flower Making – Ashuruli Gram of Diamond Harbour II Block.**

According to **Gautam Barik** of Paschim Para , Ashuruli Village their family is creating Bamboo Flowers for over 14 generations. They generally prepare Baskets ( Jhuri ) , Flower Basket, Kulo (A flat plate with a flat roof of a kulo or koola, which is open to a side.), Fan etc . The raw materials for the baskets making comes from East and West Medinipur, Haora etc. The finished products are sold in the tourist spots of Digha , Contai and also in the markets of Moyna , Kanthi, Tamluk of East Midnapur. All the family members are associated in making of Bamboo crafts.



Plate 114 : Bamboo Jhuri making in Kolkata Hastoshilpo Mela. Representatives from Ashruli Gram , Diamondharbour



**iii. Palm/ Palmyra leaves fans/hats**– Parulia Gram Panchayat , Chandnagar Village . Almost 50 families of this village are engaged in this type of craft. All of them are muslims All the family members are employed in doing this craft. Male folk goes to the market for selling the products. Riazuddin Laskar ( 35 ) said that they take the products to the Hardwood Point ( Kakdwip ) ferry ghat for selling the products. In this business his wife and sisters help him. He also informed that he and his friends from the village all travel together to the different fairs of North 24 Parganas ( Bongaon , Bashirhat Matua Mela of Thakurnagar ) to sell their products.



Plate 115 – Women folks are all involved making Palm Leaves Fan . Generally family members are the major labour for this craft.

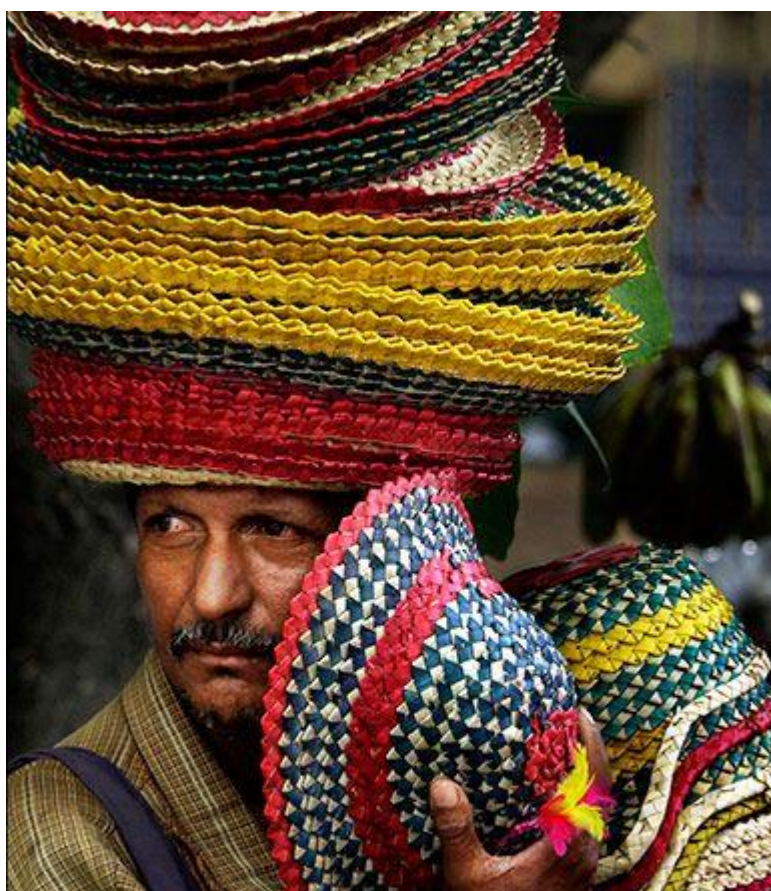


Plate 116 : Palm leaves hat are sold at Sagar Mela .



**iv. Palm/ Palmyra leaves Sunflowers** – Parulia 9 Gram Panchayat , Abdalpur Village .  
**Mostly women folk are engaged in this craft.** They bring the raw materials from the Sherpur Village of Usthi P.S . The flowers are made out of Palm leaves. The major ingredients required for these craft items are - 1. Palm Leaves 2. Colour 3.Black coloured seeds of Sunflower 4. Strings 5. Paper 6. Palm Leaves sticks 7. Adhesives.

One of the women artist , Usha Majhi ( 50-55 years ) informed that they prepare 4 petal and 6 petal flowers . For preparation of 100 flowers they receive Rs.100.



Plate 117 – Usha Majhi preparing Palm Leaves Sunflower.



**v. Earthen Water-jar / pitcher/ Ghat used for worshipping** – In Budhakhali village of Namkhana Block , a unique type of earthen water jars are found to be worshipped. They do have heads of Lakshmi and Ganesh . These are prepared by few families residing in Budhakhali Village. These local deities are mostly worshipped by womenfolks who all have migrated from Paschim Medinipur. As we have interviewed Alpana Samanta , Rinku Jana and laksmi Jana , we found that they procure these pots from Dashakarma Bhandar ( The shop which sells Pujo Equipments). These pots are made in the riverside areas by few potter families who are all originally from Paschim Medinipur.



Plate 118 : Earthen Water Jar / pitcher used as pitcher

**vi. Net Making** - Throughout our study area we find there are many families who all are involved in making Net Making. These nets are used mostly for fishing , boundary making of aquaculture ponds, boundary making of Vegetable Farming . Some of the centres of Net making are –

**a. Thakur para and Chakpara of Budhakhali Village , Budhakhali Gram panchayet , Namkhana block** – A very unique type of nets are prepared in this area with mostly nylon or polyester chords. Khokon Jana , one of our interviewee informed us that raw materials are brought by local business men from Kakdwip and Purba Medinipur. Many women are also involved in net making. The nets are also used for Hilsa , Pomfret , Pangas , Puti Fish fishing .



Plate 119 - Indigenous method of creation of Water Transport. Thermocol pieces are stuffed inside the net for fishing .





Plate 120 – “Banki “ is the traditional method of Net Creation using bamboo sticks, tyre threads etc. These are done by fishing communities of Medinipur who all have settled here.



Plate 121 - “Done” – The dried tail of Kamot is used as bait for Crab catching.



**b. Pujali , Budge Budge area** – In the adjoining Ghat of Pujali , we found a group of Fishermen , who all are involved in making and repairing fishing nets. They are originally from Paschim Medinipur , but now have settled here for fishing activities.



Plate 122&123 : Net making at Pujali





**C. Kakdwip Area , near Kalnagini River (Plate 124 & 125)–** Adjoining the Kalnagini River we found a cluster of fishermen villages. In this village , there are few houses where the fishermen only are into making Fishing Nets .





**d. Net Making , Jele Para along Ganga Sagar Khal Gangasagar , Sagar Island -  
21°38'3.66"N 88° 4'16.01"E Plate 126 & 127**





**e. Net Making for Illish fish , Beguakhali Khal , Sagar Island , 21°39'19.41"N 88°2'42.40"E , Plate 128 & 129**





**f. Net Making at Nadabhanga , Namkhana along Hatania Doani River 21°45'51.15"N  
88°13'29.95"E , Plate 130 & 131.**





**g. Ilish Fish Net Making in Narayanpur , Namkhana 21°45'38.37"N 88°14'22.88"E,  
Plate 132 & 133.**





**h. Net Making Bakkhali , Namkhana 21°36'55.85"N 88°15'38.12"E , Plate 134 & Plate 135**





**d. Jari Work** – Nungi , Thakurpur Maheshtala  $22^{\circ}30'3.09''N$   $88^{\circ}12'58.74''E$ . Muslim women from atleast 10 families are engaged in doing this Chumki- Jari embroidery work from Mathpara , Nungi , Thakurpukur Maheshtala Block. Due to its location near to Kolkata , these women get orders from the boutique owners of major markets . **Plate 136 & 137.**





**e. Bamboo Baskets getting sold at Chourangi , Sagar Island.**



Plate 138 & 139 : Bamboo baskets ,Chourangi, Sagar



**f. Date Palm Leaves Patti making , Namkhana Block - 21°46'5.09"N 88°13'35.10"E**

Women are mostly involved in making Patti Making. There are few households in Nadabhanga Village of Namkhana Block where these pattis are made.

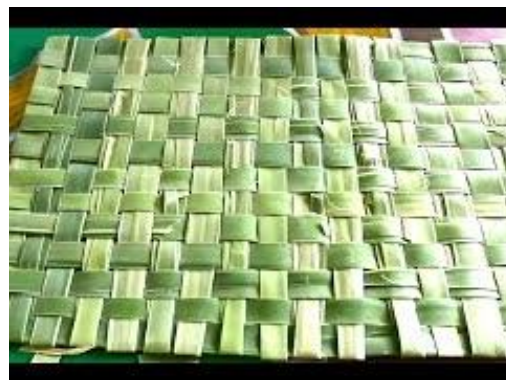


Plate 140 ,141 & 142: Patti Making , Namkhana

## CHAPTER 7 – FOOD AND DRINK OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS

Bengali cuisine is one of the finest blends of non-vegetarian and vegetarian dishes. Bengal is known as the land of 'Maach aar Bhaat' which means 'fish and rice'. The wide varieties of Bengal Cuisine in festivals, occasions and seasons are integral part of Bengali Culture - literature, songs, paintings, movies have a nostalgic appeal . The Bengali cuisine has an unique feature being an assimilation of the best of the world gastronomy and Indian diverse cookery. Each and every districts of Bengal has certain specialities in terms of cuisines.

Our study area has comprising of Budge Budge , Diamond Harbour , Kulpee , Kakdwip , Namkhana , Sagar has 2 distinct communities living in for generations. History says that originally this entire area was under the marshy tracts of Sundarbans which slowly became reclaimed from 18<sup>th</sup> Century . For clearing forests, people from Medinipur were brought by the Britishers. The entire Sagar Block , Namkhana , Kakdwip has a tremendous influence of Medinipur who all have again brought the cultures from Odisha. On the other hand the blocks like Budge Budge , Kulpee, Maheshtala are heavily industrialised. The labours were brought from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh . The culinary traditions of this entire zone are naturally the reflections of the people who all are residing here. Let us now examine the varieties of food and drinks which are prevalent in this area.

a. Fish has been the defining component of the Bengali diet down the ages. If the poor Bengali had nothing else, he had fish. This was particularly true of deltaic Bengal. “*Matsya maribe khaibe sukhe*” (catch fish and eat merrily) is a phrase that a Bengali child learned on his mother’s knee. The delta-inhabiting Bengali rural commoner was very often a fisher on the side, supplementing his diet by spearing a few fish in the pond or the river with the *khonch*, or perhaps a *khyapla* net.<sup>67</sup> The *bhadralok*<sup>iii</sup> would also fish of course, but he would be more likely to use a line.

The basic staple food of this riverine zone is fish and rice. Varieties of fish are eaten and different curries are prepared out of these fishes. For a regular meal in a standard middle class family is rice with small fish curry ( Mourala Fish ) . Fresh Rohu and Katla curry with coriander , ginger and tomato is cooked or with mustard paste and green chillies. In our study area we also find people preferring more of sour fish curry. Usually it is done with small fish or with Hilsa fish. Tamarind paste is used to make this sour fish curry.







**b.Petai Parota ( Crispy Indian smashed Flat Bread ) and Ghugni ( Chickpeas )** – A very common food item of South 24 Parganas is the Petai Parota and Ghugni. Almost in every small eating joints , sweet shops one can find this combination of food. Petai Parota has unique style of preparing. It is beaten or smashed (petai) into pieces and served as per its weight. Other than this paratha , generally do not prefer to have Rotis or chappatis in their meal. In both lunch and dinner rice is favoured.

Plate 145 & 146– Petai Parota with Sabzi





**c. Fried Fish of Bakkhali and Moushuni Islands** – All along the beach areas of Bakkhali , Fraserguange , Henry Island and Moushuni Island there is a practice of selling fried fish to the tourists. Fresh fish like tigerprawns , pomfrets , catfish , bhetki and even crabs are displayed in the trays near the tourist belts. They are marinated with dry masala and deep fried before serving.

Plate 147 & 148 : Fried fish selling at Bakkhali





Plate 148 & 149 : Fried fish selling at Bakkhali





**d.Dried Fish or Shutki** - Shutki — a Bengali word that connotes dried-up or anorexic — stands for dried fish or shrimp, and it is inextricably associated with the overpowering smell that emanates when being cooked. Dried fish has a strong flavour and an overpowering smell, which makes it an acquired taste. While smaller fish such as prawn/shrimp and anchovy are sundried, the process is different for fleshier fish such as king fish. Traditionally, cleaned fish would be rubbed with salt, packed in palm leaf baskets and hung to dehydrate; now machines do this job.

In our study area , most of the population are fish consumers. Every day , two times they prefer to have fish as their main food along with rice . Dried Fish or Shutki is also consumed in Sagar Block, Namkhana and Kakdwip. There are varieties of Shutki preparation like *loitta shutki* with dried bombayduck and bottle gourd or *Shutki chingri/shrimpBhorta* with mashed vegetables like eggplant,potatoes,pumpkins,okhra or *Shutki Paturi* or *Shutki Maach Bata* ( *Chutney*)

Plate 150 & 151 : Dried Fish bhorta



**d. Puffed Rice and Vegetable Oil fritters** - Throughout our study area we find the overall consumption of vegetable oil fritters and puffed rice as evening snacks. Specially in Sagar Island which is a religious spot, many North Indian vegetarian people come here and relish on these oil fritters.

These fast food is best matched when served with puffed rice or muri with some black salt sprinkled on the top. It was described as "Paat Bhaja" in old days meaning "battered and fried - part by part". Some other names are chop, fuluri, singara, kabiraji etc. Do not add salt to the vegetables before frying, make your batter according to your taste with gram flour, salt, turmeric, chili powder, water, and sprinkle sugar to balance the taste, add a pinch of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) and leave for 5 to 10 minutes to activate the batter. It should not be too thick or thin. Beat the batter vigorously. For deep frying for a Bengali fritters – you will need to maintain a temperature neither at the smoking point nor at a simmer to achieve a grease-free chop or fritter and also to allow the inside to cook properly. Batter the vegetables in a way so that it will quickly form a protective shield. When you put the battered veggies inside the properly heated oil, the battered veggies first will sink into the oil then get puffed up and the items will slowly rise to the top. It will slowly turn golden in color.



Plate 152 –“ Beguni”- Aubergine fritters are being prepared by local women in a temporary stall, Sagar





Plate 153,154 –“ Beguni”- Aubergine , onion fritters are being prepared by local women in a temporary stall , Sagar





### **e. Sweets of South 24 Parganas**

Bengal had always been the land of sweet lovers. It is commonly believed that this region, which once was known as Gour Banga, got its name from the production of 'Gur' (molasses). The creativity in sweet making and its artistic presentation was something that undoubtedly brought fame to Bengal in those days.

**i. Date Palm Jaggery** - Date palm jaggery can be eaten as nolen gur — the softer, golden coloured gur, named after the nol, or the pipe that is used to collect the sap, and from nolen meaning new. Or as jhola gur, the viscous liquid gur made by reducing the sap but stopping short of crystallisation. Jhola comes from the Bengali word for 'hanging' — the way the pots are hung. Jhola gur has low shelf life but high aroma, and is used to make the famous Joynagarer moa. Then there is poyra gur, from the word poila or 'first', for the gur made from the first sap of the season. This is believed to be the best variety because of the elongated period of rest that the tree gets. The jhola gur made from the first sap is called jiren jhola gur — 'jiren' being the word for resting. The jiren gur is almost translucent. The sap is reduced further on low heat and poured into terracotta moulds to yield the solidified patali, which has the highest shelf life of about eight months but is the most compromised on flavour. Khejurer gur has now become a part of fine dining and has inspired several refined sweets, but the first jhola gur each season still evokes memories of a winter special Bengali breakfast of luchi and jhola gur. Or, as the famous poet Sukumar Ray recalled, “kintu shobar chaite bhalo, pauruti aar jhola gur” — the best of all is bread with jhola gur.

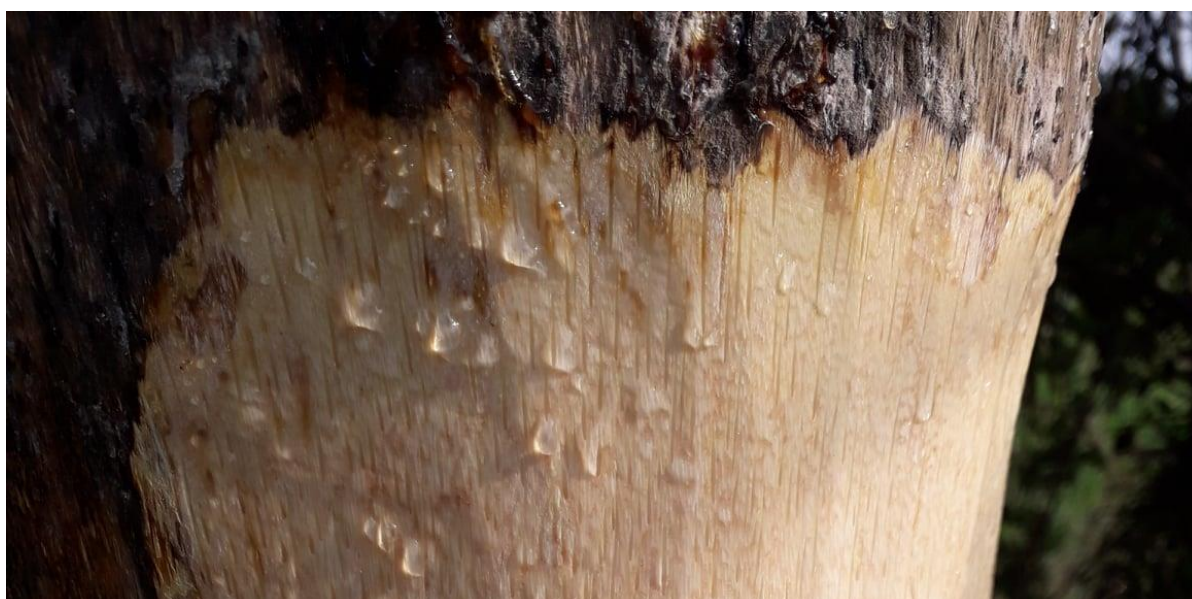


Plate 155 : Date /palm jiggery is getting prepared



**Stages for the Preparation of “ Nolen Gur ” Plate 156**

**A: Collection of Sap from date palm tree**





B. Brewing of the sap in the early morning





C: Brewing is done for many hours





D: Gur or Jaggery is prepared by thickening of the sap



E & F Jaggery is sold in mould form and also in liquid form





**ii. Joynagarer Moya** – Joynagar and Bohoru of South 24 pargans is the birth place of one of the most famous sweetmeat of Bengal , that is Moya. It is located only 20 kilometers from the study area. The entire Bengal market gets flooded with this special winter delicacy .

Joynagarer Moa was given a GI tag in 2015. **Jaynagarer Moa** is made with **Nolen Gur** (jaggery made from date palm tree extract with exquisite taste and aroma), **Kanakchur khoi** (a form of popped rice made from a special variety of aromatic rice), Gawa ghee (a type of clarified butter made from cow's milk), elach (cardamom), and posto (poppy seed). Both Nolen Gur and Kanakchur rice are winter products (available around November to January) and hence Jaynagarer Moa is available during this period only. The ordinary or common Moa is a small crispy ball made of puffed rice ("Muri" rather than "Khoi") and jaggery. It is produced in homes all over Bengal and is also generally available in grocery shops in small plastic packets, throughout the year. There are over 250 sweetmeat shops around Jaynagar, which produce Jaynagarer Moa with the original ingredients. The Jaynagarer Moa manufacturers in Jaynagar had been attempting to get Geographical Indication status for Jaynagarer Moa.



Plate 157 : Roadside Moya seller



**iii. Kheer Sweetmeats** - In ancient texts, we have a mention of milk based desserts but it was not until Bengal learnt the art of making chhana, that is, curdling milk with an acidic agent like lemon and separating the milk solids that chhana-based sweets emerged; a positive outcome of Portuguese influence. The **khoya/kheer** or thickened or dried milk-based sweets are more popular elsewhere in the country; namely the north. In Sagar Island there is a huge number of Dried Milk Based sweetmeat shops .



Plate 158 & 159 : Traditional Fish (Illish) Sweet preparation with kheer, Sweet shop





Plate 160 :” Lyngcha “ is a common sweet found in locality

Bengal too has its range of khoya/kheer based sweets. In fact there are broadly four categories of sweets in this state. In addition to chhana-based sweets, there is ‘kheerer mishti’ or sweets made with kheer; the third category would be variants of north Indian sweets, some of which are derivatives of Turkish and Iranian delights such as balushahi, sohnepatri, gulab jamun to name a few. Fourth, the local ethnic communities have added their touch with besan or moog ka laddoo, barfi and even a seasonal winter delight ghewar, very popular in Rajasthan. Chains of halwai ending with, Ram such as Ganguram, Haldiram, Bhikaram, Bancharam dot the cityscape, and stock a mix of sweets, in addition to savouries. However, even if some sweets of Bengal may have its origins outside the state, a whole lot of shops in North India go by the name of Bengal Sweets. On the other hand, the creative moira/modak/halwai or sweetmeat maker in Bengal, under the patronage of several rulers, perfected the art of sweet making. They innovated and tweaked several styles to come up with some presentations and even if these are not original per se, they are definitely unique to this region.





Plate 161 : Gaja , Nimki (savouries ) are part of every fairs and festivals

#### **f. Popular Drinks - Locally available alcoholic beverages**

**Rice beer (handia)** Rice beer (handia), a traditional drink, contains 9-10% alcohol. Indigenous people (Adivasis) regard it as both a food and an intoxicant. It is made from boiling parboiled rice and yeast (bakhar), derived from ground roots gathered in the forest. Fermentation takes 2½ -3 days; the filtered drink resembles weak cream-coloured buttermilk. Most *adivasi* households produce handia for their own consumption and some sell their excess production to ‘outsiders’ at Rs. 2 per pot. Adivasis, including men and women of all ages, drink handia as a staple beverage and typically consume it with a relish made of onions, chili and salt (chaat). It is believed that drinking handia from an earthen pot makes it more intoxicating (nesha). As an integral part of adivasi life, they also drink more of it on special occasions, such as weddings and at other cultural events. Handia is easily available in Namkhana, but in Sagar it is only available in the weekly and daily markets. Upper caste men and women, and salaried workers usually do not drink it, because they associate it use with

lower caste groups. To protect their social status, those who do drink it usually do so privately. It is acceptable, however, for young boys to drink handia during festivals or at the annual Hindu pilgrimage festival on Sagar Island, the Ganga Sagar Mela

**Palm wine (tadi)** **Palm wine**, another traditional drink, is made from the fermented sap of the date palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and other palm trees. The sap is collected from slitting the bark of the tree, the original source of palm sugar, and when it ferments, it becomes palm wine. Palm wine is more readily available in Sagar throughout the year. It is shipped from Haldia, an industrial port to the north on the Hugli River, where commercial processing adds yeast to increase the alcohol content. However, in the interior of Kakdwip it is available only in the winter. Labourers, including van pullers (who pedal flatbed tricycles transporting people and goods) and collectors of tiger prawn seedlings in the rivers, drink this inexpensive tadi. A 750-ml bottle costs Rs. 20, and it is also sold in half and quarter bottles.

**Country liquor (chullu)** Country liquor (chullu, bangla) is made in a distillery (bhatikhana) from low-grade molasses (chitta gud), which is often used as cattle feed. Yeast is added to the molasses and fermented, and the brew is then distilled in a covered pot (bhatti); then it is diluted with water to reduce the alcohol concentration to 40-50%. Chullu is sold in bottles, by the glass, or in polythene sachets, which cost Rs. 10 for 300 ml. Men whose livelihood requires heavy labour (such as pond diggers, van pullers, and tiger prawn seedling collectors) find it especially appealing. They explained that drinking chullu at the end of the day brings relief for body aches and pains. Some heavy drinkers take chullu regularly, but others, especially young men and boys, drink it only on special occasions like festivals. Villagers can purchase chullu from local distilleries (bhatikhana) from some kiosks, roadside tea stalls, shops near bus stations, or at other places where people gather. Code names—“pepsi” (associating it with the popular international beverage that is now available locally) or “50-gram muri (puffed rice, a traditional snack)” —are used to avoid mentioning the name “chullu.” The packets are placed in paper bags so they look like packets of puffed rice. Retail distributors take the chullu on bicycles to various drinking places along the riverbanks or embankments, on trawlers, in hotels, picnic areas, and other spots where men hang out (adda).

**Tonics and medicines** In addition to liquor, people also consume various medicines and tonics with high alcohol content. The most popular are **Amrita Sanjiboni Sura**, Homeo 50 and Weak Ginger Tonic. Amrita Sanjiboni Sura (and its variants) is an Ayurvedic tonic and



energiser costing Rs. 50-60 for a bottle of 200 ml. Businessmen, people in service and anyone who has ready cash can purchase it from Ayurvedic or medicine shops. It is often prescribed to women after childbirth. Homeo 50, a homeopathic energiser, and Amrita Sanjiboni Sura are also available in homeopathic medicine shops that are typically used by better-off villagers. Both rich and poor use Weak Ginger Tonic, an allopathic preparation that costs Rs. 30, and which is also available in medicine shops. Various types of local health care providers prescribe and promote these medicinal tonics; people may also choose to buy them on their own. A substantial number of persons were identified who were addicted to these tonics.

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