

EXPLORING THE RICH TAPESTRY OF HISTORY: HISTORICAL SITES OF PURULIA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

This comprehensive exploration delves into the historical tapestry of Purulia District in West Bengal, India. Spanning geographical, cultural, and demographic facets, the district's evolution from its inception to the present day is chronicled. The cultural history of Purulia, shaped by Jainism's influence since the 6th century BC, unfolds as a resilient response to changing religious inclinations. The remnants of Jainism in Deulghata, Banda Jain Temple, Temples in Para, and the Radha Vinod Temple in Cheliyama, Tatgram, Telkupi etc are meticulously explored, highlighting their architectural significance and historical context. Additionally, Pakbirra emerges as a significant archaeological site with Jain and Hindu influences dating back to the 8th century BC. These sites bear witness to Purulia's rich cultural heritage and the need for systematic excavation.

Keywords: Purulia District, Jainism, Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Sites, Historical Evolution.

INTRODUCTION

Spanning a vast landscape in the Indian state of West Bengal, Purulia District is a mosaic of diverse cultures, landscapes, and historical narratives. This section offers a condensed yet thorough introduction to the geographical, cultural, and demographic facets that define Purulia. From its inception to the present day, the district's evolution is chronicled, providing readers with a foundational understanding of the region.

Purulia district is located in west Bengal, on the eastern part of the Chotanagpur plateau. The district's terrain is undulating. wildlife's gift to this region is its nice surroundings and lovely wildlife. This district's geographical boundaries are 22030 north to 240 north latitude and 85030'E to 870 E longitude (Patra et al. 2). Purulia district underwent multiple and protracted reform phases before becoming a distinct district in West Bengal from Manbhum district in Bihar on November 1, 1956, under the West Bengal and Bihar (Reorganisation of Territories) Act. Manbhum district, as it was founded in 1833, originally contained Dhanbad, Purulia, and a portion of Bankura district, with an area of 7896 square miles. In 1879, the area was reduced to 3759 square miles, and it now has an area of just 2407 square miles or 6259 square kilometres, of which the urban and rural regions account for 79.37 square kilometres (1.27 percent) and 6179.63 square kilometres (98.73 percent), respectively (Basak 1753).

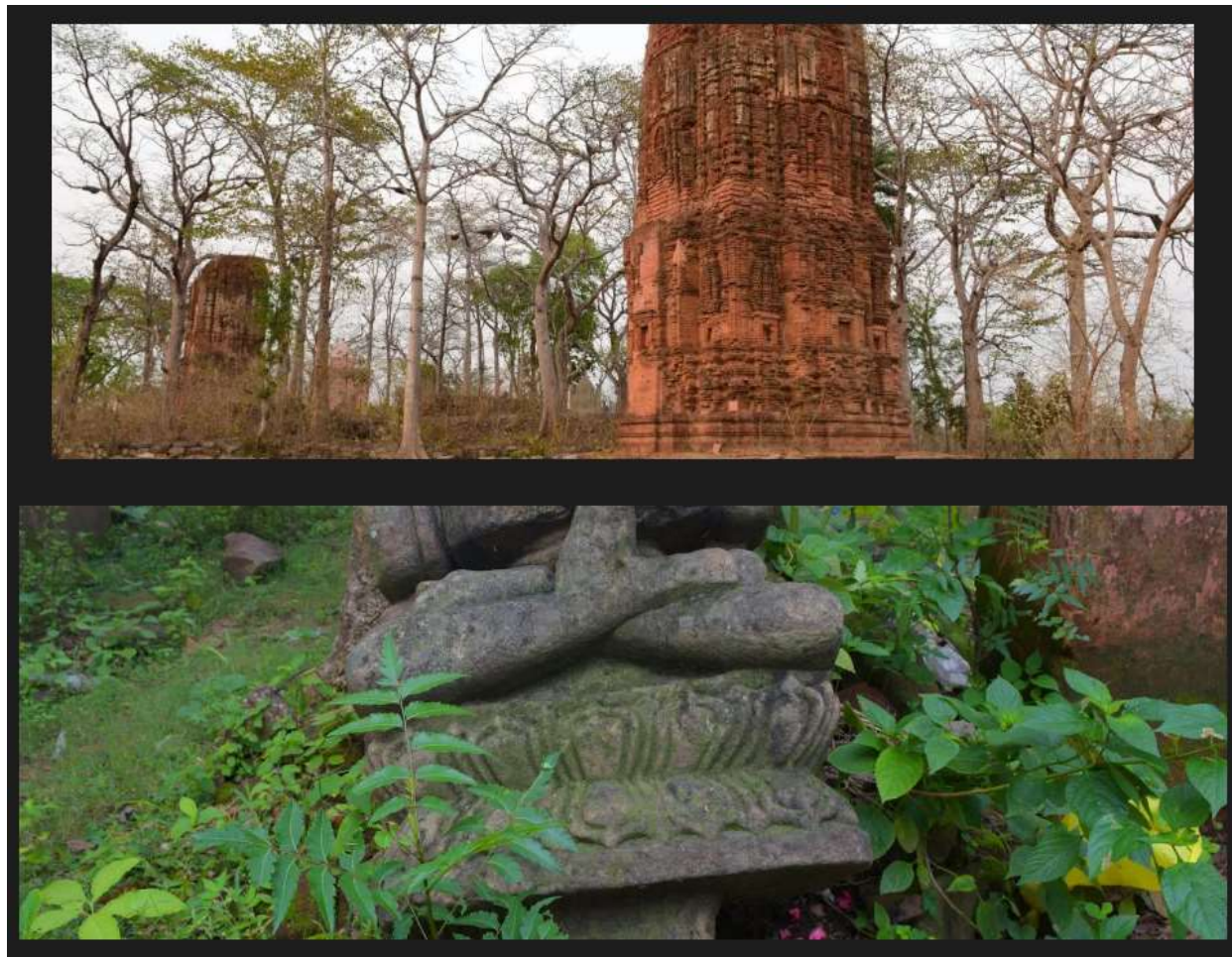
Jaina Bhagavati-Sutra of circa 5th century A.D. mentions that Purulia was one of the 16 Mahajanapadas and was a part of the country known as Vajra-bhumi in ancient times (History | Purulia District, Government of West Bengal | India).

Purulia has a rich cultural history that encompasses diverse folk arts and remarkable architecture. This cultural tapestry evolved through various influences, beginning as early as the 6th century BC when Jaina Tirthankara Mahavira traversed this land, as documented in the Kalpasutra. Despite the challenges posed by the passage of time, the resilient people of Purulia actively engaged with and responded to each cultural event, turning it into an integral part of their heritage. Jainism played a pivotal role in shaping Purulia's cultural landscape. Intriguingly, the indigenous inhabitants of this region were among the first to embrace Jainism. Even today, certain folk rituals practiced by the locals can be traced back to their Jain roots. The significant turning point for Jainism in Purulia occurred during the rule of Anantavarman Choda-Ganga-Deva in 1078 AD. He extended his kingdom southwestward up to the river Bhagirathi and established his second capital at Ambikanagar in Bankura. As a devoted follower of Jainism, Anantavarman provided royal patronage, leading to the construction of numerous Jain temples for the Digambara sect in Bankura and Purulia during the 11th and 12th centuries AD, dedicated to Parswanatha and Mahavira. However, the subsequent shift in religious inclination among the Odishan kings, who embraced the Brahminical faith, brought about a transformation. Jaina temples were repurposed into Hindu temples devoted to Shiva or Vishnu. Over time, images of Jain Tirthankaras were assimilated into the Brahminical order, worshipped as deities like Vishnu, Shiva, or Dharma Thakur. Some attempts were made to modify these images, resulting in deformations. With the withdrawal of royal support, these temples gradually lost their former glory. In the following centuries, many succumbed to ruin, and those that miraculously endured face an uncertain fate. The most lamentable incident occurred in the mid-1950s

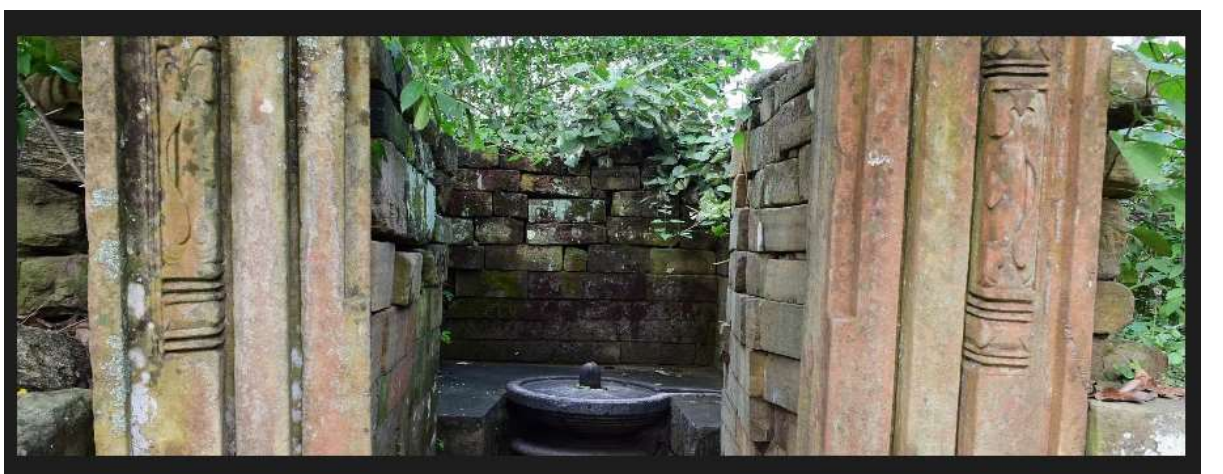
when the area of Telkupi was intentionally submerged under the newly constructed dam by the Damodar Valley Corporation. This deliberate act left no room for documentation or translocation. Telkupi, a significant Jain settlement, housed temples and artifacts dating back to the 9th century Pala period, making its loss a tragic chapter in Purulia's cultural history (Dutta 115).

In a Hindustan Times article titled "Signs of Civilisation in Purulia for the Last 1 Lakh Years" by Snigdhendu Bhattacharya, recent archaeological findings present compelling evidence of human habitation in the hilly and forested regions of Purulia, Bankura, and West Midnapore districts in West Bengal, India. These areas, approximately aligning with the modern-day Jangalmahal, exhibit indications of human settlement dating back to the last one lakh (100,000) years. The significance of this discovery lies in its challenge to prevailing notions about prehistoric human behavior. Contrary to the conventional understanding that human settlements were rare during the prehistoric period, the identified archaeological evidence suggests a prolonged and consistent habitation in these regions. This challenges the prevailing narrative that ancient communities predominantly led nomadic lifestyles, dictated by the availability of food resources. The comprehensive study, undertaken over recent years, revealed the presence of a micro blade industry in and around the Ayodhya hills area. In archaeological terms, a micro blade industry encompasses the production and utilization of small stone tools, chipped off from stones for purposes ranging from hunting to earth excavation. This industry's existence points towards human activity during the Late Pleistocene period, a crucial era marked by the inception of small stone tool usage between 20,000 and 10,000 years BC. The archaeological record in the region previously indicated relics of large-sized stone tools from the early stone era, dating back to 80,000 to 100,000 years. However, the recent findings not only reinforce the existence of human habitation in the early stone era but also suggest a continuity of settlement into the late stone era. This chronological continuity is supported by the coexistence of large-sized stone tools and micro blades, implying an uninterrupted and possibly prolonged human settlement in the area. The simultaneous presence of both large-sized stone tools and micro blades challenges the traditional belief that prehistoric communities frequently migrated. Instead, it raises intriguing possibilities that these ancient populations might have chosen to settle in the Purulia region, contributing to the complexity of our understanding of prehistoric human movements and settlement patterns (Bhattacharya).

Deulghata



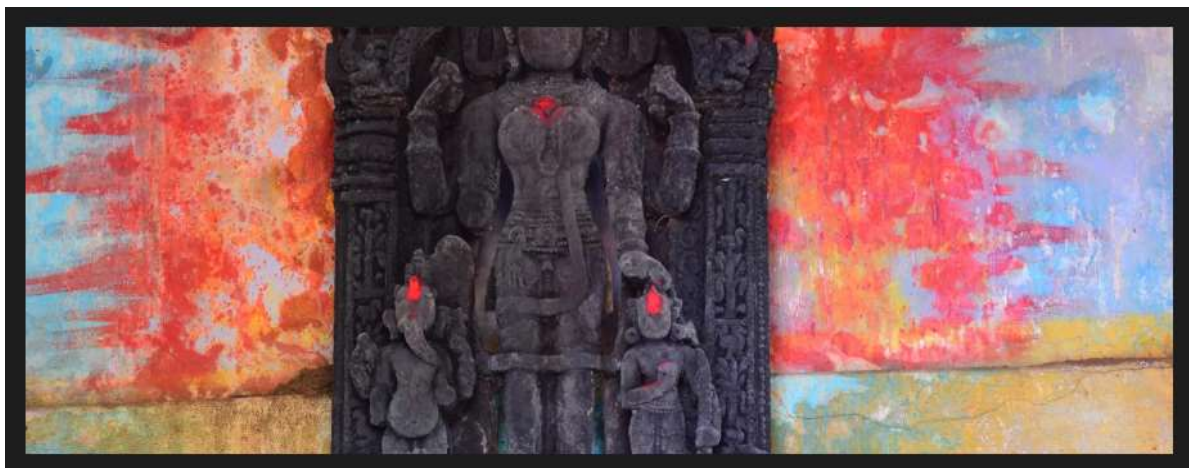
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Hidden within the jungles of Purulia in West Bengal are the remnants of a once-thriving center of Jainism, echoing with the presence of Vardhamana Mahavira, the 24th and last Jain Tirthankara. The village of Deulghata, now overshadowed by soaring, overgrown ruins, bears witness to the rich Jain heritage that once flourished in this region. Located approximately 315 km west of Kolkata, Purulia unveils its historical treasures as you navigate the nondescript village of Garh Jaipur, turning south off the Ranchi-Purulia Road. A mere 5 km from the Ajodhya Hills, Deulghata remains concealed until one embarks on a padyatra, leaving the road and venturing into the trees on foot. The first temple, intricately adorned and partially hidden near a paddy field, offers a surprising discovery for those who stumble upon it. Purulia, part of the Chotanagpur plateau encompassing South Bihar, Jharkhand, and Purulia and Bankura districts of West Bengal, was once known as Rarh Pradesh. Historical Jain texts like the Acharang Sutra from the 3rd or 2nd century BCE mention Mahavira's visit to Rarh Pradesh, where he faced hostility. The Bhagavati Sutra indicates Mahavira spending considerable time in Panit Bhumi, now Purulia. Around 1078 CE, King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty ruled the region, marking Jainism's Golden Age. Despite being a Shaivite, the king was a significant patron of Jainism, resulting in the construction of numerous Jain temples between Bankura and Purulia from the 11th to the 12th centuries. The Deulghata temples are believed to have been built during this period. Colonel E T Dalton, the British commissioner for Chotanagpur, rediscovered Deulghata in 1864-65, and archaeologist J D Beglar of the Archaeological Survey of India later documented the site in 1872-1873. Despite minimal research on the Deulghata temples, their architectural significance and historical context are apparent. Today, only two brick temples remain, as the third collapsed in 2002. The surviving temples, constructed with precision using two types of bricks, showcase intricate designs executed primarily with brick and stucco work in some areas. The ornamentation, though abstract, includes depictions of geese, kirtimukha, and headless seated figures. The artifacts recovered from Deulghata, believed to date back to the 11th century, include statues of Eight-armed Durga, a Four-armed goddess, Ganesha, Singha Bahini, and Ranachandi. Scattered remains of idols and temples across the area point to a significant Shaivite presence, although no Jain idols have been recovered. While Deulghata lacks protection from the State Archaeology Department or the Archaeological Survey of India, it continues to attract tourists, especially during the Tusu harvest festival (Gupta).

Banda





In the same remote western areas of old Manbhum district the Jains seem to have gone on building temples up to the 13th century or later, quiet a few of these standing today
 - David McCutcheon, Late Medieval Temples of Bengal



Amidst the verdant tapestry of West Bengal's Purulia district, nestled within the picturesque embrace of Banda village, lies a solitary gem – the Banda Jain Temple. This exquisite architectural marvel, bathed in the warm hues of time, stands as a testament to the artistry and spiritual fervour of a bygone era. Its existence, a whisper against the grand narratives of history, speaks volumes about the unwavering devotion and meticulous craftsmanship that once bloomed in this corner of the world. Carved from the soul of red sandstone, the Banda Jain Temple dates back to the 15th century, a time when the Jain faith found fertile ground in the Bengal region. Unlike the grand, sprawling temple complexes that dot the

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Indian landscape, this solitary structure exudes an air of quietude and introspection. Its pyramidal tower, reaching skyward like a silent prayer, is adorned with intricate carvings that tell stories of faith and devotion. Stepping through the intricately carved doorway, one is transported into a sanctum of serenity. The air, infused with the whispers of centuries, carries a palpable sense of peace. The soft hues of sunlight filtering through the latticed windows cast dancing shadows on the walls, adding to the temple's mystical aura.

The inner sanctum houses a captivating idol of Lord Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. Carved from black stone, the idol exudes an aura of tranquility, his meditative posture and gentle smile inviting introspection and spiritual communion. The delicate lotus pedestal on which he sits symbolizes purity and detachment, reminding devotees of the core tenets of Jain philosophy.

The walls of the temple, once vibrant with colourful frescoes, now bear the patina of time. Yet, in their faded beauty, they speak of the dedication and skill of the artisans who brought these stories to life. The intricate floral motifs, geometric patterns, and celestial nymphs hint at the grandeur that once adorned the temple's interior.

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the Banda Jain Temple holds immense significance for the Jain community. It is a living testament to their rich cultural heritage and unwavering faith. The temple served not only as a place of worship but also as a center for learning and community gatherings.

Today, the Banda Jain Temple stands as a beacon of hope and resilience. Despite centuries of weathering and the changing tides of time, it continues to draw pilgrims and art enthusiasts from far and wide. Its solitude, unlike a deafening silence, speaks volumes – a testament to the power of faith and the enduring beauty of ancient craftsmanship.

Temples in Para



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Para, a quaint village situated approximately 30 km northeast of Purulia Town in Purulia District, holds historical significance as it lies on the route to Banda Deul, one of Purulia District's well-preserved ancient temples. Records suggest that Para may have functioned as the capital of the Panchakot kings and potentially served as the capital of the Manrajas before that. Today, only three weathered temples stand as remnants of Para's royal legacy, with the first two, one made of stone and the other of bricks, positioned adjacent to each other, while the third, a mix of stone and brick, is slightly farther away. The Para Brick Temple, towering at 45 feet (although the exact height is uncertain due to the collapse of its top part), lacks a foundation plaque, but experts estimate its construction during the 10th to 11th century AD. This brick temple shares striking similarities with the two existing temples in Deulghata, presumably built during the same era. Though the temple likely had limestone plaster with stucco motifs, no traces remain today. However, the intricate ornamentation of decorative bricks has endured, showcasing floral and geometric designs, along with relief work depicting decorative deuls. The entrance to the Para Brick Temple is a narrow gateway crowned with a triangular corbel arch. Within, a nearly obliterated ancient circular sculpture, locally known as Udaychandi and worshipped every Tuesday, adorns the interior. Adjacent to the brick temple stands the Para Stone Temple, likely predating its brick counterpart. Standing at about 40 feet, it once boasted intricate stonework covering

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every inch of its outer surface, depicting dancing ladies, galloping horses, and various geometric and floral motifs. Unfortunately, the ravages of time, nature, and neglect have erased much of this detailed artistry. Despite its rundown condition, the stone temple bears a resemblance to Banda Deul. The stone temple's entrance, unlike Banda Deul, lacks an ornamental stone door frame. Shallow rectangular depressions on the remaining four walls, which likely housed stone statues now vanished, hint at the temple's former grandeur. The third temple in Para, located to the west of the village, comprises two adjoining structures. The lower part is built of stone, while the collapsed spires were brick-built. The front portion contains an illegible foundation plaque, leaving much unknown about its construction period. Experts suggest it was likely built in the 10th to 11th century AD. Although presently in a dilapidated state and overgrown with vegetation, the temple is abandoned, except for the celebration of Janmashtami (Datta).

The Radha Vinod Temple in Cheliyama



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The Radha Vinod Temple, a Hindu place of worship dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is situated in the village of Cheliyama within the Raghunathpur II CD block in the Raghunathpur subdivision of the Purulia district in West Bengal, India. Positioned on the southern banks of the Damodar River, the temple holds the status of being a monument of national importance under the supervision of the central Archaeological Survey of India. Constructed in 1698 CE (1619 Shakabda), as indicated by the foundation inscription at the temple, it adheres to the atchala style of architecture. This style, akin to the char chala temple style with four sides, incorporates a small replica of the base temple on top. Elevated on a platform, the temple comprises a sanctum and a verandah featuring a triple arched entrance. Elaborate terracotta ornamentation embellishes the facade, external walls, and columns, portraying scenes from Krishnalila, Ramayana, incarnations of Lord Vishnu, hunting episodes, royal processions, devotees, social life, as well as floral motifs and geometric patterns. Among the intricate depictions, a noteworthy scene unfolds the confrontation between Lord Rama and Ravana, set against the backdrop of colossal war chariots, with monkeys and demons actively participating in the battle. The Radha Vinod Temple stands as a cultural and historical gem, preserving its architectural significance and intricate terracotta artwork for generations to come (Ilamurugan).

Pakbira





Nestled in Purulia, renowned as the land of temples, Pakbirra has emerged as a significant archaeological site, unraveling numerous historical facts related to Hindus and Jains. The cultural influence of Jainism in the eastern part of India dates back to the 8th century BC, with Purulia playing host to the 23rd and 24th Tirthankaras, Parashawanath and Mahaveer, respectively. These visits temporarily elevated Jainism over Hinduism in Bengal, leaving an indelible impact.

Initially part of Bihar, Purulia, and specifically Pakbirra, gained attention when an abundance of antiquities connected to Hindus and Jains, along with distinctive temples, were discovered. Over a century ago, Pakbirra resembled an open archaeological gallery with several temples and countless Jain statues. However, due to neglect and internal conflicts between Hindus and Jains, only three temples endure today, while numerous priceless statues are deteriorating in the open (*Somen Sengupta*).

J.D. Beglar (1845-1907), a pioneering scholar of Indian archaeology, embarked on explorations in Pakbirra in 1872-73. At that time, only five temples remained, diminishing further over the years, and now only three stand in a dilapidated state. Built with abundant greenish chlorite stone found in the region, these temples exemplify the 'rekha deul' style of Odisha architecture. Beglar's 1878 report documented the monuments, debris, and images found in Pakbirra. Notably, a significant excavation uncovered a 7.5 ft high Mahababubali statue, an uncommon find in North India. Now worshipped as the Hindu deity Bhaironath, the colossal figure stands on a lotus, its forehead and feet adorned with oil and vermilion, with a trident placed nearby. The original temple housing this statue has vanished, but Beglar speculated it faced west, based on his observations (Majumder).

Today, eight more statues, representing various Tirthankaras, accompany the colossal one, with indications of their identities through symbols like bull, lion, horse, lotus, and half-moon. Pakbirra also houses ancient statues, some possibly 1200 years old, buried in soil and showcasing exquisite sculpture. The potential for significant archaeological discoveries remains untapped, highlighting the need for systematic excavation.

Among Pakbirra's remarkable findings is a flat black stone sculpture featuring 14 rows of figures, each row representing 24 'tirthankaras,' with a seated cross-legged figure at the top. Another standout statue is that of Mahavir on the side wall of the second temple, adorned with smaller figures representing religious exponents of Jainism.

While Pakbirra holds promise for substantial archaeological revelations, limited efforts have been made for scientific excavation, with no significant projects initiated by the government post-Independence.

Tatgram

The village of Tatgram, nestled amidst the scenic landscape formed by the seasonal rivers Harai and Gorai, stands as a significant archaeological site in Jharkhand. Its geographical positioning, approximately 19 km northwest of Para and 7 km east of Chandankiyari, adds to the allure of this historically rich region, challenging conventional timelines with its archaeological wealth. Tatgram's historical narrative unfolds through the discovery of Black-and-Red Ware shards, pushing back the village's origins beyond conventional estimations. The resilient presence of Jainism during the early medieval era is palpable, with the current population showcasing a substantial Jaina 'Sarak' community. Additionally, the exploration has unearthed remnants of Brahmanical sculptures, adding layers to the historical tapestry of this village (Biswas and Majumder 416).

Locality No 1:



Figure 1: Sculptural Remains from Locality 1 of Tatgram



Figure 2: Jaina Tirthankara Image from Locality 1 of Tatgram



Figure 3: Sculptural Remains from Locality 2 of Tatgram

Intriguing findings emerge from Locality No 1, situated near the village center. Here, two diminutive Jaina images, accompanied by sculptural fragments, have been uncovered. The detailed depiction of a Jina in kayotsarga posture, standing on a lotus pedestal with a tri-liner chatra, reflects the artistic finesse of the ancient craftsmanship. Complementing these discoveries are sculptural fragments, including a broken memorial stone, shedding light on the historical depth of Tatgram (Biswas and Majumder 416-416)

Locality No 2:



Figure 4: Visnu image from Locality 2 of Tatgram



Figure 5: Broken image of Surya from Locality 2 of Tatgram



Figure 6: Broken Jaina Tirthankara image from Locality 2 of Tatgram



Figure 7: General view of Locality 3 of Tatgram

Continuing the archaeological journey, Locality No 2, positioned about 500m west of its predecessor, showcases a repository of Brahmanical and Jaina sculptural remnants. A damaged Trivikrama-form Visnu image takes center stage, revealing intricate details despite its worn state. The site also hosts an array of fragmented sculptures, each narrating a unique story entrenched in both Brahmanical and Jaina ideologies (Biswas and Majumder 418-419).

Locality No 3:



Figure 8: Ruins of brick structure from Locality 3 of Tatgram



Figure 9: Sculptural fragment from Locality 3 of Tatgram



Figure 10: Stone pillar from Locality 3 of Tatgram



Figure 11: General view of Locality 4 along the river Harai from Tatgram

Moving westward within the village, Locality No 3 unfolds beneath the pipal tree of the modern religious spot known as Sasthi Tala. Amidst broken sculptural remains, the discovery of a damaged Siva linga, a small seated Jaina Tirthankara, and the pedestal of a female deity unveils the religious diversity that once thrived in this locale. An undecorated stone pillar adjacent to the religious spot hints at the possible existence of a temple, further enriching the archaeological narrative (Biswas and Majumder 422).

Locality No 4:



Figure 12: Type 1 memorial stone from Locality 4 of Tatgram



Figure 13: Type 2 memorial stone from Locality 4 of Tatgram



Figure 14: Type 3 memorial stone from Locality 4 of Tatgram

Venturing eastward, towards the left bank of the river Harai, Dumai Chandi Sthan emerges as a religious site, although its historical roots extend to serving as a memorial ground during the early medieval period. The site

boasts eight stone pillars, categorized into three types based on their top decorations – amlaka, jhampa simha, and figures. Of particular interest are the Type 1 memorial stone pillars, which, owing to their ornate decorations, suggest a connection to a temple and possibly commemorated individuals with strong religious affiliations with Jainism and Brahmanism (Biswas and Majumder 423).

Telkupi



Telkupi at Present

PC: Purulia Tourism



Remains of Telkupi

PC: ASI, India



Temple No: 14 (Mahanir Deul)
PC: ASI, India



Temple No: 16 (Gaonbediyar Deul)
PC: ASI, India



Lord Surya
PC: ASI, India



Temple No: 17 (Narasimhathan deal)
PC: ASI, India



God Narashimha

PC: ASI, India

Nestled on the border between the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal, Telkupi stands as a renowned heritage site situated on the southern bank of the Damodar River. Officially falling within the administrative jurisdiction of the Raghunathpur II block in the Purulia District, this historically significant location has been documented since the initial survey conducted in 1951 (Mitra). Telkupi, spanning approximately 1613 acres along the southern bank of the Damodar River at the border of Jharkhand and West Bengal, primarily thrived on agriculture as its mainstay. Beyond the farming community, the village boasted a diverse populace engaged in various professions, including Bauri, Malakar, Dhivar, Kumbhakar, Gorain, Carmaker, Modak, Dom, Handi, Rajak, Sundi, and more. The village's cultural richness was evident in its local public festivals, as documented in the first census report. Notable celebrations included the Danda-chhata-parab, representing the worship of Jagai and Madhai, who served as priests according to folk tales. Another popular festival was Harinam-sankirtan, held in the month of Vaisakh. Vaishakhi and Karttik Kalipuja, along with the grand Durga Puja, were prominent events in Telkupi (De 1-2).

The intriguing name of the place, 'Telkupi,' holds a significant historical meaning derived from two Sanskrit words. 'Taila' refers to a type of tax, and 'kampa' denotes an area or pargana. Therefore, 'Telkupi' or 'Tailakampa' signifies an area that was administered as a capital town by a feudal king named Rudrasikhara. This king played a crucial role in assisting the renowned Pala king Rampala in effectively suppressing the Kaivarta rebellion. Historical literature, particularly the celebrated 'Ramcharitamanas,' reveals that Rudrasikhara belonged to the Sikhara Dynasty. Interestingly, for many years, the local inhabitants were unaware that Telkupi had once served as the capital of the Sikhara Dynasty, showcasing the historical depth and significance of this lesser-known chapter in the region's history (Imam).

The area is renowned for its numerous small, standalone 'Deulis' or temple architectures. Unfortunately, the majority of these structures have been submerged due to the construction of the Damodar River barrage by the Damodar Valley Corporation. In 1878, the American archaeologist Joseph David Beglar visited the region and provided his initial observations and impressions in a report to the Archaeological Survey of India. Notably, Beglar's report lacks significant illustrations of the area. Beglar categorized these temple architectures into three main groups. The first group, the largest, comprises 13 temples. Among these 13, five temples (numbered 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10) are commonly known as the Temples at Bhairavathan. According to W. W. Hunter, this site, referred to as 'Bhairavathan,' is identified as a Jain site with distinct significance. The archaeological landscape,

despite the challenges posed by modern infrastructure, retains remnants of these temples, offering glimpses into the historical and religious heritage of the region (As cited by De 3).

The temples in the area bear a distinct Buddhist influence, as evidenced by the sculptures within them, which are still venerated by the local population. The central figure in these sculptures is revered by the locals as Vira or Mahavira, who is recognized as the 24th Tirthankara in Jainism. The presence of these sculptures not only reflects the historical convergence of Buddhist and Jain influences in the region but also highlights the enduring reverence and cultural significance attributed to these religious figures by the local community. The scattered architectures in Bhairabathan stand out as the most comprehensive remnants in Telkupi. Unfortunately, due to the construction of the Damodar barrage, a significant amount of valuable elements, such as huge stone slabs, fragments of sculptures, and intricately detailed stone ornamentation, has been lost to the river bed. Following Joseph David Beglar's visit in 1878, another distinguished Archaeological Surveyor, T. Bloch of Bengal Circle, conducted a survey of Telkupi in 1903 and produced a report. However, the final description in Bloch's report lacks clarity and essentially reiterates Beglar's findings. The sole addition in Bloch's report is the mention of a couple of other temples in the first group, accompanied by photographs of these temples. Despite the challenges posed by the Damodar barrage, these reports and photographs provide valuable insights into the architectural and sculptural heritage of Telkupi. In 1969, the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, accompanied by Dr. Debala Mitra, conducted a detailed observation of Telkupi. Their findings aligned with Joseph David Beglar's earlier report regarding the three divisions of Temple Architectures. However, this discussion will focus on three other temples in Telkupi—namely, Temple 14, 16, and 17 in chronological order. The first temple, known as Temple No. 14 in the ASI report, is locally referred to as Mahanir Deul. This east-facing temple belongs to a different group that had been abandoned by the time of T. Bloch's visit. Inside the sanctum cella, no idol is observed. However, the Garbhagriha, especially the ceiling portion, displays fine craftsmanship. Notably, the door frame is a captivating feature, adorned with the depiction of abhishikta Laxmi on the lintel part. Various other motifs, identified by N. K. Bose as naga-bandhi, lata-kama, padma-pakhuda, embellish the door jambs. The architectural plan of this temple is both simple and intriguing, with a ground plan featuring a Tri-ratha base and a bada portion confirming its distinctive style. The pabhaga portion showcases five moldings—khura, kumbha, pata. The ratha portion is ornamented with a framed niche and a projecting Chhajja for the parsva-devata. Upon close examination of the ceiling, a succession of Chhajja can be observed. The head or mastaka portion of the temple comprises a beki, an analaka shila, and an overflowing Kalasa, with a khachapuri and an urn-shaped stone finial rising above (As cited by De 5).

The Gaonbediyar Deul, constructed from sandstone, stands on a simple, lean ledge-like upana with a tri-ratha ground plan. The pabhaga of the bada portion exhibits four distinctive moldings - Khura, kumbha, khura, and inverted khura. Notably, on the middle projection of the jangha on three sides, there was an akakhra-Mundi designed with a framed niche for parsva devatas, although the figures of these devatas are currently missing. The projected khura-shaped capital covers each jamb of the frame. Above the niche, two finely cut and ornamented Gabakhshas (Chaitya windows) are observed, vertically designed and divided by a narrow recess. Moving to the Gandi portion, a khura-shaped molding runs continuously on three sides. The rahapaga on three sides features a central band with intricate interlacings of Chaitya windows engraved by khura-shaped moldings. In the kanika paga, there are three upa-pagas, with the innermost, touching the raha paga, displaying four moldings - three khura-shaped and the topmost resembling a kumbha. Unfortunately, the entire superstructure above the bada has collapsed over time (As cited by De 5).

The door frame of the Gaonbediyar Deul was intricately carved, with the base of the two jambs adorned with a bejeweled male figure within an oblong niche. The facade portion of the wall also featured exquisite carvings, and the architrave portion displayed carvings of the Nava-grahas, each separated by a pilaster. The Nava-grahas included Ravi, Soma, Mangala, Budha, Brihaspati, Sukra, Sani, Rahu, and Ketu. Unfortunately, these figures have been vandalized over time. Inside the garbhagriha, there was originally a large stone figure of the Sun God, Surya. However, this figure is no longer present. Both Joseph David Beglar and T. Bloch provided detailed descriptions of the large Surya figure that once stood on a monolithic pedestal. According to their accounts, the lower portion of the figure was covered by a dhoti, and the upper portion featured a dangling folded scarf. The adorned Surya figure wore common ornaments such as a bejeweled girdle, a large necklace, and kundalas as ear ornaments. The god also wore a karanda makuta. Additionally, the figure was armed with a sword hanging on the left side from a strap. The oval halo motif, a common feature on the backside of the Sun's head, had a border of flames. One remarkable feature of the Surya figure was the depiction of his chariot. According to Bloch, the chariot was drawn by seven horses, although the charioteer and the feet of the Surya figure had completely exfoliated over time. The Gaonbediyar Deul stands out as a unique architectural masterpiece due to its exceptional workmanship and the intricate detailing of the Surya figure and chariot (As cited by De 6-7).

The Narasimhathan Deul stands as the last architectural masterpiece in Telkupi, crafted from sandstone and revered as one of the best-preserved structures in the area. Despite its current condition, with the head portion of the beki missing and significant gaps between stone slabs, this north-facing temple exemplifies fine masonry and unique features. The temple is elevated on a low upana or stone base, following a tri-ratha style in the gandi or the rekha portion. The bada portion is tryang, featuring a succession of six moldings in the pabhaga

portion, including khura, kumbha, khura with corbels, inverted khura, and another khura, khura with corbels above, and another inverted khura with betel-shaped motifs. Notably, the central projection of the jangha on all three parts resembles a well-known khakhara-shrine. The entrance door in the frontal raha is a unique feature, and the varanda with a khura-shaped molding has a recess spreading over the kanika paga. The ceiling portion of the vestibule, while smooth, has a heavy slab protruding from the top of the lintel, featuring slanting Chhajja-like eaves with a representation of a khakhara-mundi. The central projections of the gandi are made of a progression of closely-arranged khura-shaped moldings. The base of the kanika paga is designed with a striking khura-shaped base-molding, and all other khuras of the central upa-pagas are alleviated with chaitya-windows. The bend upa-pagas are divided into bhumis. The sanctum cella, with thick stone walls, exhibits a layout reminiscent of the Kalinga style of architecture. The lower ceiling of the garbhagriha is adorned with three khura-shaped corbels. Intriguingly, there is a second cell over the roof of this hall, with the ceiling of the path having two semi-circular sockets. The crowning deity of the temple is a four-armed Narasimha, sculpted from chlorite or schist. The deity carries a chakra with the upper left hand, while the corresponding upper right hand is broken. Narasimha tears the belly of Hiranyakasipu with his two lower hands, and a curved sword is also present. The sculpture depicts Lord Narasimha adorned with various ornaments like anklets, a girdle, a long garland, heavy bangles, an upavita, and a jata-mukuta or kirita-makuta. The background of the sculpture is unfinished. Despite the current state of the temple, it remains a significant representation of Telkupi, showcasing intricate craftsmanship and religious symbolism. Debala Mitra acknowledges the presence of cult-syncretism in Telkupi, with Saivism being more popular but also noting the existence of Vaishnavism and Surya cult in the region (As cited by De 6-10).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of Purulia District's historical tapestry reveals a captivating narrative of cultural resilience and transformation. The district's evolution, intricately woven with Jain influences since ancient times, reflects the adaptive nature of its people in response to changing religious landscapes. The enduring remnants in Deulghata, Banda Jain Temple, Temples in Para, and the Radha Vinod Temple narrate stories of faith, architectural marvels, and the enduring spirit of cultural heritage. While these sites stand as testaments to Purulia's rich history, the neglected state of many temples and statues underscores the urgent need for systematic archaeological exploration and preservation. Pakbira, with its potential for significant discoveries, serves as a poignant reminder of the untapped historical wealth awaiting exploration. Purulia's cultural journey, marked by the fusion and transformation of Jainism, echoes through its temples and archaeological sites. This exploration not only enriches our understanding of the district's past but also emphasizes the importance of safeguarding these cultural treasures for future generations. As Purulia continues to evolve, its historical tapestry remains a source of inspiration, inviting scholars, enthusiasts, and policymakers to collaborate in preserving and uncovering the profound legacy embedded in its landscapes.

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