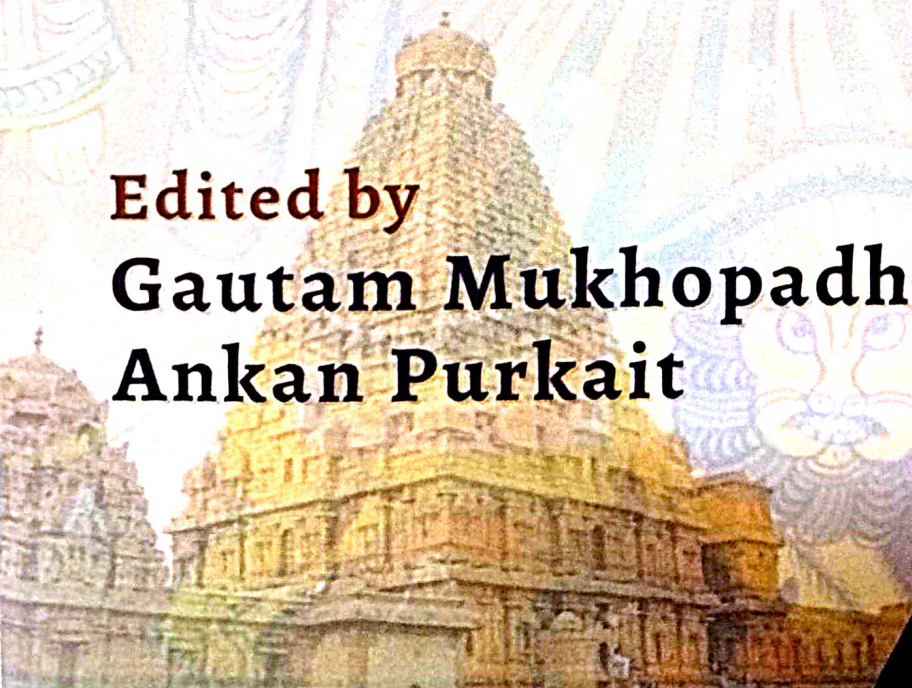




TOURISM & TRAVEL INDUSTRY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**An inclusive approach in understanding
History, Heritage, Culture, Economy & Politics**

**Edited by
Gautam Mukhopadhyay
Ankan Purkait**



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Bengal's Vṛndāvaṇa Connect: *Temples of Pūrba Gopālpur and their Possibilities as Tourist Destinations*

Ankan Purkait

We often neglect the culture in which we live and the heritage that is scattered in and around us. Purba Medinipur district in the state of West Bengal is one such place where history and heritage is lying on the dust and calling the passers-by to unveil them with fresh air and oxygen. As the purpose and the destination of my journey were fixed I boarded a train from Kharagpur to get down at the Panskura junction. I was fortunate enough that it was a cold winter morning, the beauty of which was enhanced by the warmth of the sun which had just started to rise on the east by moving the veil of fog and mist. I was supposed to go to a place called Jasora, thus I took the Ghatal-Panskura road. The condition of this road was quite alarming and the patches of repairing work made it more difficult for the passers-by. However, all these difficulties were surpassed by the lush greenery of the potato fields and the stocks of golden paddies ready for harvest. Sometimes marigold and mustard flowers were peeping in and the fields appeared to be a palette with different shades of green and yellow. While the vehicle was moving I came across the name of a place called Keshapat. Suddenly it struck my mind that the particular name has a Vaishṇava connotation. I asked my friend, as I was travelling on his motor bike, to take a right turn from there and after sometime what I saw will remain forever in my mind and heart. The present paper will deal with the architectural remains of Pūrba Gopālpur and its

surrounding areas and an attempt has also been made to delve into its glorious past and its possibilities as a tourist destination.

History of Vaishṇava Movement and its Relation to Pūrba Gopālpur:

With the disappearance of Caitanya Mahāprabhu in 1533 CE, the future of the Vaishṇava movement in Bengal and Orissa became quite uncertain. Advaitācārya with his followers at Śāntipur, followed the ideology of *Gaurpāramyavāda* and gave importance on both *jñāna* and *bhakti*. For him, Advaitācārya, both Śrī Kṛshṇa and Gaurāṅga were same. As he says:

*Baishṇaber madhye jei sampradāy hīne.
Sampradāy madhye jei Gaurāṅga nā mane...
Mor nijagan madhye durmati jāhārā
Mor ājñā laṅghi chale nāhi māne Gorā
Śrī Gaurāṅga mor prabhu mui tār dāsa
Tār caranreṇu mor pañcagrās¹*

(Among the Vaishṇavas who do not respect Caitanya is not a Vaishṇava...among my relatives who disobey Caitanya is not considered as my relative. Caitanya is my lord and I am his servant and the dusts of his feet are my food.)

Whereas Nityānanda, the foremost companion of Caitanya, centered at Kharḍaha, also gave emphasis on *Gaurpāramyavāda* but inducted people from all walks of life irrespective of caste and creed within the fold of Vaishṇavism. This anti caste sentiment of Nityānanda was unlike to that of Advaitācārya. Again, Gadādhara Paṇḍit followed the path of *Gaurnāgaravāda*. With the passage of time the schism within the Bengal Vaishṇavism started to increase. On the other hand far away from Bengal at Vṛndāvana six *gosvāmīs* (*Shara Gosvāmī*), namely Rūpa, Sanātana, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, Śrī Jīva, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Raghunātha Dāsa, painstakingly took up the work of shaping the philosophical and ideological base

of *Gaurīya* Vaishṇavism. They gave more emphasis on the worship of Kṛshṇa and took up the work of identifying the places and Vṛndāvana and Mathurā associated with Kṛshṇa's divine play. The *gosvāmīs* also received major impetus in their work from the Mughal Emperors and the *mansabdārs* stationed at Vṛndāvana and Mathurā. As Irfan Habib says, "Our documents Nos. 2 and 3 show that the priests of the Vrindawana (Vṛndāvana) temple cast their nets yet wider and were also able to attract the attention of Akbar's famous minister, Todar Mal. Doc. No. 2 is a *farman* explicitly issued on the representation of that minister and in favour of 'Jiv Gosa'in'. The *farman* is dated 14 Rabi II 976/6 October 1568. It implies that Jiv Gosa'in, 'a poor man, praying for His Majesty', needed to be protected in his right of management (*adhikar*) of the two temples Madam Mohan and 'Gobind Rai' (Govind Dev), entrusted to him by his uncle Rup Gosa'in. He was accordingly assured by the *farmān* of such protection, and, further of the right to claim all offerings (*khairat*) at the temples and to transfer or will away such rights."²

In the late sixteenth century the three important personalities from Bengal, namely Srīnibasa, Shyamānanda and Narottama, not necessarily together, went to Vṛndāvana with the motto of bridging the gap between the *Gaurīya* Vaishṇavism by providing them with a proper theoretical base. With this noble idea in their mind they went to Vṛndāvana to bring the theoretical tenants propounded by the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana. A legend goes on like this that while coming back from Vṛndāvana with cart load of manuscripts, the Vaishṇava *ācāryas* had taken the route through the present day Indian state of Jharkhand and Mallabhūm. The manuscripts were stolen by some dacoits in suspicion that these *ācāryas* might have been carrying some precious items. Ultimately, the manuscripts were recovered by Srīnibas Ācārya from the *rāj sabhā* of Bīr Hāmbir in Bishṇupur. Whatever may be the legend, the fact is that these three

ācāryas preached *Gaurīya* Vaishṇava ideology of Vṛndāvana in different places of Bengal and established a strong connection between the *Braj Bhūm* and the *Gaur mandala*. As Śrīnibasa Ācārya made his strong hold in Bishṇupur, Shyamānanda Thākura became quite famous in the areas of Medinipur, Hooghly, Orissa and some parts of Jharkhand.

Shyamānanda was born in Dharendra Bahadurpur village of the then *subāh* Orissa, which is presently located near the Kalāikunda station in the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. He was a *sadgop* by caste and his father was a poor cultivator named *Srī Kṛshṇa Mandala* and his mother was Durikādevī. Since his childhood Shyamānanda, Dukhiyā as he was called, developed a deep knowledge of religious scriptures and Sanskrit grammar. However, the life and teachings of Śrī Kṛshṇa gave him an eternal bliss. Gradually his love for Kṛshṇa became stronger in the company of devotees coming from *Gaurdeśh* to pay their homage to Lord Jagannātha in Purī Dhām. With the passage of time Shyamānanda's urge to visit Vṛndāvana became irresistible and he went there and developed a close acquaintance with Jīva Gosvāmī. As mentioned in Shyamānanda Prakāśa

*Hṛdayananda gosvāmīr kṛpā ājñā hailā,
Tabe Shyamānanda yai braje bās koilā.
Śrī Jīvagosvāmī saṅge satata rahilā,
Śrī Jīvabātsalyasneha bahuta karilā.
Rādhākṛshṇa rāsālilā sunerātri dine,
Sei se madhurarasa kare āsvādane.³*

(With the permission of his guru, Hridayananda goswami, Shyamānanda went to Vrindavana and stayed there with Sri JivaGoswami. Day and night he kept himself merged in the divine bliss of Krishna and heard the stories of his divine play.)

During his long stay in Vṛndāvana he acquired deep knowledge on Śrīmad Bhāgavata and other Vaishṇava

scriptures. Ultimately on the request of Jīva Gosvāmī he agreed to leave Vṛndāvana and preach Vaishṇavism in the regions of Orissa irrespective of caste and creed. As it is written in Shyamānanda Prakāśa that

*Srī Jiva karilā ājña jāite Uṛishyāy,
Se deśe patita tvari āsibe hethāy.
Srīmatir ei ajñā haiyāce tomāre,
Ajñār pālan kari āsibe sattvare.
Rasika murārī tathā achena abatari,
Tāhāre kahio sab brittānta bibari.⁴*

On his way back to Orissa, Shyamānanda, met Rasik Murārī at Ghatsila and he initiated him into the fold of Vaishṇavism. Thereafter he initiated the Rājā of Dhalbhumgar with *Kṛshṇa mantra* and merged the entire region with the *Kṛshṇa bhakti*. With the passage of time Shyamānanda made his strong hold at Dharendra, Gopiballavpur, Chakulia, Rohini, Tamluk, Arambagh, Narajole, Kanthi and many more to mention. Later on Shyamānanda's work was taken up by his foremost disciple Rasik Murārī or Rasikānanda. Rasikānanda made his strong hold at Gopiballavpur and preached Vaishṇavism in the regions of Mayurbhanj, Remuna, Puri etc in Orissa and Moyna, Kesari, Tamluk, Shyamsundarpur, Gokulpur etc in Bengal. After Rasikānanda his work was carried forward by his son Radhānanda. None of these followers of Shyamānanda propound a new theology; rather all of them gave more emphasis on preaching the ideas of the six *gosvāmīs* of Vṛndāvana. As Ramakanta Chakraborty says, "It seems that he (Rasikānanda) was more a worker than a theologian. But the fact that thousands of local inhabitants flocked to him for spiritual guidance makes it clear that he must have held out some hope for them."⁵ This connection once established between the *Braj Bhūm* and *Gaur maṇḍala* continued for long period of time. From a Vṛndāvana document of 1723 CE we come to know that a person called

Braj Jñanānanda, fifth in the line of Shyamānanda, came from Orissa in 1703 CE and was allotted 12 *biśvās* of land on lease out of the “garden of Chirghat, adjacent to Syamānanda’s garden, from the Rājā’s *āmlak*, for the accommodation of the visiting *gaurīya* mendicants, according to established custom.”⁶

This connection between Bengal and Vṛndāvana was not only restricted to the exchange of religious scriptures, it was also manifested through the construction of beautifully decorated temples made out of bricks and laterite stones. A complete devotion to God was manifested through the carved cornice and the moulds of clay. Temple building in present day Medinipur region received a major impetus during seventeenth to nineteenth century due to the active participation of the local landed elites. As Chakraborty says, “the kings and landlords might have supported the two leaders for two reasons. Firstly, Vaishṇavism helped them elevate their position in the caste hierarchy. Since an initiated Vaishṇava had no recognisable caste, he was above caste. Secondly, it may perhaps be argued that Vaishṇavism with its emphasis on non-violence and faith in world redeemer Kṛshṇa, made the down trodden peasantry mild tempered. As far as *rājās* and *bhūniyās* were concerned, this was most desirable development.”⁷

History of Temple Architecture in Bengal:

Temples with curved cornice, or the *cālā* style, as it is popularly called in Bengal, is a unique feature of temple architecture in Bengal, which makes it quite different from the other styles of temple in India such as Nāgara, Drāviṇa and Vesara. As per the Vaishṇava *bhakti* tradition the relation between the God and his disciple is a very personal one, which moves around the various *rasas* such as *śānta*, *dāsya*, *sakhya*, *vātsalya* and *madhura*. Thus, initially the deities of Krishna were placed in thatched mud houses and were

worshiped as family members. Later, when the *zamindars* and other wealthy persons were initiated within the fold of Vaishnavism, commissioning of temples became very common. Though temples were made out of bricks and laterite stones, structurally they resembled the thatched mud houses of rural Bengal. Temples of this time dedicated to lord Kṛṣṇa were named after the various forms of *baṁśīdhārī* Kṛṣṇa such as *kālāchānd*, *gopīnātha*, *madanmohana*, *rādhākanta*, *rādhābinoda*, *rasabihārī*, *nandadulāla* and many more to mention. The *cālā* style temples are mainly categorised under the following heads:

- a. *Do cālā*
- b. *Cār cālā*
- c. *Āṭ cālā* (see the next page)

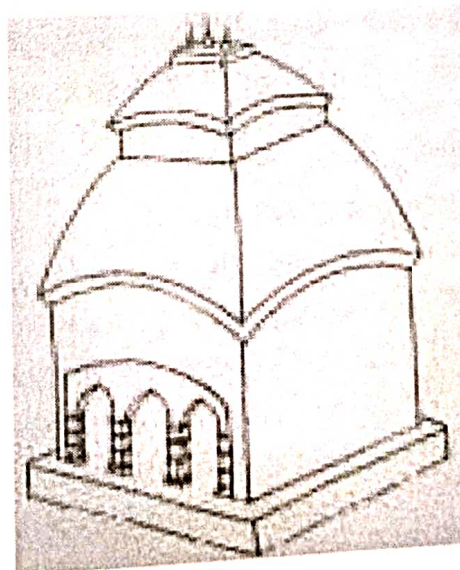
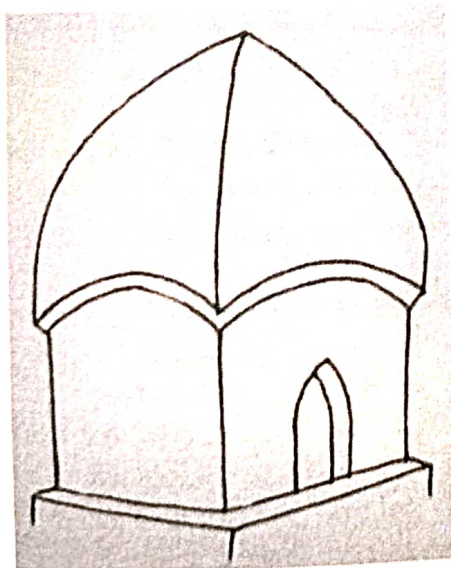
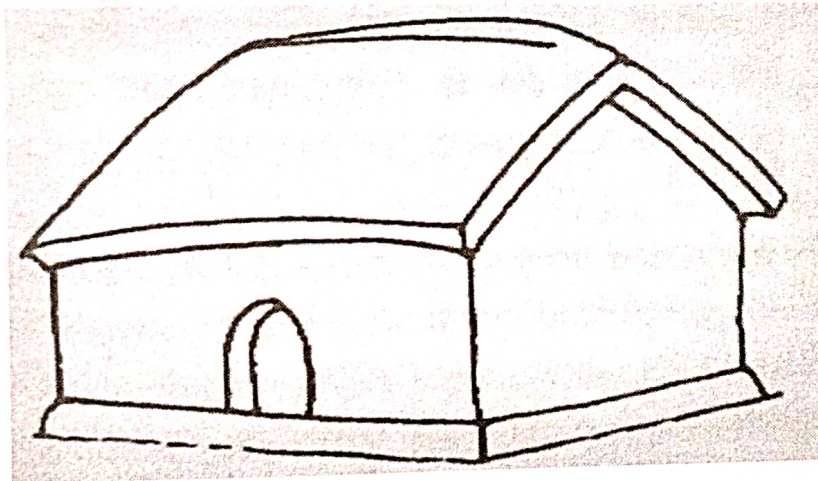
Later, these *cālā* style temples were replaced by *ratna* or pinnacle styled temples. *Ratna* style temples were again broadly categorised under the following heads:

- a. *Ekaratna mandira*
- b. *Pañcaratna mandira*
- c. *Navaratna mandira*

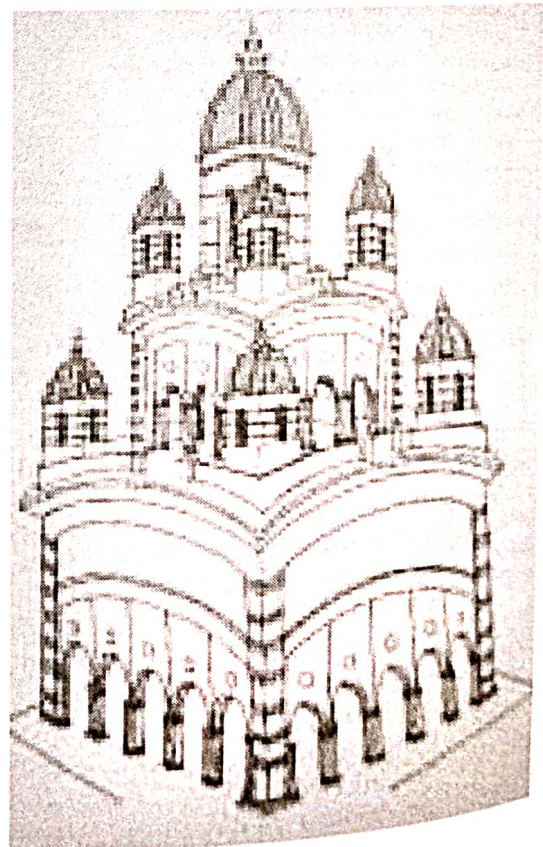
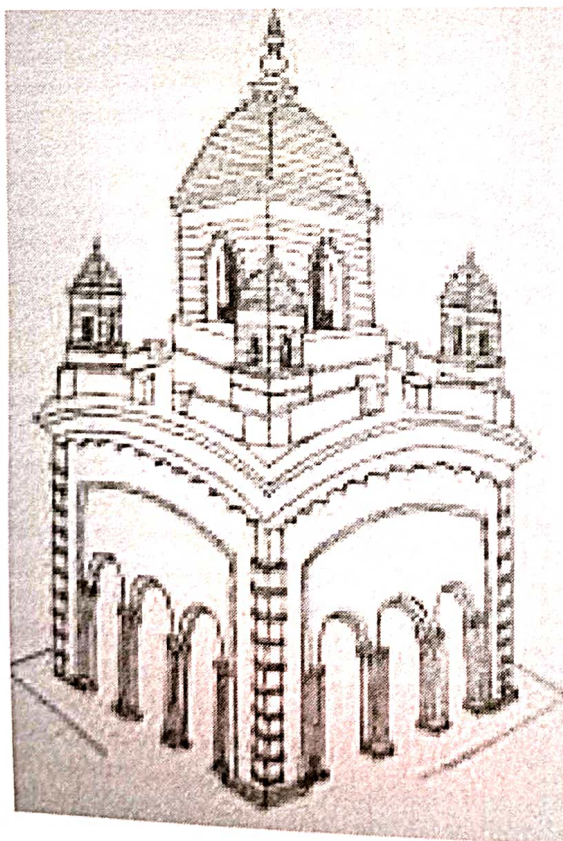
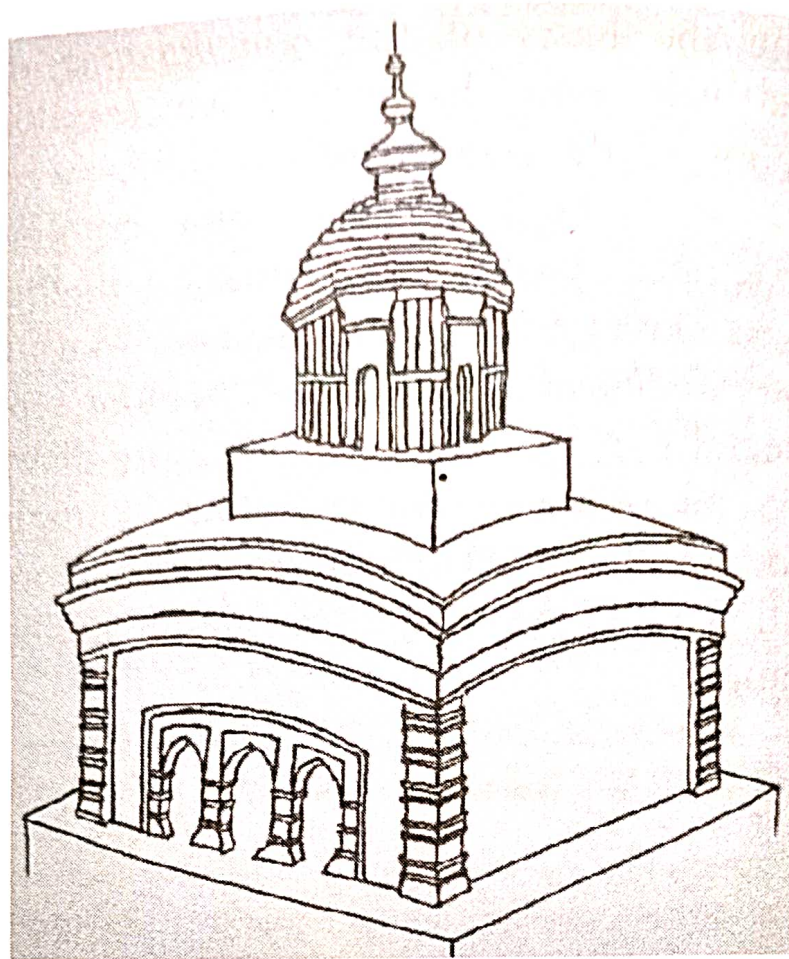
The number continues till twenty five. Apart from the number of *ratnas* the temples are also categorised on the basis of the style of *ratnas* such as *ratnas* with ridged *rekhā*, *ratnas* with *cālā* style, *ratnas* with ridged curved *rekhā* etc. The lower portions of the *ratna* style temples are same as that of the *cālā* style temples. Only difference is that the *ratna* style temples mostly have flat roofs surmounted by one or more pinnacles. Internally, *ratna* style temples have a square chamber which is surmounted internally by a dome supported by pendentives. If the temple is on an elongated base then narrow vaults are corbelled out from the central dome.

Like that of the *ekratna* temple, the earliest example of *pañcaratna* temple also comes from the land of Malla kings of Bishṇupur. It is the Shayamarāya temple commissioned by Raghunath Singha in 1643 CE. As Hiteshranjan Sanyal says,

“till date on the basis of the *pancharatna* (*pañcaratna*) temples that has been discovered we can say that the experimentation of the *pancharatna* temples were started in Bishnupur.”⁸ With the passage of time commissioning of *pañcaratna* temple became very common in the regions of Medinipur. As David J McCutcheon says, “With the *at-chala* (*āṭ cālā*), the *pancharatna* is the most popular type of Bengal temple- especially in 19th century Midnapore district, where it out numbers all others.”⁹ An excellent example one such temple is the Rādhābinoda temple of Purba Gopalpur under the jurisdiction of Panskura police station in the district of Purba Medinipur.



Do Cālā style (top); Cār Cālā style (bottom left);
Āṭ Cālā style (bottom right)



Ekaratna style (top); Pañcaratna style (bottom left);
Nava Ratna style (bottom right)

Rādhābinoda Temple of Pūrba Gopālpur:

Presently, the temple is in a dilapidated condition and is owned by the family of Adhikārīs. Present members of the family trace their origin from a person named Rādhāmādhav Adhikārī, who was contemporary of Rasikānanda and his son Radhānanda. They say that their original homeland was in Jahanabad, the medieval town of Arambag, in Hooghly district. Due to some internal quarrel among the family members Rādhāmādhav Adhikārī had migrated to this region of Medinipur and was initiated with the fold of Vaishṇavism by Rasikānanda, the then *mohanta* of Gopiballavpur *srīpāt*. Thereafter Rādhāmādhav Adhikārī was given revenue grants by the Rājā of Tamluk and since then the Adhikārīs are residing in the Purba Gopalpur village located by the side of present day Ghatal-Panskura road. If we follow the information given by the members of the family then the *pañcaratna* temple of Rādhābinoda was constructed towards the final decades of the seventeenth century. Again, Pranabesh Ray in his book mentions that according to the inscription given in the temple, presently which has been destroyed, it was constructed in 1774 CE.¹⁰ Now, it is doubtful that whether Rādhāmādhav Adhikārī of Pūrba Gopālpur is the same Rādhāmādhav who is mentioned in *Rasik Magal* among the many disciples of Rasikānanda. Whatever may be the truth, this is for sure that the Adhikārīs of Pūrba Gopālpur are the followers of *Shyamānanda* Sect and follows the *Vṛndāvanī Bhakti tattva*.

The *pañcaratna* temple of Rādhābinoda is situated over an elevated platform, most of which is covered with concrete and makes it difficult to make out that whether this temple was built upon a laterite platform or a brick platform. The lower portion of the temple follows the *cār cālā* architectural pattern, whereas the upper portion is surmounted by five *ratnas* or pinnacles. The south facing façade of the temple has three arch ways resting on two complete pillars. The central

turret or *ratna* is located just above the *garbagr̥ha* and is quite large in size than the other turrets located at the four corners of the temple. All the *ratnas* have four entrances or openings and are made over an elevated platform. Both the platform (*pābhaṅga*) and body (*bnār*) of the *ratnas* have *ratha*-like projections. The ridges of the *ratnas* are curvilinear just like the *cār cālā* temples of Bengal. The central pinnacle is surmounted by a *bneki*, *amālaka* and *kalasa*. The half of which is already destroyed. Though the *ratnas* are placed individually over the roof of the temple, the elevated curvilinear cornice of the lower portion gives a solidarity between the upper and lower portion of the temple.



Rādhābinoda Temple

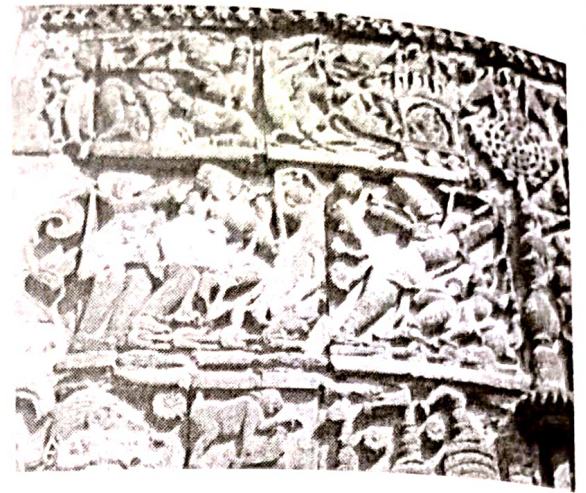
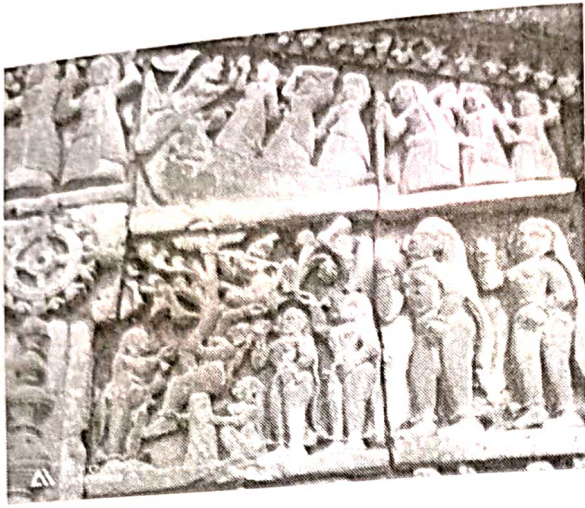
The terracotta designs on the façade of the temple mostly comprise of the stories of *Bhagavata Purāṇa* and *Rāmāyana*. Among the stories of *Bhagavata Purāṇa* *bastraharaṇapāla* and *naukābilāsa* appears on the left hand side of the façade. The stories of *Rāmāyana* such as

Lakshmaṇa cutting the nose of Surpanakhā, killing of Mārīca (disguised in the golden deer), *Sītāharaṇapālā* (kidnapping of Sītā by Rāvaṇa), the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, Bharata carrying the shoes of Rāma, Rāma Rāja's durbar appears on the middle and right hand side of the façade. Viṣṇu's *daśāvatāra* and *śarabhūja* Caitanya is also depicted in the terracotta panels of the temple. If we stylistically analyse these terracotta panels then we see that the natural environment carved out on the terracotta panels, such as foliage of the trees, birds and flowers are mostly stylised. The *gherdārjāmā* of Rāma and Rāvaṇa shows the influence of Mughal court culture, whereas the *ghāgrācoli* worn by the *gopīs* in the panel of *naukābilāsa* has an influence of north Indian costumes. Three *sudarśana cakras* placed above the arches of the temple show the influence of Orissa. Apart from these mythological stories panels with erotic scenes also appears on the facade of the temple.



Terracotta designs on the façade of the temple

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Panels of Bhagavata Purāṇa (top left); Panels of Rāmāyaṇa (top right); Panel of Daśāvātāra (bottom left); Panel of Śaraḥbhūja Caitanya (bottom right)



As per the present members of the Adhikārī family there was a small water tank, called *Rādhākunḍa*, beside the *tulasīmaṇḍapa* in front of the temple. They say that on special occasions, such as *janmāshṭamī*, *rādhāshṭamī*, deities were brought from the temple to take a holy bath on the water of the *kunḍa*. This concept of *Rādhākunḍa* was actually popularised by the *gosvāmīs* of *Vṛndāvana*. In the early years of the sixteenth century there was a village called *Arith* in the

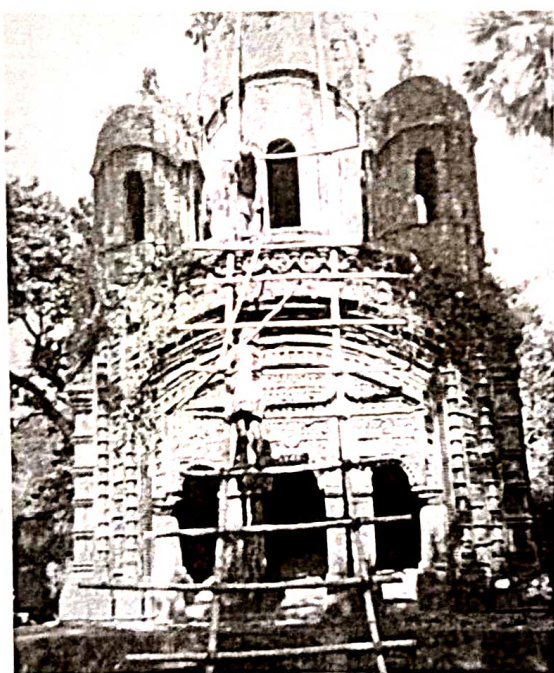
district of Mathura. There was no pretension apparently to any sanctity. “But then came the Gosa’ins (Gosvāmīs) of the Sri Chaitanya or gaudiya sect and the village gradually gained in size and importance as Krishna devotees began to come and settle here.”¹¹



Rāsamañca

On the western side of the village there is also a *Rāsamañca*, situated on an octagonal platform. It is open from all sides as the purpose of these *mañcas* was to make the deity visible from all sides. The *rāsamañca* has seventeen turrets and the style is known as *Bihārī Rasun Cūrā*. These kind of flat roofed *rāsamañca* are quite popular in Medinipur and are influenced by European architecture. As McCutchion says, “a kind of bulging vase design capped by an inverted flower and set off with ornate flourishes as in European baroque art. The

Daspura sutradhars called it rasunchura, from its resemblance to a garlic bulb. This type, with straight cornices was especially prevalent in 19th century Midnapore.”¹² As per the information given by Pranabesh Ray, the architectural edifice was repaired in 1891 CE by Ūmā Dāsī, the signs of repairing and reconstruction becomes quite clear from the remains of stucco designs which were made popular in Bengal in late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Apart from the Rādhābinoda temple of Pūrba Gopālpur, there are also other temples located in a nearby village called Shyamsundarpur Patna. The temples are Rādhā Dāmodar temple constructed by Ṭhākurdās Maity in 1859 and the Lakshmī-Janārdana temple of the Jānā family.



Dāmodaradāsa temple (left); Lakshmī-Janārdana temple (right)

Possibilities as a Tourist Destination:

People often visit the popular places like Narajole Rājbaṛī, Mahishadal Rājbaṛī located in Paschim and Purba Medinipur district respectively. Whereas places like Pūrba Gopālpur and Shyamsundarpur Patna remains highly neglected in spite of

carrying the rich heritage of medieval and late medieval Bengal. If not as a full scale tourist destinations, these rural sites can definitely act as a side scenes or rejoinders for the tourists who are visiting the places like Narajole and Mahishadal. These kind of heritage tourism to lesser known places not only helps in rejuvenating the local culture and economy, they also help in reinventing the historical paths and connectivity which had once helped in the movement of both culture and commodities.

How to Reach:

By train: From Howrah board a Panskura, Kharagpur or Medinipur Local and directly get down at Panskura station. From Panskura station either we can directly hire or 'toto' or else by bus we can go to Keshapat Bazar and from there we can hire a 'toto'.

By Car: From Second Howrah Bridge (Vidyasagar Setu) take the road going towards Kharagpur (NH 06). After reaching Mechogram (near Panskura) take the Ghatal-Panskura road and travel up to Keshapat Bazaar and from there move left to reach Pūrba Gopālpur.

Acknowledgement:

I am deeply indebted to my younger brother and friend Subha Manna for letting me know about this particular place and also taking the trouble to assist me with this entire field survey. For the analytical part I pay my sincere gratitude to my friend philosopher and Ph.D supervisor Swati Biswas, who is also one of the contributors in this book. Last but not the least I must also thank Mugdha Majumder, Assistant Professor, Department of Bengali, Jadavpur University, for supplying me with some of the primary texts.

Picture Courtesy:

Subha Manna

Bāṅgālār Mandir by Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal

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