

# *District Digital Cultural Repository*

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## **HOOGHLY**

**DIRECTORATE OF CULTURE, DEPARTMENT OF  
INFORMATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**

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# Hooghly

## *Roaming Traders, Reform Movements and Religious Heritage*

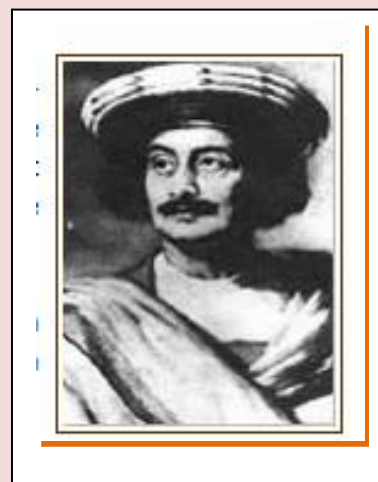
Once a key centre for maritime trade, and an international commercial hub, Hooghly is home to handicrafts such as the GI-registered Dhaniakhali saree, heritage as found in erstwhile colonial towns like Chandanangore and Serampore, and glimpses of history, as seen along the river Hooghly that dominates its landscape.

### **A. PEOPLE & EMINENT PERSONALITIES: -**

#### **Raja Rammohan Roy:**

One of the foremost luminaries of Bengal Renaissance, Ram Mohan Roy was born in Radhanagar in Hooghly district. Founder of the Brahma Samaj which played a major role in reforming and modernizing the Indian society, Roy stressed on revival of the pure and ethical principles of the Vedanta school of philosophy as found in the Upanishads. He preached 'advait' philosophy, made early translations of Vedic scriptures into English and co-founded the Calcutta Unitarian Society. He successfully campaigned against Sati, the practice of burning of widows in the pyre of their husbands and opposed social ills like child marriage and dowry.

Roy sought to integrate Western education with the best features of his own country's traditions. Roy was well versed in many languages, including Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic and also well conversant in tenets of many religions. He was among those who shaped modern Bengali prose. He penned 70 books and edited a few journals and newspapers, including Sambad Koumudi (Bangla) and Mirat-ul-Akbar (Persian)



#### **Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev**

Shri Ramakrishna was born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyay on February 18, 1836. His father's name was Khudiram Chattopadhyay and mother was Chandramani Devi. The poor Brahmin family hailed from the Kamarpukur village of Hooghly district in West Bengal.

From a very young age, Gadadhar was religiously inclined and experienced episodes of spiritual ecstasy from everyday incidents. He would go into trances while performing pujas or observing a religious drama.

After the death of Gadadhar's father in 1843, the responsibility of the family fell on his elder brother, Ramkumar. When he was sixteen, Ramkumar took him to Kolkata to assist him as he took over as chief priest in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar built by Rani Rashmani. When he died a few months later, Ramakrishna was appointed the priest.

In some time, the stories of Shri Ramakrishna's intense devotion to Kali, the Mother Goddess, his spiritual prowess and his life as a humble monk fully dedicated and engrossed in thoughts of God and divinity spread far and wide. Along with wife Sarada Devi, whom he worshipped as divine mother, he guided many devotees to the path of spiritual elevation, giving his message with the help simple everyday stories, metaphors and allegories. Among his disciples and followers, Swami Vivekananda turned out to be the one who carried his message to people and popularized his philosophy of 'Jata Mat Tata Path' (every road leads to God) in the world.

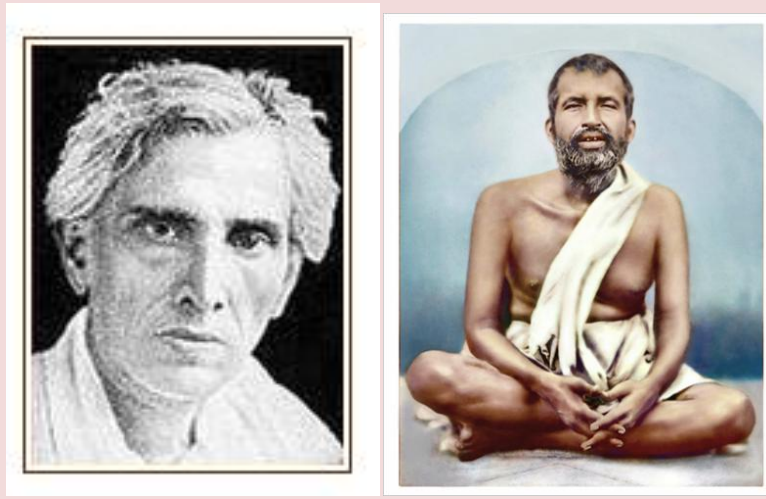
### **Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay**

One of the all-time greats of Bengali literature, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was born on 15 September 1876, in a Bengali Brahmin family in Debanandapur, a small village in Hooghly district of West Bengal.

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay spent most of his childhood at his maternal uncle's home in Bhagalpur, Bihar. His education began at Pyari Pandit's pathshala, an informal village school and later he joined Hooghly Branch High School that was near about six miles from his house Debanandapur.

Sarat Chandra wrote a number of novels, novellas, and stories, apart from a number of articles dealing with a wide range of social issues. His superb character creation and development, his keen observation that brings out all aspects and nuances of existing society and human relationships and his powerful storytelling techniques have made him one of the most widely read novelists in Bengal and even outside the state where many of his works are available in translation. Among his notable works are Shrikanta, Charitraheen, Parineeta, Shesh Prashna, Devdas, Datta, Grihadaha, Dena-Paona and Pather Dabi. Pather Dabi was banned by the British Government because of its revolutionary theme.

He also wrote essays, which were anthologized in *NarirMulya* (1923) and *Swadesh O Sahitya* (1932).



### **Kabiyal Bhola Moira:-**

Guptipara is the birthplace of Kabiyaal (folk singer) Bholanath Nayak, popularly known as Bhola Moira, who was famous not for his sweet-making skills but for his Kabi Gaan. It is a kind of musical duel in which the two participants/rivals sing extempore on a particular theme in the mode of question and answer and the one who cannot find a repartee in time is considered defeated. It has been a popular folk form in Bengal since 18<sup>th</sup> century and Bhola Moira is considered as a legend in the world of Kavi Gaan.

### **B. EVENTS & FESTIVALS: -**

#### **JAGADHATRI PUJA OF CHANDANNAGAR**

The tradition of Jagaddhatri puja in Chandannagar, a former French colony, dates back earlier than 1750. It is said that Raja Krishnachandra, the ruler of Krishnanagar, Nadia, started the worship of Goddess Jagaddhatri in his place, and one Indranarayan Roy Choudhury began performing the Jagaddhatri puja

at his own house in Chandannagar. Nowadays, the town has become synonymous with Jagaddhatri Puja, with huge idols, colourful processions and special decoration and lighting arrangements attracting tourists and devotees in large numbers.



One of the main attractions of the Jagaddhatri idols of Chandannagar is the ornamental decoration of the goddess with solapith craft and the beautiful canvas of mats with paintings that form the background.

### RATHA YATRA OF MAHESH, SERAMPORE

The Ratha yatra of Mahesh, in Serampore, Hooghly is the second oldest chariot festival or Rath Yatra in India (after Rath Yatra of Puri) and oldest in Bengal, having been celebrated since 1396. It is a week-long festival and a grand fair is held at that time. People throng to have a share in pulling the long ropes attached to the chariots of Lord Jagannath, Balarama and Subhadra on the journey from the temple to Mahesh Gundicha Bari (or, Masir Bari) and back within the 8th day.

As per legends, the Jagannath temple at Mahesh was founded by Drubananda Brahmachari, a Bengali sage who went to Puri for pilgrimage and had a desire to offer Lord Jagannath 'Bhoga' with his own hand. But he was denied the permission. Broken-hearted, Drubananda decided to fast until death. On the third day, he heard the Lord's voice in his dream that told him to return to Bnegal and make the idols of the holy trinity with daru-brahma (Neem trunk). It is said that Bhakti movement icon Shi Chaitanya christened Mahesh as 'NabaNilachal' (new Puri) and made his close associate KamalakarPiplaithe sebaite of the temple. Piplai started the famous chariot festival in Mahesh.



### GUPTIPARA RATHA YATRA

GuptiparaRatha yatra is being celebrated in Guptipara in Hooghly District of West Bengal since the 1730s. The chariot is a nabaratna-style wooden temple, where the presiding deity in the chariot is that of Radharaman Jiu. GuptiparaRatha yatra is the second only to the Puri Ratha yatra in terms of the distance covered. One of the unique events of GuptiparaRatha yatra is the bhandara loot, which is held a day before the purnayatra or the ulto rath. A

month long fair is held in Guptipara on the occasion. Every year thousands of devotees take part in this festival.

### **C. CULTURAL TRADITION AND ART FORMS**

#### **Music and Dance:-**

##### **LETO**

Leto dance: It is a performing art form, which combines elements of drama, song, dance and music. In most of the cases, male actors perform the part of women. Leto performances often address various facets of the rural social life along with popular myths and legends. In the Leto Gaan performance titled LyalarBiye or Lyala's wedding, the issue of gender discrimination in the society is highlighted through comic dialogues.

#### **Handicrafts/Handloom:-**

##### **DHANIAKHALI SAREE**

In Dhaniakhali block of Hooghly every household has at least one loom (tant). The sarees produced here are thus named after the area. The material used for Dhaniakhali saree is somewhat coarse and heavier than other textiles from Bengal but suits the middle-class budget and as such is popular. The best part of this textile is, it is very climate friendly and withstands the heat and humidity of this part of India, providing comfort to the user. An ordinary Dhaniakhali saree takes a minimum of two days, engaging in 10–12 hours each day, to be woven. While the exotic ones take 4-5 days to weave.





Dhaniakhali Saree has a Geographical Indication tag and traditionally has been in kora or natural grey with either red or black plain border. The dyed yarn was first introduced in 1942. Dhaniakhali sarees nowadays are produced in Haripal, RajbalhatRasidpur, Dwarhata, Ramnagar, Gurap and Antpur of Hooghly. Normally, cotton yarns of 80s to 100s count are used both in warp and weft with extra warp of 2/100s or 2/80s cotton yarn. Over the years the state government has been marketing the handloom sarees of Bengal, particularly the Dhaniakhalitaant saree. The Bengal cotton saree has now turned into a fashion statement, wherever it is worn and has a market all over the world.

#### **D. HISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND HERITAGE SITES : -**

##### **Hanseswari Temple:-**

Hanseswari temple is located at Bansberia, a small municipal town. Its construction was started by Raja Narsingha Dev and was completed by his wife Shankari, in 1814. The temple is unique as it represents the Yoga view of the human body and has five storeys representing the five nadis of the human

body, namely Era, Pingala, Brojakha, Susumna and Chitrini. The workmanship is unique. The temple has thirteen towers in all which raise to a height of 21 metres and assume the shape of lotus buds. The deity worshipped is Devi Haneswari, a form of Kali. The idol is built from Neemwood. Presently the temple and its surroundings are looked after by the Archaeological Survey of India.

### **Dargah of Zafar Khan Ghazi:-**

One of the prime attractions of Tribeni is the dargah of Zafar Khan Ghazi, a Turk warrior who started a Sufi lineage. Located on a small mound overlooking the Hooghly river, it is housed inside a walled complex which also contains a mosque and several other tombs. It remains an active religious site.

The mosque is one of the oldest in West Bengal and also happens to be one of the oldest Islamic structures in the whole of undivided Bengal. The dargah was constructed in 1315 and is located in the eastern end of the walled complex. It has two chambers and the roof has long collapsed. The western chamber contains the grave of Zafar Khan along with the graves of his two sons Ain Khan Ghazi and Ghain Khan Ghazi.

### **Hooghly Imambara :-**

Hooghly Imambara, an architectural splendour of the 19th century, is a holy shrine not only to the people of Bengal but also to the entire Muslim community of India. The history of the construction is associated with a rich and philanthropic son of the soil, Haji Mohammad Mohsin, whose name is also associated with the spreading of modern education in the district. The present Imambara does not have any trace of the older one. It was constructed just upon the debris of older one in 1861 by the Trust fund of Haji Mohammad Mohsin, one of the noblest sons of Bengal. It was

constructed for the observance of the Muharram and other religious functions. There is a massive Clock Tower, a concrete sundial and a Turkish bath or Hammam exquisitely decorated with colourful glass.

### **Bandel Church or Basilica of the Holy Rosary:-**

Bandel, now a small municipal town, was under Portuguese rule from the end of 16th to the middle of 17th century. Besides their many other activities, in 1599, a church was constructed by the Portuguese on the banks of Hooghly, making it the oldest church of West Bengal. In 1632, Mughal emperor Shah Jahan attacked the Portuguese settlement which also had a small fort. The Portuguese were defeated and their fort and church were reduced to ruins. The present church and monastery are said to be built in 1660 by Gomez de Soto having the keystone of the old church bearing the date 1599. In front of the church, stands a ship's mast which was presented by the captain of a vessel which had encountered a storm in Bay of Bengal and was believed to have been saved by the grace of Virgin Mary. The church has three altars, a small organ & several tomb stones. It is endowed with a sacred shrine at the balcony devoted to Our Lady of Happy Voyage.



### **Clock Tower, Chinsurah :-**

The former Dutch colony (1615–1825) was once considered the most beautiful town of Bengal. Although known for its Dutch heritage, the prime attraction of Chinsurah or Chuchura is the British-built clock tower. Located at a crossing and at the very centre of the town, the clock tower was constructed in 1914 in honour of King Edward VII.

### **Tarakanath Temple of Tarakeswar:-**

The temple, dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, worshiped as Tarakanath, is a major pilgrimage spot in the town of Tarakeswar. Built in 1729, the temple is an at-chala(eight-roofed) structure with a 'natmandir' in front. Close by are the shrines of Kali and Lakshmi Narayan. Dudhpukur, a tank to the north of the Shiva temple is believed to fulfil the prayers of those taking a dip in it.

Tarakeshwarnath represents a fierce (ugra) form of Lord Shiva who drank venom during the mythical samudra-manthan. As per local legends, the temple was built by Raja Bharamalla Rao around a swayambhu (self-manifested) Shiva Linga in 1729 AD. Pilgrims visit the temple throughout the year, especially on Mondays. But thousands throng on the occasions of 'Shivaratri' and 'Gajan'.The former takes place in Phalgun (Feb-March),while .the latter lasts for five days ending on the last day of Chaitra (mid-April). The month of Sravana (mid-July to mid-August) is auspicious when celebrations are held in each Monday.



### Tarakeshwar Temple

**Danish Governor's House, Serampore:** It was the administrative centre during Danish rule at the town. Serampore saw the Danes building a trading hub there in 1755 after being granted permission of trading rights by Nawab of Bengal Ali Vardi Khan. The Danish trading station, named Frederiksnagore after King Frederik V of Denmark, first consisted of a warehouse and mud houses. The Danish Governor's House was first mud-built which later collapsed and was reconstructed in 1771 by the Danish Governor for residential and administrative purposes. It has housed various administrative departments before and after independence and at present, following renovation has a museum and a state government office running from there.



Danish House

### **Hooghly Mohsin College :-**

Situated in a quiet corner of Chinsurah, the headquarters of Burdwan Division and Hooghly District, Hooghly Mohsin College is one of the premier academic institutions of India, promoting the cause of higher education for nearly two centuries. Following a blueprint prepared by Macaulay and with the help of a trust fund of the legendary philanthropist Haji Mohammed Mohsin, the college started its journey on the 1st day of August, 1836 in Perron's house, a magnificent piece of architecture overlooking the river Hooghly.

For the first one hundred years of its existence, the college was known as New Hooghly College. On the occasion of its centenary celebration, the college was renamed as Hooghly Mohsin College. This glorious house of learning nurtured some of the doyens of the nineteenth century Indian

Renaissance. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the composer of ‘Bande Mataram’ and other eminent writers of Bengal like Dwijendralal Roy, Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay were distinguished students of this college. Biplabacharya Jyotish Chandra Ghosh, Kanailal Datta, jurist Syed Amir Ali, scientist Dr. Upendranath Brahmachari, singers Shyamal Mitra were among the alumni.

### **Serampore College:**

The Serampore Mission of the Baptist Missionary Society was established on 10th January 1800. The missionary trio of William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward laid great emphasis on the training of Christian leaders for the church in Asia, but also desired to have the college opening its doors to all students irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. Besides educational enterprises the founders did the pioneering work of publishing periodicals such as the Dig Darshan, the Samachar Darpan and the Friend of India, the ancestor of the present Statesman. William Carey published grammatical and lexicographical works in Sanskrit and Bengali and is considered among the founders of modern Bengali prose. They founded a printing house where many of the Indian and other Asian languages were printed for the first time.

### **Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s Residence:-**

It is said that “Vande Mataram”, India’s national song, was composed by Rishi Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay at Joraghat in Chinsurah. The house concerned is situated on the bank of the river Hooghly. Chinsurah is on the opposite bank of the town of Naihati where the novelist was born and brought up. He lived in this house for five years while working as a deputy collector in the district. He was also the first Sub-divisional Officer of Arambagh and an alumnus of the Hooghly Collegiate School. According to Bankim’s biography by Shrish Chandra Chattopadhyay, the former in a July 1880 letter

had written that it was while residing at this Chinsurah home that he wrote the novel Ananda Math, of which the whole five-stanza song became part. Ananda Math was published as a book in 1882, a year after Bankim left the Chinsurah house

### **Armenian Church of St. John the Baptist:-**

St. John the Baptist Church of Chinsura church, built in 1695–1697, is the second oldest Christian church in Bengal, and the oldest Armenian church in India. Each year on 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> January, the church celebrates the feast of John the Baptist. Armenians settled in Chinsura in 1645, after the Dutch, who formed their colony in 1625.

### **Radha Govinda Mandir, Antpur:-**

Antpur, a village located in Jangipara Block, Serampore Subdivision and Hooghly district, houses one of West Bengal's as well as India's finest pieces of terracotta temple architecture – the Radha Govinda Temple. The 100 feet high temple was constructed in 1786 (1708 Shakabda) by Krishna Ram Mitra, the Diwan of Bardhaman Raj. The temple which is more than 200 years old, is about 100-ft high and is built in the style of Bengal architecture school, the aatchalastyle. The front façade is adorned with terracotta tiles depicting Hindu mythological scenes, Hindu gods & goddesses like Radha, Krishna & Durga, scenes from Indian epics Ramayana & Mahabharata and social life in erstwhile Bengal. There are panels showing European women and soldiers as well. The terracotta works are excellent. Its Chandi Mandap and Dol Mancha have beautifully crafted wood carvings and terracotta. It houses a black stone idol of Lord Krishna.



**The Underground House (Patal-Bari) :-**

Situated at Chandannagar, Patal-Bari is a beautiful example of the advancement in the knowledge of architecture. The lowest floor of the building remains submerged in the Ganga, hence the name. Luminaries like Rabindranath Tagore and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar stayed in the building.

**Nandadulal Temple :-**

Nandadulal temple is situated in Durga Charan Rakshit Road, Chandannagar. It was built in 1740 by Indranarayan Roychoudhury. It presents an excellent example of ancient Indian sculptures and was built in do-chala style.

Compilation: Suvamoy Mitra  
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