

# **DISTRICT DIGITAL CULTURAL REPOSITORY MURSHIDABAD**

Directorate of Culture, Department of  
Information and Cultural Affairs  
Government of West Bengal

# Table of Contents

<b>People and Eminent Personalities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Events and Festivals</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Cultural Traditions and Art Forms</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Historical, Anthropological and Heritage Sites</b>	<b>7</b>

# Murshidabad

## *Of royalty and glorious past*

The last capital city of independent Bengal, Murshidabad is steeped in history and heritage, and famous for its mangoes and silk

### **A. PEOPLE AND EMINENT PERSONALITIES**

**Biswanath Chakrvarthy** (1643-1720): Biswanath Chakrvarthy, an inhabitant of Saidabad, was a great Vaishnava scholar of all India fame. He was an eminent philosopher, a famous author of many Sanskrit books and a poet. His greatest achievement was his commentary of the Shrimadhagabatam, entitled Sarath Darshini. His collection of Vaishnavpadabali (devotional songs) titled Kshanada-Gita-Chintamani was the first of its kind in Bengali literature.

**Radha Mohan Thakur** (1696-1776): Radha Mohan Thakur, a resident of Malihati in Bharatpur police station was a descendant of the illustrious Shrinivas Acharya. A renowned Sanskrit and Vaishnav scholar and poet defeated many great scholars of North India in a debate and established the superiority of Gouriya Vaishnavism. His greatest contribution to Bengali Literature was his collection of songs and poem by an eminent Vaishnav poet called the Padamrita-samudra.

**Kaviraj Gangadhar Sen Roy** (1798-1885): KavirajGangadharSen Roy came to Sadabad Berhampur from Kolkata in 1836 and settled there. He became a legend as a physician; he was a scholar in Sanskrit and in various scriptures. Beside commentary on the charankaSamhita, he wrote many others books.

**Govinda Das Kaviraj** (1539-1613): Govinda Das Kaviraj, an inhabitant of village Budhuri near Bhagwangola , was one of the greatest Vaishnavi poet of post Chaitanyaera. It was called vidyapati II, for his versatile talent and for his style being reminiscent of the great Maithili poet. Nearly 800 songs are known to have been composed by him. He was the author of several drummers books on Vaishnava-philosophy and books of poems like Sangita-Madhava, Karnamrita, and Gitamrita.

**Nirupama Devi** (1833-1951): Nirupama Devi was born at Gora Bazar Berhampur. She was a noted novelist and some of her famous books are Shyamali, Didi, and Annapurnar Mandir.

**Rezaul Karim** (1902-1993) :Rezaul Karim was a freedom fighter, a scholar, a journalist and exponent of communal harmony and author of several books and many essays and philanthropist, a variable and popular professor and a highly respected politician.

**Mahasweta Devi** (1926): Mahasweta Devi, daughter of poet Manish Ghatak, writes short stories and novels - mainly about the downtrodden and the tribal people of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. She won the coveted Jnanpith Award for her literary accomplishments and also the Magsaysay Award for her social activities.

**Sayed Mustafa Siraj** (1930): Sayed Mustafa Siraj, a short story writer and a novelist, had risen to fame from a very humble beginning in his ancestral village of Khosbaspur in Kandi. Before being established as a writer he spent his time in various fields of activities like politics and culture. including folk culture. He played an important role in his propagation of alkap, a native dance drama from Murshidabad. Some of his famous books are Hijol-Kanya, Mayamridanga, and Trinabhoomi.

**Ramendra Sundar Trivedi** (1864-1919): Ramendra Sundar Trivedi of Kandi, was one of those persons of Murshidabad whom the people of Bengal can be proud of. A great thinker, renowned writer, social worker and a professor of repute, he rose to great heights in many spheres of life. Though a Professor of Chemistry, he also excelled in subjects like Philosophy and Literature. He was one of the founders of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, the pioneer culture institution of Bengal. Some of his famous books are Jijnasa, Bangalkshmir Brataatha, Charita Katha and Bichitra Prasanga.

**Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay** (1885-1930): Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay of Berhampore was a famous historian, archaeologist and epigraphist and also a novelist, writing mostly historical novels. His greatest achievement was the discovery of the Indus Civilization site Mohenjo-Daro. He also conducted excavations of Paharpur Monastery in North Bengal. He wrote Banglar Itihas, Origin of the Bengali Script, Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture, Palas of Bengal, The age of Imperial Guptas and historical novels in Bengali like Pashaner Katha, Sasanka and Dharmapala.

**Ata Hussain Khan** (1818-1909): Ata Hussain Khan, one of the greatest exponents of Tabla (a percussion instrument), was the court musician of

Feradunjah, the Nawab-Nazim of Murshidabad. He won many awards in his country for his performance. In 1869, his performance was highly admired by the audience at a function in Queen Victoria's palace in England.

**Girija Sankar Chakravorty** (1885-1948): Girija Sankar Chakravorty of Berhampore, perhaps the greatest musician of this district, was famous for his Thumri songs. He was also interested in painting and drama. But he was a genius as a vocalist and known throughout the country. He learned classical music from different schools (Gharana) of musicians all over India. He himself was an institution. Many famous musicians, like A. T. Kanan and Gyan Prakash Ghosh were his students.

**Sheikh Gumani Dewan** (1896-1976): Sheikh Gumani Dewan of Jindihghi in Sagardighi P.S. was by far the greatest Kabial (instant composer and singer of a song-form in which a public debate is conducted by songs) of Murshidabad. He was known for his gentle behaviour and respect for all religions.

**Jhanksu alias Dhananjoy Mondal** (1898-1980): He was born at Dhanpatnagar near Jangipur Town. He was a great exponent of the Alkap and Pancharas (famous song-dance-drama forms of the area)

**Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi** (1860-1929): The Maharaja of Cossimbazar was known for his acts of charity for individuals as well as noble causes, He donated enormous amounts of money to various Institutions, particularly in the field of education and culture. He was the founder of many educational institutions, was a patron of literature, music and other cultural activities. It was because of his initiative that the first conference of Bengali literature outside Kolkata was held at Cossimbazar in 1907. In Mahatma Gandhi's words, no other individuals in the country were equal to him in charity.

**Swami Akhandananda** (1864-1937): A direct disciple of Ramkrishna Paramahansa and a close friend of Swami Vivekananda, he was a wonderer monk who settled at Sargachhi village near Berhampore in 1895 to serve the famine-stricken villagers of Sargachhi and Mahula. The Ramkrishna Mission at Sargachhi founded by him has a school with a hostel and is now a big institution, serving the people.

**Sarat Chandra Pandit** (1880-1968) Better known as “**Dada Thakur**”, he had his ancestral house at Dafarpur in Jangipur Sub-Division but resided Permanently at Jangipur town. A man of simple and dutiful nature with a ready wit and an acerbic tongue, he was a fearless critic of injustice and of any one doing anything wrong, irrespective of their position in the society. His

newspaper, Jangipur-sambad and Bidushak were among his weapons for this purpose. He could compose at will rhymes and songs full of puns and wit. He became an institution in his lifetime.

## **B. Events & Festivals:-**

**Bera Festival:** "Bera" is a festival of local Muslim community, which traces its origin back to about three centuries. English Civil Sergeant Major J. H. Tal Walsh in his book "A History of Murshidabad District" published in 1920 noted that Nawab Murshidkuli Khan used to organise this festival during his tenure. However, historian Golam Hossein mentioned Nawab Siraj-ud-daula as the one who started the festival. Dr. Janes Wise in his book "The Mohamadans of Eastern Bengal" also opined the same.

Bera is a Persi word which means boat, which is destined to make a great journey. The Nawabs used to send gifts to Emperors of Delhi in a decorated large boat and with a prayer for safe journey of the boat, religious rituals were performed. Further, on the same day a grand rally also used to be organised with horses and elephants. Canons were fired and arrangements of dance and music were also made. Keeping the tradition alive, Bera Festival is still organised on the bank of Bhagirathi with a well-decorated boat and other festive arrangements on the last Thursday of the Bengali month of Bhadra.

**Rajya Kabial Mela:** In memory of Sheikh Gumani Dewan, regarded as the greatest Kabial (instant composer and singer of a song-from in which a public debate is conducted by songs) of Murshidabad, Rajya Kabial Mela is organised usually at Jindighi in Sagardighi. This four-day long event, which started in 1999, is primarily sponsored by Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, Government of West Bengal and Murshidabad district administration. This fair is famous for participation of hundreds of kabials from various parts of the state. Usually it is held in the first week of Bengali month of *Falgun*, commemorating the birthday of Sheikh Gumani Dewan, who was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> *Falgun*.

### **C. Cultural Traditions & Art Forms:**

**Rainbense:** Rainbense is one of the most popular folk forms of Murshidabad. The word “Raibense” originates from the word “Rai” which means royal and “Bans” or bamboo. It is an acrobatic martial art form where bamboo stick is used as one of the main instruments. It is also seen as part of “Brataochari” culture prevalent in parts of West Bengal. This dance, performed mainly by males, traces its origin to war dance performed by soldiers. The Kandi subdivision of Murshidabad is famous for many noted Raibense performers, namely, Swadhin Bittar, Shakti Dalui, Abu Saleh and many others.



### **Alkap:**

Alkap originates from the word ‘Al’ & ‘Kap’. Al means “Abalamban” and Kap means “Koutuk” (humour) in Bengali. It is a folk drama popular in Murshidabd, which is entertaining due to comic element. Originally, it was performed as extempore. However, like all other folk forms, Alkap too has also evolved to become more like a kind of *Jatra* or drama having a comic element in it. There are about 10 to 15 artistes in an Alkap team. In Murshidabd, it is said that an artiste named Bonakana from Malda was the forefather of Alkap. Dhanajay

Mandal popularly known as *Jhaksu Ostad*, Naimuddin Manadal. Sudhir Das were some of the well-known Alkap artists of Murshidabad.

#### **D. Historical, Anthropological & Heritage sites**

**HAZAR DUARI:** Situated on the eastern bank of River Bhagirathi, Hazarduari was built in 19th century under the reign of Nawab Nazim Humayun Jah of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The palace of many doors was earlier known as Bara Kuthi and was built so that if any intruder tried to escape, he would be trapped amongst the false and real doors.

The magnificent architecture of the palace is a testimony to grand ornamentation of the Durbar Hall, rich collection of Nawabs' furniture, paintings, statues, rare books and manuscripts along with a host of priceless artifacts. Hazarduari is not merely an architectural marvel having 1000 doors, but a story which still speaks of pride, courage, self esteem and relentless fight against a mighty opposition.



**BIG BEN OR THE CLOCK TOWER OF MURSHIDABAD:** Between the Imambara and the Hazarduari Palace, corresponding or rather contrasting with the rounded cupola of old Madina, is a tall tower of great architectural beauty and majestic height, which affords a magnificent frame work for wonderful



illumination. The tower was designed by Sagar Mistri, a native Bengali assistant of Colonel McLeod, architect of the Hazarduari Palace.

**YELLOW MOSQUE:** The original name of “Yellow mosque” is “Jorod Mosque”.

Some believe that the Mosque was built by Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula while some others believe it to be Nawab Humayun Jah. While there may be contention over its construction, nobody can deny the grandeur that it invokes while looking at it.

**MOTIJHEEL:** Of all the historic places of Murshidabad, Motijheel is one of the most beautiful and artistic creations. This is the place which has seen major ups and down of the then Nawabs.

This palace was built by Nawab Alivardi Khan as a gift to her eldest daughter Ghaseti Begam, when she was got married to Nawajesh Mohammad, a pearl merchant and a valiant warrior of Dhaka.

A lake of horseshoe shape was designed to protect Sinhi Dalan, the palace of Ghaseti Begam from three sides surrounded by a beautiful water body. This lake is known as Motijheel. The conspiracy of killing Siraj-Ud-Daulah was also hatched in this palace.

The Government of West Bengal has re-designed and re-constructed the entire landscape to give an outstanding elegance to this place.

**KATHGOLA BAGAN:** Situated on the northern side of Murshidabad railway station, Kath Gola Bagan has a four storied palace, a temple and a zoo.

A multi millionaire merchant, Lakhshmipat Singh Dugar was asked by heavenly commands to establish a Jain Temple of Shree Adinath. He sought permission from the then Nawab Mobarauddaula. Nawab gave him the permission with a condition that Dugar must also build a luxurious palace for him. Hence a temple was made in imitation of the Parshanath Temple with an idol of Bhagwan Adinath which is considered to be almost 900 years old.

Kathgola Palace is a four-storied palace and is famous for its ornamented facade, valuable paintings, colorful mirrors and priceless furniture. It has a huge Jalsaghar (music room) and has seen performances of some of the most famous

court dancers of the bye-gone era. This place has an underground connection with the house of Jagat Seth.

Nowadays the place is often rented for film and television shooting.



**CHAR BANGLA MANDIR:** If one wants to see most artistic and tasteful terracotta works on the walls of a temple in Murshidabad, he must visit the Char Bangla Mandir and Bhabaniswar Temple. The temples are situated on the West bank of river Bhagirathi and were made by Rani Bhabani, the zamindar of Natore. There are four temples facing each other and each temple has three Shiva Lingam. The biggest one is the temple of Bhabaniswar - an eight-angled tomb. On the wall of the temples, there are statues of Radha Krishna, Hanuman, Kaliadaman and Shri Ram Chandra.

**COSSIM BAZAR CHOTO RAJBARI:** Cossimbazar Rajbari was established by Dinbandhu Roy in 1740, during the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. Ajodhya Ram Roy, the founder of the family had the hereditary title of 'Roy' conferred upon him by the then Nawab Nazim, in appreciation of his meritorious and relentless services. It is a huge palace with 10 Shiva temples, one Radha Govind temple, one Durga temple and a museum.

The front facade of the palace comprises of two huge, iron gates, railings front patio, carriageway and staircases leading up to north verandah, central ball room, and annexes which were built by Nrisingha Prasad Roy, son of Jagabandhu Roy in 1850.



Ratha Yatra, which is still observed today, was started by him. He also constructed his family's residence on the first floor but this was demolished by a devastating earthquake around 1900.

**WASIF MANZIL NEW PALACE :** Nawab of Murshidabad, Wasif Ali Mirza built this beautiful Palace as his residence which is located between Hazarduari and Dakshin Darwaja (South Gate).

The palace was built by Mr. Vivian, PWD officer of the Nadia rivers division. Surendra Barat, a Bengali engineer, directed and supervised the building work. A handsome iron railing encloses a garden space in front, and its main entrance is a fine Norman archway with open-work iron doors.

Entire upper storey of the palace was crashed in a devastating earthquake in 1897 which was repaired later on, (except the second storey). There was also an artificial hill and a landscape garden adjacent to the Palace which no longer exists now. Staircases made of marble and beautiful statues of this Palace are

worth seeing. Halls were used for judicial proceedings and there was provision for Begams to witness them.

**JAFARGANJ CEMETERY:** Jafarganj Cemetery was built by Mir Jafar. It hosts the graves of the later Nawabs of Bengals of the Najafi dynasty, starting from Mir Jafar, and their family members. The Jafarganj Cemetery has the graves of the family members of the Nawab of Bengal. Two most interesting graves found in this area, are of two pigeons, Heera and Panna, of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah who were trained in exchanging confidential information. Unfortunately, they were caught by Mir Jafar and his men, and were killed.

**NASHIPUR RAJBARI:** This grand palace is situated in Nashipur and was built by Raja Kirti Chandra Singha Bahadur in 1865.

Maharaja Ranajit Sinha who succeeded his father Raja Kirti Chand was elected chairman of Murshidabad municipality and a member of Bengal Legislative Council. Nashipur Raj Estate was one of the bigger Zamindaries in Bengal, covering large portions of the districts of Birbhum, Murshidabad and Malda in the present State of West Bengal in India and a major portion of the district Rajsahi and small portions in districts Pabna and Bogra in the present Bangladesh.

The palace is often referred to as a miniature version of Hazarduari Palace due to its similarity of features. Among them are grand flight of stairs and the large vertical standing columns.

**RADHAMADHAB JIU'S TEMPLE ( KANDI):** Situated 3 km south of Murshidabad station, Radha BallavMandir was established in 1609 by Sri Banshibadan Goswami. He brought the valuable black stone statue of God Radhamadhav from Vribdavan and established him in the temple. Subsequently, Divan Ganga Govind Sinha renovated the temple and gave it an artistic form. An Ashtadhatu (an alloy of eight metals) statue of Radha Rani was constructed later on, beside the principal deity.

Raash, Dol, Snan Jatra, Ratha Jatra, Nabanna are some of the important festivals that are organised here every year and are celebrated with great enthusiasm.

**HOUSE OF JAGAT SETH:** The house of Jagat Seth which we see today is actually a palace built by his father Manik Chand. Incidentally, Manik Chand

was extremely close to Murshid Quli Khan, and he built the building after Khan transferred his capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad. The mint was located just next to this palace. The palace had an underground tavern, connected to Motijheel, the mint and Kathgola Bagan Palace. Presently the government has established a museum which showcases ancient muskets, different kinds of weapon, various attires, armours, muslin sarees, manuscripts etc.

**KIRITESHWARI TEMPLE:** It is the oldest temple in Murshidabad district built in 19th century by Darpanarayan. It is one of the 51 Sati Piths and it is where Sati's 'kirit' or crown fell and hence got the name.

The unique feature of the temple is the absence of any image or deity. The red coloured stone which is supposed to be the symbolic representation of the Goddess is covered by a red veil throughout the year. Only on Ashtami of each Durga Puja, the veil is changed and goddess is given a holy bath.

It is said that Mir Jafar in his death bed suffering from leprosy, had requested for the holy 'charanamrito' (the holy water of the lotus feet of the deity after her great both) of Maa Kiriteswari. And he breathed out his last after having the holy sip of water.

**JAGATBANDHU DHAM:** Jagadbandhu Dham, also known as Dahapara Ashram, is situated at Dahapara in Murshidabad.

It is the birth place of Sri Prabhu Jagadbandhusundar. The ashram, founded by Sri Kunjadas Brahmachari, is set in very picturesque surroundings with many historic sites nearby. The Ashram and mandir are surrounded by lush green mango groves and a variety of other trees including 'bakul' flower and the famous 'chalta' trees that are characteristic and emblematic of Probhu Jagadbandhu centres founded by MahanamSampraday of India.

**TRIPOLI GATE:** Tripoli gate was actually known as Chawk Gate. It is a huge gate with a triple arched gateway surmounted with a Nahabatkhana. The gate was built by Nawab Shuja Khan, who succeeded Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. The arches were high enough to accommodate Nawabs riding even on elephants. This marks one of the entrances to the Killa Niazamat area of Murshidabad.

**ROSHNI BAGH :** Roshni Bagh was built in 18th century by Nawab Ali Vardi Khan. The tomb was built in memory of Nawab Shuja-ud Daulla who was son

in law of MurshidQuli Khan. The entire place was often decorated and illuminated with beautiful lights resulting in earning its name as Roshnibagh.

There is also a Shiva Temple near the mosque which was built by one Jagannath Pandit in 1819.

**KHOSH BAG (THE END OF LIFE'S ROAD IS THE GATEWAY TO ETERNITY):** It is the garden cemetery of the Nawabs. The complex is the resting place of Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah, his wife Lutf-un-nisa, Nawab Alivardi Khan, and his mother, amongst others. A mosque, built by Alivardi Khan stands behind the tombs as a witness of history.



**KARNA SUBARNA:** Karnasubarna (made beautiful by Karna) was the capital of Shashanka, the first important king of ancient Bengal who ruled in 7th century. After Shashanka's death it was ruled by king of Kamarupa probably for a short period. This is evident from his Nidhanpur copperplate grant.

In the mid-7th century, it was the capital of Jayanaga. Ruins of Karnasubarna have been located at Kansona in the district.

Compilation: Probal Basak,  
District Information and Cultural Officer  
Murshidabad, May 2022