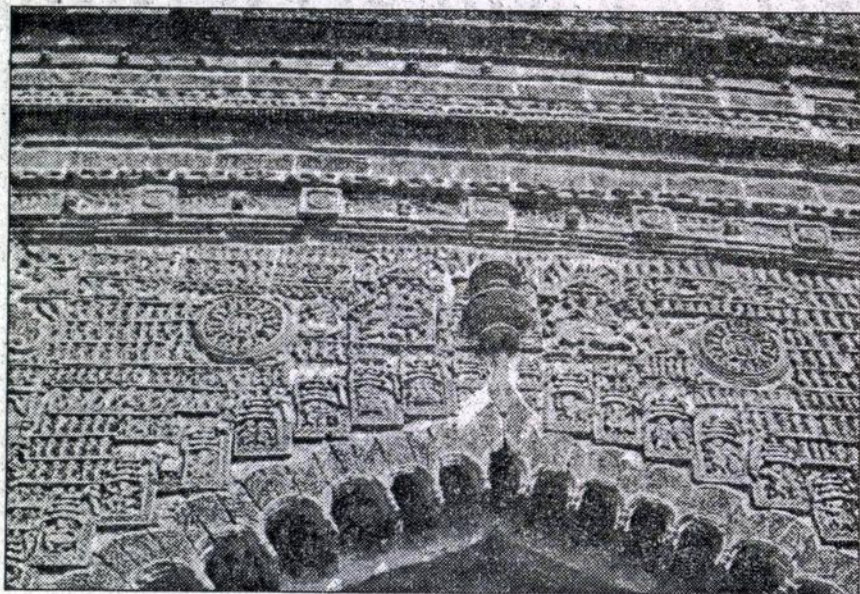


THE BENGAL AGE

RAMAYAN RENDITION ON VILLAGE TEMPLE WALLS



The walls of the Ramchandra temple have excellent terracotta motifs which tell the story of the Ramayan. It is built in the charchala style. Pix:

Somen Sengupta

BY SOMEN SENGUPTA

The Ramayan temples of West Bengal have richly woven histories behind them. Based on the ancient epic by Valmiki, these magnificent structures combine art

with heritage to present a mix of splendid architecture.

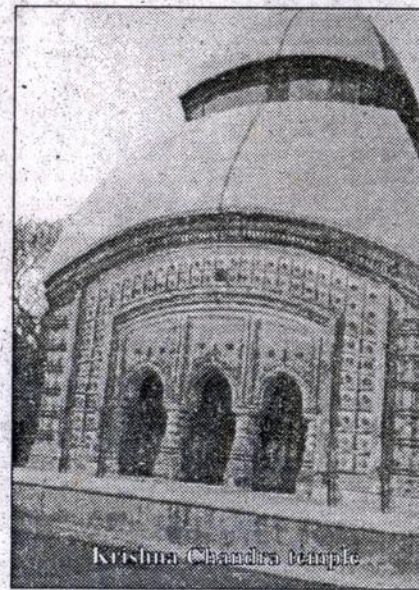
Places like Malancha in Medinipur, Baronagar in Murshidabad, Bansberia in Hoogly and Palpara in Nadia have temples with the influence of Kritibash Ojha's

The hamlet is famous for another reason. Community Durgotsav, commonly called Baroari Puja, is believed to have started here. In mid-17th century, twelve friends from Guptipara got together to organise a common Durgotsav

Ramayan of the 13th century. The son of the soil translated the great epic in Bengali winning the hearts of millions. His epic left its mark on all branches of culture — literature, music and architecture.

The walls of temples are no exceptions. Since stones were not easily available, in Bengal this expression took shape in the form of burnt clay, popularly called terracotta. There was a smattering of Ramayan temples all around the state, the best among them coming up in Guptipara, a small village in Hoogly.

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Krishna Chandra temple

The Ramayan temples of Guptipara stand in a complex with three other temples. Guptipara Math houses Ramchandra temple, Brindavachandra temple, Chaitanya temple, and Krishna Chandra temple.

Of them, Chaitanya temple is the smallest and built in the Jore Bangla style with the double arch roof of the Bengal school of architecture. Built in 1650 by Biswam-

abar Roy this is one of the few temple made in this style. The idols of Gourang and Nityananda adorn the insides of the temple that was originally constructed in terracotta.

The Ramchandra temple built in the first half of the 19th century is another marvel of design. The Charchala style shrine stands on a seven feet high platform with a small tower-like structure at the apex. Terracotta figurines on its walls tell the entire story of Ramayan.

The other two Aatchala temples — Brindavan Chandra temple and Krishnachandra temple — in the compound. They are full of frescoes, prominent mostly in the temples of Nadia.

Brindavan Chandra Temple is basically a Radha Krishna temple. During Akbar's regime, Satyadev Saraswati of Santipu came here to set up an image of Lord Krishna. Harishchandra Roy, king of Sheoraphuli, put up the massive structure in late 18th century.

The Krishna Chandra temple looks very much like Brindavan Chandra temple and has been adorned with creative frescoes.

The story of Guptipara would remain incomplete if the 400 year old Rath Yatra is not mentioned.

A big fair sees devotees gatecrashing the temple for prasad. The event is called bhandar loot.