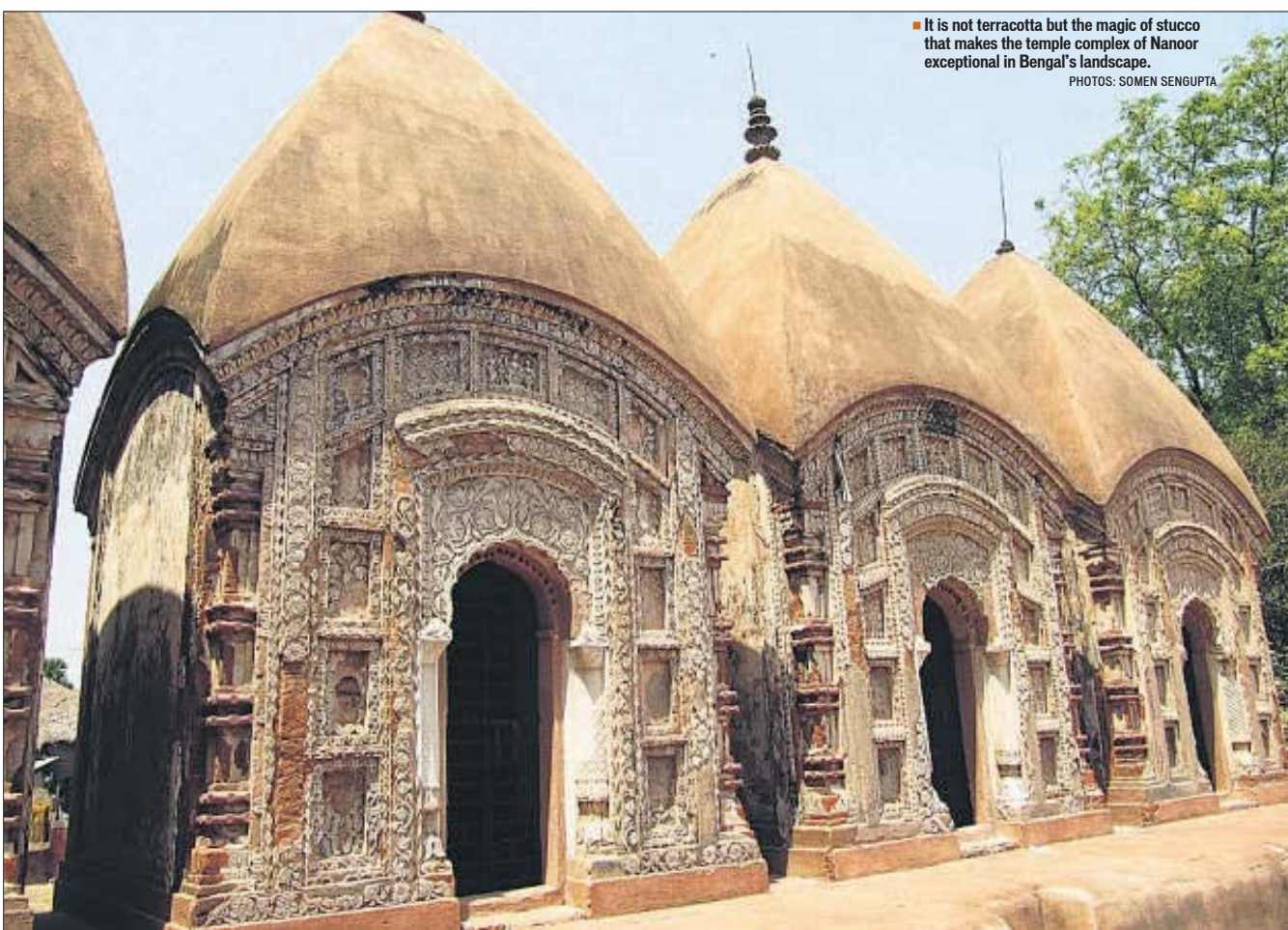


## metrovariety

FOUR SMALL SHIVA TEMPLES IN THE GROUP OF 15 TEMPLES AT NANOOR ARE SIMPLY AMAZING AND DISTINCTIVE



It is not terracotta but the magic of stucco that makes the temple complex of Nanoor exceptional in Bengal's landscape.

PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA



Nanoor's temple walls are decorated with stucco – a mixture of lime, sand and dust shell.

## ONCE UPON A TIME

**DIGGING FACTS** Excavation of Basuli statue and temple artifacts have led to the belief that poet Dwijo Chandidas lived at Nanoor in Birbhum district of Bengal



There was no evidence of this temple in Nanoor for 300 years.

Somen Sengupta  
somen.sengupta@gmail.com

The excavation of the Nanoor temple complex brought to light a rich history of Bengal and artifacts that was hitherto lost to the civilization. Nanoor temple complex in Birbhum district of Bengal, which is 18 km from Bolpur, is a place where legend and history coexist.

Nanoor is that small place where medieval, humanist poet Dwijo Chandidas lived and spread his noble message through his verses. This was the time when Vaajrajaan School of Buddhism began to flourish. At the same time, Hindu gods and goddesses entered the Buddhist pantheon in this part of Bengal. Hindu goddess Saraswati entered Buddhist mythology as Vajreshwari Devi and later was reincarnated as Hindu goddess Basuli.

It is believed that Dwijo Chandidas was worshipper of Basuli and a temple dedicated to the goddess was built at Nanoor. According to history, Dwijo Chandidas was brutally killed in Kirnahar village in broad daylight when he was singing his verses in a kirtan akhra. It is believed that soldiers of Muslim ruler Pathan Khilji killed him and reduced the Basuli temple to rubble. A priceless Radha Krishna image along with many more artifacts was destroyed.

In the next 300 years, there was no evidence of this temple. In early 18th century, local people excavated a mound at Nanoor and the Basuli image as described by Dwijo Chandidas was found from there.

Moved by this amazing discovery zamindar of Dheka village Ramjeevan Roy built a new temple of Basuli in the memory of Dwijo Chandidas. Along with the main temple, 14 additional beautifully designed temples were built over the years. Thus, with a set of 15 temples, a new temple complex was gradually formed. Today, whatever we see at the temple complex is similar to the kind we had at that place in 17th and 18th century.

It is unfortunate that large-scale excavation was never undertaken in Nanoor. The first phase of the excavation was conducted in 1945-46 by University of



**THE TEMPLE COMPLEX OF NANOOR HAS 15 TEMPLES DIVIDED INTO 3 GROUPS. ONE HAS PLAIN ROOF. THE OTHERS ARE AATCHALA OR CHARCHAL A TEMPLES**

Calcutta while Archaeological Society of India executed another phase of excavation in 1963-1964. Both the excavations concluded that the place was inhabited from ancient period but none of the reports concluded very strongly that poet Dwijo Chandidas lived here. However, the discovery of the Basuli statue and the discovery of several temples led to the belief that it was indeed the place where Dwijo Chandidas once lived and worked.

The temple complex of Nanoor having 15 temples is divided into three groups. One group of temples has plain roof while others are *aatchala* or *charchala* temples, which is very common in Bengal school of temple architecture. The *aatchala* temples have eight-slope roofs and are embellished with terracotta motifs. The *charchala* temples are richly decorated with stucco. The seven brick temples are bare, simple and have one Durga Dalan.

Two temples with terracotta tiles are larger in shape and they

stand on a common plinth. Both temples have plethora of floral motifs in their central panel while borders are richly decorated with human figures – mainly that of Dashavatar of Vishnu. The top row of the central space of the entry gate is decorated with small human figures playing various musical instruments while panel just above the gate in central arch contains a row of small chariots, which is a common design in terracotta temples.

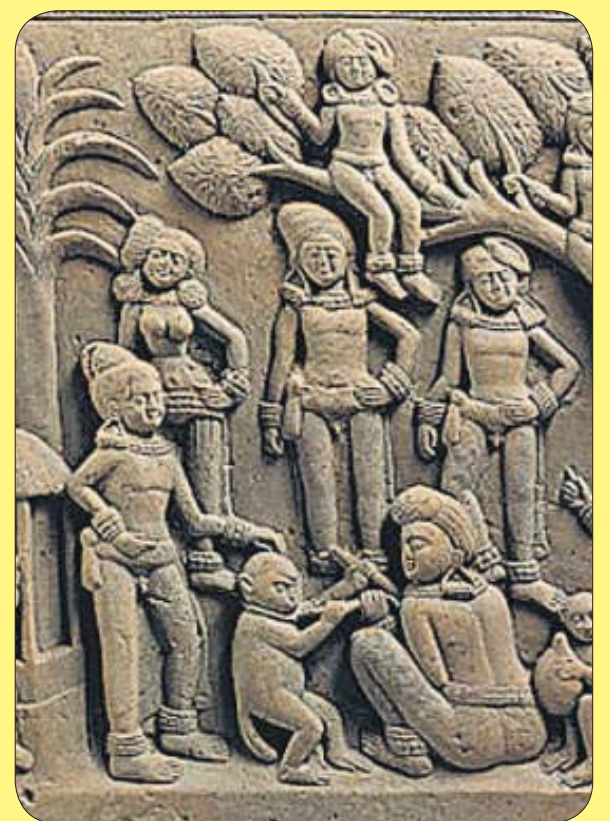
One of the temples has Mahishashur Mardini in the centre with Laxmi, Ganesh, Saraswati and Kartik on her two sides. The figures are small in size but good enough to impress. The most common subject that is found on these temples is Krishna Leela and stories of Purana. A panel showing Krishna eating butter is beautiful.

It is not terracotta but the magic of stucco that makes the temple complex of Nanoor exceptional in Bengal's landscape. Nanoor's temple walls are richly decorated with stucco – a mixture of lime, sand and dust shell.

Unlike terracotta panels, stucco is not commonly used in Bengal for decorating temple walls. Still there are a few temples in Bengal where stucco dominates the artistic imagination. Four small Shiva temples in this group of 15 temples are simply amazing and distinctive. Here, mostly floral designs are done with few birds in the central arch. Human figures like king and queen on the throne receiving services from their attendants are most prominent. However, it is not clear whether these sets of king and queen represent Ram and Sita as there is no detailing of Ramayana in any form. Corner blocks that are crowded with floral designs are exceptionally brilliant.

The Basuli temple where once the historical image was enshrined is ordinary looking. The temple has been renovated several times over the years. The historic Basuli image was stolen from the temple in 2001 and is still missing. The present image is a mere replica of the original.

However, historians are yet to confirm that poet Dwijo Chandidas actually lived in Nanoor and archaeologists are yet to come up with defining evidence of those times. But whatever is there makes Nanoor a rich historical site of Bengal. (The writer is a contributor)



The Monkey Trainer – a rare piece of art at Chandraketugarh.

FILE PHOTO

## Other excavations in Bengal

**CHANDRAKETUGARH**

Located 45 km from Kolkata in North 24-Parganas district. The University of Calcutta first excavated the site in 1956-57. Civilisation flourished in Chandraketugarh from 5th century BC to the medieval period. Later, excavations revealed bone points, dice, terracotta ball and a fragmented terracotta plaque with an elephant on it and a broken red sandstone grinding material. The discovery of a terracotta mithuna plaque is noteworthy. The ceramic types include grey ware, dull red ware and the main shapes are vases, bowls, miniature pots and handis, among other things.

**MOUND NEAR CLIVE HOUSE**

Situated at Dum Dum in North 24-Parganas district. Excavations were conducted here from 2000 to 2003. It brought to surface objects from 2nd century BC to 16th century AD. Terracotta objects having human and animal figurines

of Sunga-Kushan and Gupta period, cast copper and punch-marked coins, plaques, beads, ear studs, seals and sealings, medallion, hopscotch, sling balls, terracotta beads, decorated medallion of Kushan-Gupta assemblages have been found. Pottery works of red ware, dull red ware, grey ware, black and red ware, porcelain ware have been discovered.

**MOUND ADJACENT TO GAUR PALACE**

Excavations were conducted here in Malda district from 2002 to 2005. Digging unearthed artefacts, coins and structures of the Sultanate period (15th century AD) to the Mughal period (17th century AD). Important findings include glazed bricks with floral painted designs, moulded burnt bricks, porcelain and glazed wares, mainly belonging to the Sultanate period. Coins of the Sultanate period and even the British times were found.

## BRUSH STROKES

**CHHATRAPATI DUTTA**

However glorious the golden days of yester years might have been, for anyone living in this cyber age and world with the advantage of having witnessed the happenings of the last 50 years or so could proudly proclaim to have lived in the most densely happening

## Leonardo da Vinci was essentially an Italian polymath

times in the history of mankind.

There is no denying that in no other juncture of history has mankind moved so rapidly into the future of civilization as it has in the last couple of decades. Not in the times of Aristotle, Achilles, Archimedes or Aryabhata did one man traverse between utopian leaps of technological advancement within the span of one lifetime.

Today any average citizen of the world, who is 50, would have travelled through a range of personal and social experiences of confronting technology, each time painstakingly and gradually upgrading himself to finally be able to Skype or make online payments of his bills from home today.

For a man who was comfort-

able with his post office, as far as distance communication was concerned; writing post cards, inland letters and airmails (envelopes meant for foreign countries, which had special stamps) and happy sending telegraphic messages – that too only in times of an emergency – that would take days to reach.

These are Herculean leaps. Having grown up listening to the radio and making telephone calls by dialling (literally rotating the numbers desired on a dial) and reaching the person on the other side via an operator, the coming of television itself was a moment of great excitement.

Then the telephone turned digitally mobile with the advent of the 'pager', which soon brought in the cell phone. For a person, who grew up

with his ears peered to the 'Aakash Vani' (on radio) to be able to now just touch a little mobile screen a few times and not only be able to speak, but also see the other person across distances of continents is no mean distance travelled in one's own mind.

Even after being a part and parcel of this vast body of generated knowledge continuously building on itself and multiplying in leaps and bounds throughout the world, results of which we reap with every passing day now, how strange is it for us to be able to believe that one solitary man could be able to singularly grow in depth and width of all sciences and more, in one's own capacity and within his own lifetime, more than just about a thousand years before us.

Just as life has always been

stranger than fiction, so have the lives of greats like Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci been an enduring and exceptional lesson for human civilization.

Born on April 15th, 1452 at the third hour of the night in the Tuscan hill town of Vinci, then part of the Republic of Florence, popularly just addressed as Leonardo, was an Italian polymath.

With little known about his childhood, this enigmatic youth traversed all paths of scholarship that led him to become a painter, sculptor, architect, scientist, musician, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, geologist, astronomer, cartographer, botanist, historian and writer. Widely known and considered to be one of the

greatest painters of all time and perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived in the Western world, Leonardo had no surname in the modern sense. 'da Vinci' implying his place of birth and 'Leonardo' meaning 'son of' the wealthy Messer Piero Fruosino di Antonio da Vinci, a Florentine legal notary; his mother was a peasant his father never married. Though 'ser' implied that his father was a gentleman, nothing came in the way of his monumental talent of becoming the 'Leonardo' of our hearts.

By remembering Leonardo, we would be synonymously saluting our own near and dear ones, greats like Dr Abdul Kalam of our times.

A study by Leonardo da Vinci

