

It may sound more fiction than fact when we talk about the actual geographical existence of Moynagarh or Garh Moyna as local residents describe it outsiders. Imagine, a living island circled by three water creeks one after another, where communication to the mainland is only via boats. All of this is in the heart of Tamluk, East Midnapore. Astonishment waits on the western bank of Kangsabati river in Tamluk where this unique gem-like place lies rusting in dust, waiting to vanish into oblivion.

In the early '70s, while scouting for location for his classic movie *Ashani Sanket*, Satyajit Ray had almost finalized this spot as the backdrop of famine ridden village of Bengal of 1943. Unfortunately, the plan could not be converted into reality due to logistics issues and lack of electricity.

However, the place cast a magic spell on him and as per a present member of royal family, the axiom "only living fort" was coined by Ray.

In history, the legend of Moynagarh



THE LIVING FORT

Astonishment waits on the western bank of Kangsabati river in Tamluk where this unique gem-like place lies rusting in dust, waiting to vanish into oblivion. *somen sengupta* explores the historical Moynagarh

Although the historical existence of Echal Ghosh is now an established fact by scholars, there is little support found in the favor of Lausen a character mentioned in famous Bengali book *Dbarmanangal*.

Unlike other forts, Moynagarh had no walled compound. It is surrounded by three big circular waterbodies, out of which two

still exist and are regularly. The main island is a land surface of 562500 sq ft and is surrounded by a water body which is 150 ft wide and nearly 12 ft deep. The island is much lower from the mreebed and the entire land surface is supported by earthen wall, as is seen in the Netherlands. This part is called *Bhatargah* or the interior fort. The external surface is called *bihinghar*. This part is encircled by another canal, nearly 150 ft wide and 8 ft deep.

It is disheartening to note that there is no fort-type structure left at Moynagarh.

On the main island, present generation of the royal family resides in modern houses which have no historical significance. Moynagarh attracts people for two things. One is the excellent natural panorama. The water creek with deep green bush and coconut trees lining the shore remind one of the Kerala's backwaters. The lush green of vegetation on the



clear water and the thrabbing silence is unforgettable.

Two temples that still survive on the main island are known as *Rukmini mandir* and *Shyamsundar jew mandir*. The first one, also known as *Lokeshwar shiva temple*, has some terracotta panels.

One panel shows the celebration of *rathiyatra* festival with musicians playing their instruments. It shows the influence of *Vaishnava* cult present in the royal family.

We also noticed various floral motifs and rows of ani-

mals like deer and cows. The quality of the terracotta is nowhere near to that of other parts of



More details at www.midnapore.in. Photographs by *Somen Sengupta*.

Midnapore.

The other temple is a typical pancharatna temple of Bengal school where the family deity *Radha Krishna* are worshipped. The temple with five pinnacles are simple yet majestic. There is no terracotta panel remaining on this temple. All are either removed or got destroyed with time.

There is another temple called *Kameshwar Shiva's* established in 1901 by *Rani Saranoyee* of this family. In 2006 at the time of renovation, the temple's dedicatory stone was unearthed from a layer of cement. It was found one *Shekh Rahamat Mistry*, a Muslim had been the architect of this Shiva temple. This signifies the secular characteristics of Moynagarh.

After the fall of *Pala* dynasty in Bengal, the place tumbled into oblivion for several centuries. In all official and unofficial documents, the place was mentioned as *Killa Moyna chura* - the word *Killa* is derived from Arabic, meaning a castle, while *chura* in Oriya means an island. It was *J D Beglar* the Archaeological Surveyor of Bengal who first used the word *Moynagarh* in the year 1886. He wrote, "The fort is built on an island within an island" in the book "Revised list of ancient monuments in Bengal".

The story of Moynagarh will remain incomplete if the 450-year-old 'tra ma' is not mentioned. Known as a showpiece even of communal harmony of two communities in Midnapore, this *meela* is a living heritage of this place. It is organized in the month of November. The festival is celebrated with fireworks, paper balloons, decorated boats, illuminations and musical concerts.

ACCESS

GOING BY ROAD is the best option. Go to *Nimtoadi*, a small junction before *Tamluk* and from there take the left-bound road to Moynagarh. The name of the village is *Garsafat* or *Garsajung*. *Locate Rajbari*.

Sidhartha Babubalendra a present member of the royal family is a teacher in a local high school. He keeps records of the place and encourages people to explore the place.

From *Esplanade* catch any *Tamluk*-*Boisani* bus from *Nimtoadi* catch a motor-bus to *Moyna*. Nearest rail stations are *Tamluk* (10 km) and *Mecheda* (46 km). Night stay is not needed. Packed food and bottled water is available.

Photography is subject to the permission of the royal family.

Sidhartha Babubalendra can be contacted for more details.