

## Sleepy Seat Of A Quiet Revolution



Somen Sengupta

FEW OF us know that renaissance in modern India originated from a small town called Srirampur, earlier known as Akana, situated a few kilometers from Kolkata.

In this sleepy town, the first modern university of Asia was established and William Carey set up the Srirampur Mission, ushering in the golden era of Indian printing. The history of this town can be traced back to 1756 when Danish traders got this place from the nawab of Bengal, Alivardi Khan. The city was renamed Fredericsnagar after the Danish king Frederic V. But that name didn't last.

The Danes mostly traded in cotton and silk. In 1806, they set up St Olaf's church, a marvellous piece of European architecture, in front of Srirampur court. The next historical spot is the Srirampur college campus where Dr William Carey in 1822 spent Rs 150,000 to set up the first modern university of Asia.

The college building with its classical Greek column and portico offers a panoramic view of the Ganga flowing close by. This college also earned the distinction of bringing about a revolution in printing. When Srirampur Mission was set up, from 1800 to 1834, Carey and his followers translated The Bible in 33 different languages, including Avadhi, Marwari, Baluchi and Multani. Srirampur again made history when in May 1818, India's first



PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA  
Top: Srirampur College;  
Above: St Olaf's Church,  
the Danish landmark

newspaper in Bengali, *Samachar Darpan*, was published from the town.

One of the attractions of Srirampur College is the William Carey Memorial Museum, which has rare manuscripts, coins, letters and articles published by Carey. One should also visit Martyn's pagoda, where educationist Henry Martin used to discuss theology.

### Travel Information

By train from Howrah, Srirampur is hardly an hour away. Take a cycle-rickshaw to visit all the spots. It will cost less than Rs 50. The Carey Museum is closed on Sunday. On weekdays its open from 10 am-4 pm. St Olaf's church is not open to public, but permission can be obtained from the college. ■