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Heritage Tourism sites in Birbhum District of West Bengal : Its Present Condition and Protentialities



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Abstract

To tour is to venture. Tourism is an activity done by an individual or a group of individuals, which leads to a motion from a place to another. From a country to another for performing a specific task, or it is a visit to a place or several places in the purpose of entertaining which leads to an awareness of other civilizations and cultures, also increasing the knowledge of countries, environmental, political, cultural or religious cultures, and history. Thus, Tourism geography covers a wide range of interests including the environmental impact of tourism, the geography of tourism, leisure economies, management concerns and locations of tourist spots. The overall purpose is to gain an appreciation of the past. 'Heritage' and 'Culture' have become interchangeable and elastic terms. In the context of the arts for example, the use of the term culture relates to how a society's history, beliefs, values, traditions and icons are manifested in an artistic format. Heritage tourism helps make historic preservation economically viable by using historic structures and landscapes to attract and serve travelers. Heritage tourism focuses on certain historical facts, as opposed to economically developing the site and surrounding area. Visiting heritage places can be part of a range of activities undertaken by tourists or it can be the sole reason for travel for people with a high level of interest in natural and cultural heritage.

Key words : economically, entertaining, environmental, civilizations,

Introduction :

The land of the "red soil" is also called "the land of the brave." or Virbhumi.¹ The land of red soil", i.e. Birbhum is noted for its topography and its cultural heritage which is unique and is some what different from that of the other districts in West Bengal. Birbhum district is an administrative unit in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is the northernmost district of Burdwan division-one of the three administrative divisions of West Bengal. The district headquarters is located at Suri. The name Birbhum comes probably from the term Land (Bhumi) of the Brave (Bir).² The capital of the Bir kings was Rajnagar Or Nagar.³ According to the works of Gourihar Mitra that the district bears the name of Bir kings, who ruled in the area.⁴ But, another theory says, the word "Bir" in Santali language which means forests,⁵ and therefore, Birbhum could also mean a land of forests.⁶ History of Birbhum District goes back a long way, almost as far back as the 5th century B.C. At the dawn of history, a part of the district (as it now exists) appears to have been included in the tract of the country known as "Rarh", and the part was included in the tract called "Vajjabhumi."

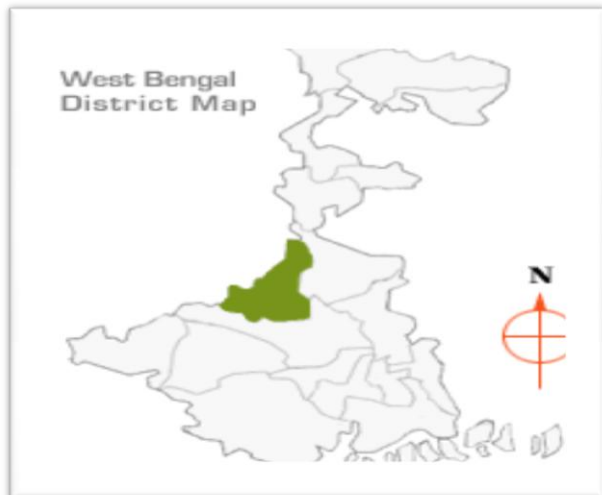
Rarh was part of the territory ruled over by the Mauryan Emperors,⁷ and was subsequently included in the empire of the imperial Guptas, Shasankas, last sovereign king of Bengal and Harshavardhana. In the middle of 12th Century A.D. after dismemberment of Harsha's Empire, the whole area included under the Pala kingdom and formed a part of it until when the overlordship passes to the Sena kings. In the 13th Century A.D. the district passed under the rule of the Muhammedans, and according to some authorities, Lakhanor (or Lakhnour), an important frontier post of Musalman territory, and lay within its limits.⁸ It is true, the whole area of the study belonged to Magadha Kingdom during 14th & 15th century.⁹

2. Study Area

Birbhum is the northernmost District of Burdwan division. It is Located between 23° 32' 30" and 24° 35' 0" north latitude and 88° 1' 40" and 87° 5' 25" east longitude Birbhum and about 4,545 square kilometres (1,755 sq mi) in area. The District is sharing border with Dumka District to

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the North, the jungles of the Santal Parganas on the west, 11 Pakur District to the North, Bardhaman District to the South, Murshidabad District to the East, from which it is separated by the Ajay river. River Ajay forms the southern base whereas the apex of the triangle points to the north. 12 The river forms the boundary between the districts of Birbhum and Bardhaman. 13



3. Objective of Area

The main objectives of the study are-

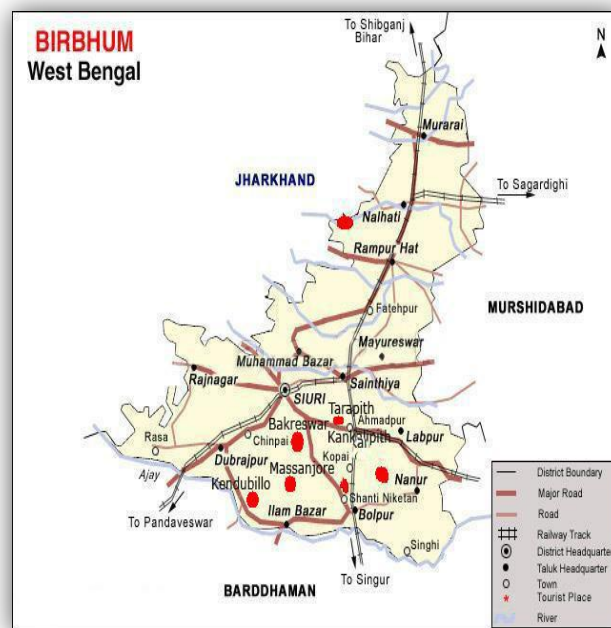
- To highlight the legendary history of Birbhum District
- To highlight places of tourists interests.
- To find out the problems of tourism development .
- To give the suggestions for the tourism development.
- To consider anticipated future growth, aspirations and opportunities in the surrounding landscape.
- To support research in tourism environment related areas.

4.Data Base and Methodology:

The study is based on field observation and secondary data. The secondary data have been collected from various Govt. Departments Website, District Library, Vivekananda Library, Internet, Various Research Society of Bibhum, Gazetteers of the Birbhum, books and Journals issued from Bibhum District.

The study has following phases-

- Information collection from secondary sources,
- Collection of primary information through field work
- Analysis and discussion on heritage tourism potentiality.



8.Suri Sadar Subdivision: Suri Sadar subdivision is a subdivision of the Birbhum district in the state of West Bengal. Which consists of three municipalities, Suri, Dubrajpur, Sainthia, and seven community development Blocks.

8.1 Suri Block - I: A wonderful location to visit, Suri is also known as Siuri, a place for those who want to relish the charm of rich cultural heritage and beauty of Birbhum. This place is famous as a hidden jewel of West Bengal. 14 It boasts of a glorious past in the by gone era, the rich culture heritage and ancient monuments promising the facts. The name of Suri comes from the word 'Shuri', the ancient caste of the area.

8.2 Suri Block - II This block consists of rural areas with six gram panchayats, -Abinashpur, Domdama, Koma, Banshanka, Kendua and Purandarpur. Headquarters of this block is in Purandarpur.

8.3.Sainthia : This block consists of one census town, Ahammedpur and rural areas with 12 gram panchayats. The headquarter of the area is located at Sainthia. Visit to interest: Temple of Nandikeswari: The best tourist place is Nandikeswari. This temple was constructed in 1903. 15 It is 179 km from Howrah. A piece of marble, positioned in between a pipul and banyan tree, is worshipped by the followers. There are also deities of other gods and goddesses. The name of deity probably comes from the name of Bhairav. 16

8.4.Rajnagar: Rajnagar was founded by Bir Singh, a great Hindu Raja in ancient times on whose name the district Birbhum was formed. Rajnagar or Nagar most interesting place and also known as an ancient capital in the District, is situated within pargana Haripur. It is located at a distance of 15 miles from west of Suri. 17 Prior to the arrival of the Muhammadans, Nagar was the capital of the Hindu princes of Birbhum. 18

As per legend, Rajnagar was founded by Bir Singh in ancient times. In 1206, Rajnagar was occupied by Muhammad Shiran, a general of Muhammad Bakhtiyar, and annexed by Ali Mardan, probably in 1211. However, Pathans do not seem to have enjoyed undisputed control over the entire district or area.

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In the middle of the 16th century the entire district was brought under the administration of the Mughals through numerous wars waged on this 'Gateway of Bengal'. The later Muslim Zamindars of Rajnagar, known as "Nagar Raj", were feudatories of the Mughals.¹⁹

Bakreshwar:

Village Bakreshwar in Suri Sub-division is situated 59 km from Shantiniketan 18 kms South West of Suri and 6 miles north-west of Dubrajpur railway station on the Andal Sainthia branch of the Eastern Railway. ²⁰ The word Bakreshwar comes from the name of Lord Shiva worshipped in the locality.²¹ Bakra means bent or curved. Ishwar means God.²² Mythologically it is said that in Satya Yuga during the marriage ceremony of Lakshmi and Narayan, Astabakra Muni²³ (then known as Subrata Muni) was insulted by Indra. The muni was so enraged that he developed 8 cripples in his body Ashtabakra Muni was blessed by Lord Shiva here after many years of Tapashya (meditation). ²⁴

Bakreshwar is also a place of geological interest with many hot springs. There are ten hot springs here. They are:

- Paphara Ganga.
- Baitarini Ganga.
- Khar kunda: The water in this spring is of 66 degrees Celsius.
- Bhairav kunda: The water in this spring is of 65 degrees Celsius.
- Agni kunda: Agni means fire. The water in this spring is at 80 degrees Celsius.
- Dudh kunda: Dudh means milk. The water of this spring attains a dull white hue during early morning probably due to ozone concentration. The water in this spring is at 66 degrees Celsius.
- Surya kunda: Surya means sun. The water in this spring is of 61 degrees Celsius.
- Shwet Ganga, Brahma kunda & .Amrita kunda.

8.5. Khoyrasole: Khoyrasole Block consists of rural areas with ten gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Khayrashol. There is no located any heritage places but most of the area of the block is rural.

8.6. Dubrajpur: Dubrajpur was an ancient town, situated in the south of Shah Alampur Pargana.²⁵ It is a little settlement and have a big Shiva temple in the Pahareswar hill area. There are numerous huge rocks in the Numbers of granitic rocks are found in the same area. There is a Goddess of Kali temple built by Gopinath Hadi in 1296, Bengali era.²⁶ The granite is gray and composed of glassy quartz pink, gray feldspar and black mica. Two significant rocks are recognized as Mama & Bhagne (Uncle & Nephew).

The beauty of the place is very much pleasing. Travellers from different places come to visit there everyday.

Hetampur: The settlement of Hetampur is situated near Dubrajpur and 14 miles to the south-west of Suri. ²⁷ The founder of Hetampur is Hatem Khan. ²⁸ It was formerly within the Zamindari of the Raja Bahadur of Hetampur. ²⁹ It is well-known for the past Historical heritage and famous for Rajbari. Hetampur has a number of good tanks, ³⁰ one of those Govindasayar which surrounded by human settlement and on the northern side of the sayar there is a heritage Degree College named Krishna Chandra College, established on 27th June in 1897. ³¹ Padma Sundari, queen of Ramranjan is established the College by the name of her father in law. The Ranjan Palace of Hetampur,

made in the style of Hazarduari of Murshidabad is one of the chief tourist spots here, is a beautiful specimen of art and architecture. ³²

8.7. Md. Bazar: A village in the police station of the same name, is situated 7 miles to the north of Suri, headquarter of Birbhum District. ³³ Mahammad Bazar block consists of rural areas with 12 gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Patalnagar.

Visit to interest: There is located a famous Peer Mazaar, named Makdum Saheb at Makhdumnagar near Md. Bazar and 18 Km. from Suri town. ³⁴

9. Bolpur-Sub Division: It consists of one municipality and four community development blocs, Bolpur–Sriniketan, Ilambazar, Labhpur and Nanoor. The four blocks contain 40 Gram Panchayats. The subdivision has its headquarters at Bolpur.

9.1. Bolpur–Sriniketan block: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats and the Headquarters of this blocks is Sriniketan. As its history it was a small village in 1851-52 in pargana Shoopoor. ³⁵

Santiniketan: It is situated near Bolpur, in the Birbhum District of West Bengal, Santiniketan is a small town famous world-wide, as it was the hometown of the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali polymath. ³⁶

Sriniketan: Merely 3 km from Santiniketan, the university town in West Bengal, is Sriniketan, a rural reconstruction center that was established in 1922. Apart from this, major attractions in Sriniketan include Kala Bhavana, Rabindra Bhavana, Uttarayan Gardens and Deer Park.

Birbhum offers explorers and those in quest of excitement and thrill an excellent opportunity to indulge in adventure escapade. Located near Shantiniketan, in Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum District, Ballabhpur Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1977.

Kankalitala: It is situated 7 KM. from Bolpur in the village, Bengutia, in the station Prantik.³⁷ Devi Kali in the appearance of Devi Kankali is admired in this temple. ³⁸ This temple is believed to be an extremely holy place by the Hindus. A festivity is also held yearly throughout the April.

It is one of the fifty two pithas or sacred where a part of the dismembered body of Sati fell. In this case the waist (Kankal), hence the name. It is one of the fifty two pithas or sacred where a part of the dismembered body of Sati fell. In this case the waist (Kankal), hence the name.

9.2. Ilambazar : This Block is situated 39 KM. south-east of Suri, 16 mile from Dubrajpur³⁹ and 20 KM. south west of Bolpur on the northern bank of the river Ajay which forms the boundary between Birbhum and Burdwan. ⁴⁰

Headquarters of this block is in Ilambazar. A considerable place of trade and the headquarters of a police circle, situated in the southern portion of the ancient Shah Alampur Pargana. ⁴¹ The English assumed the direct administration of the district in 1786 and the British East India Company had a factory at Ilambazar. At that time the French East India Company also made a foray in the Ilambazar area. ⁴²

Joydev-Kenduli: Jaoydev is an old village and gram panchayat in Ilambazar community development block in Bolpur subdivision of Birbhum District of Bengal. It is situated on the bank of Ajoy river⁴³ and 24 mile from Suri and 12 mile from Dubrajpur station. ⁴⁴ Local people are known by the name Kenduli. ⁴⁵

It is renowned as the birth place of great Sanskrit poet Joydev who flourished in 12th Century and composed the well known Geet-Govinda, a Sanskrit Lyrical poem.⁴⁶ The Radhabinode temple has exquisite terracotta carvings⁴⁷ some depicting Ramayana scenes on the

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wall of the temple.⁴⁸ The temple was built by the queen of Burdwan, named Nairani Devi in 1605 A.D. ⁴⁹ Annual-Mela is held in the village Kenduli in the last day of Bengali month Pous and first 2 days of Magh⁵⁰ and is attended by thousands of pilgrims including Bauls. The fair is at least 50 years old and serves as a great congregation for Bauls of Bengal.

9.3. Nannoor: 47 Kms. from Suri and 29 Kms from Ahmadpur by road. Headquarters of this block is in Chandidas Nannoor. Famous for birth place of Chandidas, a famous lyric poet of 14th century. ⁵¹ Nannoor is a town with a police station in Bolpur subdivision. It is developing as a craft centre with NGO support. Visit to interest: There is a temple dedicated to Devi Basuli at Nannoor.⁵² The Navaratna temple at Brahman dihi, and the Chand Roy temple and four Shiva temples at Uchkaran are amongst the temples under the protection of the state archaeological department.

9.4 Labpur: Labpur is a little gateway near Bolpur-shantiniketan in Birbhum district. The entire place is its virgin natural beauty. Labpur village is covered in greenery, but is quite developed.

Visit to interest: The beautiful temple of Fullara is just 50 km from Bolpur linked with Nanur/ Kirnahar and adjacent to the labpur station, where myths and legends abound. ⁵³ The temple is almost a hundred years old and believed to be one of the 51 piths of Goddess, where Sati's dead-body fell. The myth is that, the lip of Sati cut down at Fullara. The temple is surrounded by dense foliage, giving the place a mysterious look.⁵⁴ A huge pond nearby enhances the beauty of the destination.

Ahmedpur: Ahmedpur is a town in the Suri Sadar subdivision of Birbhum District. There is railway Station at Ahmedpur on the Bardhaman-Sainthia section of Sahibganj Loop. Ahmedpur is a village panchayat under Sainthia panchayat of Birbhum Zilla Parishad. The town is well known in the area for its sugar mill, rice mills, some of which manufacture bran oil⁵⁵ and as one end of the vintage narrow gauge railway. It hosts a growing local business centre, being well connected with Kolkata and other cities of West Bengal via railway.

10. Rampurhat subdivision: Rampurhat is a subdivision of Birbhum District of West Bengal. It consists of two Municipality, Rampurhat and Nalhati and eight community development blocks.

10.1. Rampurhat-I: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Rampurhat. Charles Hamton, contractor of British East-India Company came to live at Rampurhat on the eve of the 1st World War and renovated the area. ⁵⁶

10.2. Rampurhat-II: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Rampurhat.

Tarapith: Tarapith a holy religious place, is situated in a village Tarapur under Rampurhat Police Station of Rampurhat Sub-Division in the district of Birbhum. The common local opinion is that it is really a Pith and Basistha selected this place for worshipping Sati because it was a pith. It is visited everyday by a good number of devotees. Here pilgrims constitute a vast chunk of domestic tourists. The Tantric Hindu temple is dedicated to goddess Tara, a fear some Tantric aspect of the Hindu Divine Mother the chief temples of the Goddess-oriented Shakta sect of Hinduism. ⁵⁷

Zafar Ali Khan is one of the Peer Mazar, located at Margram, under Margram P.S. The common local opinion is that Zafar Ali Khan was one of the relative of Mughal

Emperor Aurangzeb and he came there to punish the outraged local ruler, manpat Singh. ⁵⁸

10.3. Nalhati-I: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Nalhati, which is situated to the north east of the Rampurhat subdivision. ⁵⁸ It is situated near Nalhati Railway Station on the Howrah Sahebganj loop line of Eastern Railways.⁵⁹ It is famous for Nalateswari Temple.⁶⁰ It is so called because Nala or throat of Sati fell here as known by tradition.⁶¹ Another report says that it was a Lalat or forehead that fell here. ⁶² It is regarded as a Pithas i.e. one of the 52 places where parts of Sati's body fell. ⁶³ It is located on a small & beautiful hill.

10.4. Nalhati-II: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Lohapur. Visit to interest: There is situated a phalus or symbolic representation of Lord Shiva beneath of a big tree at Banerwar village 1 mile from famous Jeen Dighi near Lohapur area. ⁶⁴ Bana Raja of Kirat was established the holy place at the same time. ⁶⁵ Bhadrapur is a Memorial village of Maharaja Nanda Kumar, ⁶⁶ within Bhadrapur Panchayat, there is a 'Guhyakalika' temple established by the king himself⁶⁷ and also located a peer mazaar under a Banyan tree. ⁶⁸ Southern-side of the village there is situated the big Rajpalace of Maharaja Nanda Kumar and beside the palace two big tanks named 'Ranisayar' and 'Gurusayar' remained abandoned. ⁶⁹

10.5. Mayureswar-I: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats, viz. Baraturigram, Dakshingram, Mollarpur-I, Bajitpur, Jhikodda, Mollarpur-II, Dabuk, Kanachi and Talowan. Headquarters of this block is in Mollarpur. Once Mollarpur was a capital of Mollo Kingdom. Molleswar Shiva temple was built by the Mollo King in 1124. ⁷⁰

Visit to interest: The temple of Dabukeshwar at Dabuk is a holy village under Mayureswar-I block of Birbhum district. This Dabukeshwar temple is the highest temple built keeping in mind its huge architecture and space in Birbhum district.⁷¹ It was constructed in 1287 Bengali era.⁷²

10.6. Mayureswar-II: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Kotasur.

Visit to interest: The village also has the temple of Goddess "Palashbasini" and of Goddess "kali of Dwarbasini", "Kundalatala", once frequented by Nityananda, still exists in this village. There is a Shiva temple named Kaleswar, is situated under Mayureswar Police Station, Birbhum on the Road from Sainthia to Kandi, Murshidabad turning right from Kaleswar more 3 km distance to the Temple.

10.7. Murarai-I: This block consists of rural areas with seven gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Murarai.

Visit to interest: Two muslim saints graves are located there in the locality, one is Kopa-Pirasthan and other is Nyangta Peer. The first is situated at Kopa village, two KM. from Chatra Station in Murarai P.S. and another is at Rudranagar 4 KM. from Chatra Station. ⁷³

10.8. Murarai-II: This block consists of rural areas with nine gram panchayats. Headquarters of this block is in Paikar. Visit to interest: Mahabub Shahar Mazaar is located at Edrakpur village 5 KM. from Paikar under Murarai Block-II. Another Mazaar named Kalapeer situated at Sumsumerpur village in the same Block.

11. Causes of Backwardness in Tourism.

The main causes of backwardness in tourism of the district are-

- The tourist spots are connected with pocket routes

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its cultural heritage and unique topography which is quite different from the other districts in West Bengal.

- The history of Hetampur and Rajnagar are unwritten registry. So, it is not highlighted to the national and international tourists.
- Most of the Tourist places are not protected by the Govt., above all, it is true that many places are not interested to local visitors due to anti-social activities.
- Some Heritage places are not highlighted to outside due to the fact that there is lack of communication of local people to outside.

12. Government Efforts:

Government has taken initiative to the development of some of the Tourist spots in Birbhum Districts like other places of West Bengal. These are-

- The Government of West Bengal is desirous of promoting Birbhum as an ideal tourist. It aims at developing specialized tourism products such as: Pilgrimage tourism i.e. Tarapeeth, Nalhati and other important places.
- Some of the locations already chosen for the disbursement of funds are Nalhataswari of Nalhati, Nandekeswari of Sainthia, Gopal Nagar of Mohammed Bazar and Bakreswar of Suri.
- These locations have been hindered by communication problems and the lack of toilets, drinking water, and other basic services, as far as attracting tourists was concerned.

13. Suggestions for the Tourism Development:

The suggestions for the heritage tourism development in this region are-

- Tourism has been declared as an Industry by the State in 1996. The Government in an effort to promote the same has formulated a number of schemes to encourage Tourism.
- Transport and communication should be developed.
- The legendary history and the heritage tourist spots should be highlighted to other districts and states.
- Both the State and Central government should take proper steps for the development of tourism.
- The local people should also come forward for the highlight of tourist's places and their development.
- In recent years, the growth of tourism has slowed, due to lack of communication.

14. Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are-

- The Birbhum district bears a legendary past history.
- Most of the tourists places of the district are located in pocket routes.
- There is huge potentiality of heritage tourism development.
- The tourist spots are not so highlighted to the outside tourists.
- The recent excavation sites are very important to researchers, students and tourists.

15. Conclusion: Birbhum is very well connected to the other districts in West Bengal. The Panagarh-Moregram Expressway linking Grand Trunk Road (NH 2) Apart from this, there are several other entry points for the place as well. Regular bus services from Kolkata, Siliguri and other cities connect Birbhum to all the districts in West Bengal. Tourism in Birbhum district lies in visiting the various ancient temples located here. Of particular interest here are the various pithas that are found here. Pithas are said to be the sites where one of the many dismembered body parts of Sati fell. Apart from these a number of Shiva temples are also found strewn in the district. Birbhum is distinguished for

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