

History on the Banks of the Buriganga

By Rahat Fahmida

BDHAKA is heir to a rich cultural legacy. So, for every traveller who has any taste of his own, the only useful guide-book will be the one which he himself has written. All others are an exasperation.

The capital of Bangladesh — Dhaka, lies on the northern bank of the river Buriganga. Situated at the heart of the country, Dhaka is able to command all the great water routes.

The Buriganga, about 26 miles in length, rejoins the Dhakeswari near Narayanganj, twin city and in some sense port of Dhaka.

The tourist destinations vary according to motivational reasons. Dhaka over the years has attracted quite a number of wanderlust tourists.

That is those, who desire to exchange the known for the unknown, to go and see different places, people and cultures of relics of the past in places famous for their historical monuments, ruins and activities.

One can, unequivocally say that the historical remarks are the only attractions which can turn Dhaka city into a destination for thousands of tourists all around. Some of the prominent and prospective re-

sources in Dhaka, that have been inherited are quite a few.

The Lalbagh Fort and its monuments is talked about in all the tourists books and guides. This fort is situated in the South-West corner of the city. This was started by Prince Muhamed Azam, the third son of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, in 1678. Besides the decorative walls and gates, a fine masonry tank, an audience hall, a mosque, the tomb of Pari Bibi are important at-

tractions inside the fort.

Then there is Khan Mohammad Mirdha's Mosque, on Mahallah Alish Khan, about 1 mile west of the Lalbagh Fort. In the north of the Lalbagh Fort, on Dhakeswari road, the Dhakeswari temples.

After visiting the Lalbagh Fort along with the other places of interest around it, one may proceed South-East, along the bank of the

Buriganga river, following the water works road till it enters the busy hub of the old city — the Chawk Bazar. The scattered group of monuments around the Chawk is best visited on foot, leaving the Chawk behind, the winding stretch of about three miles of east-west road parallel to the river, passes through Islampur, Wiseghat and Sankhari Bazar and terminates at Sadarghat. The stretch of highly twisting road is of great interest, as here you can still breathe the atmosphere of 19th century Dhaka, which is typical of all oriental cities. The streets are narrow and crooked, lined on either side by tall, decrepit and precariously poised old houses which, on the lower floors, accommodate wholesale shops selling all conceivable articles of packed merchandise from fruits, flowers, footwear to costly — silver and brass jewellery. The seething crowd of pedestrians is bounded by a constant stream of indiscriminate cycle-rickshaws, push-carts and occasionally by the now fast disappearing hackney-carriages. One is just as likely to be confronted by a bullock-cart as the latest model of the Mercedes-Benz.

South-east of the central jail, on the Begum Bazar road is Kartalab Khan's Mosque, close to this mosque is Baoli.

South-west of the Chawk Bazar, that is facing the Buriganga river is — 'Bara Katra'. This is one of the most important remains of Moghul period. Built in 1644 by Abdul Qasim Dhan of Shah Shuja. Unfortunately it is now in ruins and the old glory has been lost.

'Choto Katra' is situated about 200 yards east of 'Bara Katra'. It was built in 1633 by Shaista Khan.

It is a pity and shame that both 'Bara Katra' and 'Choto Katra' are at present overcrowded with shums and huts, small factories and merchants' godowns, and in a way its original grandeur can hardly be seen.

A tourist should not miss the 'Husaini Dalan' and the 'Ahsan Manzil'.

The Husaini Dalan, is the famous Imambara of 'Shah' community, a sect of the Muslims is located behind the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. It was built around

1642.

The 'Nawab Bari' or the 'Ahsan Manzil' is situated on the northern bank of the Buriganga. The palace was originally built in 1872 by Nawab Abdul Ghani.

Among other important buildings of Dhaka the Rose

Garden, Sutrapur Zamindar Mansion, Sankhanidi House (specially the dance hall), Bhajhari Lodge, Ruplal House are worth seeing for their elegance and architectural beauty. There are also many historical tombs, mausolea, monuments, mosques, and temples in Dhaka.

When one travels down from the old city following the north-south running Nawabpur road, turning at right angle to Sadarghat and eventually ap-

proach the Ramna group of old buildings of the early 20th century, which are centred around the Curzon Hall. From here onward, to the north, east and west, the city of 'New Dhaka' spreads with its modern buildings.

Preservation of historical remains is becoming more and more important for our country. Because except our glorious historical past, we have very little to sell to the wanderlust tourists.

Capital City of Brass, Pearls and Many Lures

By Fayza Haq

If you are keen to collect items in brass one of the best places to hunt is the Brass Village, not far from Dhaka city, all you do is get yourself a van and arrange a group of six or eight people and you are off on an expedition to discover necklaces, waist belts, anklets, bracelets and decorative pieces like statues of gods and goddesses. Brass bowls, trays, plates and images of animals and birds, specially elephants, deer, swans and ducks are all available here.

If you wish to decorate your lounge room or your dining place or even the niche in the verandah or the empty space in the bedroom, there is nothing like these brass treasures that you get in all shapes and sizes to match your choice and pocket.

The prices are cheaper than anywhere available in the city itself and the items remain greatly prized when taken to places like USA, Europe and Australia. The dancing Radhas and Krishnas are definitely pieces of art and are comparable to any that you can get in adjoining India.

There was an active Hindu and Buddhist culture flourishing in Bangladesh before the rulers from Delhi took over and influenced the people. The handwork is fine and imaginative as found anywhere. People interested in art relics, in historical items, in collecting beautiful artifacts from the east would do well to come here to fill their hearts with feasts of artistic accomplishments.

If you do not have the nerves or the time to undertake the trip to the Brass Village there are numerous shops in Gulshan and Banani that will please you with brass artifacts that will please your heart. These small shops even have bedheads, table tops, lanterns and table-lamps complete with stone encrustings. You have a vast selection of items for your personal wear and for your house. Gifts for friends are also easy to select from here.

Once again the prices are reasonable and you can bargain at will. Bowls, platters, paperweights, candlebras, paper knives, sets of jug and cups in the style of Omar Khayyam's imaginative poetry, pairs of swans and ducks are all available at these shops. Tigers, deer, cobra, and fish are found in tantalising brass shapes.

If you should wish for a cheaper variety of bric-a-brac for the house, and do not wish to venture too far from your hotel, placed centrally in the city, all you have to do is take a rickshaw or scooter and sometimes even casually walk, if the weather is good, and reach new Elephant Road, at the heart of the city. The shops here — alternated with carpet, shoe, dress and toy shops — sell beautiful brass lamps and trays which would do you proud in a western citadel.

Brass trays with filigree work, inlaid with stones, standing on wooden legs, brass plaques with calligraphy and patterns of idyllic oriental lovers, picture frames pen holder sets, "golab pashes" and "attar dans" are here to entice the man seeking curiosities from the east.

Should you be a little more bold you can take a rickshaw and venture into the silver jewellery shops in Old Dhaka. The jewellery pieces they make — the "hashuli", "bicha", "bala", "ball" — for the ears, throat and the wrist are made from pure silver. Often they are beaten silver and filled with stuffing so that the jewellery appears bold, impressive and stunning by any standards. Articles of use for the home in silver such as "attardans" and "golab pashes" are done in immaculate details. Here also are "pandaans" and little boxes for "panmasala". These ornate pieces, done with inlaid and filigree work are fine indeed. Models of Bangladeshi boats with sails and paddles are also to be found at reasonable prices.

These jewellery items and silver

pieces are traditional ones. They have been making these types of fancy ornaments for hundreds of years. They make plaques and trays too and almost anything which you feel like fancying like soapcases or picture frames.

At Islampur, where these silver commodities are found, you can shop for anything from anklets to bracelets and be satisfied. The prices here are much lower than what you would find in Bangkok or Singapore and the design too is unique. Most of the motifs used are floral and suitable for the feminine taste.

While you are in Old Dhaka, you can have a taste of bangles made from conchshells which is unique to this area and different from bracelets and bangles found anywhere else in Asia and suits the western wrist just as much as the Hindu housewives, who must wear these conch shell bangles as a routine.

Apart from the brass and silver in Dhaka there is the lure of the pearl. You find pearls of different qualities, sizes, and shapes. Pink pearls are the speciality of Bangladesh and they are available in various places in the city, ranging from Gulshan to Chandni Chowk, Purana Dhaka, Baitul Mukarram and New Market. You can find them at "Shetuli" and "Arong" shops too along with stones like garnets and sapphire, brought in and made into tempting jewellery in Dhaka handicraft shops. Rice pearls are also made into jewellery and sold at these local shops. Should your mind fancy gold bracelets for your wife or gold chains for your sweetheart, Dhaka is the place where the making charges remain reasonable and you can be assured of the gold content.

For this "Jarwa House" and "Pearl Paradise" are reliable places to shop at. Peacock designed necklaces and earrings have been made with enamel and stone work for decades now. Dhaka is certainly a place where the jewellery and brassware connoisseur will find tremendous satisfaction.

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