



Palace of Queen Bhawani

Reminiscing the glory of Queen Bhawani's palace

WOULD there be any Bangalee who has not heard of Bonolata Sen's Natore?

The 150-year old town around 225 kilometres to the west from Dhaka, is not only famous for its Kantchagolla (a kind of sweet), gold ornaments and the country's largest beel - Chalan, is famed for its historical relics and monuments of archaeological interest.

Two palaces stand out in royalty at a distance of approximately two kilometres at the northern corner of the town. Having remnants of the largest Zamindari in Indian subcontinent is Uttara Ganabhaban or the Palace of Queen Bhawani.

Once a symbol of pride,

Queen Bhawani, born in 1706 AD, ruled a large part of Bengal for five long decades in the 18th century. Historians say, the queen ruled an area of 13,000 square kilometres encompassing Bangladesh's Rajshahi, Rangpur, Pabna, Dinajpur, Bogra, Kustia and India's Nadia, Birbhum and Maldaha from her palace in Natore.

So extensive was her territory of 164 parganas that it took at least 35 days to visit the entire kingdom, describes writer Holwell, an Englishman. The kingdom's annual revenue at the time amounted to Tk 1.5 crore of which she paid Tk 72 lakh to the Nawab of Bengal. The surplus revenue was used for intensive welfare activities for her people and during her

regime, she spent about Tk 50 crore to build roads, schools, temples and other charitable institutions.

Her palace erected between 1706 and 1710 by her father-in-law King Ram Jiban housed 21 buildings, four temples and five water reservoirs on the 70.42 acres of land. The buildings and ponds on 37.40 acres of land are vested properties while the 20 acres of the Inner Ber Chowki lake surrounding the entire palace (ten buildings and five ponds) and 13.02 acres of the lakeshore belong to the government.

Some of the buildings were named Chhoto Taraf's palace (queen's youngest son), Kachari Bari of Boro Taraf, Kachari Bari of Chhoto Taraf, Rani Mahal, Honey queen's palace (queen's pishima's house), Guard house, Arsenal, Stable and temples. The ponds also have names, such as Jaltong, Gopinath, Debottar, Chhoto Taraf and Tarakesswar.

Since liberation, the palace housed the Agricultural Training centre, District Judge's court, police line, police superintendent's office and Agriculture Development Corporation's revenue office. In 1985, the then deputy commissioner of Natore turned the surrounding areas of the palace into a youth park that have some 163 varieties of trees.

Arrayed in large and tall devdaru, palm and coconut trees and a beautiful flower garden will greet you at the entrance to the palace. Yards before the main gate, flows the Inner Ber Chowki (sentinel) lake from where one can take a cruise round the palace by boat. At the entrance, lies Ananda Bhaban, built in 1995 to be rented out for cultural functions and marriage ceremonies.

Some 200 yards into the premises, a giant building on a five-foot platform will not miss your eye. It was called the palace of Boro Taraf King (queen's elder grandson), but local people preferred it as the queen's Darbar Hall.

The main gate of the Darbar Hall stands on eight pillars having embedded six idols of women and children on each of them. These idols grafted with architectural marvel at every top, - windows, doors and walls. A little staircase of snow-white touchstone will lead you to the floor mildly designed with black and white stone.

The most exciting view is yet

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to come. This building has 12 rooms, 120 doors and almost a double more windows. You will find a very formal hall on entering, but when you turn your eyes upwards, the spectacle of a beautiful Italian design in different watercolours

will entrance you.

There are also another well decorated palatial building named as the palace of Chhoto Taraf (queen's youngest grandson) in the southern corner of the Darbar Hall.

The spiral staircase, ornamentally plastered walls, pillars and tombs at the building is a reminiscence of its past glory and the architectural values of the palace which was, currently controlled jointly by the Archaeological department and

local administration.

Built nearly 300 years ago, Queen Bhawani's Palace is gradually loosing its grandeur due to lack of attention though, a scanty restoration, at a cost as low as Tk one crore two years ago added some lustre to attract

tourists.

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