



Tajhat Palace

Tajhat's role in Mahiganj's urbanisation

TAJHAT palace still attracts visitors from home and abroad because of its amassing architectural skill. The 100-year-old extraordinarily designed palace makes visitors ponder over the urbanisation of old Rangpur and craftsmanship of the past.

Mahiganj the then main town of Rangpur of which Tajhat was a part. This town was urbanised with the Tajhat viceroy as the centre...

The word *taj* means cap and *hat* means bazaar. In fact there was a bazaar of caps, about $\frac{1}{2}$ km in the southwest of Mahiganj. Caps, studded with various kinds of pearls were sold at the bazaar. Hence the place was called Tajhat. Since then it is known as Tajhat.

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He was conferred the title, 'king' in 1888 and 'great king' in 1892. He succumbed to his injuries when the palace collapsed during an earthquake in 1897.

The founder of Tajhat-dynasty Manna Lal Roy was a big cap merchant. He came from Punjab in India in early 18th century. He became rich with the sales of caps. Fortune smiled on him during the famine of 1770-1790. He lent money to many viceroys in the region, had other viceroys in Rangpur and its adjoining areas under his control and became an influential zaminder in the 19th century.

After his death in 1830, his grand son Dhonpeth Roy came to the throne. Upendra Lal Roy who died as a boy was his grandson. He left no heirs. Consequently, the British govern-

ment took charge of the Tajhat viceroy. Such a situation gave rise to Giridhari Lal, a Judge (Mooneef) under judicial department of the then provincial government claiming in court that he was a maternal uncle of Upendra Lal. The court's verdict was in favour of Giridhari Lal who became the viceroy of Tajhat.

As he had no sons of his own, he adopted Gobinda Lal as his ward that after Upendra Lal's death in 1879 became the viceroy of Tajhat.

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Gopal Lal Roy, Gobinda Lal Roy's son became the last viceroy of Tajhat in 1908. He was the most educated viceroy of the Tajhat-dynasty who nurtured nationalism.

The 42-year-long tenure of his viceroyship was in to two phases. During the first phase from 1908 to 1937, administration of the viceroy came under his direct authority, but the second phase from 1934 to 1950 was handed down to the court-of-wards.

Gopal Lal Roy was also conferred with the title 'Raja' in 1912 and 'Raja Bahadur' in 1918. He contributed much for the advancement of education, culture, literature and sports of Rangpur during his tenure.

The palace was erected in the middle of about $\frac{1}{2}$ sq km of an area. The two-storyed-building has wide stairs at the front side. In the middle of the roof there is a lofty round shaped tower that has made the whole building beautiful. There are also a number of round-shape small towers surrounding the roof.

The ground and upper floor of the building were decorated with valuable pieces of stone. Beautiful pictures were depicted on doors and windows.

The existing palace building is believed to have been erected in the early 20th century during the tenure of Raja Gopal Lal Roy. Total area of it was 56 acres. The area of the palace has been reduced as the government donated about 10 acres of land to the Agriculture Institute and 25 acres to the horticulture centre.

There are four ponds in the palace compound, which are as old as the dynasty of Tajhat.

Officials and soldiers of the viceroy stayed there. After the viceroy system was dissolved in 1950, some family members of Gopal Lal Roy lived at the palace and some others went to India. During the time of liberation

war in 1971, the family members, who lived there, also went to India. None came back again.

After 1972 Tajhat palace was an asset of the Archaeology Department. But it was handed over to the ministry of law in 1984. The ministry shifted the then Rangpur high court to the palace. After the fall of the Jatiya Party in 1990, the new government decided to withdraw the high court from Rangpur in 1991. On vacation of the Rangpur High Court the palace was came under the purview of the Ministry of Law till 1995. In 1995 the Tajhat palace was handed over to the ministry of culture.

There are two caretakers at the Tajhat palace who have been appointed on a master roll basis. There are three other buildings in Rangpur, which were constructed during the time of Gopal Lal Roy. These are administrative buildings of Carmichael College, Gopal Lal (GL) hostel of Carmichael College and district board office building. The names of these buildings are notable for two reasons. First, the viceroy Gopal Lal Roy had contributed much in the erection these buildings. Second, these buildings have been built in Serasenic architectural designs similar to the Tajhat palace.

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