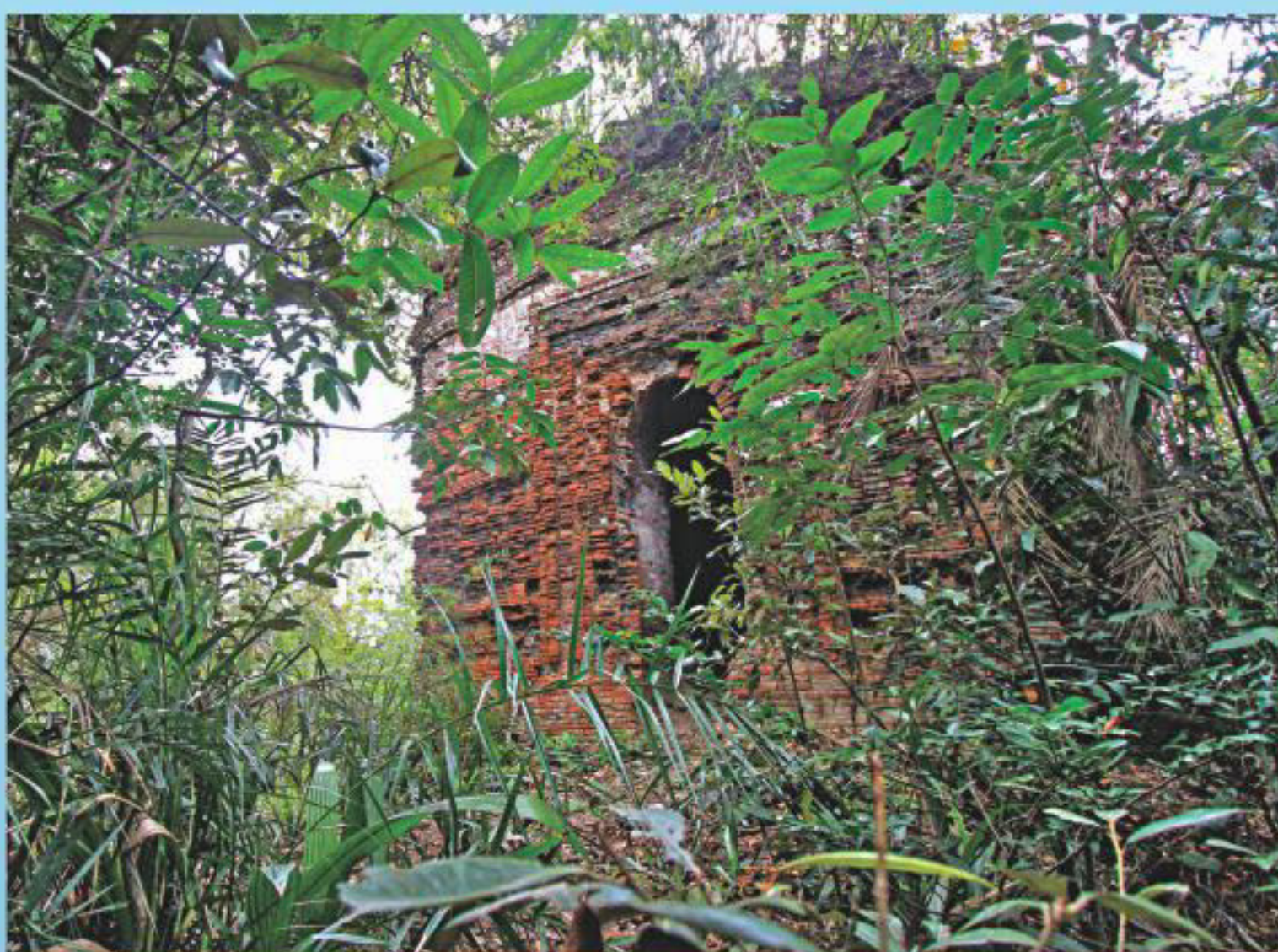




Finding BANGLADESH

THE PRATAPADITYA TRAIL

One of the more significant approaches towards understanding human ecology is rooted in the romanticized notion of “if the land could speak.” The next train of thought that naturally arises is, “if the land could speak, what would it speak about us?” Think of exploring this very notion for the land mass encapsulated within the boundaries of modern-day Bangladesh. Herein, I also believe, is the stark difference between traveling a country and finding a country, the former being a subset of the latter. To truly know a land, one must delve deeper in their travels, bearing both the knowledge of the past and the audacity to scrupulously imagine the empathies associated with the facts that once were.



In this short article, I humbly attempt to engage the readers and equip them with some facts about olden Bangladesh that once were linked to historical sites that now lie dormant and dilapidated – the decision to scrupulously imagine will, however, remain with the reader.

In unearthing stories of historical monuments, the best approach is often to unearth the story of the builder, or the one who intended to build the edifice. We will follow a similar approach. We will visit specific historical sites, mostly ones that are unfamiliar and overlooked, following the trail of a man who shaped the demographic, socio-cultural and political faces of pockets of our olden land. In today's article we follow the trail of the now lesser known Raja Pratapaditya, one of the Baro Bhuiyans, who independently

reigned over 16th century Jessore and contributed much to the region's evolution.

TRACING RAJA PRATAPADITYA'S STEPS: THE TRAIL

In the olden times, the marshy lands of Jessore were known as Yashohara, literally translating to “glory depriver.” The name was given believing that Yashohara would strip the glory of the olden capital of Bengal, Gaur (spread across present day Malda district, West-Bengal and Chapai Nawabganj, Rajshahi), for itself. It was Bikramaditya, Pratapaditya's father, who had established the township. Raja Pratapaditya was born in 1561, and at his birth a state seer (raj-jiyotishi) predicted that Pratap would soon supplant his father. While Bikram did not kill the boy upon hearing the seer's premonition, as

would be the norm for the time, out of apprehension, Pratap was sent to Agra. However, Bikram met his destiny on the very road he took to avoid it.

At Agra, Pratap won the favour of Emperor Akbar with his ready wit and royal ways and was granted his father's territory. Fulfilling the prophecy, Pratap then came back to Jessore and assassinated his entire family; but his uncle's son survived – he was the boy who lived and will be important later in our story. Pratapaditya prospered immensely, building numerous forts and temples and rapidly expanding his kingdom centered in Yashohara. Ultimately, he declared himself independent of the emperor of Delhi and became a part of the Baro Bhuiyan legacy.

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