

Temples of Dantan: A Survey with Special Emphasis on Tourism Development

Biswajit Ghosh

Bhatter College Private ITI, Paschim Medinipur

Introduction: Temples are the most significant and typical monuments of architecture of an area and admirably sum up and represent the subtle values of a culture. Elaborations of the temple structure followed the firm establishment of image worship and accompanying development of the rituals which took time to crystallize. To the Hindus, the temple is the abode of God, who is the spirit immanent in the universe, and which, therefore, is known by such terms as *devalaya*, *shivalaya* and *devayatana*. Hence, constituting the living use of the temple starts with the installation of life in the form of the deity in the sanctum. The architects of different ages fulfilled the spiritual thirsts of the devotees by their skilful and varied architectural edifices. In *Dantan*, a number of typical old temples are located bearing testimony to a rich tradition. Before dealing with them we deliberate upon a few things about the ancient region which nurtured this great tradition.

The Topography: *Dantan* is situated in the district *Medinipur* (undivided), West Bengal, India. *Medinipur* is located between 21°36'35" and 22°57'10" North Latitude and between 86°33'50' and 88°12'40' East Longitude. Geographical coordinates of *Dantan* are 21° 57' 0" North, 87° 16' 0" East and its original name (with diacritics) is *Dântan*. It is the plane of the river *Subarnarekha*. In its lower flow/basin, *Dantan* is the south-west border area of the District Paschim Medinipur, specially characterised in relation to geographical position. It is surrounded in the north –west by Keshiari and Nayagram P.S., the so called *Jungle Mahal*-- the hard lateritic forest. In the north-east, Narayangarh and Egra-Ramnagar P.S., the alluvial plane. In the north, it is delimited by the Balasore district of Orissa—the coastal area of the Bay of Bengal. Nayagram and Keshiary P.S. constitute of old alluvial deposits with rocky red soil of laterite formation. *Dantan-Mohanpur* is the plane of *Subarnarekha* which is flowing from North to South keeping *Dantan* at the East bank/elevation.

The Population Structure: The population structure of the area has also its own specialty. *Santals* are the main aboriginals. They are of ostral origin. They are the haulage of their own style/custom in worship, believe in god and religious faith. They don't have temple or deity/icon. Trees and stones are used as the symbol of god in practice and in folk culture. *Badam Thana* is such a place of deity where stones are gathered under a tree in the *jungle/bush*. For the *Vumij* and *Mahato* castes it is the same and known as *Garum Thana*. Other castes are *Majis*, *Jeles*, *Kaibartyas/Kadmas*. But most of the population consists of *Utkal-Banga* mixed Hindu castes, viz ,*Karans*, *Sadgops*, *Rajus*, *Brahmins*, *Mahesyas* and many others. Normally, a typical culture came into being from such mixed population mixed with the ethnicity of religious customs and worship tradition.

The Historical Influence: Ancient *Dantapur*, *Dandabhukti* or modern *Dantan* has witnessed the events of history to a great extent. The existence of *Dantapur* city is accepted from Pre- Buddhist era, though there are great disagreements about the geographical location of *Dantapur*. According to Cunningham, *Rajmahendri* on the bank of river *Godavori* was the capital of old *Kalinga*, and *Dantapur* was the *Neelachala* or *Puri*. According to some other eminent historians, the name *Dantan* of the district *Medinipur* is corrupt form of *Dantapur*. *Shasanka*, the king of *Gouda* conquered the *Dandabhukti* kingdom in 7th century. The subordinate royal representatives, 'feudatory prince' *Somdatta* and another ruler *Subhakirti* (*Medinipur copper plate*, acquired from *Egra*) ruled over the area during the period. The legend is that the *Sarashankadighi* is the commemorative work of *Raja Sashanka*.

In *Pala* era, the relative of 1st *Mahipala* (Historians' assumption), *Dharmapala* was the king of *Dandabhukti*. After demise of *Dharmapala* (from 1043 AD to 1077AD assumed), *Dandabhukti* was under *Utkala* and the area was ruled by the kings named *Karnakeshari* and *Vikramkeshari*. The ancient city *Amaravati* (later on *Mughalmari* from *Mughal* reign), was filled with the memory of *Sashisena* who was the daughter of *Vikramkeshari*. Recently archaeological excavation has proved that the area was indeed a place of ancient settlement with a Buddhist Monastery. At all events, history of *Dantan* has no use in the discussion of temple architecture up to the reign of *Vikramkeshari* due to lack of architectural evidences of the reign before the starting of 16th century. The history of subsequent time was consisted of small *feudatory kings*, *jamindars* and *landlords*. Out of that we get a little history of the *Monoharpur* (1575 AD and thereafter) and *Khandarui* (assumed 16th century) zamindari.

The Religious Influence: The area was dominated by *Saiva* worshipers. But evidences of *Vishnu* worship is also evident from the 8-9th century AD too. The emergence of *Vaisnava* religion later on which had much to do with the great career of *Sreechaitanyadeva* *Sree Chaitanyadeva* went to *Puri Dhama* keeping on *Odissa Trunk Road* on foot. Besides, *Shakti*-worship was also in practice from the ancient period.

The Social Impact: From 12th to 16th century the region (up to river *Kapisha* presently river *Cossay*) was under the rule of *Gango* and *Surya* dynasty of *Odissa*. During the period, it was saw emergence of commerce and industry and it was enriched with financial stability, art, craft and architecture.

The Art and Architecture: Architecture is regarded as a material record of man's intellectual evolution through the ages. It gives us ample opportunity to recollect the past and to visualize the social, economic, political and religious customs of the particular area.

The temple architecture of *Midnapur* has no regular shape of its style. Various styles have combined to form a style of its own. It may be said that here in the *Medinipur* district an attempt of synthesis of *Oriya* and *Bangla* style has been made out of all the existing styles. They cannot be categorically divided but its design may be classified as (a)

Sekhara/Rekha, (b) Ratna, (c) Chala and (d) Flat roofed/Dalan (made mainly for the deities *Sitala* and *Kali/Chandi*) etc.

The temple architecture of the Medinipur district is influenced to a great extent by *Rekha* styles. This *Rekha* structure of temple is peculiar to the neighbouring province Orissa. They may be of different types like *Pirha deul, Varha deul* etc. The *Sikhara* is free from horizontal bars, the *Ratha* projections are deep and spaced. The crowning *Amlaka* is large and flat surmounted by a pot finial or series of spheres. Some *Rekha* styles are erected in the middle of a flat roof and others in the form of pyramids.

In this district the *Ratna* type of temples has surpassed all others. The *Ratna* design has a rectangular or square box with curved cornice. Its roof is more or less flat and is surmounted by more towers called *Ratna* (jewel). The single surmounted tower known as *Ek-Ratna*, to which four more miniature towers may be added making it *Pancha-Ratna*. The number of *Ratnas* can be multiplied to nine, thirteen, seventeen and twenty one up to a maximum of twenty five (Pnchavimsati-ratna). *Ratna* style seems to have emerged in Bengal in the 16th century. It was a favourable style of the *Malla Rajas* of *Bishnupur* in the *Bankura* district.

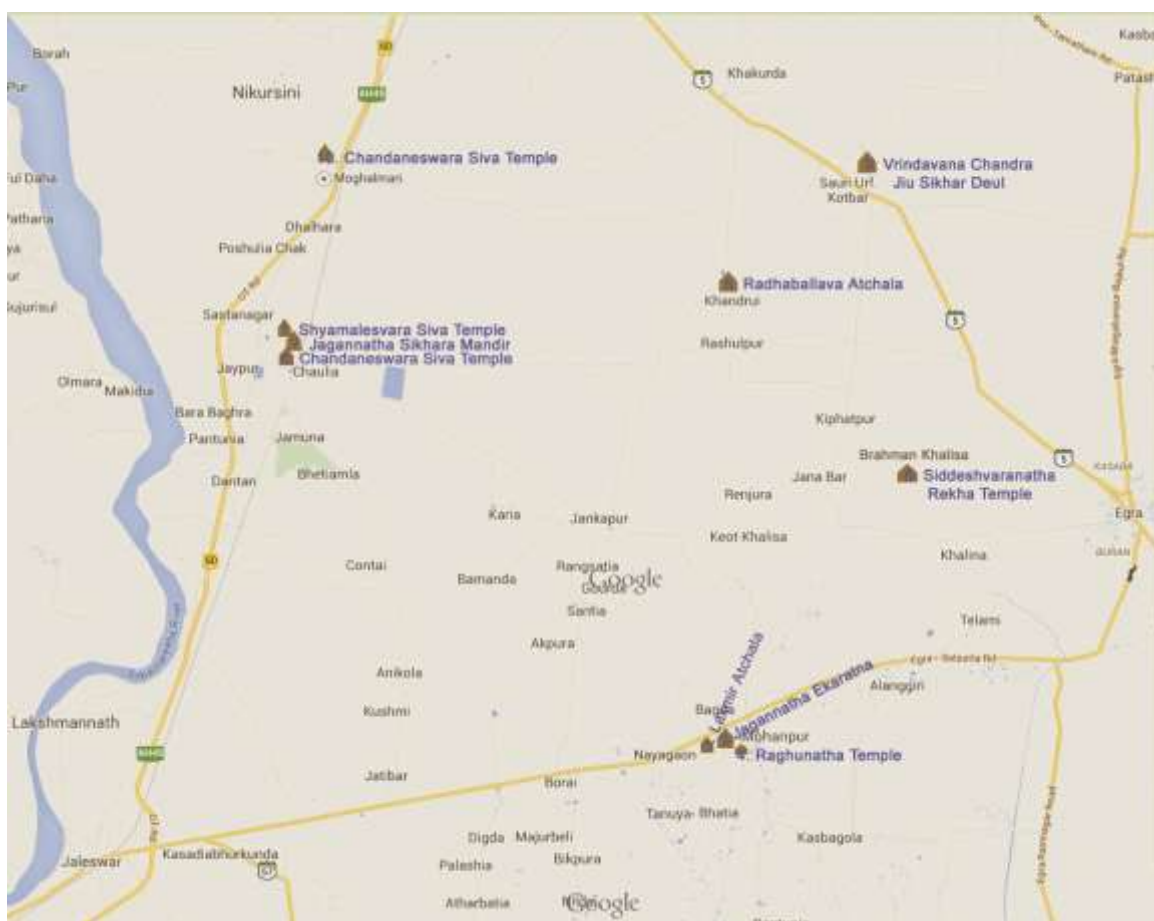


Figure 1: Map of the Temples of Dantan

The *Chala* (roof) style of temple is simple in construction. It consists of only one chamber and is formed in the shape of square or round shaped huts. The *Charchala* may be converted into *Atchala* making a super-structure on it. Most of the *Atchala* temples have a front porch but no rear porch or passage way. Structurally the basic *Charchala* or *Atchala* design is a square chamber surmounted internally by a dome on pendent, which is built over on the outside to the characteristic hut-shaped roof. In this district this type of temple is made mainly for the deities *Laxmi*, *Rama-Sita*, *Radha-Krishna*, and *Siva* besides a few others.

Visiting the Temples: We visited and surveyed the significant temples of the area and studied them with their art and architecture painstakingly.

(1) ***Syamalesvara Siva Temple:*** This is the oldest monument of temple architecture in the *Dantan* region. It is located at *Mandir Bazar of Bhabanipur Mouza* (J.L.no.-65) under *Dantan CD Block-I*. The area of the temple is 13883 sq. ft. surrounded by a boundary that is constructed of *laterite* stone. The main temple is 12 ft. square plain with 28 ft long low roof *Jagamohana*. 'Bard' part of the temple is positioned on a 4ft high *Padapitha* (base or plinth). *Gandee (Chapar)* part is made with five *Pirha*. A big notched *Amlaka* is there on the top of the temple carrying *Kalasa* with a trident. The temple is 25 ft high and is constructed with *laterite* stones having dome roof of wavy (*lahara*) style. The *Jagamohana* also has a roof of crescent rectangular style (*dochala*). It is an example of traditional *Pirha Temple* looking like a curved pyramid.

The entrance door way of the temple is 5ft in height and 2ft 7inches in width, which is narrower than the main door of *Garvagriha*. There is also a very narrow door at the south side wall of *Jagamohana*. A recumbent *Vishnu* figure is engraved on the top of the entrance. In the north side of the temple there is an outlet called *netranala* of horned shark face made of decorated touchstone which is used for water drainage from *Garvagriha*. The *linga deva* is buried on a big infernal birth slab (*Gourijonipatta*). The *Patta* and the *Linga* are tied up with a big one stone *Nandi* figure by an iron chain.



Figure 2: Shyamaleswarava Siva Temple, Dantan (Side View : South)



Figure 3: Shyamaleswarava Siva Temple, Dantan (Side View: North)



Figure 4: Figure 10 Shyamaleswarava Siva Temple, Dantan (Piraha View)

There is no existence of foundation plate in the temple. Considering the architectural style of the temple archaeologists assume that the temple was established in 16th century. Some historians think that it was erected by *Gajapati Mukundadeva*, born in the *Surya* dynasty, in the last half of 16th century. According to Pranab Ray, the style of the temple is, to some extent similar with *Sarbamangala* temple of Keshiary which is of *Vadra* style. Hence they are contemporary and established in the first-half of 17th century. But according to Binoy Ghosh, the *Sarvamangala* temple is not a pattern of any specific architectural style—it is the combination of *Oriya and Bangla* style presented by *Oriya* artisans. But according to Tarapada Santra, some of the district's south-west areas were under the control of *Orissa* in between 15th and 16th century and the evidences of construction of *Sikhara* and *Piraha deul* are mostly available from that time. For example, he has indicated the *Pirha deul (Syamalesvara Siva Temple)* of *Dantan*.

(2) ***Jagannatha Ekaratna***: It is important specimen of temple architecture of present *Mohanpur CD Block*. The temple is situated in the village/mouza *Mohanpur* (J.L. No. 384) and the field was donated by *Purusottamdev Harischadra*. But the construction was started by *Mrityunjay Kar Mahapatra*, fourth generation of *Karmahapatra* family and finished by *Parashuram Kar Mahapatra*. The total area of boundary surrounding the temple is 2 acres 62 decimal. Out of that the temple is on 90 decimal areas.



Figure 5: *Jagannatha Ekaratna, Mohanpur (side view)*

This is an important monument of *Ekaratna* of *Ratna* style temples in *Dantan* area. The temple is built of thin burnt brick with mortar made by limestone and brick-dust (*chun-surki*). The east-facing *Jagamohana* is of two sloping roofs (*do-chala*). The length and width of the main temple are 26ft square largely plain and the height is 80 ft with large *ek-bangla* porch and the length, breadth and height of *Jagamohana* are 40ft, 30ft and 30ft

respectively. East and west sides of the temple are decorated with *terracotta* images mainly relating to *Krishnaleela*. In front of the *Jagamohana* there is a courtyard (*Chobutara*) which is 49ft x 21ft in length and width. Presently it is in wretched condition. *Pakshala* (kitchen) is in the southern side. In the northern side of the temple there is a bathing stage (*Snanmancha*) at a distance. It is made of *laterite* stone. In the south-east, adjacent to the temple, there is a *Rekha Deul* of *Narasinghadeva* and in the adjacent north-east; there is *Laxmir Atchala*. The temple is assumed to be constructed in the middle of 18th century.



Figure 6: Jagannatha Ekaratna, Mohanpur (front view)

(3) *Laxmir Atchala* : Crossing the north door of *Jagamohana* of the *Jagannatha Ekaratna* one can reach the temple of goddess *Laxmi* which is called *Laxmir Atchala*. The temple is 14 ½ ft x 12ft 9 inches in length and width. It is a low towered *At-Chala* of the later *Burdwan* type with single entrance. Front side of the *Atchala* is also engraved with fine *terracotta* images. There is no foundation plate in the temple. It is only assumed by the historians that the temple is constructed in the middle of the 18th century. But the roof edges are invariably rounded showing the 19th century *Midnapore* style.



Figure 7: Laxmi Atchala, Mohanpur (front)

(4) **Raghunatha Temple:** In a distance of $1/4^{\text{th}}$ km south-east of the *Jagannatha Ek ratna* temple, there is located another 40ft high east facing *Ekaratna* style *Raghunatha temple* with a *charchala* porche (*Jagamohana*) including *antarala*. The 19ft square *garbhagriha* of the temple with *Jagamohana* (14'10" x 8' 5" *antarala* + porch: 17'6" x 11' 3") having single entrance attached to the *ek-ratna* temple. The height of the *Jagamohana* is 25ft. The *EkRatna* with smooth *rekha* tower is constructed by burnt bricks with mortar of limestone and powdered brick without significant decoration. It is contemporary to the *Jagannatha Ek ratna*. Twelve *Shivalingas* are buried surrounding the temple. They are called *Dwadasha Siva*. Such co-existence of *Vaishnava* and *Saiva* sects is in the area.



Figure 8 Raghunatha Ekratna (front view)

(5) **Radhaballava Atchala:** Khandarui village (J.L.No-245) is under Dantan-I CD Block where Krishnadas Satyandra Mahapatra established *Khandarui* zamindari approximately 300 years ago. Now they are called *Singha Gajendra Mahapatra family*, without the zamindari. The east facing temple of *Radhaballava Jiu*, owned by the family, is a remarkable monument of this area.



Figure 9 Radhaballava Atchala, Khandarui

The temple is built by burnt bricks with limestone mortar. It is 32ft 10 inches in length and width and approximately 23ft in height. There are two doors in the temple of which east facing main one is 6ft high and 3ft 6inches in width. The other is north facing of same height and width. An open corridor is there surrounding the main temple. It is a building like a typical village *chala* (hut) on an elongated base, a verandah subsequently built all round, giving an *At-chala* appearance. Top of the base has ornamental work of burnt clay relating to hunting story, couple and dancing woman figures. The artistic works are of high standards.

The *Natamandira* which was a brick built typical *charchala hut* (LBH was 37ft x 19ft x 20ft) in front of the sanctum is almost dilapidated. The southern side of the main temple is also getting ruined. There is no foundation plate in the temple. As per the structural setting, it is assumed that the temple was constructed in middle of 18th century. It is an important illustration of *Chala* style temple in *Dantan* area.

(6) ***Siddeavaranatha Rekha Temple***: The temple is located at village *Bramnhan Khalisha* (J.L.No.-310) under Dantan II CD Block. This western facing, burnt brick *Rekha Deul* is surrounded by a boundary approximately of 13 decimal area.



Figure 10: Siddheswara Siva Temple, Haripur (front view) Figure 11: (back view)

The plinth of the temple is 3 ½ ft, length, width and height is of 20 ft 6 inches, 19 ft and 45 ft respectively. The width of the wall is of 3 ft 6 inches. The main entrance (western side

door) is of 7 ft 5 inches in height and 4ft in width. The height and width of eastern side door (blocked) is 6 ft 3 inches and 2 ft 2 inches respectively. It is smaller than the main entrance door. Both the doors contain standard artistic works of wood craft. The ceiling of the temple is of pagoda style and skitter. There is no *Jagamohana* with the sanctum. It is a single large smooth curvilinear *Rekha* Temple. The front wall of the temple is engraved with mythological art relating to images of god and goddesses made by burnt clay. The works are of medium standard. In the northern and southern side walls there are four figures of burnt clay installed. The artistic works are of lower standard.

This represents the transformed *Sikhara* style influenced by Oriya temple culture. According to architectural style, it is assumed by the historians that the temple is constructed in the first phase of 19th century.

(7) ***Jagannatha Sikhara Mandir***: Situated at School Bazar of Dantan, the *Jagannatha Temple*, is an example of *Nabaratha Sikhara deul* established by the patronage of Oriya tributary princes. The area (17 decimal approximately) of the temple is surrounded by brick built boundary (presently damaged). It is 68 ft high and 15 ft in length and width and constructed by both *laterite* stone (lower portion) and burnt bricks (middle and upper portion). The roof of *Garvagriha* is built in *lahara* style. The length and breadth of flat roof *Jagamohana* is 20 ft x 16 ft and height 25 ft. The brick built *Snanamancha* (bathing stage) is in the north side of the temple.



Figure 12: Jagannatha Sikhara Deul, Dantan (front view)

No decoration is there in the temple other than a couple figures on the south outer wall of the *Jagamohana*. As there is no foundation plate, historians assume that the temple was constructed in early 18th century. The Rathajatra festival, the only folk ceremony of the temple, is held in the month of June/July with the participation of the people of different castes of the surrounding areas. It is an important temple in terms of antiquity.

(8) **Chandaneswara Shiva Temple:** Within 10 meter distance from south side of *Jagannatha Temple* there is situated another temple of *rekha* style constructed with *laterite* stone. It is 22 ft square plain and 40 ft in height with flat roof porch. According to structural nature it seems to have been constructed in early 19th century.

(9) **Vrindavana Chandra Jiu Sikhar Deul:** On the way from Kharagpur to Egra on state highway, there is a bus-stop named *Sauri*. At a distance there is a village named *Damodarapur* (J.L. no-269). An important archeological site of this village is *Vrindavana Chandra Jiu* temple under the possession of *Choudry Das Mahapatra family*. The temple is an example of *Sikhara deul* with east facing *Charchala* porch. It is established on approximately 5ft high plinth and in the niches of plinth wall there are big *terracotta plates* of Hindu deities and images of couples are engraved. The main temple is 15ft square plain and 40ft in height where the *Charchala Jagamohana* is 11ft x 7 ½ ft in length and breadth. On the top of the entrance of *Jagamohana* there is also *terracotta* ornamentation relating to mythology.

There is no foundation plate in the temple but according to the structural pattern it is assumed that the temple was constructed in middle of 18th century.



Figure 13 & 14: Brindavana Jiu Temple, Damodarapur (Front View), (Close-up of terracotta works)

(10) **Chandaneswara Siva Temple -- Moghalmari:** About 4.5 km towards south of *Dantan* there is a village named *Moghalmari* (J.L. no. 73). Beside the *mound of Shasisena* there is a temple of God *Siva* who is called *Chandaneswara* by the villagers. The temple is significant for its *Bimana* or *Gondi* part which is dome shaped with pinnacles in four corners of the roof. It is alike the upper portion of a mosque imposed on the middle portion of a temple which is something new and not constructed maintaining the grammar of temple architecture. The height of this 100 years old temple is 22ft and there is no ornamentation.

Findings of the study: A thorough study of the above significant temples of *Dantan* reveals following characteristics:

1. The temples are mostly influenced by *Odishan School of Architecture*.
2. In relation to Midnapur district, the architectural styles of the temples of *Dantan* (*Dantan Block-I & II*, and *Mohanpur P.S.*; according to the Census Report 1911, *Mohanpur* was a *fanri* of *Dantan P.S.*) are categorised into three major styles (a) *Sikhara* or *Rekha*, (b) *Ratna*, and (d) *Chala*.
3. *Pirha* is the oldest style of temples.
4. Depending on the availability, burnt bricks were the predominant materials of temple construction and *Chun* (limestone) and *Surki* (powdered brick) were being used as joining substance.
5. Artisans of Bengal generally used *Lahara* (curvilinear) form of roof.
6. Decoration/ornamentation is rare in the temples of the area.
7. *Shiva* temples are mostly found in *Dantan* area (mostly in every village).
8. Temples were generally made by the patronage of *Rajas* (feudatory princes), or *Zaminders* and the villagers.
9. The temples which were built by the *Rajas* or *Zamindars*, have now badly collapsed. The temples which were dependent on public charity are somehow continuing the functions now and are in a better condition.

Conclusion: The field survey on these temples reflects the cultural evaluation of the people from remote ages, and we can understand the socio-cultural pattern of the region of *Dantan* area. Mythology, religion, architecture, art, epigraphs etc. of each temple enlighten the visitors of special interest. Though not very old, the *Shyamaleswarâ Pirahdeul*, *Radhaballâva Atchala*, and *Jagannathâ Ekratna* etc may claim their antiquity from three hundred to six hundred years. Throughout the area several temples of different categories belonging to different ages are found to exist mostly in a scattered way. The rich people with their highest aesthetic sense left a creation which deserves warm admiration from all. A study of above temples of *Dantan* also gives us an idea about the architectural styles of temple structure, contemporary socio-economic condition, and religious customs in general.

References:

1. Temples of North India- Krishna Deva, NBT
2. Temples of Midnapur- G Santra, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Kol(1980)
3. Excavation at Mughalmari – AsokDutta, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata
4. 1995: Bengal District Gazetteers – Midnapore – L. S. S. O'Malley
5. 1972: Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal – David J. McCutchion, The Asiatic Society
6. 2004: Banglar Mandir: Sthapatya O Bhaskarya in Bengali by Pranab Ray
7. পুরাকীতি সমীক্ষা- তারাপদ সঁতরা
8. দাঁতনের মন্দির স্থাপত্য – বিশ্বজিৎ ঘোষ, (এবং সায়ক, অক্টোবর ২০০৯)
9. সুবর্ণরেখার নিম্ন অববাহিকা ; মোহনা ভূমি – বঙ্কিম মাইতি, (এবং সায়ক, অক্টোবর ২০০৯)
10. ক্ষেত্র সমীক্ষা (Field Survey)

*Biswajit Ghosh works at Bhatler College Private ITI. He writes on local history and heritage.
Email: biswajit_haldia@yahoo.co.in*
