

## metrovariety

IT IS EASY TO GO TO KENDULI. BOLPUR IS 40 KM FROM KENDULI. THE DISTANCE FROM KOLKATA IS JUST 185 KM



**THE HOLY DIP** Every year, hundreds of devotees gather at the Joydev-Kenduli Mela in Birbhum to celebrate the spirit of eternal bonding

## LOVE IS FAIR

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Standing beside the water body with a dense fog around, one could see silhouettes of human beings walking beside the shallow mass of water. The shadows seemed like spiritual souls and the water body looked like the River Vaitarani that lies between Earth and Hell, as mentioned in the Hindu religious texts.

Suddenly, the shadows walked towards the river, took a holy dip and splashed

the famous Sanskrit poem *Geet Govinda* in 12th century. The poet worshipped at the Kusheswar Shiva Temple at Kenduli, where his square meditation stone still exists.

The present temple was built in 1910, while the original temple was a small earthen structure located in the midst of deep forests of Kusha trees. Other important temples of the area are the famous 17th century Navaratna Radhabinode Temple and the joint Shiva Temple of Rameshwar and Ratneshwar.

Every year from January 14th onwards a three-day long fair is organized at Joydev-Kenduli village. The story goes that Joydev had to walk a distance of more than 30 km from his village at Kenduli to take a dip in the Ganges. This was tiresome for the poet and one day Lord Vishnu asked the Holy Ganges to infuse her holiness into River Ajoy of Kenduli on the day of Makar Sankranti.

From that day, legend has it that the Ganges flows into River Ajoy once a year. And legend says that people who take a dip on this auspicious day in the River Ajoy have their wishes fulfilled.

From 1982, Kenduli fair has been brought under the control of the district authorities, which provide basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation, lighting, makeshift accommodation and security at the fair premises.

Though during Makar Sankranti the Gangasagar Mela of Sagar Island attracts more visitors, the fair at this small village of Birbhum has its own charm. To start with there is an everlasting chaos in the area, especially in the early morning hours when people rush to take the holy dip.

Kenduli fair provides an opportunity to listen to Baul

songs for three days. Bauls are singers who travel and sing soulful songs. They are mainly Vaishnava Hindus or Sufi Muslims, but their music spreads love above religion. And off late, Kirtania singers are also making their presence felt in the fair.

Like Gangasagar, at Kenduli fair too one could see people sitting on one side of the path with uncooked rice, coins and some potatoes scattered in front of them. These are poor villagers, to whom people donate rice, money and other edibles on the holy day.

A little ahead, a group of musicians could be seen chanting Hari Bol. Sadhus are seen playing violins in front of an idol of Goddess Kali. A little away from them sits a middle-aged lady singing Lord's name with a small musical instrument called Khanjani. Others are busy taking a dip into the river. Some Vaishnavas after completing their bath put a *chandani tilak* on their forehead.

The fair has several stalls selling variety of food, clothes, cooking utensils and paintings. Most popular is the paintings of poet Joydev and his wife Padmavati. It is learnt that Chaitanya Dev himself was fascinated with *Geet Govinda*. Spiritual Love is the essence of Joydev-Kenduli fair.

It is easy to go to Kenduli fair. Bolpur is just 40 km from Kenduli. The distance from Kolkata is around 185 km. Hire a car or take a bus from Jambuni bus stand at Bolpur to reach Joydev-Kenduli stop. It takes about two hours. Several trains go from Sealdah to Bolpur, which is about a 3-hour journey. Accommodation is not a problem in Bolpur.

(The writer is a contributor)



3

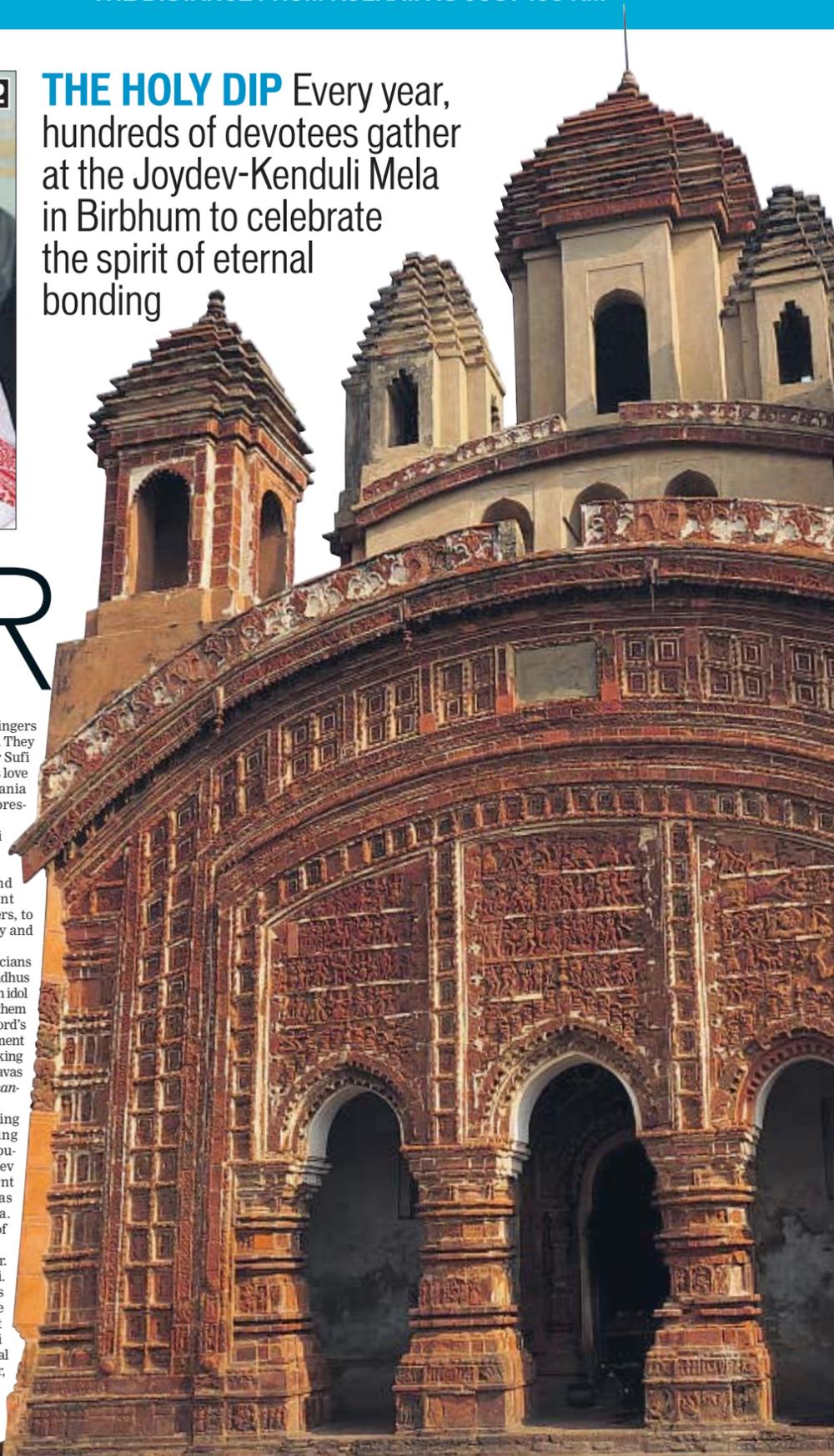
1, 2 and 3: Sadhus and sanyasins at the fair grounds.

water around. The trance of the devotees watching them from a distance was broken by the commotion.

Devotees realized they were standing on the banks of River Ajoy at Joydev-Kenduli village. And people were taking the holy dip into the chilly waters of the river on a cold January morning on the occasion of Poush Sankranti or Makar Sankranti – the last day of Bengali calendar month.

Joydev-Kenduli is a small village located on the banks of River Ajoy at Birbhum district of West Bengal. This is the birthplace of poet Joydev who wrote

(Above) The Radhabinode Temple. (Below) A view of the fair ground on the banks of River Ajoy.



PHOTOS: AMITABHA GUPTA



## BRUSH STROKES



CHHATRAPATI DUTTA

It is not often, amidst the rig-ma-role of our hectic urban existence, that we get a chance to stop, look around and wonder how fast our social environment is transforming.

A recent exhibition of photographs by Moska Najib and Nazes Afroz titled 'From Kabul to Kolkata: Of Belonging, Memories and Identity' at the Harrington Street Art Centre did this for us.

While Moska Najib was born in

## 'From Kabul to Kolkata: Of Belonging, Memories &amp; Identity'

Afghanistan, he lived, studied journalism and worked in India before working on South Asia and contributing to the BBC as a producer and correspondent.

Nazes Afroz has been a print and broadcast journalist for over 30 years, working initially in Kolkata and later moving on to London, documenting communities and people through his photographs, publishing his work on the BBC and Al-Jazeera websites.

The two dynamic photographers embark on a three-year-long project to trace the nearly forgotten community of Afghans who travelled to India.

This exhibition tells the story of a century of social transformation within this migrating community through photographs that mirror the secluded and little known settlements of present day Afghans in India — from their living environments, their food, clothing and the places they travel and market at.

It was in 1892 that Rabindranath Tagore gave a romantic and lasting identity to this history through his eponymous short story *Kabuliwala*, a popular

term coined to identify the Pushto-Afghani vendors (of dry fruits, nuts and woven textile) and moneylenders in this part of the world.

It is only obvious that Najib and Afroz were inspired from this simple text of love, affection and memory before they plunged into their endeavor.

Not very long before this city was introduced to the shopping mall and multiplex culture, a variety of colourful communities annually migrated to vend and set shop in streets and markets in and around Kolkata, adding to the diversity of the city we were proud of. Not only did this add multiculturalism to our existence, it knit the minds and hearts of people of different lands and helped in our understanding of the other.

Elizabeth Noble, the Irish woman who is more popularly known to us as Sister Nivedita, first translated Rabindranath's *Kabuliwala*, which was first published in *Sadhana*, a Bangla literary magazine which the author edited through the 1890s and early decades of the 20th century, into English.

This was followed by other translations before it was successfully adapted and picturised on celluloid by Tapan Sinha in 1957. The role of the protagonist — *Kabuliwala* — was played by no other than the legendary Chhabi Biswas, while Ravi Shankar composed the music for the film. The success of the Bangla version led to a Hindi version, directed by Hemen Gupta (but was once the private secretary to Subhas Chandra Bose).

Unlike many other films inspired by Tagore's texts, which are strongly rooted in context and period, this 1961 film produced by Bimal Roy and starring Balraj Sahani, offers a more classical perspective of humanism, identity and difference.

This exhibition, which every social anthropologist would admire as much as anyone else, is not only a tribute to Kolkata, but its every image connects the viewer to the themes of human bonding, belonging and its absence, constantly reverberating through the images and the memory it evokes of the chemistry of 'Khuki' and the 'Kabuliwala', as in Tagore's short story.



In 1892, Tagore's short story *Kabuliwala* gave a romantic and lasting identity to the migrant Pushto-Afghani vendors and moneylenders.