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The crumbling temples of Maluti on the West Bengal-Jharkhand border; and (right) an exquisite terracotta panel



PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMITABHA GUPTA

## CLAY MODELS



**T**HE CENTURIES-OLD TERRACOTTA TEMPLES OF MALUTI have only recently come to the notice of the Global Heritage Fund. And the Fund has promptly accorded these temples the unenviable membership of a club of 12 worldwide heritage sites on the verge of vanishing. They are in august company to be sure, sharing the honour with worthies like the abandoned medieval city of Ani in Turkey, the once bustling port of Famagusta in Cyprus and Taxila in Pakistan. As many as 72 of an original 108 temples survive in this village on the West Bengal-Jharkhand border near Rampurhat. Their rather romantic history dates back to the 15th century, when a shepherd boy, Basanta, received this area as a gift from Sultan Alauddin Hus-sain Shah of Gaur in exchange for his lost hawk (*baaj*). He became King 'Baa' Basanta and built his capital at Maluti. In later years, the 'Baa' Basanta dynasty was divided into four houses (*chow tarafs*). The kings of these *tarafs* started building numerous temples in a bid to outdo each other, transforming Maluti into a temple village. While the Jharkhand government has done little to restore the now-crumbling structures here, a resident of Maluti, Gopaldas Mukherjee, has been trying hard to publicise the plight of the temples. An NGO based in Kolkata, Save Heritage and Environment, has also played an active part, including creating a web presence ([maluti.org](http://maluti.org)) for Maluti.

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