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METRO

on Sunday

Next weekend you can be at ...

Hadal-Narayanpur

Hadal-Narayanpur in Bankura district is home to some of the finest and ancient terracotta temples of Bengal. Steeped in history, the twin villages are a one-and-a-half-hour drive from Bankura town. You have to get down at Dhagaria, the nearest rail or bus stop, and take a vanrickshaw from there.

Located on the banks of Bodia river, Hadal-Narayanpur is said to have been established by "Murokata" Chakraborty, who had apparently cut down trees to start the village, thus acquiring the moniker.

The road is scenic and the village looks prosperous. The first temple we visited doesn't look like a traditional structure. The entrance has a panel of Shiva dancing with the body of Sati on his shoulder.

The temple houses the idol of Bramhani Devi. It is made of *kashthi pathar* (black touchstone) and surprisingly has a strong resemblance to south Indian idols. There are small female figures at the foot of the main idol. This statue is said to be from the Pal era of Bengal.

Legend has it that after the village was established, a woman named Rani Moira dreamt that an idol was stuck in the banks of the Damodar. People went looking for the idol and found it beneath the mud beside the river. The idol was brought



out and established as Bramhani Devi.

We next moved on to the three Mandal family temples — Barataraf, Mejotaraf and Chhototaraf. The Mandals were one of the early settlers in the area. At Barataraf, there is a huge *rasmancha* that resembles a 17-ratna terracotta structure near the entrance. Look out for sculptures

depicting Durga and her family and Vishnu reclining on snake Ananta (Vishnu's Ananta sayane posture).

There is a large *thakurdalan* inside, where the main attraction is the 1806-built Pancha Chura terracotta Radha Damodar temple and two small Shiva temples. The temples contain a few but significant sculptures.

Make sure to get a glimpse of the *ratha* (chariot) made of bell metal inside an enclosure. There are figures engraved on the chariot representing Shiva, Kali and the Narasimha avatar of Vishnu. On both sides of the *ratha* are human figures with heads upside down.

We next visited the Radha Damodar temple of Mejotaraf, which is a *navaratna* temple. Located near a water body, the temple has terracotta carvings depicting the battle of Ramayana. Other significant carvings are Ananta sayane Vishnu and Ganesh sitting on a giant mouse.

Finally, we visited the terracotta temple of the Mandal family's Chhototaraf. The first thing we noticed was the uniqueness of the structure. It is similar to a church. Although the main panel of the temple displays a scene from *The Mahabharata* where Arjun is targeting the fish eye at Draupadi's *swayamvar*, there are terracotta motifs on the walls displaying British lifestyle too.

Outside the premises of Chhototaraf is a decaying *pancharatna* temple that has a sculpture of two Ananta Sayane Vishnu, facing each other. Nearby is an *aatchala* temple. **Trip trivia:** Rampur — the birth place of mathematician Shubhankar Das — is very close to Hadal-Narayanpur. It may be worth mentioning that Shubhankar Das was the creator of "Subhankari", an almost forgotten tradition of computation prevailing in pre-colonial Bengal.

Metro on Sunday thanks reader AMITABHA GUPTA for this contribution.
Pictures by author



Going

Take the Howrah-Chakradharpur Passenger to Bankura. From Bankura take a local train to Dhagaria. Hire a vanrickshaw at the station to reach Hadal-Narayanpur.

You can also reach Bankura at night by the Howrah Purulia Express and leave for Hadal-Narayanpur early next morning in a hired car.

Staying

There are several budget hotels in Bankura. Hadal-Narayanpur has no accommodation facility.