

Exploration

Reclaiming Shree Shree Narayan and Reconstructing the Lost Temple of Narayangarh

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Abstract

This photo essay seeks to engage people's representatives, administrative officials, and research scholars with the neglected heritage of Pakurseni village in Narayangarh, West Bengal. The site preserves the remains of a forgotten Narayana temple, constructed between the 12th and 15th centuries CE. This essay proposes that the present-day name 'Narayangarh' derives from Narayana, the presiding deity of this lost temple, and the *garh*, that surrounded it. Surviving artefacts- a four-armed Vishnu idol with a donor's portrait, an amalaka, a Gauripatta, a hero stone, and eroded images of Buddha or Shiva- testify to the antiquity and syncretic religious history of the place. This essay argues that the reconstruction of the temple and preservation of the artefacts can help in reclaiming the cultural identity of the people of the region and open up tourism opportunities for the regional heritage circuit, linking Narayangarh with the Moghalmari Buddhist monastery, Kurumbera Fort, Raibania Fort, the Subarnarekha River, and the Jungle Mahal.

Keywords: Pakurseni, Narayangarh, Narayana Temple, Heritage Conservation, Archaeological Remains, Religious Syncretism, Vishnu Iconography, Cultural Identity, Heritage Tourism, West Bengal.

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Figure 1: An AI reconstruction of the Temple

Introduction

The Pakurseni village of Narayangarh, West Bengal, preserves the remnants of a forgotten Narayana temple built between the 12th and 15th centuries. The name Narayangarh itself derives from Narayana, the presiding deity of the temple. The stylistic properties of the *murti* suggest that it predates all other available artefacts and architectural structures of Narayangarh, particularly the Narayangarh Rajbari, which is to be traced to the Mughal period. The surviving artefacts, including a four-armed Vishnu idol, an *amalaka*, *Gouripatta*, an extremely eroded statue of either Buddha in Bhumisparsho Mudra or Shiva, a hero stone, stone blocks of the temple with its intact base, and lots of pottery sherds, indicate a temple of considerable antiquity and artistic merit. To understand its heritage, it can be placed in relation to the Ananta Vasudeva Temple in Bhubaneswar, a canonical example of medieval Odisha temple architecture (Mitra, 1984; Michell, 1988).

Site Location

The original temple site is situated at Pakurseni, Narayangarh, West Bengal, approximately 22.083° N latitude and 87.483° E longitude, just behind the factory of Supreme Industries, Kharagpur. Surrounded by ponds and agricultural fields, which may have historically functioned as defensive trenches, this spatial layout is visible in satellite imagery and corroborates the fortified nature of the *garh* complex (Patnaik, 2002).

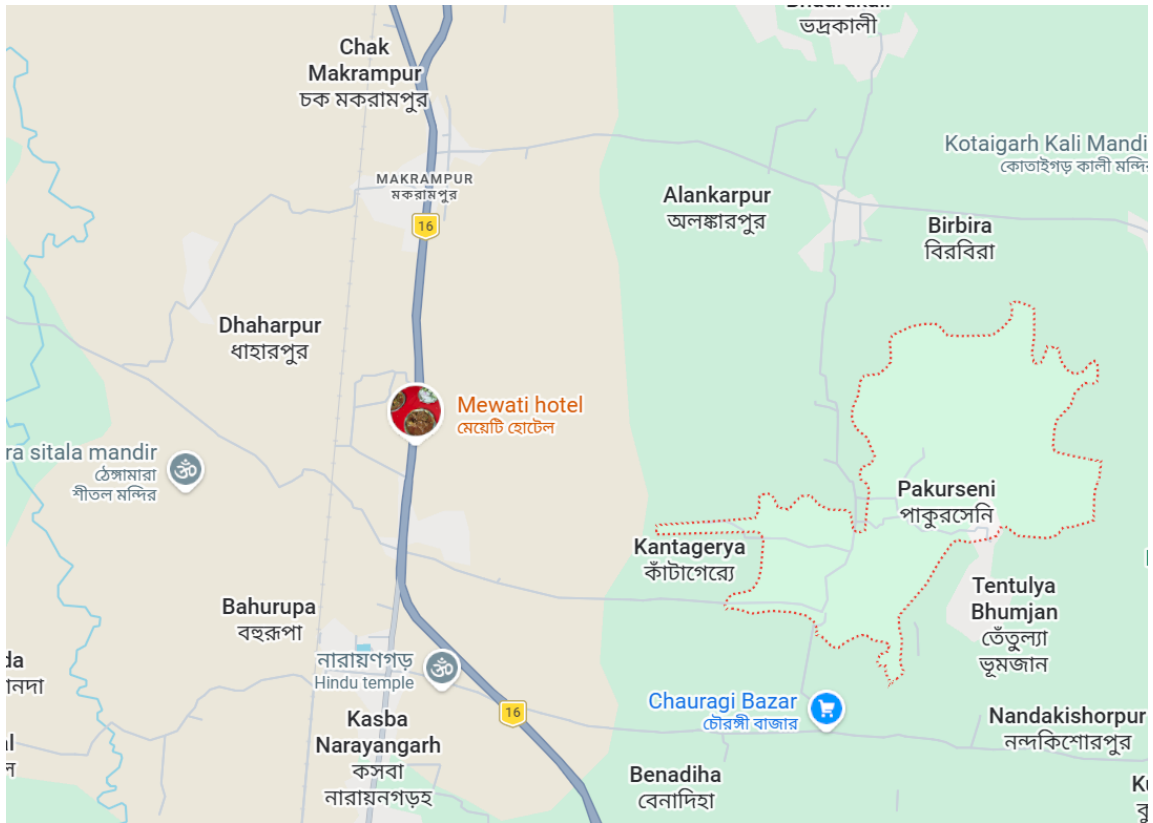


Figure 2: Google map image (22.185648302666646, 87.43764028123744)

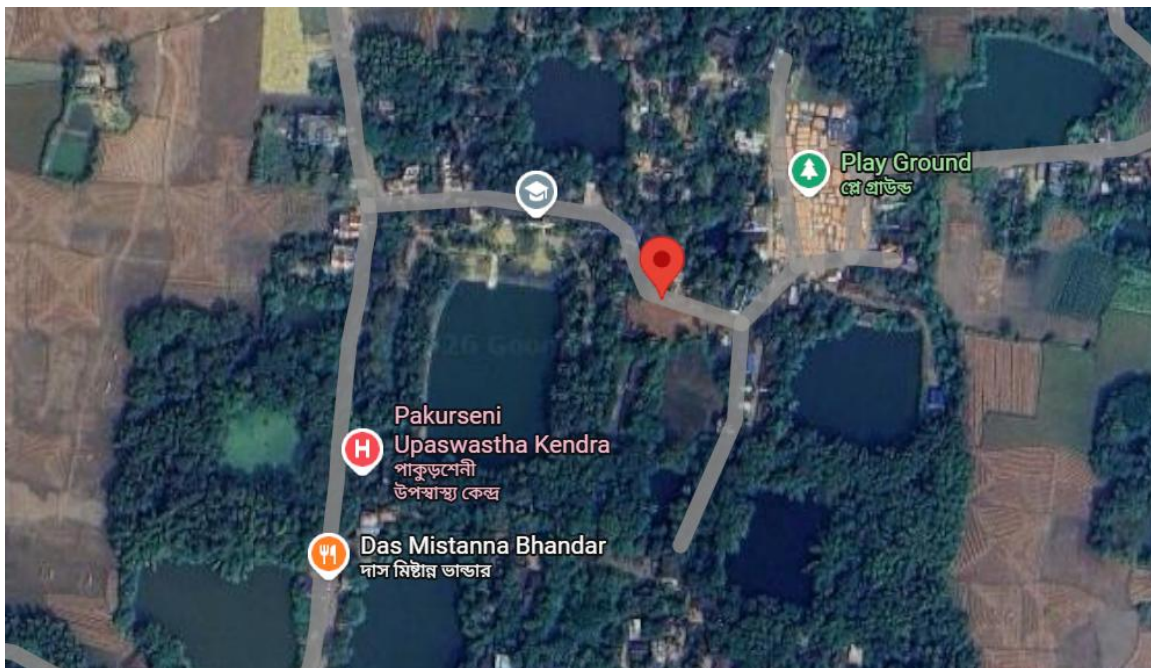


Figure 3: Satellite image (<https://maps.app.goo.gl/gc1ebrjy7AVNoptUA>)

An Overview

Archaeological evidence and stylistic parallels suggest that the temple may date to the 12th–15th centuries CE, during the transitional period following the decline of the Eastern Ganga dynasty. It is possible that the site received patronage under Kapilendra Deva, ruler of Odisha, who is credited with building the Kurumbera Fort and the Gaganeswar Temple at Gaganeswar village at Keshiary, located not far from Pakurseni. Keshiary, itself seems to have been derived from the title of some royal person, 'Keshri'. From Kurumbera, it can be further linked stylistically to the temple complex at Raibania Fort, Raibania, Odisha, where the temple has been reconstructed from ruins. This implies that the fortified temple complexes were both religious and defensive in function, or the *garhs* contained temples for worship.



Figure 4: Narayan Statue



Figure 5: Artefacts collected at Pakurseni

The artefacts recovered from the Narayangarh temple site provide a mixed picture of its religious and cultural traditions. Foremost among them is the huge, almost life-size Vishnu idol, notable for the rare inclusion of the donor's portrait, which is an unusual feature in Bengal's iconographic tradition. Equally important is the *amalaka*, the ribbed crown stone that once crowned the temple's shikhara in the Rekha-deul style. The hero stone (*Vīrastambha*) depicting a warrior suggests the presence of a noble or martial class that defended the shrine or the entire area. The *Gauripatta*, associated with feminine divinity and Shakti cults, points to the syncretic worship practices that coexisted with Vaishnava traditions or predated it. However, the Shākta cult might be related to the previously dominant cult of Sapta Matrika in the Dandabhukti region. The Bramhani Temple of Narayangarh preserves and continues this tradition till date.

The Narayangarh temple exemplifies the Rekha-deul style, a hallmark of medieval Odishan architecture characterised by its soaring curvilinear *shikhara* crowned with an *amalaka* and *kalasha* finial. This vertical emphasis, tapering upward in rhythmic curves, symbolised the cosmic axis and the temple's role as a bridge between the earthly and divine realms. The surviving laterite blocks and the base structure at Pakurseni follow closely the typology of Odisha's medieval temples, particularly the Ananta Vasudeva and Lingaraja temples in Bhubaneswar, which are considered canonical references for this style (Michell, 1988).

The reuse of temple stones by villagers to construct pond *ghats* shows erosion of the traditions because of the lack of patronage and preservation. However, it must be noted that the physical structure has suffered neglect; the villagers take extreme care to look after the artefacts as their precious heritage and carry out preservation work in their own style.



Figure 6: Buddha or Shiva



Figure 7: Gouripatta



Figure 8: Hero Stone



Figure 9: Lateritic blocks of the temple

AI Reconstruction on the Basis of the Base and the *Amalaka*



Figure 10: AI Reconstruction

Reconstruction for the People of Narayangarh

In this context, I demand reconstruction of the Narayangarh temple for religious and cultural purposes. On the one hand, it would enable a religious revival by reinstating the intact Vishnu idol

within a sanctum, thereby restoring worship practices that once defined the spiritual life of the community. On the other hand, it offers the potential for cultural tourism that can transform the site into a heritage destination.

Given the fragile condition of the surviving laterite base, relocation to a nearby communal area would ensure both preservation and accessibility. This adaptive approach may be based on the Archaeological Survey of India's guidelines for conservation and reuse of heritage sites (ASI, 2019). Such restoration would also provide opportunities for community development, including festivals, heritage walks, and educational programs.

Based on the surviving *amalaka*, pedestal fragments, and iconographic parallels, the Narayangarh Temple can be reconstructed as a towering Rekha-deul structure. The restored temple evokes the grandeur of Odisha's medieval architecture, comparable to the Ananta Vasudeva Temple in Bhubaneswar and the Lingaraja Temple, both of which exemplify the Rekha-deul typology (Michell, 1988; Mitra, 1984). Even, it can be compared with the temple complex at Raibania. The Narayangarh reconstruction would likely feature intricately carved exterior walls with floral, geometric, and mythological motifs, niches containing subsidiary deities, and a raised platform accessed by stone steps. An AI reconstruction, based on several relevant factors, is given for reference.

The restoration of the Narayangarh temple is not important as an architectural project but a profound act of cultural reclamation. The very name Narayangarh—derived from Narayana, the presiding deity, and *garh*, meaning fort—embodies the union of divinity and defence. By rebuilding the shrine, the people of Narayangarh can proudly reclaim their ancestral identity. This reconstruction distinguishes Narayangarh's sacred origins from later associations with the Rajbari or zamindari estates, which represent a different historical layer. Reclaiming the temple thus restores the etymological authenticity of Narayangarh, affirming that its name and cultural memory are rooted in the deity and fortified temple complex rather than in feudal structures.

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