

## Rich Reserve Of An Ancient History

Somen Sengupta

CHANDRAKETUGARH IS about taking a walk back in time and digging into the rich cultural and historical reserves of Bengal. It was discovered in 1956 when the archaeological department of Calcutta University was excavating in Berachapa, 35 km from Kolkata. The digging revealed pottery, silver coins, statues, lamps and drinking pots — all evidence of a 2,500-year-old civilisation.

The belief about the existence of the place — first expressed in 1906 by then superintendent of Archeological Survey of India (East), Long Hurst, who discovered clay dolls and statues in the area — was reinforced with the further discovery of houses, roads and public places by the CU team. It was a discovery that historian Rakhal Das Banerjee had predicted in 1907.

The excavations exposed the prosperous town called Chandraketugarh and smaller villages. It is believed that the Hindu kings Tajta and Laarpo ruled here. The coins are similar to those found at Tamralipta, Pataliputra and Kaushambi. A huge structure, Khana Barahar Dhibi, with 37 steps going under the ground, was also excavated nearby.

Haroa, near Berachapa, was the site of yet another ancient culture —



PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA

**Above:** Ruins of a building at Chandraketugarh; **Below:** Khana Barahar Dhibi

the Balanda civilisation. It is said that a large port named Gangarijiya was located here along the river Vidhyadhari. This was the capital of the Rajballavi kingdom. Muslim invaders destroyed both Chandraketugarh and Balanda nearly 1,500 years ago. A few samples from the lost civilisation is preserved in CU's Ashutosh Museum. Two individuals — Dilip Kumar Mohite and Abdul Jabbar — have personal museums at Berachapa and Haroa.

### How To Go

Take a Basirhat-bound bus from Esplanade to Berachapa Bazaar. From here, all the tourist spots are within walking distance. Haroa is 15 minutes by auto from the Berachapa bus stop. ■

