

## Solitary Edifice Testifies To Terracotta's Glory Days

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ALTHOUGH TERRACOTTA art made great waves in Bankura, Burdwan and Hooghly from the middle of the 15th century, not too many examples of this art are seen in Nadia district, except for the famous Mustafi Bari temple of Birnagar. The district, however, does have another splendid pora mati structure — the relatively unknown but century-old Palpara temple.

This is a largely ignored masterpiece, with very little written history. There is not even a plaque or inscription to give a specific

date about the time of its foundation or the name of its founder. However, that does not diminish the attraction of its majestic and isolated presence.

After the birth of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Bhakti movement in Bengal gave birth to several temples all over the state. The temple at Palpara, it is believed, was constructed by Raghab Roy, a member of the royal family of Nadia, sometime between 1632 and 1683. However, this is a theory disputed by many others.

The temple, 12 metres high, is made of red bricks. Built in the typical *ekchala* style of Bengal

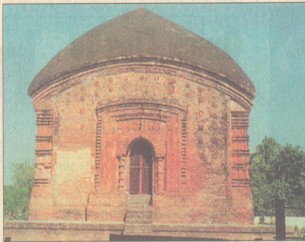


PHOTO:  
SOMEN  
SENGUPTA  
This  
temple at  
Palpara  
is said to  
have  
been  
built in  
the 17th  
century  
by a  
scion of  
the royal  
family of  
Nadia

school, the temple has its front marked by excellent terracotta craft, which mainly describes various episodes of Ramayana. The corners are decorated with small

arches. The wall carried various Hindu motifs like the chakra, bell and conch shell. A plethora of floral motifs in the form of small terracotta artwork are on the walls.

The most exceptional is the dragon motif, which is a rarity in Bengal. Historians are not sure about the influence of this.

At present, no deity is worshipped at this temple. It was a deserted place till the Archaeological Survey of India found it and began to preserve it. Today, the temple stands in a fenced garden with a small sign board giving at least a hint of its history to those who suddenly stop here.

### Tourist Info

PALPARA IS a small station in Nadia, coming before Chakdah. It is about 90 minutes ride on the train. Explore the place on foot, or hire a cyclickshaw from the station to take you to the temple. Being a small hamlet, Palpara is good for a day trip but not for overnight stay. It is best to carry your own food and water. ■