



PHOTO: SANJIB SARKAR

The Pratapaditya temple and Rash Mancha are two of the finest terracotta edifices in Bengal

Terracotta Grandeur To Match The Best

Somen Sengupta

AMBIKA KALNA, popularly known as Kalna, is a place which leaves no one untouched by its magical attraction of historical background and peerless architecture. Kalna's terracotta grandeur is no less than Bishnupur's world famous temples. The royal estate of

Bishnupur was purchased in 1806 by the royal family of Burdwan, who had their base at Kalna. Ever since, both the places had the privilege of becoming enriched by the magic of terracotta.

The zamindars of Burdwan were religious and patrons of fine arts. Although their root was in Punjab they became part of Ben-

gal's pristine glory. During 1752 to 1766, seven big and 12 small temples were built there. Even today, those exotic piece of art make us flabbergasted. The first thing that attracts you is a set of 108 Shiva temples in a single complex.

Just opposite of this complex is the main attraction of Kalna, Pratapaditya

temple. Built in 1849, it stands as one of the best terracotta temples in Bengal.

Opposite Pratapaditya temple is the majestic 60-feet high and 25-tower terracotta structure named Krishna-chandra temple. The dilapidated palace of royal family and Rash Mancha are situated in the same complex.

Another temple that draws attention is Ananta Basudeva temple. This was renovated by the Birla family in 1964. Near the Ananta Basudeva is perhaps the oldest temple of Kalna, the Sidheshwari temple, built in *ekchala* style. The first five steps to the temple indicate tantric cult while next nine steps indicate Nabagraha cult. Gopalbari is another temple with 25 towers. This temple contains exotic terracotta crafts on its wall and panel.

How To Go

Take any local train from Howrah early in the morning and you will reach Ambika Kalna in two-and-a-half hours. Take a cycle-rickshaw to visit all the places. Photography is allowed at the temples.

There is no good restaurant in Kalna. So carry dry food and water from home. PWD guesthouse can be booked from Calcutta. ■