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Sonepur Mela

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MESSAGE

I extend my sincere greetings on the occasion of Sonepur fair. The Sonepur Cattle Fair/Mela or Harihar Kshetra Mela is held on the full moon day (Purnima) of the Hindu lunar month of Karthik in Sonepur, in the Saran district in the northern part of Bihar. The Mela held on the banks of river Ganga most particularly on the confluence of the Ganga and Gandak, till date is the biggest cattle fair of Asia. It is a fair of togetherness that instills a great deal of pride in the people of the Harihar Kshetra. It strengthens the emotional integration and brings them all together to present their colourful tradition in the form of the fair to the entire world.

With great pleasure I convey my warm greetings for this fair and I hope it ushers in contentment, peace and joy to all. On this joyous and vibrant event I congratulate the Tourism department for their dedicated effort in leaving no stone unturned to make this experience a remarkable one for the tourists and also for bringing a coffee table book to mark the occasion.

Dr. D. Y. Patil
Governor, Bihar



MESSAGE

The colourful Sonepur Fair starts on 5th day of November this year. This fair, which is organized every year at the bank of the confluence of Ganges and Gandak in the Harihar Khsetra of Bihar, is believed to be the largest cattle fair of Asia. It showcases the social and economical livelihood of the rural Bihar. It is robust yet sophisticated, traditional yet contemporary and is a spectacular experience. I am more than pleased and I take great pride in expressing my thoughts and wishing great luck to the Tourism Department for successful completion of this fair.

This Sonepur Fair, which also attracts a significant tourist influx with people coming from different spheres of life, I hope, sets a benchmark of an extraordinary kind in terms of its grand celebration. This coffee table book is an effort in right direction to table the awe-inspiring Sonepur Fair.

I welcome all of you on this larger than life event, which is the quintessence of harmony, peace and unity in diversity in Bihar.

Jitan Ram Manjhi
Chief Minister, Bihar



MESSAGE

The world Famous Harihar Kshetra Sonapur Mela 2014 is being organised from 5th November 2014 to 4th December 2014.

The month long fair primarily depicts the rural ethos of Bihar. Ever since the department of tourism has been given the responsibility to organise the fair, department has always endeavoured to upscale the fair and we tried to bring new innovation to mark the fair attractive. This year the Department of Tourism is creating an Arts & Craft village & a food court to serve variety of cuisines which is expected to be centre of attraction in this fair.

In addition a Maha Aarti is being organised at the confluence of River Ganges and Gandak. The department and Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation is also organising transportation cum tour packages to Sonapur for visitors and for Patnaites.

Further The Department is also bringing a coffee Table Book to mark the occasion. I take this opportunity to invite one and all to experience the diverse line of this fair.

Dr. Javed Iqbal Ansari
Minister, (Tourism)
Govt. of Bihar



MESSAGE

On the eve of Kartik Purnima, the Sonapur Mela starts at the confluence of the holy Ganges & Gandak. We all know that the historical mela has been one of the largest cattle fairs of the world, with time adding many other dimensions to it. This has not only become a place to showcase the cultural diversity, various arts & crafts, local cuisines of the state but also become a place of economic activity with traders from far flung areas like Kashmir, Punjab & Gujarat participating in a big way.

The rustic & unique flavor of the mela also attracts many foreign tourists & their numbers are swelling with time.

The Department of Tourism with support from the Department of Art, Culture and Youth, Affairs, Department of Information and Public Relations and the District Administration have been constantly making an endeavor to upscale the mela which is appreciable.

This year the Department is also bringing out a coffee table book to mark the occasion.

I wish them best wishes & am sure this year too it will be a very colourful & eventful affair.

Anjani Kumar Singh, I.A.S.
Chief Secretary
Government of Bihar



MESSAGE

It's heartening to know that this year too like every year on the auspicious day of Kartik Purnima the annual Sonepur Mela/Fair starts on the confluence of the holy Ganges & Gandak. The mela depicts unique historical & cultural perspective of the state as we all know.

Dept of tourism along with dept of art & culture, dept of PRD & District administration's support is going to organize various cultural, sports, exhibitions, cattle fair, art & craft bazar to create an ambience of fun & fiesta.

It's also heartening to note that this year the department is also bringing out a coffee table book to mark the occasion. I wish them all success in the endeavor.

S. K. Negi
Development Commissioner
Bihar



MESSAGE

Since time immemorial Bihar has been the epitome of knowledge, devotion, power and belief. Right from when this part was the greatest power in the history of the world till today unity in diversity has been the essence of existence here.

People have always come together and created an extraordinary experience for others to witness, participate or simply appreciate. Sonepur is another one such Colourful event with rustic flavour to quench ethnic, traditional and unsophisticated Yearning for enthusiasts. The uniqueness of Sonepur also lies in the fact that in the presence of the blazing, fierce ambience it also has a touch of sophistication, divinity and purity. And this all makes Sonepur fair an experience of a lifetime, a treat for all.

At tourism this year we have tried our best to make this experience as flawless, majestic and unforgettable as possible. This year we have strategized and upgraded this Sonepur experience for the tourists. The transportation facility has been powered for easy and luxurious travel, variety has been added to the cuisine platter with a taste which can be forever savoured and an art and craft display has been included to present the traditional ethnicity of Bihar.

I also take this opportunity to thanks all the departments, especially the Department of Art and Culture & Youth, Information & Public and Relationship Department and District Administration who all are equal partners in showcasing the event.

I hope our efforts in making your visit remarkable proves fruitful and you build a long lasting connect with the immaculate, with Bihar.

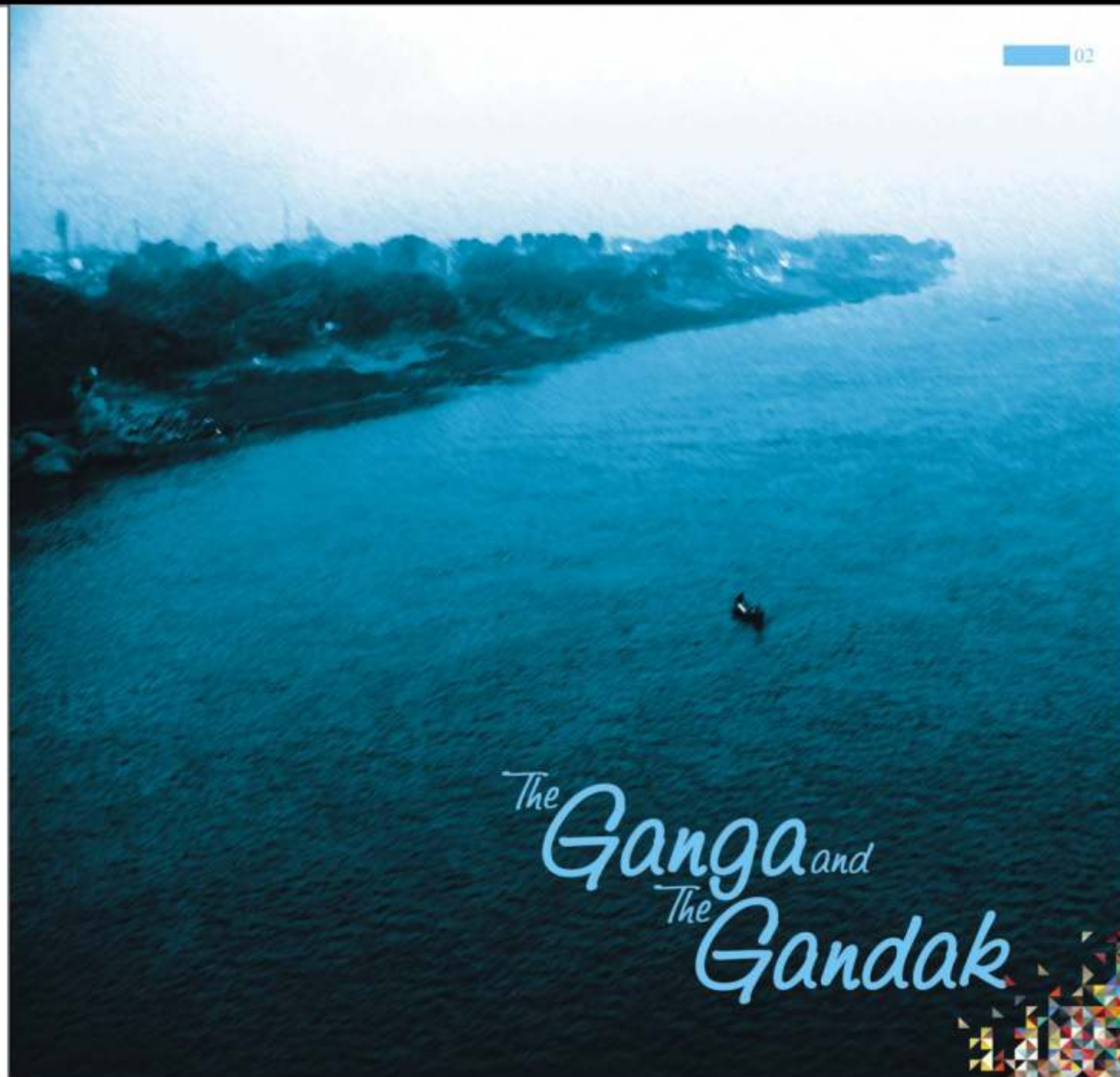
Dr. Deepak Prasad
Government of Bihar
Principal Secretary (Tourism)

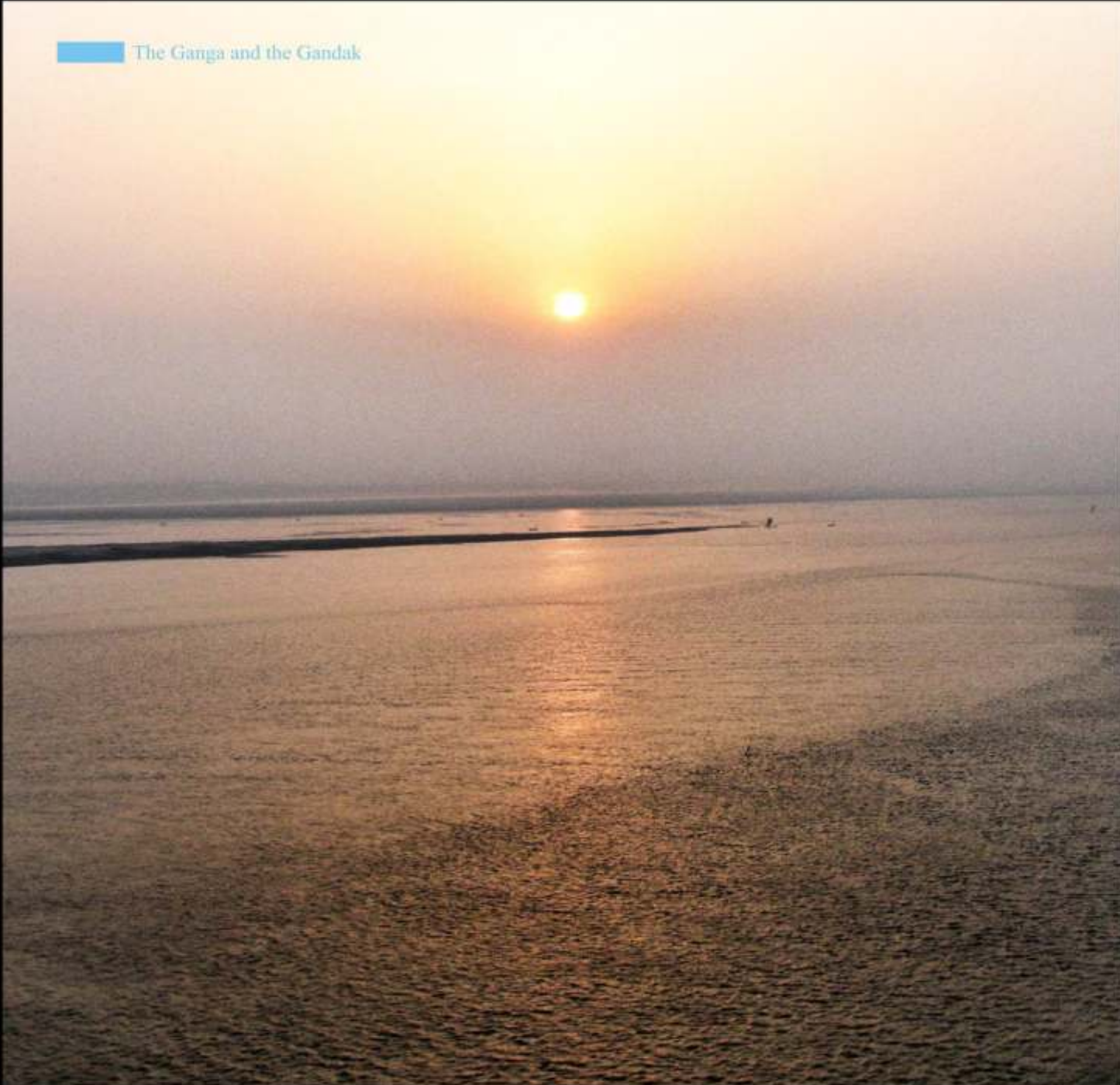
"The Ganga, especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age-long culture and civilization, ever changing, ever flowing, and yet ever the same Ganga."

Jawaharlal Nehru, First Prime Minister of India

"A bath in Ganges undoubtedly absolves one of all sins; but what does that avail? They say that the sins perch on trees along the banks of the Ganges. No sooner does the man come back from the holy waters than the old sins jump on his shoulders from the trees. The same old sins take possession of him again. He is hardly out of the waters before they fall upon him."

Ramakrishna Paramahansa





CONGREGATION AT CONFLUENCE!

Sangam, the Sanskrit word for confluence symbolizes the merging of souls.

In India traditionally, the confluences of rivers have been the important meeting places. The confluences are considered sacred and there are invariably some ritualistic festivals around the Sangams.







Here in Sonapur, where the two holy rivers meet, there had to be an auspicious and important event to celebrate the meeting of the Rivers. The holy river Gandak meets Ganga at Sonapur and the myths and stories flourished around. The river Gandak originates in Nepal and known as Narayani in Southern Nepal. This is the river from where the sacred Shalgram Shila or Narayan Shila are collected for worshipping the aniconic form of Vishnu. The puranas weave the story of Gandaki, the daughter of a prostitute whose devotion was tested by Lord Vishnu. Pleased with her dedication, Vishnu blessed her that He will always be found in her heart. So the Narayan Shila, the stone with Vishnu's signs are only found in the Gandaki River bed and immensely revered by the Hindus.

At the Sangam of the Ganga and the Gandaki, Kartik Purnima is celebrated as this full moon of Kartik month of the Hindu calendar also signifies the birth time of incarnation of Vishnu's Matsyaavataar. It is considered auspicious to take a dip at this confluence on Kartik Purnima and devout Hindus gather together to be blessed by the god Vishnu.



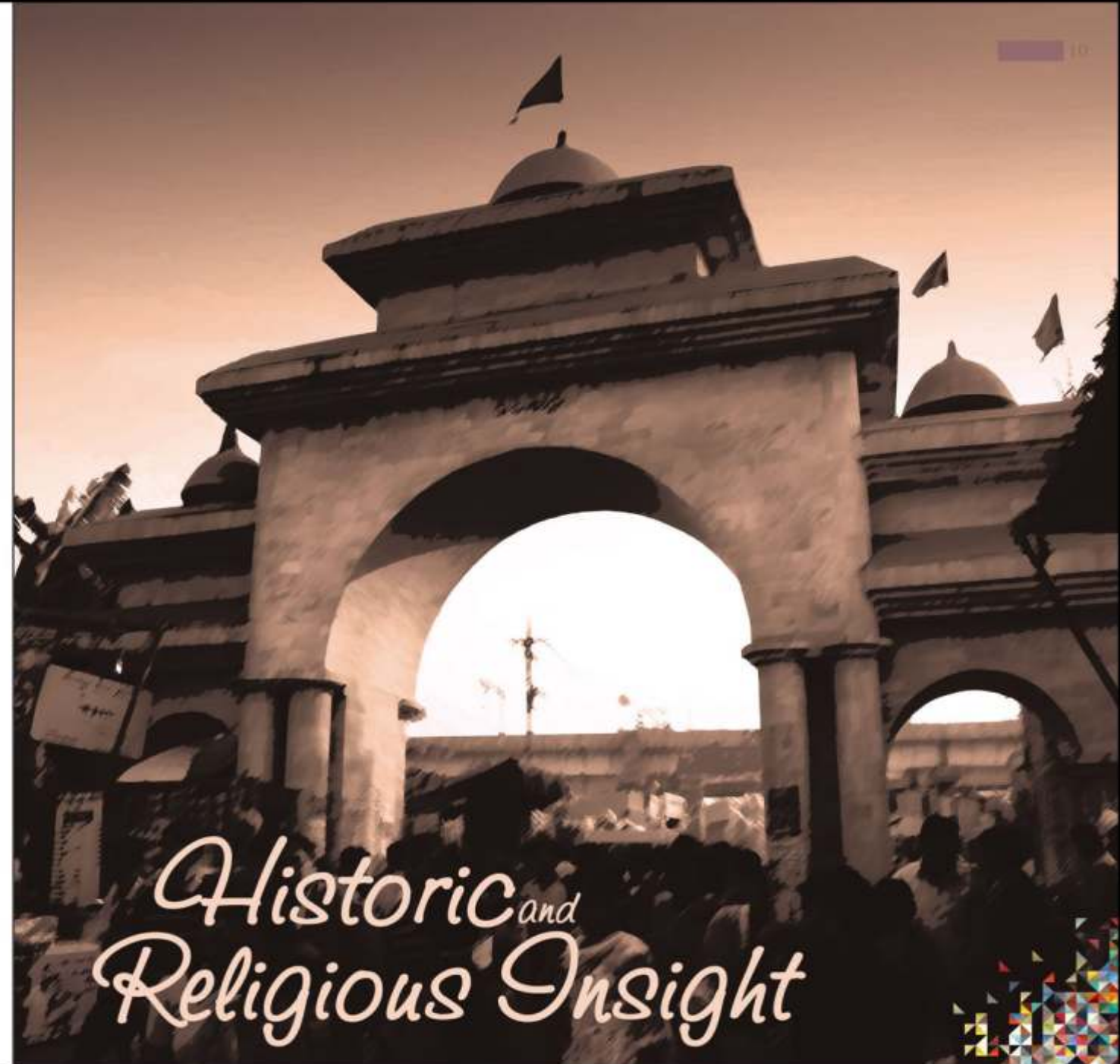
This place was known as Harihar-Kshetra and was an integral part of the Vrijjian republic in ancient time. The wealthy Vratyas or Kikatas clans ruled this area then. However, this place have not been mentioned in the memoirs of the Buddhist Chinese travelers, Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang.

The Sonapur Fair is of great antiquity because it has its origins during ancient times. History talks about Chandragupta Maurya, the first Pan-India ruler of the Magadha, used to visit this fair to buy elephants and horses across the river Ganges.





Religion is part of the human make-up. It's also part of our cultural and intellectual history. Religion was our first attempt at literature, the texts, our first attempt at cosmology, making sense of where we are in the universe, our first attempt at health care, believing in faith healing, our first attempt at philosophy.



*Historic and
Religious Insight*



HISTORIC AND RELIGIOUS INSIGHT

At Sonapur, the Asia's second largest cattle fair is organized. It is situated in the Saran(Chhapra) district in the northern part of Bihar, on the confluence of the banks of the sacred river Ganga and Gandak. This fair is known as Sonapur Cattle Fair/Mela or Harihar Kshetra Mela begins on the full moon day (Purnima) of the Hindu lunar month of Karthik Mas (Month of November). In the ancient times, the Kings, Nawabs, Zamindars/Jagirdars, local chieftains, big business men used to camp in Sonapur, it foretells about the unique and a historical importance in the Indian Mythology, with a visit to the Hariharnath temple and to take holy dip into it, priests, tourists from all across the globe gather here to aim for their healthy and prosperous life. In local folklore it is believed that the Hariharnath temple have been originally built by Lord Rama, on his way to Videh (modern mithlanchal) King Janak to participate in the 'swayambar' to win the hand of his daughter princess Sita. Centuries later this temple is reconstructed and repaired by Raja Man Singh after being told about the importance and this story related to it.



'I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion, and it is the spirit.'

"Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total; of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."





It is hard to imagine that around 2500 years ago people used to have trade-fairs and traders from different walks would gather to exchange the most demanded commodities. The demand for the elephants and horses for wars and the cattle for the farmers were the major attraction of the fair in those days. So much so that it is said that the Great Emperor Chandragupta Maurya used to buy the elephants and horses from this fair. Those were the battle elephants and horses from this very place with which Chandragupta conquered the vast Indian subcontinent for the first time in the history.



"The whole course of human history may depend on a change of heart in one solitary and even humble individual - for it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost."



The fair continues for about fifteen days to one month. According to local folklore Sonapur Cattle Fair revives the Gajendra (King of Elephants) moksha legend which is related to the Hariharnath Temple in Sonapur. The Puranas tell the story of the Elephant King Gajendra saved from the crocodile attack by Lord Vishnu. In the deep forests of this place, there lived the king of the elephants Gajendra who was originally a king named Indradymna. He was cursed by a sage to be born as an elephant. As an elephant also he became the ruler of his herd and one day was attacked by a crocodile who was also a cursed Gandharva. The fight between these two powerful individuals lasted for long years till the elephant prayed to Vishnu for help. It is Vishnu's chakra that severed the crocodile and the spirit of Gandharva was released. The King Indradymna was also liberated with Vishnu's blessings.



The Hariharnath Temple is a Vishnu and Shiva temple situated at the bank of the river and the devotees throng the temple after an early morning ritual bath at the Sangam on Kartik Purnima.

Hariharnath is another name of Shiva and there is a belief among Hindus that this temple was built by Rama while his journey towards Janakpur to Sita's Swayamvar. However, this is not depicted in Ramayana. There are numerous temples around this area which are fabled with various phases of Ramayana. This temple of Hariharnath also bears the ubiquitous reference of Rama.





"When I admire the wonders of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in the worship of the creator."



The present structure of the temple is not very old and the architecture is simple. It was built by Raja Ram Narain in late Mughal period and reconstructed by the Birlas in the recent past. It also attracted traders from many places as distant as Central Asia. The site of the present fair was originally at Hajipur but later shifted to Sonapur during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. One of the purposes of the people visiting the Sonapur Fair, apart from the fair, is to take a holy dip and offer puja at the Hariharnath Mahadeo Temple.

There is a Kali temple or Kali Asthan, a Panch Devata Mandir (Five Deity temple) and a Nepali temple nearby. The pilgrims visit these temples as well. At the Kali temple there is an ancient stone pillar made during the Shunga dynasty.







To experience the sight of hundreds of pilgrims taking bath, one can hire a boat and get a wonderful view while the boatman takes rounds at the locations.

Sonepur Mela started to lose its sheen as the participation from different stakeholders drastically gone down due to issues related to the condition of the state and disinterest shown by locals and traders' coming from outside, the low buying capacity was also a very important factor. With the advent of new look melas organized in different part of the country with better management and hospitality added fuel to its slide. But Indeed in recent years under new rule special stress was given to this Mela. Proper planning, management and execution with the help of professionals have changed the face of it and its makeover is indeed very engrossing. Though still way to go but it has certainly brought back the lost interest and market is thriving. Just a little concern which needs attention is the longer stay of Elephants and quality of 'Dangals' which has been discussed in great deal and for spectators this can be beautiful surprise this year!





*"You are invited to the festival of this world and
your life is blessed"*

*"God respects you when you work, but He loves
you when you sing."*

*"Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the
dawn is still dark."*

*"Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we
create the capacity to receive it."*



*Mela with
Emotions*



MELA WITH EMOTIONS

The wintry dawn of the Kartik Purnima unwraps with the pilgrims' early morning ritual bathing at the river and then their prayers and offerings at the Hariharnath temple. The believers gather here to wash away sins that they have collected. The act of the ritual dips in the river for washing away the guilt prompts the regaling mood. The mundane lives of the daily chores break free to get the taste of fun at the fair. Most of the visitors' year-long wait to get a flicker of enjoyment starts to unfold as the frolicking begins.





"Hip-hop is the streets. Hip-hop is a couple of elements that it comes from back in the days... that feel of music with urgency that speaks to you. It speaks to your livelihood and it's not compromised. It's blunt. It's raw, straight off the street - from the beat to the voice to the words."



Amidst the prayers and chanting the numerous animals' roars and grunts infuse the nippy morning breeze. They may not be the happy lot in the chains and cages but they put up a commendable show under the trainers. The elephants and the horses show their talents to earn the value for money. The veterans would recount the older days when the rulers and zamindars would come to select the best of the lot to add to their pride possessions. The elephants were brought from Assam and then trained to perform. The legend of the Emperor Chandragupta is still narrated with lot of pride by the villagers in the mela.





"Festival of the impassioned efforts and manifold ambitions of all forms of youthful activity of every generation springing from the threshold of life."







Along the passing of time, the warfare animals became the amusement commodity and fancy pets for the affluent. One comes across numerous breeds of dogs, colorful feathered birds, rabbits and hare, guinea pigs etc. along with the variety of farm animals. It is here that the farmers from all over Bihar and nearby states come to trade for their livestock.



The hurried motion of colours formed by the rustling sarees and pugrees along with the twinkling ornaments conjure up a perfect setting for confluence of people. People from various caste and creed forget their differences in the excitement of experiencing so many novelties. The Sangam no longer stands for mere symbolism but also in reality it becomes the place of mingling cultures and souls.





Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe.



"Superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy the mad daughter of a wise mother. These daughters have too long dominated the earth."



*Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming....
"Wow! What a Ride!"*





"The Personality of Godhead, after hearing the elephant's plea, felt that he was in great distress. Thus at once the Lord appeared there on the Garuda, with the chakra He cut to pieces the mouth of the crocodile to save the elephant and He delivered the elephant by lifting him by his trunk. It is a promise of the Lord that His devotee will never be vanquished."

*Cattles
in
Fair*





CATTLES IN FAIR

The jingling sound of the cow bells of hundreds of cattle fills the morning air with a festive mood. The traders start to exhibit their prized offers, the sheer range of cattle, in all variety of sizes, colours and breed is an astounding experience. One cannot stop marveling at the embellishments right from their horns to hooves. Sometimes, the white coats of the cattle are covered with the pink and blue palm marks that are the signs of ownership.



"To a rider, a horse is not a 'pet' and not a friend. Your horse is a best friend, a listener, a partner, a team mate. Horses do not care about how many times you may come off, how covered in dirt you are, and at the end of the day: It doesn't matter what color ribbon you got. Because it's your horse who will be there for you, to love you, and cherish every moment with you, to talk to you, and to listen to you."



"Strength doesn't lie in carrying heavy loads. Camels can do that. Strength lies in controlling your temper."



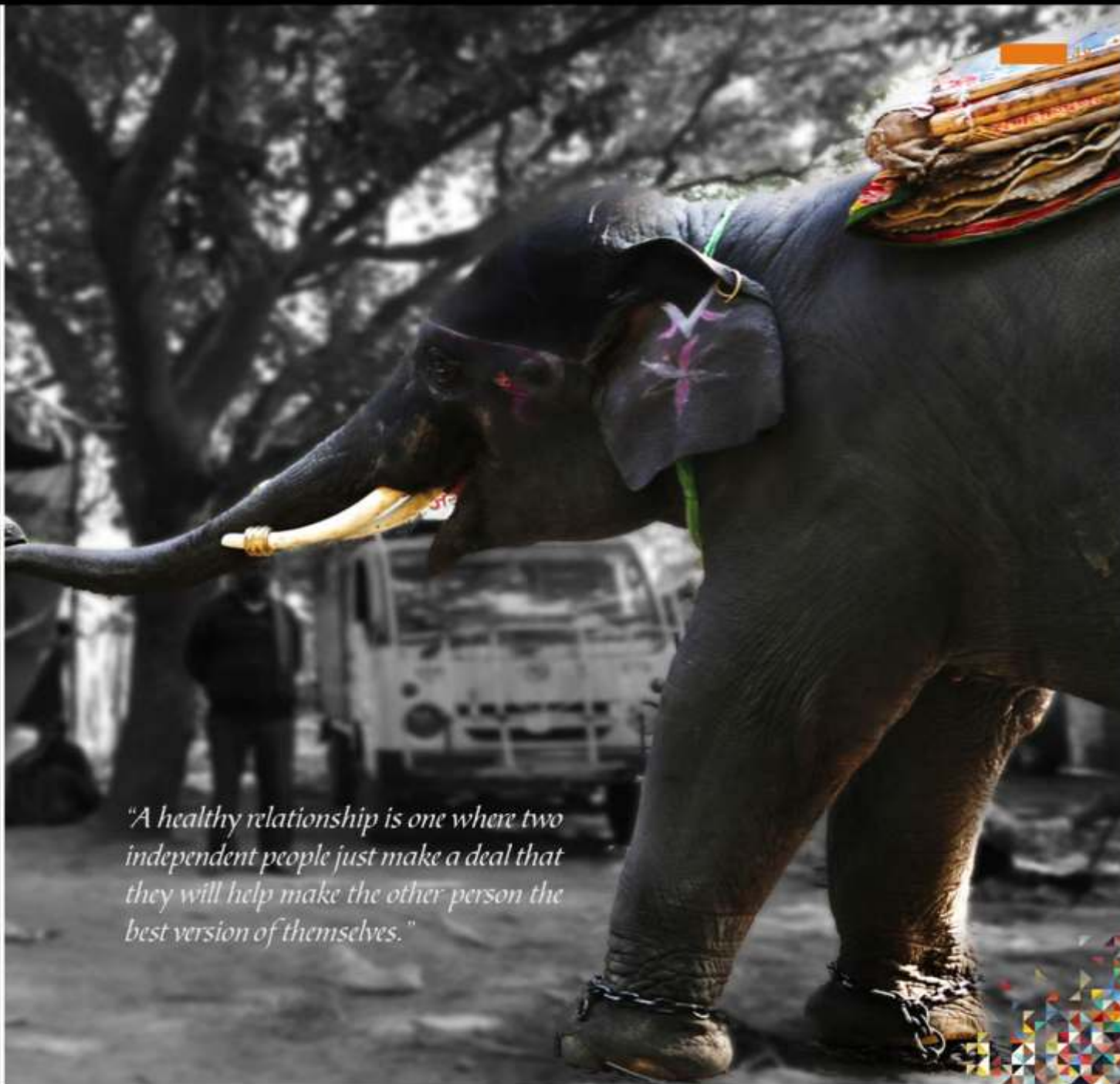
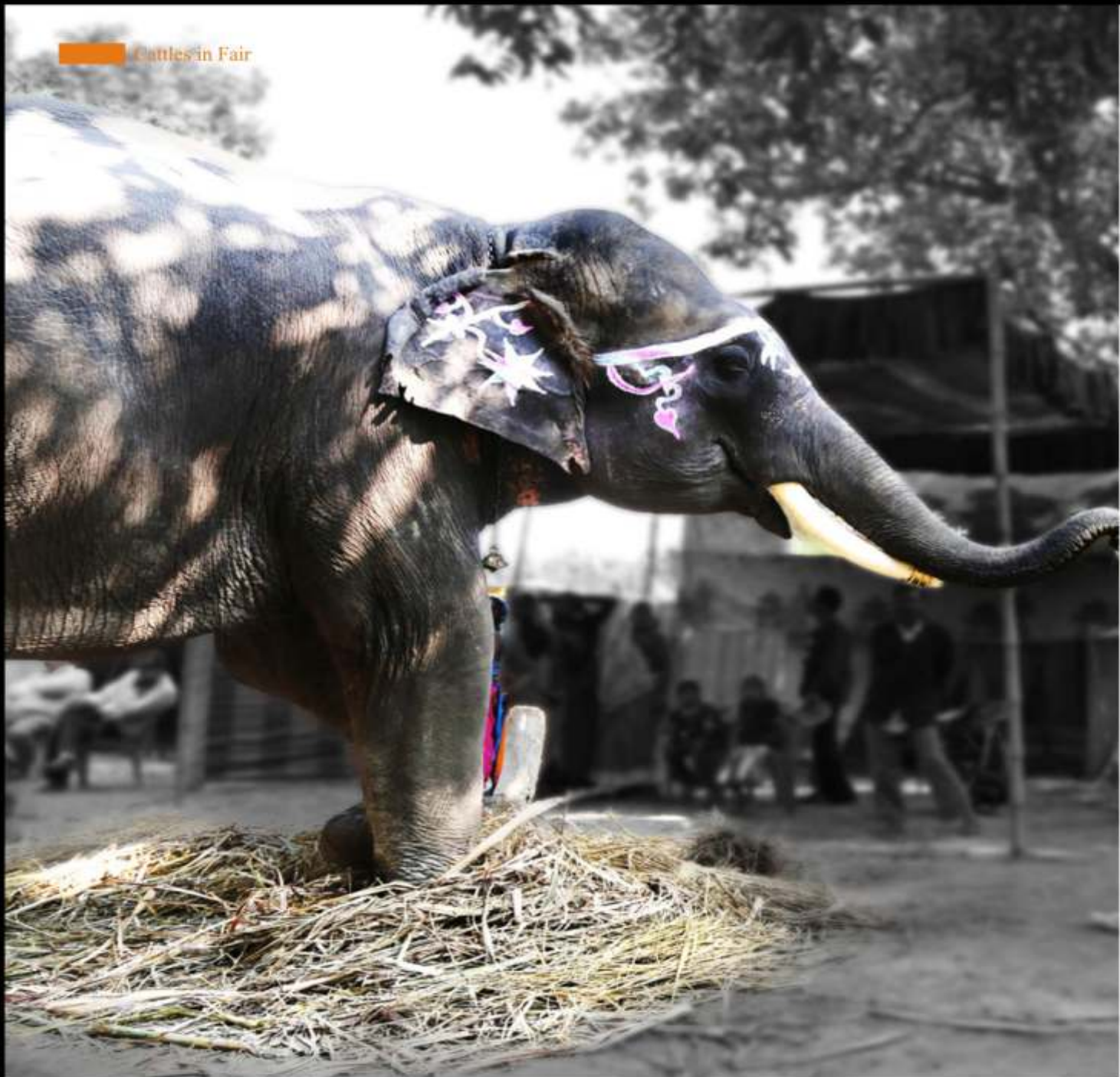


Today it is well known fact that Sonapur Mela is Asia's second largest cattle fair. However, not so long ago, this fair was the trading ground of kings and nobles for the grand elephants. Elephants have been regarded as auspicious and since the Indus valley civilization, domesticating these gigantic animal have been practiced in the Indian subcontinent since time immemorial. Elephants have been tamed to carry loads of logs and other heavy objects to transport and they were the mighty vehicles and terrors in the battlefields. The temples would keep elephants as a living deity. Till now, numerous temples have elephants and the worshippers pay their offerings to them. Although the wildlife protection act has minimized the trading of wild elephants, one can still experience the show of the domesticated elephants at Sonapur Mela. The morning bathing of elephants at the river, the parade of the elephants with all gorgeous ornamentation and then the race and performance show to impress the buyers are the vanishing trails of the ancient glorious times. The prices are not labeled or declared. There is this old tradition of covering the buyer and the seller's hands under a cloth. The price is negotiated by holding the number of each other's fingers. The amount that is being exchanged is supposed to be confidential and the system is still in practice.



We admire elephants in part because they demonstrate what we consider the finest human traits: empathy, self-awareness, and social intelligence. But the way we treat them puts on display the very worst of human behavior.





The horses were also one of the major attraction as they were in great demand for the farming and battlefield utility. This Mela has such an ancient origin when the kings would arrange AshwamedhaYagna and the horse played the most important role in defining the boundary of the kingdoms. Presently the horses are dealt for the collectors and the farmers.

The elephant, horse and cattle race events are exciting spectacle of the fair. These races are organized mainly for the buyers but the onlookers enjoy a great deal of the show.

Other pet animals like dogs, birds, rabbits are also among the trading objects of the fair. The sheer variety of the dog breeds also from foreign countries is quite surprising. The barking of the dogs of various breeds, the chirping of the colorful birds and of course the silent rabbits and hare, all await their new owner, new home. If one is lucky, then there are also calves of elephants to be seen with the mother elephant frolicking in the river. Elephants and other cattle are bought and sold by mostly the forest departments and the people who are heavily involved in logging



This fair regained some popularity during the British Raj and the viceroys and other British officials would come and have their own tents in separate camping areas under the shades of mango groves. The Europeans amused themselves with polo, racing and other sports besides visiting the fair. There were traders from Calcutta, Lucknow and other cities to sell products like saddlery and other sports equipments as well. The cutleries, crockery and furniture were among many favorite items for the European visitors.





"Food, in the end, in our own tradition, is something holy. It's not about nutrients and calories. It's about sharing. It's about honesty. It's about identity."





TREAT FIESTA IN SONEPUR MELA

As the sun starts the ascending journey, the hunger- barometer starts rising among the visitors. The array of food sellers spread their delicacies to pacify the eager visitors. With the passing of time, the food culture of the Mela has also evolved to cater to the taste of the present. It is an assortment of the local delicacies along with the cross-cultural dishes. Although most of the visitors are vegetarians, the presence of the rivers is the delight of the fish-eaters. Most of the food stalls are located at a designated place in the fair. However, there are quite a few scattered stalls to appease the thirst and the snacking spells. The aroma draws the visitors in hordes towards the food arena as the day moves ahead.



The specialties of Bihar are Ghughni, Samosa, Chaat and Litti-Chokha in the savory side and the sweet dishes boast of Jalebi, Chini ki Mithai and Khajja. The presence of Litti - Chokha in every Bihari house irrespective of their wealth parameter never fails to fascinate the taste buds. The litti is a simple preparation of Kneaded wheat flour ball baked inside the coal chullah to form a sort of crust bread. The chokha is made of potato to accompany the litti. It is the most popular staple of Bihar.







Among the sweet dishes the Jalebee is hot favourite. This is indeed to be taken as fried hot. The lentil flour dough fried in twisted circular shapes and then dipped in syrup are loved by the most.

The foods that travelled from far, like Noodles, Chowmein, Burgers, Chole- Bhature, Tikki, Paratha etc. are becoming popular fancy dishes for the local crowd. Fried fresh fish from the river and local egg preparations are also among the favorites of the foodie visitors.



There are still no multinational food brands at the Mela, so one can taste the fusion of the local taste even in the alien dishes. The sellers are mostly the local people and some who travel in other fairs too. The buyers are way too many for the sellers to worry about the sale with any advertisement, not even a call of invitation. The freshly prepared dishes get fast depleted to satisfy the desire of the most primitive form of entertainment.



What I've enjoyed most, though, is meeting people who have a real interest in food and sharing ideas with them. Good food is a global thing and I find that there is always something new and amazing to learn - I love it!





*"Time flies whether you
are having fun or not,
Choice is yours."*





FUNTIME AT SONEPUR MELA

As the sun starts to turn vermillion and paint the sky and water with lovely hues, the gleaming water hugs the image of the glowing sun and ushers the moment of the evening rites, Sandhya- arti at the temple. Along with the peeping stars, the glow-lights of the amusement sellers begin to dazzle the onlookers.



After gratifying their appetite, the visitors are now out to explore the thrills of other sensations. The fair comes with all the jingbangs of the crowd pullers, like giant wheels, merry-go-rounds, magic shows, air-rifle shooting, Death -Well driving etc. The filmy dance performers, the parrot fortune readers, the palmists and so many other entertainers, all set to celebrate the annual festive mood. Other attraction during this fair is the great racings of all kinds where owners display their best breeds to compete to showcase their riding skills as well as their cattle's prowess both to the spectators and the traders.





The Death-well where the motor bikes and a car take the rounds inside a well like temporary structure is literally nerve raking as the drivers risk their life in this dangerous show just to earn some basic livelihood. The riders of the bike and the car driver take huge risk on their lives as they spin inside the caged well. People watch this life threatening performance with breathtaking excitement and sometimes throw money as a sign of their appreciation.







*"Life is short.
Time is fast.
No replay.
No rewind.
So enjoy every moment
as it comes."*



'Theatres' known as 'nautanki' also take place making this fair a huge point of attraction starting in the late evening lasting till the daybreaks. Combined with a thrilling 'maut-ka-kua' stuntmen show and their screaming bikes and cars, and magic shows, colorful and delicious street food and various colorful bangles and ornaments. With music, dance, lighting, and the entire brilliantly organized fair, Sonapur becomes the place to be in Bihar during this kartik month. The brightly lit, makeshift structures for the performances are the major attraction point especially for the village crowd. Originally it was the popular Nautanki style of performances which was a fusion of dance, romantic melodrama and humorous dialogues with the audience to entertain. Over the years the trend has become more of a popular filmy dance movements to show the tangible women instead of moving pictures of the cinema. The dancers dressed in their fantasy attires, revel the villagers with heady music and dramatic spectacles. The music from popular films are played and the women of varying age gyrate to satiate the all- male audience. The large posters of these saucy poses are hung outside the tents to yield the magnetic effect on the visitors' otherwise plain village life. These have become a characteristic feature of the fair and adds some spice to their chores.



Among the visitors from village there are many young newly married couples who come here to have a romantic fun filled time away from the elders of their joint family. There are traders as far as from Haryana, U.P. Gujarat who sell stuffs that are still novelties for the villagers. Ranging from daily household objects like utensils, small furniture, decorative items, there are also agricultural products like the tools and machineries etc. The colourful sweaters, shawls and other warm clothes for sale, reminds the approach of winter round the corner.



The fun tale will be incomplete if the ghost sellers of the fair are not mentioned. As if to leave nothing out from the merchandise offered at the fair, there have been these strange village cult practitioners who come here to sell ghosts from their earthen pots. However unimaginable it may sound, there were buyers for these spirits too. Presently the number of such practitioners have dwindled to near extinction... may be because the ghosts have fled away being scandalized to see the hell created by us!!!





"Walking is my main method of relaxation. I don't go over my lines or try to solve the world's problems, I just enjoy the scenery and the wildlife."

"My ideal relaxation is working on upholstery. I spend hours in junk shops buying furniture. I do all the upholstery work myself, and it's like therapy."

"The village had a mill near it, situated on the bank of Ganges, which made very good flour. The population consisted of civilized Indians, but much mixed blood."

Experience a Stay





EXPERIENCE A STAY

As the indigo of the night sky gets slowly woven by the starry zardozi and the reveling mood starts to fade away, the exhausted bodies come back to the shelters for a peaceful rest.



The temporary guest houses built by the tourism department with natural materials like hay, cane and bamboos are very comfortable besides being aesthetically pleasing. The furnishing consists of the basics as beds and chairs and a table and a cupboard all made with cane and bamboo are a refreshing change. There are attached washrooms and toilets along with the makeshift rooms.



Usually the regulars stay on for a while. The fair is a month-long affair and the selection of livestock mostly take long time to figure out the condition of them. Testing done right from the teeth to toe to judge the right price of the animal. Watching the process of selection of the healthy cattle is truly a learning experience. From morning to evening people are also busy feeding the animals.





For the urban visitors it is indeed a humbling experience to watch these large number of animals getting fed and taken care. In the urban set up the central priority of most activities revolve around human beings. Here, in this fair, the animals and human squatting next to each other and exchanging dialogues is a common sight.



It is a unique experience to get closer to the rural India where the lifestyle is still very basic. The luster of modernity alluring them in trickles through the window of this fair.

Walking in the idyllic surroundings at the bank of these wide rivers, the thick mango groves, the unending banana plantations enliven the connection with the mother nature.





Sonepur Cattle Fair

Official Name	: Harihar Kshetra Mela, Sonepur Cattle Fair
Observed by	: Hindu
Type	: Religious
Begins	: KartikPoonima (Full Moon Day of Nov-Dec)
Durations	: 21days
State	: Bihar
District	: Saran
Population (2011)	: 37,776
Coordinates	: 25.7° N 85.18° E
Pin	: 841101
In The Bank Of	: River Ganga & Gandak
Route from Patna	: NH77 to Hajipur via Mahatma Gandhi Setu; NH19 to Sonepur.

How to Reach Sonepur Mela

Sonepur is 25kms from Patna, The capital of Bihar (Hajipur - 5Kms). Well Connected by Road, Rail & Air. After boarding by Rail at Patna or Hajipur can Hire taxi/auto for Sonepur Mela. Many Buses are also running between Patna-Hajipur and Sonepur. From Hajipur it will take 20 mins ride to reach Sonepur Mela and on the way you can catch the beautiful Bank of Gandak River and also most important 150 years old British made Steel Bridge.

The Viceroy, Lord Dufferin opened the old Gandak Railway Bridge by the side of the Sonepur Railway Station, in March, 1887. It is 2,176 feet long and is built of eight spans of 250 feet, with two broad pathways for pedestrians. Because of the swift flow of the Gandak when in flood and of the unstable nature of its bed, the bridge was regarded as a triumph of engineering skill when it was built.

Sonepur has (and 2nd longest at the time of construction) longest platform secure 8th position in the world at 2,415 ft (736 m).

Important Tips:

Sonepur Mela is famous for Crowds so be prepare for that. Careful about money handling, If you are very conscious about Food hygiene please carry your Food and Drinking Water.

Tourist Offices:

Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation
Bir Chand Patel Path, Patna
Tel: +91-612-2225411

Go Around to See More



"For time is the longest distance between two places."

Patna attracts tourists from all over the world as there are numerous Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh pilgrimages located in Bihar. Kumhrar and Agam Kuan are the sites of the ruins of the Ashokan Pataliputra. The Didarganj Yakshni sculpture at Patna Museum is a remarkable illustration of Mauryan art.

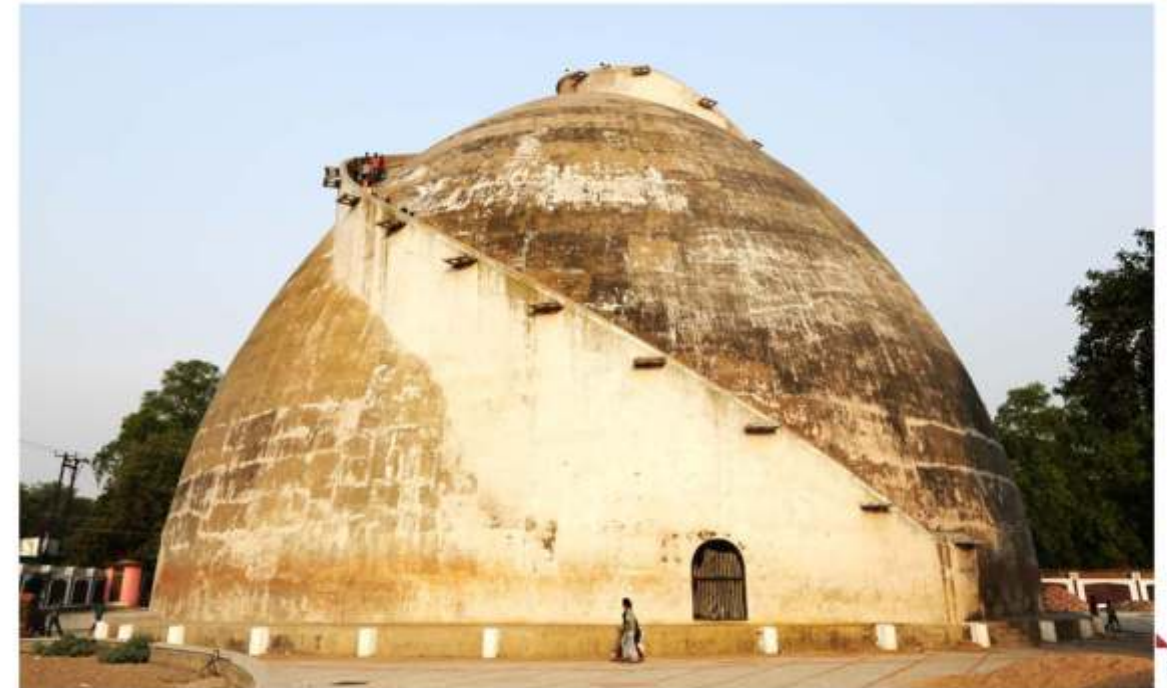
Takht Sri Patna Sahib is one of the Five Takhts of Sikhism and consecrates the birthplace of the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Gobind Singh. There are five other Gurdwaras in Patna which are related to different Sikh Gurus; these are Gurdwara Pahila Bara, Gurdwara Gobind Ghat, Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh, Gurdwara Bal Leela and Gurdwara Handi Sahib.

The British architecture in Patna can be seen at Padri Ki Haveli, High Court, Golghar and Secretariat Building.

GO AROUND TO SEE MORE

Bihar is a historically rich region and there is no dearth of interesting sites to visit. This fair is a month-long affair and there are plenty of nearby sites of interest.

The capital city Patna is located only 25 Km. from Sonapur. Patna has been known by various names during its more than 2,000 years of existence Patligram, Patliputra, Kusumpur, Pushapur. The Mahatma Gandhi Setu connects Hajipur with Patna. The name Patna derived from the name of the Hindu goddess, Patan Devi. Patna became significant around the year 490 BCE when Ajatashatru, the king of Magadha, wanted to shift his capital from the hilly Rajagrhya to a more strategically located place to combat the Licchavis of Vaishali. When the fair originated in ancient time, Pataliputra was an important city then which eventually became the capital city of the vast Mauryan empire. There must have been significant trading through the waterways of the Ganga River and its tributaries. During the 17th century, Patna became a centre of international trade.





The banana groves of Hajipur is well-known for its China banana. The waves of greenery created by these banana plantation just next to the Ganga River can be enjoyed from the Mahatma Gandhi Setu.

Hajipur is the headquarters of Vaishali district of Tirhut Division. Mahatma Gandhi Setu, one of the longest bridges in the world, links it to Patna. In the ancient time, it was known as Ukkacala and was the first village to come after crossing River Ganges at Patna. The village of Hajipur gained significance, as it was the venue of one of the discourses given by the Buddha. The Buddha preached the Kula Goplalaka Sutta. A very close disciple of the Buddha, Ananda's last remains of ashes were enshrined here.

The Maha Kaleshwar Mandir situated in Naya Tola Mohalla, Hajipur is the temple of Shiva with statue of Hanumaanjee, Goddess Durga, Chitra Gupta (God of Books) and other Hindu Gods. This temple was established with combined effort of the local people. The Ramchaura Mandir is a Hindu Temple in the city of Hajipur.



Kaun- Haara Ghat is considered one of the main ghats of Ganga-Gandak, where worshiping and cremation has been performed for centuries. This ghat has got its name based on the ancient legend of Vishnu saving the Elephant from the crocodile and also releasing the Gandarva from the crocodile body. The famous fight of Gaja (elephant) and Graah (crocodile) is the reason behind people asking -'kaunhaara' and hence the name.

On the confluence of the Ganga and the Gandak is situated the unique Shaivite shrine. Made in the late medieval period (18th century), by Mathabar Singh Thapa, one of the army commanders of Nepal, the temple brings-in a fresh pagoda-style architecture of the Himalayan Kingdom to the plains of the Ganges. This temple is built largely of wood. Another distinctive feature of this temple is its fine wooden carving, which includes, of others, generous erotic scenes. Both in style and finish, largely drawn in from the Himalayan world of architecture, Nepali Temple at Hajipur remains quite singular and inimitable.

The Mahatma Gandhi Setu (bridge) is the important link between north and south Bihar. It has been constructed over the Ganga River near village Jadhua and connects Hajipur with Patna. This is one of longest river bridge having length of 5.575 km. The bridge was commissioned into service during the year 1982. Travelers get an enthralling experience and panoramic view of lush green banana plantations while crossing the bridge.



Ancient village of Vaishali is located about 35 km North-West of Hajipur. The place can be reached by road and offers many archeological places to see which includes Buddha Stupa, Ashokan Pillar, Abhishek Puskarani (coronation Tank of Vajji Rulers) etc. All the places can be seen during a day long visit by arranging a private transport. Vaishali Mahotsava (great celebration) is held every year on Baisakh Purnima (Full Moon Day of 1st Hindu month Vaishakh) during mid-April to celebrate the birth anniversary of 24th Jain Tirthankar Lord Mahavir who was born here in the village Kundalpur, 4 km from Vaishali. The soil of this land is blessed by the visit of Lord Buddha twice during 3rd century BC.



*"Blessed are they who see beautiful things in humble places
Where other people see nothing."*



Muzaffarpur is another important town near to Sonapur. Muzaffarpur is famous for the juicy Shahi litchies. The land use around Muzaffarpur is mainly agricultural and horticultural. While litchie and mangoes are abundantly grown. It is the commercial hub of North Bihar and the wholesale market of Mumbai, Surat and Ahmedabad. The textile mills of Suta Patti in the city are dominated by the Marwari community. The commercial hub of the city are located around Moti -Jheel, Kalyani -Chowk, Purani Bazaar, Sarriya Ganj, Jawaharlal Road, Harisabha Chowk, Bela Industrial Area, Club Road, Islampur, Shafi Daudi Market, Andi Gola, Chata Bazar, Company Bagh, Tilak Maidan Road, Juran Chapra, Bank Road, Mithanpura, Aam Gola.





This will be the
inside of back cover