

# TRAVEL & DEAL

**COVER STORY:**

## THE SANCTITY OF THE BLISSFUL RATHA YATRA

SHANKU SHARMA

**HERITAGE:**

THE ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCE ON  
THE CHIKANKARI EMBROIDERY OF

## LUCKNOW

ADITI RAMAN

**PHOTO ESSAY:**

## THE ENTICING UNAKOTI

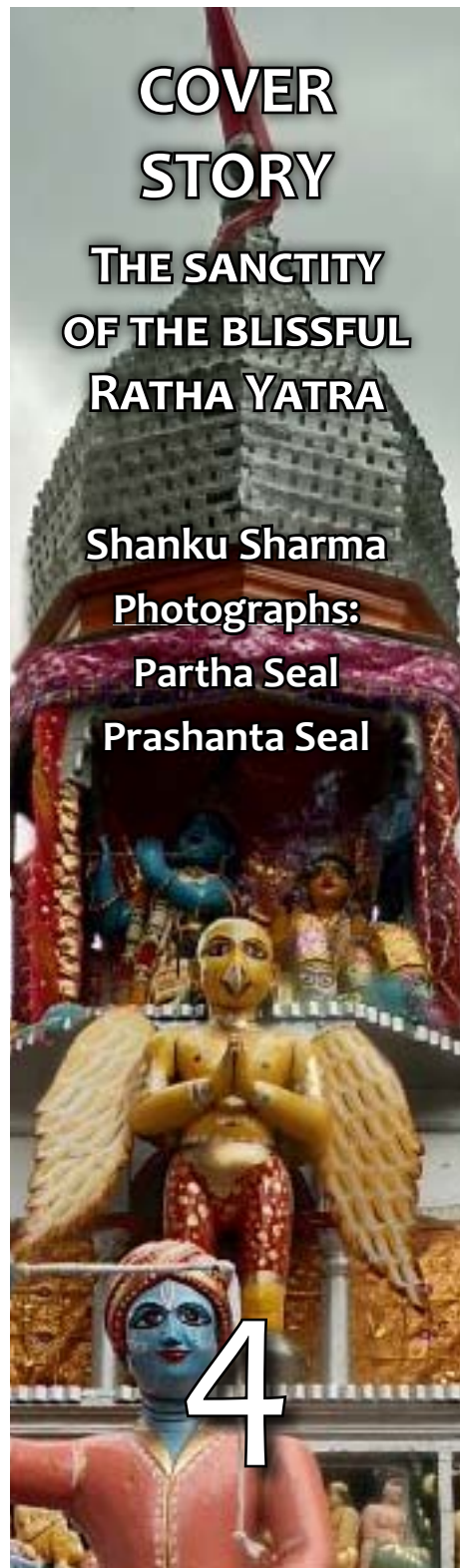
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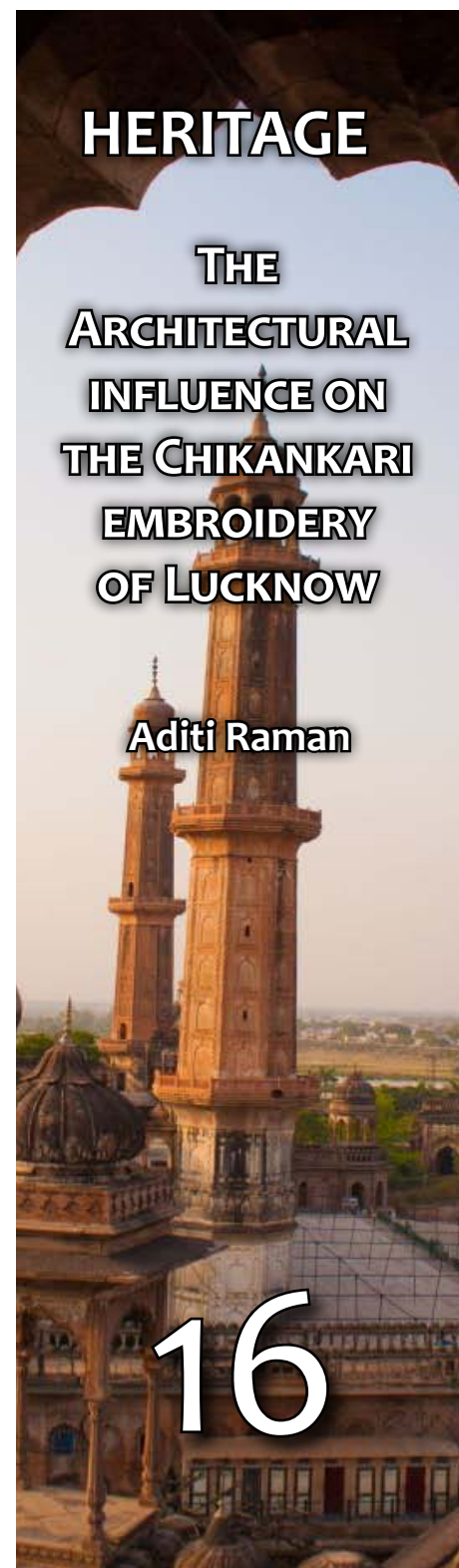
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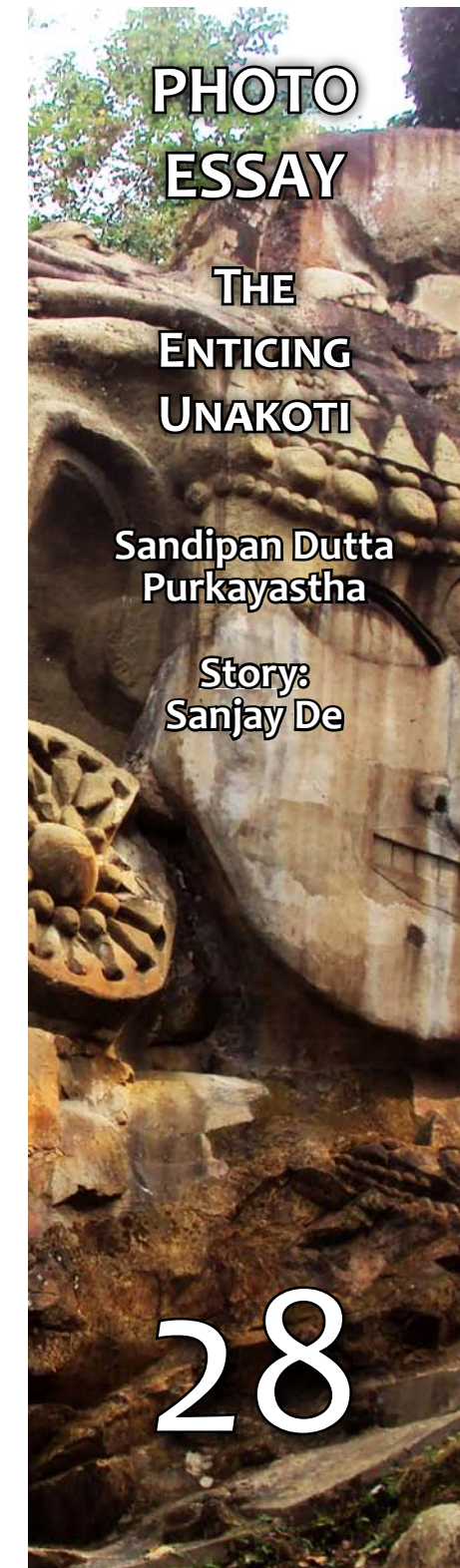
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# THE SANCTITY OF THE BLISSFUL RATHA YATRA

Story: Shanku Sharma

**R**atha Yatra or Ratha Jatra or the annual Chariot Festival is a colourful Hindu festival in which lakhs of devotees take active part. The festival venerates the deities Lord Jagannath, his elder brother Balabhadra and younger sister Subhadra. A massive procession is taken out in the festival which is celebrated in a grand scale at Puri in Odisha. Puri's Rath Yatra is the oldest of all Rath Yatras in the world and it finds mention in the Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Skanda Purana and Kapila Samhita. The lavishly adorned chariots in close resemblance with that of the structures of temples are pulled through the streets.

Devotees from every corner of the country carry an earnest desire to touch and pull the Lords' chariot as this is considered very auspicious and propitious. The huge processions accompanying the chariots play devotional songs with drums, tambourines and trumpets. Children line up the streets through which the chariots pass and add





to the mass chorus. In Silchar, a number of such Raths are taken out in procession. The festival is celebrated with great pomp and show, yet with a deep sense of solemnity, sublimity, piousness and devotion across Barak Valley. A large number of devotees are seen hitting the streets to accompany the holy chariots. They brave the sultry weather and rejoice the festival.

Rath Yatra is celebrated in devotion of Lord Jagannath, who is one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. He

is brought out along with His elder brother and sister. The Lord takes rest for a week and then goes back to His temple. During this stay, devotees shower their offerings. The festival begins when Lord Jagannath leaves His temple. The Bishnupriya Manipuris living in the metro cities of India participate and enjoy the festival to the fullest. However, they often make Raths of their village with the help of wood, bamboo and clothes. They use wooden wheels.



Photo courtesy: Google Images



*Photo courtesy: Prashanta Seal*

The Bishnupriya Manipuris of Bhagatpur in Silchar love to remain rooted to their cultural and spiritual roots. The day's show stealer is always the 'Mridanga Chalan'. Sankirtana is also performed as part of this festival. Both groups of men and women perform Sankirtana in a circle. They sing songs with the rhythm of the Pung. A Pung is a Mridanga used by the Manipuris. The festival is sacred to the Bishnupriya Manipuri community. Another Rath which deserves special mention is that which is taken from Radha Madhab Akhra at Bilpar in Silchar. The chariot is the second largest in Assam.

It is designed with fine, artistic and skillful hands. Beautiful and spectacular chariots with the deities of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are brought out from the Radha Madhab Akhra and the Bishnupriya Manipuri Temple of

Bhagatpur in Silchar. All the beautiful chariots have the impression of serenity, sanctity, piousness and purity. The magnificence of the chariots overwhelm the onlookers as they look in awestruck wonder. A number of NGOs are seen distributing water for the people who come out on the streets to enjoy the Festival of Chariots. Policemen are seen in every nook and corner of the town to ward off any unwarranted incident.

Various beliefs and faiths are associated with this Rath Yatra. On a lighter vein, many people come out to feel the ambience of the day filled with festive mood. The chariots with the deities crisscross the streets of the town which draw huge crowds around them. It is a colourful chariot-festival that has all the semblance of serenity and sanctity. After a week, the chariots again return to their sanctorum. Rath Yatra is celebrated in more than 108 cities of the world.

# FESTIVALS OF JULY

*The sweltering summer months have reached their peak, and the sun seems to be sucking our vigor dry. However, thankfully the clouds are being merciful now, giving us certain days of refreshing downpour. It is July folks, and this month highlights some very significant festivals that celebrate nature, cultural diversity and human gallantry alike. Find out with **Travel & Deal...***



## Van Mahotsav

All over India | July 1st – July 7th, 2018

Alarmed by the extensive felling of trees and the direct damage it is causing the environment, Dr. K.M. Munshi, the Union Minister of Agriculture and Food in the 50's, came up with the idea of an annual tree planting festival in order to raise awareness among the masses towards forest conservation. His idea was to not just launch a mere plantation drive, but to create a festival-like enthusiasm in the citizens as well, to pay reverence-in-action to the 'silent green soldiers' of our planet. The other objectives of Munshi

were: to increase production of fruits, which could be added to the potential food resources of the country, help create shelter-belts around agricultural fields to increase their productivity, provide fodder leaves for cattle to relieve intensity of grazing over reserved forests, boost soil conservation and prevent further deterioration of soil fertility. The festival now finds mass participation of people, including government agencies, civic bodies and educational institutions across the country, who come together every year to plant saplings.



## Jagannath Rath Yatra

Puri, Orissa | July 14th, 2018

To honor the devotion of Queen Gundicha, wife of the legendary King Indradyumna who built the Puri Jagannatha temple; Lord Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra leave their regular abode in the main temple and spend a few days in this temple built by Gundicha in their honor. Lord Jagannatha or the Lord of the Universe (literal meaning of the name), a form of Lord Vishnu, is worshipped primarily in the city of Puri, at the famous Jagannatha temple. Jagannatha temple is one of the four Hindu pilgrimages known as the Char Dham Yatra that a Hindu is expected to make in one's lifetime. According to the Hindu Lunar calendar, the Rath Yatra falls on Dwitiya Tithi during Shukla Paksha of Ashada month.

After resting eight days in the Gundicha temple Lord Jagannatha returns to his main abode. This day is known as the Bahuda Yatra or Return Yatra . During the Bahuda Yatra Lord makes a short stoppage at Mausī Maa temple which is

dedicated to Goddess Ardhashini. It should be noted that the rituals to this festival start much ahead of the actual Ratha Yatra day. Approximately 18 days before Ratha Yatra, Lord Jagannatha, his brother Balabhadra and his sister Devi Subhadra are given the famous ceremonial bath known as the Snana Yatra, observed on Jyestha Purnima.



## Kharchi Puja

Agartala, Tripura | July 20th 2018

The word Kharchi is derived from the word Khya which means earth. Kharchi Puja is basically done to worship the earth. One of the most popular festivals in Tripura, it is a week-long royal Puja held in the temple premises attended by thousands of people. All the rituals are of tribal origin, performed to wash out sins and to clean the post menstrual phase of mother earth's menstruation. Thus the Puja is performed for seven consecutive days. On the day of the Puja, the fourteen Gods are carried to river Saidra. The gods are bathed in the holy water and are brought back to

# FESTIVAL

the temple. Then they are re-installed in the temple by performing Pujas, offering of flowers and vermillion. Animal sacrifice is also an important part of this festival and includes sacrificing of goats and pigeons. Both tribal and non-tribal people come together in celebration. A large fair and some cultural programs are also organized during this time.



## Champakulam Boat Race

Champakulam, Kerala | July 28th 2018

A boat race held in Kerala, this event enjoys the participation of many colorfully decorated snake boats along with traditional boat songs and water floats. This particular one is perhaps the oldest Snake Boat Races in the State and outsets the boat race season every year. The Pampa River plays host to this race held in Champakkulam, a village in the Alappuzha district.



All photo courtesy: GoogleImages

## Kargil Vijay Diwas

All over India | July 26th 2018

It was on this day 18 years ago that the Indian Army recaptured all the Indian posts in Kargil that had been occupied by Pakistan's army, known famously as "Operation Vijay". Since then, July 26th has been observed annually to commemorate the sacrifices made by soldiers in this war. The war took place between May and July of 1999 in Jammu and Kashmir's Kargil district.

## Guru Purnima

All over India | July 27th 2018

This festival is celebrated to honor all teachers. In Indian traditions, teachers are called Guru. The author of Mahabharata, Shri Veda Vyasa is worshipped on this day. Students pay respect to their teachers and elders with gifts of coconut, clothes, and sweets known as Guru-Dakshina.



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The Architectural influence on the Chikankari embroidery of

# LUCKNOW

Story: Aditi Raman | Photographs: Aditi Raman, Google Images



*"Bajeecha-e-atfal hai duniya mere aage  
Hota hai shab-o-roz tamasha mere aage"*

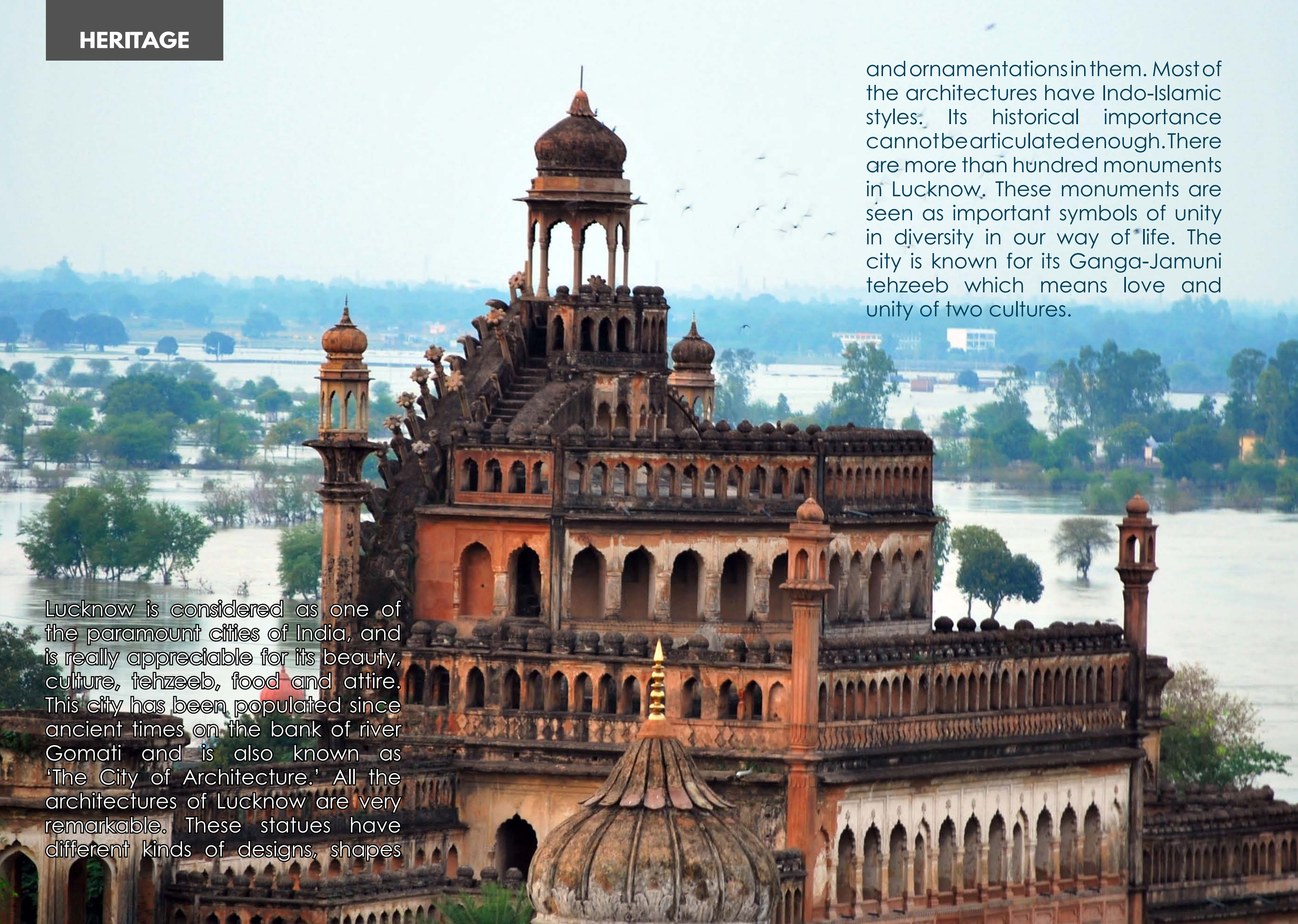
This *sher* of Ghalib is the perfect representation of the beautiful architectures of Lucknow. The giant architectures around Lucknow along with residential and isolated areas are the silent observers of change with passing time. They have seen all the changes silently as they played the role of parents for different generations. The architectures have been a great source of inspirations for artist, writers, craftsmen, musicians and dancers of the city.



## HERITAGE

and ornamentations in them. Most of the architectures have Indo-Islamic styles. Its historical importance cannot be articulated enough. There are more than hundred monuments in Lucknow. These monuments are seen as important symbols of unity in diversity in our way of life. The city is known for its Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb which means love and unity of two cultures.

Lucknow is considered as one of the paramount cities of India, and is really appreciable for its beauty, culture, tehzeeb, food and attire. This city has been populated since ancient times on the bank of river Gomati and is also known as 'The City of Architecture.' All the architectures of Lucknow are very remarkable. These statues have different kinds of designs, shapes



## HERITAGE

Cultural amalgamation brings out an amazing feature of the monumental heritage of Lucknow, as it has been ruled by three cultures: Hindus, Mughals and Britishers; and each one of them have contributed something towards the architectural styles of this city. Most of the buildings have a mixture of Indian and Islamic styles which is called Indo-Islamic architectures, but Lucknow has witnessed the European influence also on its buildings during British raj. Charbag Railway Station, Clock Tower, Residency and Christ Church are some examples of the Indo-British style.

Along with these architectures, there are several kind of filigree embroideries famous in Lucknow, but Chikankari is the most well known. It is famous across the world for its elegant features. Its Indian origin goes back to the days of Nurjahan, who brought the chikankari tradition from Persia to India. *Chik* is a Persian word which means 'embroidery' and *Kari* is a Sanskrit word that means 'To Do'. There is a great influence of architectural patterns and motifs of chikankari clothes. There is a magical relation between architectures and textiles of Lucknow.



## HERITAGE

For example, the white on white nakkashi on the walls and white on white embroidery or, tint shaded embroidery on white cloth look similar to each other.

The shapes of tomb and chatris are similar to the neck patterns in chikankari dresses. The karigars of Lucknow are doing same motifs somehow taken from these buildings in a new style and new material for different purpose. There are many current designs of chikankari which are taken from the framed traditional buildings. For example, the 'Nakkasi' and the 'Mihrab' of the architecture are very close to chikankari Bel or border motifs. One may feel an embroidered cloth covering the wall while looking at the outside view of architecture. For instance, Jaali stitch looks like the Jharokha of the monuments. My interest and involvement are taken over by the following points to find the relational context between architecture and textiles:

1. The reflection of light in architectures and its idea in embroidery.
2. The relation between Jaali stitch of Chikankari and the Jharokha of the architectures.
3. The similarities between the shape of the dome and arches with patterns of embroidered garments.



Nakkashi on the wall of Chhota Imambara of Lucknow



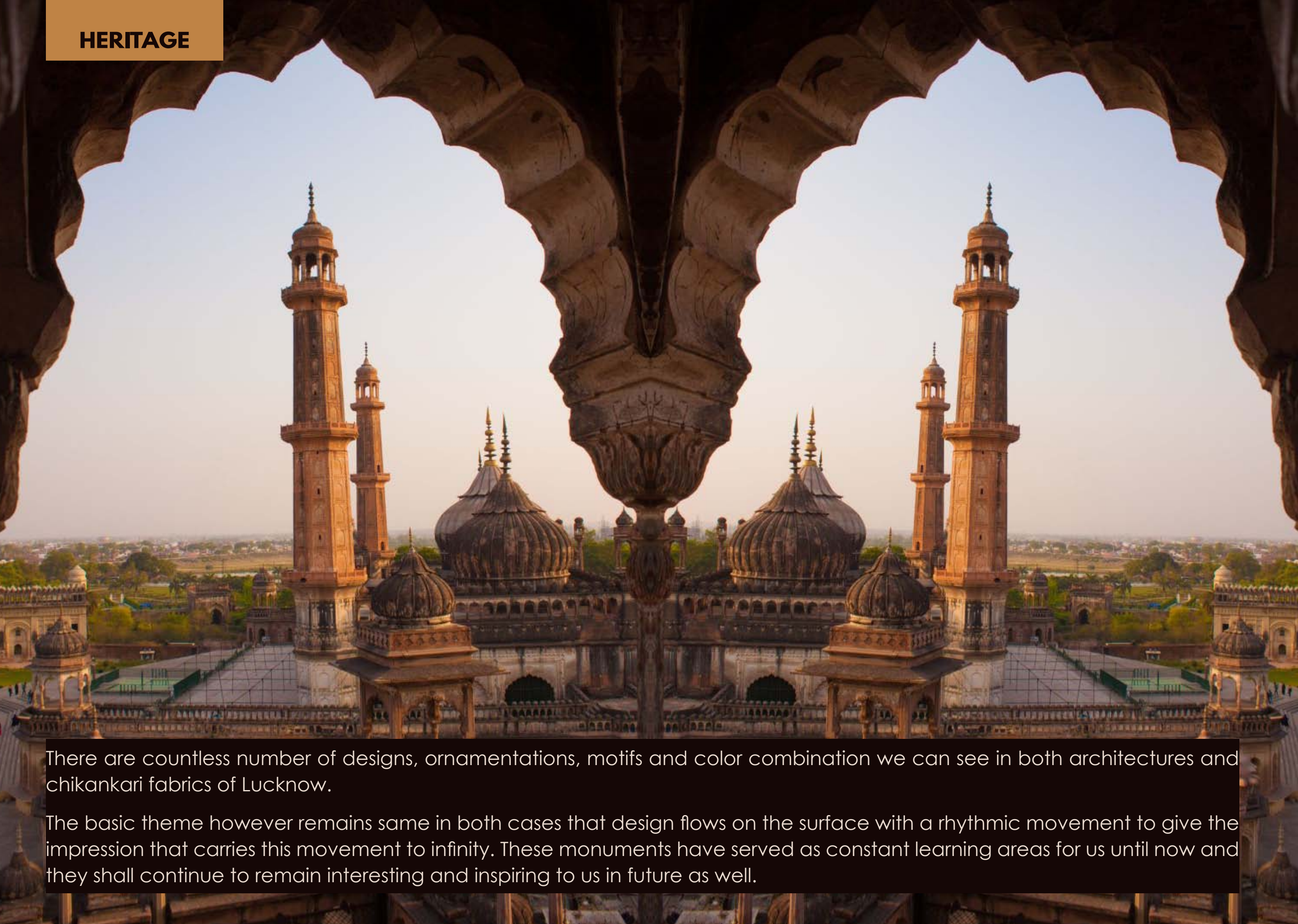
The shapes of windows are similar to the neck pattern of Chikankari cloth



The floral Patterns on the architecture and embroidered cloth Floral patterns in Chikankari Cloth



The zigzag pattern in Jharokha of an architecture and Jaali stitch of Embroidery



There are countless number of designs, ornamentations, motifs and color combination we can see in both architectures and chikankari fabrics of Lucknow.

The basic theme however remains same in both cases that design flows on the surface with a rhythmic movement to give the impression that carries this movement to infinity. These monuments have served as constant learning areas for us until now and they shall continue to remain interesting and inspiring to us in future as well.

**WHAT YOU NEED:**

One glass chilled milk, one glass chilled cola and 1/2 a tablespoon sugar.

**HOW TO MAKE IT:**

Put sugar in a glass. Add milk and mix really really well. Top it off with the cola and there you go!

# DOODHCOLA

Kolkata is known for its sultry summers, and more so for the unbeatable heat waves in the afternoon. However, the same city does offer us something just as enlivening: doodh cola. Now who would have ever thought of a fizzy glass of milk? Like **ever**? But apparently, somebody did. In the early 1980's, dhaba owner n out of the box invention by dhaba owner Balwant Singh, near the Elgin Road Gurudwara in Bhawanipore.

It is a mixture of Milk and Thumbs Up. Its taste very very unique but they should put less ice and more of milk and cola. 'Doodh Cola's price is 120/- per liter enough for two people. Ambience is very ordinary and staffs are okay also parking is a big difficulty here. Kolkata, the culture capital already tops the chart for its famous mistidahi and other products made from milk but this after meal freshener is in different demands.Served in kullads makes it even more eye catching and already cools down your thirst on a hot sultry day in the city.

**Location:** 10/B, Harish Mukherjee Road, Near Elgin Road Gurdwara, Bhawanipur, Kolkata

**Opening Hours:** 7:00 am - 12:00 noon


# THE ENTICING UNAKOTI

Sandipan Dutta Purkayastha

Story: Sanjay De

**T**he Unakoti Tirtha is a unique place 178 km from Agartala, Tripura (in North East India) which cannot be compared to any other place in the country in terms of absolute grandeur and artistry. Unakoti is deservedly reputed for its 7th - 9th AD stone and rock cut images, deep in the forests near Kailashahar. Unakoti literally means one less than a crore, i.e. 99,99,999. The place obviously does not have those many sculptures, but the hundreds of massive rock-cut sculptures and those made out of sandstone, besides scattered ruins of ancient temples make Unakoti a unique place.

## PHOTO ESSAY



Legends say, according to Hindu mythology, when Lord Shiva was going to Kashi passing this place along with one crore other Gods and Goddesses, He had retired for the evening here. That night, He had asked His co-travelers to wake up before sunrise so they could proceed for Kashi on time. But, unfortunately nobody woke up except Lord Siva himself. Hence, He cursed them to become stone images. That is why we have one less than a crore stone structures there.






Another story associated with the site is a quite a different one. It goes like this. Once a renowned sculptor Kalukumar saw Lord Shiva in his dream. He was asked by the Lord to carve out one crore images of Gods and Goddesses in a single night to make the site as sacred as Varanasi. The sculptor, along with his associates worked all night and were able to almost complete the creation of one crore sculptures. However, when Kalukumar was just short of one sculpture, the idea dawned on him to carve out his own figure as well in order to attain immortality. But before he could complete his work, day broke out and the massive task of one crore sculptures and figures remained incomplete.

The central Shiva head known as Unakotiswara Kal Bhairava is about 30 feet high including an embroidered head-dress which itself is 10 feet high. On each side of the head-dress of the central Shiva, there are two full size female figures - one of Durga standing on a lion and another female figure on the other side. In addition three enormous images of Nandi Bull are found half buried in the ground.



## PHOTO ESSAY



A massive Ganesh figure is also carved in the complex while there is a Chaturmukha Shivlinga nearby. Among other rock-cut and stone images are those of Vishnu, Nandi, Narasimha, Ravana, Hanuman, and several unidentified deities.



The consensus among archeologists is that although the predominant influence of the Shiva cult is obvious, the sculptures were also influenced by several other cults like Tantric, Shakti, and Hatha yogis. It is also inferred that the site dates back to the period between the 12th and 16th centuries, and that the sculptures belong to two different periods of art.

## PHOTO ESSAY

Unakoti is a must for every traveller to the Indian North East. The road to Unakoti is as beautiful as the place. The Dhalai hills is the greenest forest I have ever seen. The bamboo and bananas almost touch the sky. You will cross the most beautiful villages all the way. It takes 5 hours in a private vehicle (about 200 kms from Agaratala) and you can come back at night to Agartala, as staying there may not be possible. But carry some thing for the mosquitoes.

Every year a big fair popularly known as Ashokastami Mela is held in the month of April which is visited by thousands of pilgrims. Another smaller festival takes place in January.





The site has suffered centuries of neglect causing degradation and loss of considerable scale to the rock art. Since its adoption by the ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) as a heritage site, the situation has slightly improved, though a lot of work including substantial excavation remains to be undertaken. The government of India has approached the UNESCO to declare it as a world heritage site. The Centre has recently granted Rs 12 crore to the state for developing the area, 178 km from here, as a major tourist destination.

# KUFRI : TO GO OR NOT TO GO



"I visited Kufri in December 2016, in its peak of snowing. We faced no problem in finding accommodation. Kufri is the lifeline, the heart and soul of Shimla. Our drive was exhausting because of so much traffic. However, when we reached there, all our tiredness went away, it is a wonderful place, full of adventures! We did bungee jumping, rope climbing and what not!

Also the horse and the yak rides were fabulous! You will have to buy a ticket of 400 rupees for horse riding. The ride is for one hour. It is a very crowded place. You can also buy various traditional items from there like Himachali caps, wood-craft items, Shimla shawls, etc.

The best thing about the place is the evenings. Honestly, the beauty of the place gets enhanced manifold and adds a romantic touch to your stay.

The people of Kufri are also very awesome, and it is an overall safe place. In case you decide to go in summers, you will not find any snow, but it will still be beautiful and peaceful. Unlike Shimla which is overcrowded, the temperature of Kufri is usually low because of its height.

I highly recommend a trip to Kufri, especially if you are planning to go to Shimla."

- **Shantanu Samanta**

"We visited Kufri during the first week of November 2017. We had to take horses in order to reach the destination. The path is risky since there are steep slopes on either side of the roads and there is no proper fencing. We felt nervous to travel by horses. When we did reach there after a long, dangerous ride there was nothing interesting to see. A total waste of time and money. Kufri is basically a very barren land where all you can see are yaks, and you can only click pictures with them. The local daily-wage workers seeking to maximise profits may try to dupe you by selling a ride on khacchars (mules). Do not take them as they will ask for almost Rs. 350 to Rs. 400 saying the distance is a very long one. When you reach you will see it was hardly 2-3 kms. And

by the way they don't even care about their animals. I will recommend you to go up by walking as it is a fairly smooth and easy trail and it will take you maximum half an hour to go. And beware of the khacchars as they are not in control of their owners, they may mistakenly push you over. If you have a lot of time then maybe you can go otherwise there are many places to visit in Shimla. The weather was very chilly but we were disappointed to not see any snow. The place was also really dry. There are many small eateries there. You can take photos by wearing different costumes for rent. They will take you to some place telling there is an apple garden. There is nothing like that.

Accessibility was not that tough as Kufri is well connected to cities like Shimla and Kalka with quality transportation. Hotels were very cheap as well, but the services offered by them dashed all my hopes of having quality accommodation. People were good and the city is very safe even at nights.

However, in my honest opinion, I did not like Kufri."

- **Shaili Nagpal**



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