

JANAKPURDHAM

the land steeped in mythology



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THE NAME
JANAKPURDHAM
IS COMPOSED OF
THREE WORDS IN THE
DEVNAGARI SCRIPT,
I.E., 'JANAK', 'PUR',
AND 'DHAM', WHICH
MEAN 'FATHER',
'VILLAGE' AND
'RENOWNED PLACE
FOR PILGRIMAGE'
RESPECTIVELY.



A traditional mud house ornamented with hand paintings.

Historical and mythological background of Janakpurdham

Janakpurdham, presently the headquarters of both Janakpur zone and Dhanusha district, was the capital of King Janak's ancient Mithila Kingdom during the Treta Yuga, or period, nearly 12,000 years ago. The name Janakpurdham is composed of three words in the Devnagari script, i.e., 'Janak', 'Pur' and 'Dham', which mean 'father', 'village' and 'renowned place for pilgrimage' respectively. Named after the sage king, Janak, Janakpurdham, however, also encompasses Mithilanchal, or the Mithila region. Balmiki's epic Ramayan on Aryan culture and Ramcharitmanas by Tulsidas authenticate this.

The boundary of Mithila is cited in the Mithila Mahatmaya Khanda (part) of Brihad Vishnupuran in Sanskrit as:

*"Kaushkitu samarbhya Gandaki
madhigamyawai,
Yojanani chaturvishadyam parikeertitah.
Ganga prawahmarbhya yawat himwat wanam
Vishtarah shodashah prokto deshasya
kulanandan."*

(It starts from Koshi River in the east to Gandaki River in the west measuring the distance of 96 kosh (192 miles) and from the river Ganges in the south to the forests of the Himalaya in the north measuring a distance of 64 kosh (128 miles).

The great poet and composer of Mithila, Bhasha Ramayan Chanda Jha, has defined the boundary as follows (in Maithili):

*"Ganga Bahathi janik dakshin dish purwa
Kaushiki dhara,
Pashchim bahathi Gandaki uttar himwat ban
bistara,
Kamala, Triyuga, Amrita, Ghemura, Bagmati
Krita Sara,
Madhya bahathi Laxman prabhriti se Mithila
vityagara."*

(The Ganges flows in the south and the Koshi in the east. The Gandaki flows in the west and the Himalayan forest in the north covering the sacred rivers like the Kamala, Triyuga, Amrita, Ghemu, Bagmati and Laxman, that glorious part of Mithila is the home of learning.)

From the above definitions, the boundary of ancient Mithila extends into neighbouring Indian territory also. Even Indian scholars on Mithila acknowledge Janakpurdham to be the main centre of Mithila.

PILGRIMAGE

AS THE FULL MOON
CANNOT GET
COMPLETE SHAPE
WITHOUT THE FULL
LUNAR NIGHT, IN
THE SAME VEIN,
A PILGRIMAGE TO
ALL THE SACRED
PLACES CANNOT
BE CONSIDERED
COMPLETE WITHOUT
A PILGRIMAGE OF
THE MITHILA REGION.



Elderly woman painting on the wall of her house, this tradition has been passed down from generation to generation.

Importance of Mithila from Pilgrimage and Touristic Point of view

The Aryan book on mythology Mithila Mahatmaya points to the importance of Mithila region in the following Sanskrit verse:

*“Purnamasi vina chandro yatha purno na jayate,
Tatha tirthadikna kritwa purno na Mithila vina.”*

(As the full moon cannot get complete shape without the full lunar night, in the same vein, a pilgrimage to all the sacred places cannot be considered complete without a pilgrimage of the Mithila region.)

- (1) Janakpurdham is the birthplace of Janaki, or Sita, daughter of King Janak, who married Lord Ram after breaking the divine bow of Shiva at a tournament organised by King Janak.
- (2) Dhanushadham, near Janakpurdham, possesses a fossilised fragment of that broken bow. Lord Ram had broken Shiva's divine bow into three pieces, a condition for winning the hand of Sita in marriage. Every Sunday in the month of Magh (January/February), a Makar Mela (fair) takes place - a tradition that has not been broken since Vedic times - and devotees from Nepal and India in their tens of thousands flock here to pay homage to this place.
- (3) Out of the six philosophies on Aryan culture, Sankhya, Vaisheshik, Nyaya and Mimansa are contributions of this ancient land, which were formulated between 1000 B.C. and 600 B.C.
- (4) During the Upanishad period, this sacred land was the centre of Aryan civilisation, culture, philosophy, ideology and learning, and people from different parts of the world came to Janakpurdham to learn from King Janak, who was also regarded as Brahmarshi.
- (5) Sage Yagyawalkya had written the most famous epic Shatapatha Brahman after the Rig Veda on this auspicious land. Besides him, great saints and personalities

like Ashtawakra, Gargi and Maitreyi had disseminated knowledge from this very sacred land.

- (6) The biggest temple of Nepal, Shree Janaki Mandir, lies in Janakpurdham.
- (7) The only railway of Nepal, Janakpur Railway, continues to operate on its narrow tracks.
- (8) Janakpur Cigarette Factory, the biggest cigarette factory of Nepal, is in Janakpurdham.
- (9) At least half a dozen major festivals such as Jhoola, Durga Pooja (Dashain), Chaath, Mithila Madhya Parikrama, Vivah Panchami and Ram Nawami are celebrated with great fervour in Janakpurdham. Apart from these major festivals, the two ekadashis, 11th day of the lunar fortnight, and poornima, or full moon, are observed, during which

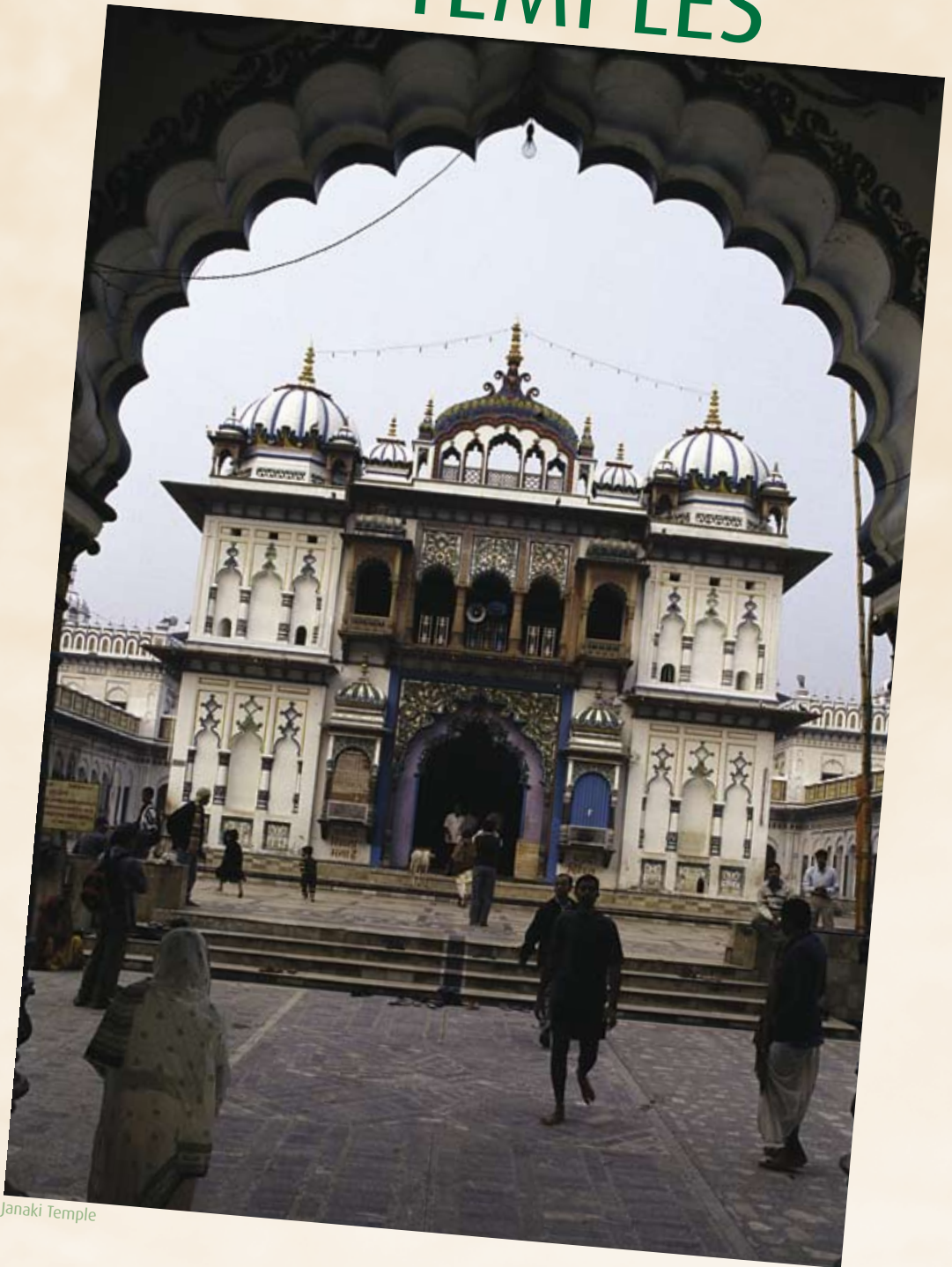
thousands of visitors from Nepal, India and even abroad attend Janakpurdham.

- (10) Janakpurdham is the world's only city having more than 115 ancient ponds of historical and mythological importance. The Mithila region prides itself in having the largest number of ponds in the country. Within Nepalese Mithila, there are nearly 2,000 villages, each of which possesses no less than four ponds.
- (11) The mango orchards of Janakpurdham could be of great attraction to the visitor. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand in his book The Story of King Mahajanaka has described the passion of having mangos from the garden, which indicates that Mithila had special fruit gardens during ancient times.



Ram Sita Bibaha Mandap

TEMPLES



Janaki Temple



Janaki Temple

Notable temples of Janakpurdham

SHREE JANAKI MANDIR

This magnificent temple of marble was built in 1874 A.D. by Queen Brishbhenu Kunwari, wife of King Pratap Singh of Orchha Kingdom of Madhya Pradesh, India. This temple takes inspiration from Moghul architecture and is the biggest temple of Nepal, covering an area of 265 x 187 square feet. On the four corners of this temple, cupolas enhance its architectural supremacy. The middle portion of the east side is known as the "Sheesh Mahal". And at the centre of the inner part where the idols of Sita and Ram are housed is called the Janaki Mahal. Behind the Janaki Mahal is the Janak-Sunaiyana Mandir, dedicated to the father and mother of Goddess Sita.

The whole temple complex is also locally known as the Naulakha Temple as nine lakh rupees, or Rs. 900,000 - a colossal sum of money then - were said to have been spent in the construction of the Janaki Mandir.

On the premises of Janaki Mandir, in the northeast corner lies the Lakshman temple, while the magnificent Vivah Mandap lies to the southwest in the midst of a beautiful garden. In the southeast corner is a park while a dharmashala (rest house) stands to the south of Janaki Mandir.

* Prayers are held in the temple between 8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m., and 6.30 p.m. and 8.00 p.m., amidst the sounds of bells and drums. During Durga Pooja, or Dashain, in September-October, hymns are sung and prayers are offered to Goddess Durga.

SHREE RAM MANDIR

This pagoda temple was built in 1782 by Amar Singh Thapa, while its gilded roof was bestowed by Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher in 1907. This temple, which lies on the western banks of the holy Dhanush Sagar and to the southwest of Shree Janak Mandir, abounds in ancient idols.

RAJ DEVI MANDIR

The temple of the patron deity of King Janak, Goddess Raj Devi or Rajeshwari, lies on the north side of Ram Mandir in another compound, where during the Durga Pooja, or Dashain festival, special worship is held in the morning and evening by devotees from Nepal and India. Local organisations make arrangements for this grand worshipping ritual. According to tradition, thousands of goats are sacrificed during Ashtami-Nawami (eighth and ninth day of Dashain) in the Janakpurdham area. Thereafter, no sacrifices are allowed in the area.

SHREE JANAK MANDIR

This temple at Janak Chowk is dedicated to King Janak renowned for his scholarship in that age. He was also regarded as "Videh" or someone without a body. Though this temple is comparatively small, it has held great importance in popularising Janakpurdham as the ancient capital city of Vedic Mithila Kingdom.

DULHA-DULHAN (bridegroom and bride) MANDIR

This temple lies to the west of Ramananda Chowk, where a magnificent gateway stands with an idol

of Shankaracharya on top. The temple enshrines the idols of Goddess Sita and Lord Ram dressed as bride and bridegroom.

DHANUSHADHAM

This place of mythological importance lies 20 km to the north of Janakpurdham. It was here that a fragment of Shiva's divine bow fell after Lord Ram broke it into three pieces during the Bow-Breaking Ceremony held at Rangabhoomi in Janakpurdham - a condition for obtaining the hand of Sita in marriage. During the Makar Mela festival held every Sunday in the month of Magh (January-February), hundreds of thousands of devotees throng Dhanushadham to pay homage to the fossilised bow piece.

Buses leave regularly for Dhanushadham from Janakpurdham. One can also reach there from Bhiman on the East West Highway - a distance of just 6 km.

HANUMAT DURBAR

This temple is close to Ramananda Chowk on the main highway to Jaleshwar. Though this temple is not very big, it once drew large crowds of devotees because the world's largest monkey, locally worshipped as Baua Hanuman, made its home here. The monkey, which found its way in the Guinness Book of Records, weighed more than 55 kilos.

JALESHWARNATH MANDIR

This temple lies in Jaleshwar, the headquarters of Mahottari district, 18 km to the southwest of Janakpurdham. The temple enshrines a Shiva lingam 20 feet below the surface. The phallic symbol of Lord Shiva lies immersed in water, hence its namesake. The temple draws large numbers of devotees from both Nepal and India on Shivaratri, the Night of Lord Shiva, in February, and also during the month of Shrawan (July-August).

SALHESH PHOOLBARI

This mythological garden in Mithilanchal dates from the 5th century, where the legendary hero Salhesh used to take a stroll with his beloved Deena

Malini, the princess of Morang and daughter of King Maheswar Bhandari. The garden, rectangular in shape, covers an area of 14 acres. This garden is densely forested and lies 65 km from Janakpurdham to the northeast.

The garden has a temple dedicated to the folk hero, Salhesh. Behind the temple is a tree named Haram which sprouts only one flower on the night of Chaitra 30 (mid April). A big fair takes place here which sees thousands of visitors from both Nepal and India. It is said that Deena Malini makes her appearance in the form of that flower to show her affection for her love, Salhesh. Folklore has it that Salhesh used to pick flowers from this garden to make offerings to the deities. Near the garden are several places of mythological importance, such as Mahisautha, Pakariya, Kamaldah, Manikdah and Patari Pokhari.

SHREE SANKAT MOCHAN MANDIR & RANGABHOOMI

This temple is dedicated to Hanuman, the most loyal attendant of Lord Ram and Goddess Sita. Hanuman, the son of the Wind God, is also known by the name Sankat Mochan, or redeemer of all woes. This temple lies in the northwest corner of the mythological land called "Rangabhoomi", also known as 'Barah bigha' as it is 12 bighas (1 hectare = 1.6 bighas) in area. It was here that King Janak had arranged the Dhanushayagya, or the Bow-Breaking ceremony, in the Treta Yug. This Hanuman temple sees thousands of devotees twice a week on Tuesday and Saturday.

SHREE LAXMI NARAYAN MANDIR (MATIHANI)

This temple lies on the north bank of the huge Laxmi Sagar pond. It is 6 km from Jaleshwar to the south. It was in this pond that the Matakori (Soil digging ceremony) was performed before the marriage of Sita to Ram. There is also a Laxmi Narayan Temple in the area. Another temple here is known for an iron strap used by a hermit called Tasmayi Baba, with engravings on it dating back to about 450 years.

PONDS



Man offering prayer to sun God



Chhat festival

Some important ponds of Janakpurdham

The following verse from Mithilanchal points to Janakpurdham as being the world's biggest city of ponds:

*"Baban kutty attarah ganda pokhari,
Matha-mandirsan sushobhit Janak Nagari."*

(Janak Nagari, meaning Janakpurdham, is endowed with 52 big and small temples as well as 72 ponds of mythological importance.)

GANGA SAGAR

Any pilgrimage is incomplete without a ritual bath in this pond which has never dried up. According to popular belief, water from the Seven Seas and all sacred places were collected, and this sacred pond called Ganga Sagar took shape.

DHANUSH SAGAR

This pond lies in front of Ram Mandir. It is said that the bow which Lord Shiva had given to King Janak during the Treta Yug was kept at this place for safe keeping, and the pond was built in the shape of the weapon.

ANGRAG SAR, locally called ARAGAJA

This pond lies north of Janaki Mandir. Goddess Janaki, or Sita, used to bathe in this pond after smearing her body with turmeric cream. It is said that a dip in the pond cures one of skin diseases

MAHARAJ SAGAR (DASHARATH TATAB)

This pond lies about 200 m to the west of Shree Janaki Mandir. Sage Parshuram is said to have been absolved of his sin of matricide after taking a dip in

the pond. Later Lord Shiva, too, was pardoned for killing Parshuram after a ritual bath in this pond. The temple of King Dasharath, father of Lord Ram, lies on the west bank and the office of the Greater Janakpur Region Development Council on the north bank of this pond.

RATNA SAGAR

This pond is to the northwest of Rangabhoomi and Ramananda Chowk. It is said that King Janak used to store jewels in this pond. People say that the bow turns a shining red when observed from one corner of the pond while it disappears after prayers and lighting of the ritual flame by the priests of the local temple.

KAPALMOCHAN SAR

This pond lies to the northwest of Maharaj Sagar. According to legend, Lord Brahma found himself greatly attracted to his own daughter, Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, who then had to seek refuge with Lord Shiva for protection. Lord Shiva, in his

wrath, beheaded Brahma, but the head got stuck to his hand. It was only after Lord Shiva took a dip in this pond that the head of Brahma got detached..

BIHAR KUNDA

This pond lies to the southwest of Rangabhoomi and Ramananda Chowk. Even after her marriage to Lord Ram, Sita, with her sisters and friends, used to frequent the pond for a bath. The water of this pond is so clean that the people drink straight from it.

AGNI KUNDA

This pond lies about half a kilometre to the southwest of Ratna Sagar, where yagyas (offering made to a sacred fire) used to take place during Vedic times. Although comparatively small in size to other ponds, it is very deep.

PAD PRAKSHALAN SAR

This pond lies to the south of Shree Janaki Mandir. King Janak and Queen Sunaina are said to have washed the feet of Lord Ram with water here at the time of the wedding. It was only later that a pond took shape.

PAP MOCHAR SAR

This pond is located at Pidari Chowk. A ritual bath in this pond absolves one of all sins.

BISHAHARA SAR

This pond lies to the east of the historical Tirhutiya Gacchi (Garden of Tirhut), once a large orchard of mangoes, rose apples, licchis and guavas in ancient times. A dip in this pond absolves one of all his sins.

JANAK SAR

It was in this pond that King Janak took his baths.

MURALI SAR

This pond is in the northeast direction of Vidyapati Chowk. Lord Krishna is said to have appeared thrice in Janakpurdham, where he played the flute (murali), hence the name Murali Sar.

(14) Ram Sar (15) Laxman Sar (16) Baldev Sar (17) Prema Sar (18) Gautam Sar (19) Bashishtha Sar (20) Balmiki Sar (21) Tarantaran Sar (22) Kaudinya Sar (23) Kedar Sar (24) Brahma Kunda (25) Gandamati Sar (26) Purandar Sar (27) Bhargava Sar (28) Madan Sar (29) Riksha Sar (30) Bidal Sar (31) Sunaina Sar (33) Dhootapawan Sar (34) Chanchuwati Sar (35) Payashwini Sar (36) Kudawanti Sar (37) Gunawati Sar (38) Dipika Sar (39) Mahapunya Sar (40) Eshtwa Sar (41) Bighnahrini Sar (42) Matsyodari Sar (43) Byaghrhara Sar (44) Sthitida Sar (45) Gobraja Sar (46) Kshatra Dharini Sar (47) Chitradhara Sar (48) Poornawarta Sar (49) Durgamaya Sar (50) Chitradhari Sar (51) Khandowari Sar (52) Sudha Sar (53) Pakawati Sar (54) Nagardevika Sar (55) Sanakadi Sar (56) Manmatha Sar (57) Manthay Sar (58) Chakra Sar (59) Kaushal Sar (60) Lomash Sar (61) Saptawedha Sar (62) Dhruva Sar (63) Garuda Sar (64) Madhyama Kunda (65) Janaki Kunda (66) Kumbhodak Sar (67) Varuna Sar (68) Saraswati Sar (69) Chaturdhika Sar (70) Kashtahari Sar (71) Dhatri Sar (72) Gopal Sar and (73) Rukmini Sar. Besides these ponds, there are smaller ones called the 'koop'. They are

(74) Shirdhwaj Koop, (75) Satanada Koop (76) Akroor Koop (77) Saimanta Koop (78) Vidya Koop and (79) Gyan Koop. All in all ponds in Janakpurdham number 115.

CULTURAL DANCES

FOUR TYPES OF LOKA SANKIRTANS

- GENERAL LOKA SANKIRTAN
- JHANKI LOKA SANKIRTAN
- BISHAYA SANKIRTAN
- JHANKI VIVAH SANKIRTAN

Unique cultural dances of Janakpurdham

JATA-JATIN

This dance is performed at night by a group of rural women in the month of Bhadra (August/September) when there is a drought. The women catch frogs and put them in small pitchers filled with a mixture of water and cow dung. The women divide themselves into two groups - one masquerading as the male, which is called 'Jata', and the other as the female and is called 'Jatin'. The women then place the pitchers on their heads and go about the village, singing a song in question-answer form. At the end, they throw the pitchers into the courtyard of a person assumed to be evil-minded, and then disperse. The cultural dance is performed with the hope that there will be rain.

JHIJHIYA

This festival (on the 6th day of the bright lunar fortnight in Kartik) is the most auspicious festival of Mithilanchal. (Another dance worth watching is performed by a group of women every year in the month of Ashwin (September/October) during the Dashain festival from Ghatasthapana to Vijaya Dashami.)

In the Jhijhiya dance, some women place pitchers, with a burning lamp inside, on their heads. The pitcher has a large number of holes, and should anyone be able to count the exact number, it is believed that the vessel will catch fire, and the woman carrying it will die. The singing and dancing

go on for hours, with groups of women taking turns to carry the pitchers.

SAMA CHAKEBA

This is a play performed by the rural women of Mithilanchal for a fortnight, starting on Chhath in the month of Kartik (October/November) and lasting till the full moon. Through this play, women express their affection to their brothers. Every evening, women leave their homes with dolls in a bamboo basket, in the middle of which they place a burning lamp. They gather at a certain crossing and sit in a circle, singing till midnight. On the final night, they burn the moustache of 'Chugla', the evil doll. The dolls are then disposed off amidst the playing of such musical instruments as drums and the flute in the presence of their brothers.

JHARRI

This play is performed at the time of 'Hanuman-Jhand' (celebration commemorating Lord Hanuman's flag) and 'Daha' or 'Tajiya' (Muslim rituals). About 10-15 men perform this dance with a stick that is about 18 inches long. The singing and dancing go on for hours.

LOKA SANKIRTAN (Devotional songs)

The devotional songs teach us about morality and fraternity while creating awareness about human life. About 15 male singers sing the devotional

songs accompanied by such musical instruments as the harmonium, dholak (drum), gumti (one-sided small drum), bastarang (musical instrument made of bamboo strips), jhals (cymbals) and other instruments.

There are four types of Loka Sankirtans:

- a) General Loka Sankirtan - Sung in a group and accompanied by music.
- b) Jhanki Loka Sankirtan - Devotional songs are sung to the deities that grace a platform. During the singing, offerings are made to the deities.
- c) Bishaya Sankirtan - Team members follow the lead singer. The hymns could last hours.
- d) Jhanki Vivah Sankirtan - It enacts the scenes of the wedding ceremony of Goddess Sita with Lord Ram. Despite the difficulties, the rural women of Mithilanchal have preserved this tradition that date from the Treta Yuga.

LEELAS (episodes from the lives of gods):

Among such episodes staged, 'Ram-Leela', 'Krishna-Leela', 'Ras-Leela' and 'Shiva-Leela' are very popular, but 'Ram-Leela' tops the list. It lasts upto a month, and during the period, the entire episodes of the Ramayan are presented on stage by group artists.

FOLK DANCES AND DRAMAS

Mithilanchal has been the centre of folk dances and dramas since the 5th century. It is said that in birth,

life and death, music never abandons a person in Mithilanchal. Some of the ancient dances are the Badhaiya Nach, Pamariya Nach - both of which are performed within a month of birth - Chhaukarbaji Nach and Ras Nach.

Among the folk dramas, the most ancient are Salhesh, Gopichan, Bharthari (Bratihari), Saranga-Sadabriksh, Mahasti Bihula, Bideshiya, Hirani-Birani, Dulara Dayal, Naika-Banijara and Domakacha. These folk dramas have been handed down through word of mouth.

Besides these dramas, there are Nautankis (light dramas) which are heroic presentations. Among them are Amar Singh Rathour, Laila-Majnu and Shiri-Farhad. These Nautankis performed on stage are accompanied by music played on one big drum, three small drums along with the harmonium and other musical instruments.

MITHILA PAINTINGS & FOLK ART

Mithila paintings are renowned the world over. There is a painting centre at Kuwa, Janakpurdham, where nearly five dozen rural women from different villages are involved in preparing paintings of Mithila folk art for export to Western countries and other markets.

You will find Mithila paintings on the mud walls of rural homes, which are done by housewives. These mud wall paintings are done using local lime, ochre (locally called geru), and brown and black soot collected from the bottom of pots and pans.

Festivals



Devotees offer prayers to Sun God for bestowing the bounties of life and fulfillment of wishes.



Every house of Mithila is decorated in its own unique and beautiful way.

Annual Festivals of Mithilanchal and Janakpurdham

Month & Date

Name of the festival

Baisakh 1

First day of the New Year according to the Bikram Sambat (Mid-April)

SATUAIN - People offer flour of sweet grams to deities and after that they take that as food in the day. Legendry folk hero Salhesh is worshipped at 'Salhesh Phoolbari' near Lahan in Siraha district, and visitors from different parts of Nepal and India participate in that cultural fair.

Baisakh 2

JUDASHEETAL - Early in the morning, the head of the family pays homage to his forefathers by offering water in their name. They then bless the youngsters of the family by sprinkling water from a lota (vessel) on their heads. The family head also sprinkles water onto the heads of other youngsters in the village with the hope that the heat in the plains will not affect them. People clean the wells in the village and sprinkle lime so that water is fit for drinking. In the morning, the male members will not take their meal at home.

In the afternoon, the Salhesh Mela takes place at Salhesh Gahwars. In the evening, the folk drama 'Salhesh' is staged.

Jestha (May/June)

In this month, Ganga Dashahara and Batasabiri festivals are celebrated.

Asadh (June/July)

Adra, Nagar Dihawar Poojan or Brahma or village god are worshipped by the villagers of Mithilanchal.

Shrawan (July/August)

NAG PANCHAMI (worshipping of the snake) is marked throughout Mithilanchal by offering milk and rice to Nagdevata.

JHOOLA (ritual of placing Ram and Sita on a swing) starts from the third day of the brightening lunar fortnight in the main temple of Janakpurdham amidst cultural programmes. It is performed daily till midnight and continues till the 14th day of the lunar fortnight.

RAKSHA BANDHAN is marked on the full moon, or Poornima, the following day, during which sisters tie the sacred red/yellow thread on the right hand of their brothers. The people receive the sacred thread from their priests.

Bhadra (August/September)

The GHARI festival is celebrated in the villages, during which sweets are offered to the people after the worshipping of deities.

KRISHNASTAMI is marked with great devotion in Mithilanchal. Idols of Lord Krishna, Basudev, Yashoda and others are made and worshipped for two days. On the second day, they are disposed off in the ponds.

HARITALIKA TEEJ is a three-day festival observed by women for the well-being of their husbands and a happy, productive marriage. The festival ends on the fifth day of the brightening moon.



CHAURCHAN (CHAUTHCNANDRA) or GANESH CHATURTHI Festival is observed in the rural areas throughout Mithilanchal. For a whole day, people go on a fast. In the evening, different types of food items, including sweets, fruits, pudding and curd are first offered to Lord Ganesh and the moon. The people then eat the food as prasad to break their fast. The prasad is also offered to friends and neighbours.

Ashwin (September/October)

The PITRIPAKSHA ritual is performed by the sons during the dark fortnight of Ashwin to pay homage to the deceased ancestors.

JITIYA (JIMUTWAHAN BRATA or fasting) is observed by all mothers for the well-being and a prosperous life of their issues.

DURGA POOJA, or DASHAIN, lasts for 10 days, during which the idols of Goddess Durga, Laxmi, Saraswati, Kali, Lord Ganesh, Kartikeya and Rewanta are made from clay by idol makers at the local Durga temple. Prayers are held both in the morning and evening, and after the worship, prasad (food that has been offered to a deity) is distributed to the people.

RAJDAVI POOJAN - In proper Janakpurdham, Raj Devi, the patron deity of King Janak, is worshipped with great fervour. On the night of Ashtami, or the eighth day of Durga Pooja, thousands of goats are sacrificed at this temple.



A man painting on mud statue of Nava Durga

Kartik (October/ November)

DIYABATI, or DEEPAWALI, is celebrated by worshipping Laxmi, the Goddess of Wealth, with great devotion throughout Mithilanchal.

GOBARDHAN POOJA and BHRATRIDWITIYA are observed on the following days respectively.

CHHATH is celebrated six days after Deepawali with great devotion and in solemnity. During the celebrations, there is harmony in the air, and no distinction is made between rich and poor, caste, creed and color.

DEVOTTHAN EKADASHI is observed by the devotees on the 11th day of the bright lunar fortnight.

SAMA CHAKEWA is a play through which the women express their affection to their brothers.

Mangsir (November/December)

NAWANNA, or the festival of new harvest, is celebrated to make offerings of new grains to the deity.
THREAD OF SURYA (SUN) ritual is celebrated by women.

VIVAH PANCHAMI commemorates the wedding ceremony of Ram and Sita and is marked on the fifth day of the bright lunar fortnight of this month. A marriage procession is taken out from Ram Mandir to Janaki Mandir via Rangabhoomi, in which thousands of devotees participate.

* The month of Paush (December/January) is not considered auspicious for observing any festival or ritual.

Magh (January/ February)

At the beginning of this month, the Tilia Sankranti, or MAGHE SANKRANTI, is observed.

MAKAR MELA is observed on all the Sundays of this month at Dhanushadham, a tradition that dates back to the Treta Yug. Devotees from Nepal and India in their thousands come here to pay homage to the remains of the fossilised bow of Lord Shiva that Lord Ram broke to win the hand of Sita in marriage.

SHREE PANCHAMI, or BASANTA PANCHAMI and SARASWATI POOJA: The fifth day of the waxing moon of Magh is marked as Basanta Panchami, the advent of spring, as well as Saraswati Pooja, the celebration of the Goddess of Learning.

Falgun (February/March)

Besides Mahashivaratri, MITHILA MADHYA PARIKRAMA (fortnightly circumambulation of 14 pilgrimage spots stretching 127 km) takes place every year during this month through demarcated areas of Mithilanchal. The pilgrimage includes 14 places of

historical and mythological importance, including four in bordering Indian territory. It begins with (1) Kachuri village via Janakpurdham to Hanumangadhi (2) Kalana or Kalyaneshwar (in Indian territory) (3) Girijastan, Fulhar (where Lord Ram met Sita for the first time) in Indian territory) (4) Matihani, (5) Jaleswar, (6) Marai, (7) Dhruva kunda, (8) Kanchanban (where Lord Ram and Sita had celebrated Holi during the Vedic Treta Yug), (9) Parwatta, (10) Dhanushadham, (11) Satokhair, (12) Aurahi-Harusaha (13) Karuna (Indian territory), (14) Bishaul (Indian territory) and ending at Janakpurdham. The next day, this fortnightly pilgrimage concludes upon completion of the Antargrihi Parikrama early in the morning and celebration of Holi, or Phagua, the festival of colours.

Chaitra (March/April)

Ram Nawami is celebrated to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Ram, the protagonist of the great Hindu epic Ramayan.

REMARKS :-

1. For tourists, the best time to visit Janakpurdham is from September to April when major festivals are held.
2. The months from May to August temperature raises up to 40 degree celsius.
3. There are regular flights to Janakpurdham from Kathmandu.
4. There are regular buses to Janakpurdham from different parts of Nepal or visitors from India may arrive here through Jayanagar and Bhitthamore.
5. Janakpurdham has standard restaurants where tourists can enjoy Mithilanchal food.



Maithili kids dressed as Ram and Sita on Ram Nawami.

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