

CHAPTER XIX

PLACES OF INTEREST

The Kurukshetra District has its due share of places of interest among which Thanesar and Pehowa form places of all India importance. Kurukshetra, as indicated elsewhere, has an extensive area of about 100 miles (*48 Kos*) in length and the same in breadth.¹ It is said in the *Puranas* that those who visit this area or reside here even for a while, go straight to heaven after death. But the most sacred act is taking a dip in its many holy tanks, which are as follows:-

Kurukshetra (Thanesar)

Kurukshetra has a railway station on the main Delhi-Ambala railway line. It is about 160 kilometres north of Delhi, 30 kilometres north of Karnal and 40 kilometres south of Ambala. It is at a distance of about 5 kilometres from Pipli, a small town but an important road junction on National Highway No.1, popularly called the Grand Trunk Road. There is a big bazaar outside Kurukshetra railway station. The station is also linked by regular bus services with all important towns.

The big locality is the starting of a pilgrimage for millions of Hindus from all over the country who visited the land of Kurukshetra, the venue of the Mahabharata and the birth place of *Bhagwad Gita* for its holy places. There are no big hotels to accommodate the large influx of people, but accommodation is available in local Dharamshala, viz., Birla Dharamshala, Aggarwal Dharamshala, Jat Dharamshala, Bishnoi Dharamshala, Dharamshala Baba Kali Kamli Wala and Bharat Sewa Ashram etc. Accommodation is also available with special permission from the concerned Departments in the P.W.D. Rest House at Pipli, Modern Tourist Complex (also at Pipli) and the Canal Rest House at Jyotisar. The Haryana Government's Tourist Bureau at Kurukshetra caters to the convenience of tourists and pilgrims.

The State Government has set up an autonomous body called "Kurukshetra Development Board" which is to undertake the overall integrated development of Kurukshetra including its landscaping,

¹ B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra, Political and Cultural History, 1978, p.127.

renovation of historical places, sacred tanks and providing facilities to pilgrims and tourists.

Mythologically, the name “Kurukshetra” applies to a circuit of about 100 miles (160 kilometres) which includes a large number of holy places, temples and tanks connected with the ancient Indian traditions and the Mahabharata War. “According to popular belief the number of places of pilgrimage in it is 360, but no complete list of them is given. Its circuit is variously said to be 20, 40 and 48 *kos*, and these accounts would make it include the town of Jind, which is 65 miles (104.6 kilometres) distant from Thanesar. This account, General Cunningham rejects, as a late invention of interested Brahmans, wishing to carry favour with the Sikh Raja of Jind by bringing his capital within the range of the holy circuit; and he concludes by accepting as the probable boundary line drawn from Ratan Jaksh on the Sarassuti, westwards to Pehowa, from southwards to beyond Pundri, from thence eastward to Naraina, northward again to Ratan Jaksh. This circuit is as nearly as possible 80 miles (168 kilometres), or 40 *kos*; and within its limits lie all the famous places connected with the history of the Pandus. It may, therefore, be accepted as approximately correct”. It covers a wide area with the present Panipat and Northwest corner of Jind district in the South and Eastern part of Patiala district in the West, Saraswati and Yamuna rivers are its Northern and Eastern boundaries respectively. According to Manu, it lies between the old sacred rivers Saraswati and Drishadwati and was known as *Brahma- varta*.

In the very first verse of the *Bhagvadgita*, Kurukshetra is described as *Dharmkshetra*, the field of righteousness. It is also known as *Brahmakshetra*, the field of Brahma-the creator. Nardak is another name for Kurukshetra, probably derived from *nirdukh* i.e. without sorrow.

The very name “Kurukshetra” conjures up the imagination of every Hindu and reminds him of the ancient Indian past when the Aryans inhabited the land at the dawn of civilization. *Upnishads* and *Puranas* were also originated in this land.

Saraswati is the river par excellence and appears most frequently in the Rigveda. Kurukshetra was the abode of Sage Vyasa, the legendary compiler of the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. It was an important centre of learning and civilization. In fact, it is the cradle of Indian

civilization and culture. Around this, country took shape a civilization which is one of the legends in the course of world history and surpasses in its continuity the ancient civilization of Egypt, Summer, Babylon, Akkad and Assyria which have ceased to exist since long.

Yajurveda.- Describes it as the place of sacrifices of *Devas*, i.e. the Gods. It is also said to be associated with all the three Gods of Hindu trinity. It was the Brahma vedi, i.e. the sacrificial altar of Brahma. It was here that Brahma, the Creator, was believed to have practiced penance and performed a number of sacrifices so that he might prove equal to the task of creation. It is the seat of creation. Prajapati is said to have created the world and the four Varnas at Prithudaka, i.e. Pehowa. It was in Kurukshetra that Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, prayed to have Lakshmi as his spouse. Shiva, the Sun God of destruction, was said to have acquired the power to destroy the demon Tripura by bathing for six months in the Saraswati. He became *sthanu* by staying in Kurukshetra. Thanesar is the Sthanu-tirtha. Kurukshetra came to be called *Samantapanchaka* when Parasurama made five pools of the blood of *Kshatriyas* in revenge for his father's murder. According to tradition, these were subsequently turned into holy pools of water by blessings of his forefathers (*pitras*). It came to be called Kurukshetra the field of Kuru, when King Kuru-the ancestor of the Kauravas and Pandavas who was royal sage of great prowess, reclaimed this land with a golden plough for many years¹ the *Puranic* story about King Kuru is very interesting and runs thus:

“King Kuru selected this land on the bank of the sacred river Saraswati for spiritual culture and cultivation of eight-fold virtues. The king came here on his golden chariot and utilized its gold for making a plough for cultivation. He took on loan the bull of Shiva and a buffalo of Yama and started ploughing the area. Indra , the king of Gods, came and asked Kuru as to what was he doing. The king replied that he was preparing the land for growing the eight-fold virtues of religious austerity (tapas). Truth, forgiveness, purity, charity, yoga and continence (Brahmcharya). Indra again asked the king as to where would he get the seed of these virtues. The king replied

¹ Vishnu Purana. IV.19.

that the seed was in his possession. At this the God Indra laughed at him and went away. After the king had cultivated the land for several days, God Vishnu appeared before the king and asked him as to what was he doing. The king replied in the same manner as he had done when questioned by Indra. God Vishnu asked the king Kuru to give him the seed and said that he would sow it for him. At this king Kuru put forward his right arm and the same was cut into thousand pieces with the Chakra of Vishnu and sown in the field. In the same way king Kuru's left arm, his two legs and then his head were offered by him to God Vishnu for sowing. This act of the king pleased God Vishnu very much and he blessed him. God Indra also appeared at this stage and told the king that he was very much pleased with his sacrifices and wished that he may ask for any boon from him. The king upon this begged of him two boons: one, that this land would ever remain a holy land named after himself, and the other, that any one dying here would go to heaven irrespective of his sins and virtues."

The story briefly related above is generally interpreted to mean that king Kuru established at Kurukshetra an extensive institution for the moral and spiritual culture of humanity as a whole. His object was to lay down a code of conduct for the people, stressing the importance of intense manual labour and righteousness.

Kurukshetra further shot into prominence as the battlefield of Mahabharata and the birth place of *Gita*. The 18-day battle of Mahabharata was fought here in the ancient past between Kauravas and Pandavas for upholding the cause of *Dharma*.

It was a "war between good and evil" in which the Pandavas emerged victorious. *Bhagvadgita*, the Song Celestial is the *divine* message which Lord Krishna delivered to Arjuna on the eve of the great war when he saw the latter wavering from his duty. It epitomizes all that is the best and noblest in the Hindu philosophy of life. Jyotisar (near Thanesar) marks the site where it was delivered.

Kurukshetra is mentioned a great deal in ancient literature. A flourishing country of the Kurus, it was the most sacred region of the *Dvapara* age according to the *Matsya Purana*,¹ and one of the sixteen

¹ Karnal District Gazetteer, 1973, p.506.

Mahajanapadas of Jambudvipa.¹ In the Mahabharata period, it was known as *Bahudhanyka* (land of plenty). It was the land of lakes and lotus beds. Manu indirectly praises the prowess of the people of Kurukshetra. The Girnar rock inscription of about A.D. 150 describes them as difficult to be controlled. Bana describes it as the land of the brave in the eyes of warriors. The place was visited by Lord Buddha and appears to have been favoured by his masterly discourses.² Kurukshetra also finds mention in Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*. It was also visited by nine out of the ten Sikh Gurus. Only the second Guru Angad did not visit this place. The place where Guru Nanak stayed during his sojourn at Kurukshetra is well known as Gurdwara Sidhbat on a mound near the pumping station across the Kurukshetra tank. The Gurdwara dedicated to Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, stands near Sannihit tank. A Gurdwara near the Sthaneshwar tank marks the spot sanctified by the visit of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur. On the main bank of the Kurukshetra tank, stands the Gurdwara Rajghat built in the memory of the visit of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh who also visited Jyotisar.

The region saw the rise and fall of many Empires through centuries. Sons of the soil fought invaders in the battlefield of this sacred land from time to time and their exploits fill the pages of history. The period of King Harsha was the golden age. The Chinese traveller, Yuan Chawang (Hiuen Tsang), who visited it in the seventh century (A.D. 629 to 645) said:

“In that country of gaiety and plenty, the people were good natured, hospitable and magnanimous, devoted to their duties and shunning confusion of castes and cadres”.

Bana, the great Sanskrit poet, describes the capital Thanesar in glowing terms. Kurukshetra has been a symbol of sanctity and holiness for centuries. Traditionally, its dust blown by wind or by the feet of the pilgrims would take a sinner to *parmagati* (complete communication with God). All who die here attain *moksha* (deliverance from taking birth again and again). The very thought of going and living there would rid persons of all his sins. According to

¹ Karnal District Gazetteer, 1973, p. 507.

² Ibid.

the Mahabharata, Kurukshetra is the *tirtha* par excellence in all the three worlds.

Hindus have always considered it their good fortune to visit Kurukshetra. The orthodox belief is that charity performed here bears manifold rewards. Because of its great mythological traditions, the region abounds in *tirthas* or holy spots associated with great events or personalities of the past, legends or cults of Siva and Sun Gods. Unfortunately, after Harsha, the region did not enjoy the peace for a long time. It became a battlefield of all foreign invaders and subjected to their continuous ravages which wasted its splendid culture. The sweep of iron hand of time played havoc with this holiest of holy regions. While many of the *tirthas* have totally disappeared with the passage of time, quite a number of these continued to survive in a dilapidated condition. Still so sacred is the region that the people continued to worship it as a holy land. It presents scenes of intense religious fervor when lakhs of people from all parts of India representing all shades of Hinduism gather at the Kurukshetra tanks on the occasion of the solar eclipse and other fairs. A bath in the Brahmsar or the Kurukshetra tank at the time of the solar eclipse is said to bestow upon the bather the benefit of a thousand *Ashvamedh Yajnas*.¹

Kurukshetra remained neglected for development purposes till 1968 except making adequate arrangements at the time of the solar eclipse fair. The Haryana Government then decided to revive the ancient glory of Kurukshetra and constituted the Kurukshetra Development Board to undertake an integrated and planned development of the region.

The foremost among the Kurukshetra *tirthas* are Brahmasar or Kurukshetra tank, Sannihit tank, Sthanesvara tank, Jyotisar, Banganga, Chandra-Kupa and Nabhi Kamal. Other important *tirthas* are located in Thanesar (Sthanuvata), Pehowa (Prithudaka), Kaithal (Kapisthala), Pharal (Phalgu), Pundri (Pundrika), Pindara (Pind-Tarak). Ram Rai (Ram Hrada), Kalayat and Safidon (Sarpadevi) and many important villages. The last mentioned four places are in Jind

¹ Karnal District Gazetteer, 1973, p.508.

and Kaithal districts. However, the Kurukshetra *tirthas* are described below:-

Kurukshetra Tank.- Kurukshetra or Brahmsar tank is the centre of interest for the pilgrims. It is 1,442 yards (1,318.6 metres) in length and 700 yards (640 metres) in breadth. This place is said to be the first altar of Brahma's *yajna*. The Tank is believed to have been excavated first by King Kuru long before the epic battle of Mahabharata. For the reasons already given, the tank is considered very sacred. In ancient times, there were long flights of steps on all the four sides of the tank. But in the course of time, the steps on the southern side and part of eastern side completely disappeared. *Ghats* on the Northern and Western sides remained in good condition. The long line of trees on the Northern bank, a small island and another big island in the middle of the tank enhance its beauty and make it attractive to the visitors. The tank has been renovated in the first phase by spending Rs. 1.50 crore under the aegis of the Kurukshetra Development Board. It has been cleaned and a bathing *ghat* to accommodate ten lakh people has been constructed. On May 17, 1973, the Sutlej waters from the Gobind Sagar flowing in the Narwana Branch of the Bhakra Canal System were released into the holy tank in the presence of a large number of holy men from all over India. Inaugural ceremony was performed on Jan, 28, 1973. There are temples and places of historical interest in these islands. The small island is linked with the Shravan Nath Math (an old *ashram* of *Sanyasis*) by a bridge and bigger island is linked by another bridge which runs from the middle of the Northern tank straight to the Southern tank dividing the tank into two parts. There are mango trees on these islands. Ruins of some structures standing on the bigger island are said to be a small castle of Emperor Aurangzeb, who posted armed soldiers to collect taxes from the pilgrims taking bath in the tank or taking sacred water from the tank. The rates of taxes are said to have been a rupee for a pot of water and five rupees for a bath.¹ Pilgrims found to evade payment of taxes were punished.

¹ Karnal District Gazetteer, 1973, p. 509.

In 1948, part of the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi was immersed in this tank.

There are *Maths*, temples and dharamshalas on the Northern bank of the tank. Of these, the dharmshalas of Baba Kali-Kamli Wala on the Northeast corner and Gita Temple of the Birlas on the Northwest corner deserve special mention. In the centre of the Northern bank, there are Vyas Gaudiya *Math* of Bengalee Sadhus and Gita Bhavan. There is also a sacred place for the Sikhs on the northwest end of the tank. It is associated with the visit of Guru Gobind Singh on the occasion of a solar eclipse.

Sannihit Tank.-This tank is smaller as compared to Kurukshetra tank and has a length of about 500 yards (457 metres) and a breadth of 150 yards (137 metres). It looks like a small lake of glistening water in which the domes and spires of nearby temples are reflected. The most famous are the temples dedicated to Sri Shruv Narain and Sri Laxmi Narain. There are *ghats* on its three sides only. It is situated at a short distance from Kurukshetra Railway Station on Pehowa road. Pilgrims are led first to this holy spot at the time of the solar eclipse. Sannihit means assembly to the entire range of *tirthas*. It is said that on every *amavas*, particularly on a *Somvati Amvas*, (an *amavas* falling on Monday) all *tirthas* assemble at Sannihit tank. The performance of *shraddha* here on the day of solar eclipse is said to give the benefit of thousand *Ashvamedh* sacrifices.

Sthanesvara Tank.- Meaning the place of God, it is a sacred tank in front of a temple of Lord Shiva. It is at a short distance from Thanesar town, which itself derives its name from the tank. The tank was once famous for healing properties of its water. It is said that a few drops of water of this tank cured leprosy of an ancient king named Vena. The Pandavas are also said to have worshipped here.

Jyotisar.- It is another very important place of pilgrimage. This tank is about 500 feet (152 x 30.4 metres). Five kilometers west of Thanesar, it is situated on the Kurukshetra Pehowa road. The old bed of the sacred river Saraswati lies near Jyotisar village in the shape of narrow canal. At Jyotisar, no relic is seen except a banyan tree which is said to have been there for more than 5,000 years. Lord Krishna is believed to have delivered his message of the *Bhagvadgita* to Arjuna

at this place.¹ Pilgrims generally visit this place first before starting pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath. *Adi Shankracharya* also visited this place on way to Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Ban Ganga.- This holy tank, about 3 miles (5 kilometres) from Kurukshetra tank towards south, is connected by road. It is said that Bhishma Pitamaha lay here on the bed of arrows and felt thirsty. He asked Arjuna to quench his thirst. Arjuna pierced the earth with his powerful arrow and the water of the Ganga gushed forth in the form of a fountain which subsequently turned into a tank.

Chandra Kupa.- A small *tirtha* in the bigger island inside the Kurukshetra tank, it is said to be one of the oldest sacred wells. Tradition has it that in ancient times the water of this well used to change into milk at the time of solar eclipse. There is a temple by the side of the well, where Yudhishtira is said to have built a victory pillar after successful culmination of the war. The pillar does not exist now. The fortress built by Emperor Aurangzeb was on this well which he got filled up with lead. The Marathas got it dismantled and restored the *tirtha*.

Nabhi Kamal.- It is a sacred tank adjacent to Thanesar town. It was here that Lord Brahma is said to have been born out of lotus which grew on the *nabhi* (navel) of Lord Vishnu. According to the mythology, this tank is the source of universe; the legend goes that Lord Vishnu formless was in a trance at the site when a lotus stalk sprouted from his navel. From the lotus came the four faced Brahma chanting the *Vedas*. It was out of the limbs of Brahma that the universe came into existence. People generally visit this place in the month of *Sravan* or *Chaitra*.

¹ No reference of this spot is found in any of the holy books. Even the *Mahabharata* does not refer to any spot where *Bhagvadgita*, song celestial was delivered. The only reference found in the *Mahabharata* is that Arjuna requested Lord Krishna to stop the chariot at a place from where he could see both the armies and it was there that Lord Krishna delivered the gospel of *Bhagvadgita*. It is believed that the banyan tree at Jyotisar stands there as the only relic of that celestial scene. A marble *mandap* was constructed under the tree by the Kurukshetra Restoration Society and was inaugurated in November, 1926. A Marble chariot with idols of Krishna and Arjuna also now stands under the tree.

Gita Bhavan.- Built in 1921-22 by the Kurukshetra Restoration Society at a cost of several lakh of rupees, the Bhavan has a library which, besides other religious books, contains translations of the *Bhagavadgita* in many Indian and foreign languages.

Gita Mandir.- Popularly known as Birla Mandir, it was built by Jugal Kishore Birla in the mid-fifties of the 20th century. It is situated at Pehowa road and adjoining the holy Brahasar Tank, it is a beautiful temple- all made of marble from within. It is one of the premier temples of this region and also a specimen of Hindu architecture in modern times. The main deity of the temple is Lord Krishna, whose life size marble statue is very impressive. Full text of the *Bhagavadgita*, the song celestial, is engraved on the walls around the main temple. Carvings of various scenes from Hindu mythology are configured on the walls, pillars and entablatures which are the highlights of the grandeur of the temple. In the main hall, the portraits of Sage Ved Vyas, Mahatma Budha, Guru Nanak Dev, Saint Tulsī Das, Guru Gobind Singh and Saint Ravi Dass are incised on the walls alongwith their sayings. Another attraction is a large size all marble chariot driven by four horses and depicting Lord Krishna delivering the message of the *Gita* to Arjuna. One couplet from each of the eighteen chapters of the *Gita* has been inscribed on all the four sides of the Chariot. Janamashtmi festival is celebrated here with great enthusiasm. A Dharamshala with modern amenities provides accommodation to the visiting devotees.

Apart from the association with holy places dating back to most ancient times, the name Kurukshetra has also been applied to an institution of modern learning, namely, the Kurukshetra University. This University, at a distance of about 4 kilometres from Kurukshetra railway station and about 2 kilometres from Thanesar Town, was set up in 1956 as a Sanskrit University and has since then become an important centre of academic and cultural activities. The University campus is beautifully laid out and has developed into a miniature town having all the modern amenities. Besides the thirty-two teaching departments, a Government College, a College of Education and a National Institute of Technology are located there. Other places of public utility include a Police Post, a Post and Telegraph Office, a Telephone Exchange, Hospital, Vidya Vihar Gurukul and Gita Bhawan Library.

Bhadra Kali Temple.- From the legend of *Sati*, springs the existence of Maa Bhadra Kali temple. The legends say Sati's right ankle fell here, granting the sanctity of a *Sidha Peeth* (Place where wishes are fulfilled). It lies at a short 4 Km. drive from the railway station.

The temple has been renovated with red stone. At a well in the precincts, devotees offer terracotta horses as offerings. The inner sanctum of the temple houses are inspiring and the sublime forms of the Mother Goddess *Kali*.

Sthanesvar Mahadev Temple.- It can doubtlessly be said that the presiding deity of Kurukshetra is Lord Shiva. It is after the Sthanesvar *Shiva Linga* that Thanesar (twin town of Kurukshetra) gets its name. *Vaman Puran* categorically mentions its importance and legends tell us that Lord Brahma Himself laid the first *Linga* of Lord Shiva at this temple.

It was renovated in recent times. The temple has a white *amla* (fruit shapes) dome. A large water body is lying adjacent to the temple. A Gurudwara also stands on its opposite bank.

Lakshmi Narayna Temple.- The Lakshmi Narayana Temple lies close to the Sri Krishna Museum, some 3 Km. from the railway station. It has a small entrance and is dedicated to Lord Narayana and His consort Lakshmi. The architecture of the temple belongs to the late 18th century A.D. Structurally, the temple has a huge double storied building having three traditional architectural components. The first section lies on a high plinth having seven projections whereas the second chamber is a long corridor hall having seven projected areas on either side, bearing transacted windows. The sanctum sanctorum houses the forms of the deity. The temple's tall pinnacle proclaims its presence from a distance.

Gurudwaras.- Kurukshetra also holds great sanctity for the Sikhs. The town had been visited by a number of Sikh Gurus. As a result, a number of Gurudwaras can be seen here. The place where Guru Nanak Dev stayed during his sojourn in Kurukshetra is known as Gurudwara Sidhbat. It lies near the Kurukshetra Tank. The Gurudwara dedicated to Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, stands near Sannihit tank. A Gurudwara near the Sthanesvar temple marks the spot sanctified by the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur. On the bank of

Brahma Sarovar, stands Gurudwara Rajghat, built in the memory of the visit of Guru Gobind Singh, who also visited Jyotisar.

Sri Krishna Museum.- Kurukshetra Development Board opened Sri Krishna Museum in 1991 after collecting various art objects which celebrated the theme of Lord Krishna. The museum lies close to the *Brahama Sarovar*. In 1995, a new block was added to it. These artifacts present before the viewers, Krishna as a God, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, a great Philosopher, an epic hero, an astute statesman and a supreme lover. Idols and frescoes found during various excavations in the area have also been displayed in this museum.

Panorama Project.- The Panorama Project is cylindrical structure. Set up with beautifully laid out gardens, it is managed by the National Council of Science Museums. The Panorama Project's main attraction is the 34 feet high depiction of the Mahabharata battlefield. With the help of special acoustic effects, the epic battle seems to have come alive. This is the only project of its kind in the State. An additional attraction here is the science section which highlights the 4,500 years old scientific temper of ancient India. The project lies adjacent to Sri Krishna Museum.

Kurukshetra Panorama and Science Centre, situated in the ancient city of Kurukshetra, is a unique Science Centre in India. Housed in a tall and cylindrical building with its elegant architecture and ambience, the main attraction of the Centre is a life-like Panorama of the epic battle of *Mahabharta*. Standing at the centre of the cylindrical hall, one can feel the towering 34 feet high paintings of the episodes from the 18 days confrontation between the Pandavas and the Kauravas coming alive before his eyes. Merged with this is the drama of the battlefield that epitomizes the carnage realistically. The chanting of Geeta and distant war cries mingled with lighting illusions create the perfect ambience.

To support and supplement this, there are exhibits on the geological evolution of our land, the geography of the ancient India and the main characters of the epic. The computer-based exhibits placed in the gallery take you into the intricacies of Weapons (*Astras*) and War formations (*Vyuhās*) or the interpretation of the events like a total solar by the ancient people.

Indian Heritage in Science and Technology.- It has a long history of more than 4,500 year. Ground floor of the Centre holds an exhibition of documents Indian tradition in science and technology during this long period. The exhibition contains interactive exhibits, graphic and visual panels, artifacts, video shows etc. on this theme.

The exhibition depicts how, in course of time, side by side with art and literature, there grew up on Indian soil a very rich scientific and technological culture. This heritage has been the sound basis for future development and assimilation of new techniques and processes.

Hands-on easy to use exhibits in the *Fun Science* section invite one to play with them and explore the 'how' and 'why' of common scientific phenomena. Roll a ball, press a switch, rotate a crank and things happen scientifically, which seems miracle. Here you can have fun with mirrors, play with musical instruments or enjoy the optical illusions. Here rolling balls perform acrobatics; vortex is formed in water and complex rules of probability turns to be exciting game of fun. These apparently seem to be going against the nature, yet they teach us to get aware of the law within laws in this multifaceted world. The exhibits are fully interactive and one can learn the basics of science through a process of discovery.

Amin

Amin is Two kilometers from Kurukshetra in the west of Grand Trunk Road (N.H.I.) with which it is linked by a metalled road. It lies at 20° 54' 16" north latitude and 76° 52' 09" east longitude. It is situated on a huge and lofty mound measuring about 2,000 feet (610 metres) in length from north to south, 800 feet (244 metres) in width and with a height of 50 to 60 feet (15 to 18 metres).

Amin is said to be the traditional site of *Chakravyuha*, a strategic arrangement of the army of Kaurvas, planned by Guru Dronacharya to trap the forces of the Pandavas led by Arjuna's warrior son, Abhimanyu, during the famous battle of *Mahabharata*. Amin is also known as 'Abhimanyu Khera' or the mound of Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu was killed by Jaydratha inside the *Chakravyuha*. It was at Amin that two inscribed red-stone rectangular pillars were discovered and these are lying in the shrine of Thakurji on

the west bank of the Suraj Kund. These pillars are carved on all the west bank of the Suraj Kund. These pillars are carved on the four sides and have no sockets for cross bars. They would thus appear to have supported some sort of a platform. The inscriptions on them are in characters of the Kushan period, but are quite short and merely supply the name of their donors.¹ But this dating by Spooner does not tally with the art of the time. The depiction of the trading and artistic activities of the people carved on these pillars appears to have been the work of some Sunga artists.²

Ladwa

It is a small town, 20 kilometres east of Kurukshetra. It lies at 29° 59'33" north latitude and 76° 02'42" east longitude.

The town and the neighborhood belonged to a Sikh *Misaldar* and were confiscated by the British in 1846 as the Raja had fought on the side of the Sikhs in the First Sikh War. There is an old tank and Devi Temple on the outskirts of the town. A fair is held annually which lasts for a week. With the Green Revolution, the place has become commercially very important and a new grain market has been established here.

The places of public utility include a Government High School, a P.W.D. Rest House, a Civil Dispensary, A Post and Telegraph Office, A telephone Exchange, a Municipal Library, a Police Station and a Veterinary Hospital.

PEHOWA

Pehowa, a small town, 27 kilometres west of Thanesar, lies at 29° 58'45" north latitude and 76° 34'55" east longitude.

The place derives its name from Prithu who was called the first king. On the death of Vena, his son Prithu performed the usual funeral ceremonies and for 12 days after the cremation, he sat on the bank of Saraswati offering water to all visitors. The place, therefore, came to

¹ Spooner D.B., Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1921-22, p.47. He also held that these "two sculptured posts in red stone of the Kushan period, must have been imported from Mathura". Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1922-23. p.90.

² Aggarwala, R.C., Early History and Archaeology of Kurukshetra and Ambala division, (Indian Historical Quarterly, December, 1955).

be known as Prithu's pool and city which he afterwards built on the spot was called by the same name.

It is an ancient place of pilgrimage. As mentioned earlier, it is believed that Prajapati created the world and the four Varnas of the Hindus at this place. The town contains two specially famous tanks, sacred one to Brahma and the other to the Goddess Saraswati. A big fair is held on the latter tank every year in March or April (Amavas of Chaitra) after the tradition of Prithu and is attended by more than 50,000 persons. The fair lasts for 3 days and people offer *pinds* (balls of rice and flour) for the salvation of their departed kith and kins.

The place is of great antiquity. This is proved by the discovery of large size bricks which are 18 inches by 2½ inches to 3 inches. Two inscriptions of the time of Bhoja and his son, Mahendrapal, kings of Kanauj, and fragments of medieval sculptures and Painted Gray Ware have been found here. The inscription of the time of Mahendrapala records the erection of a triple temple to Vishnu by three brothers. There are two mounds, the larger of which is covered with modern houses and the other about 30 to 40 feet in height, is known as Tilla of Vishvamitra. The mound seems to mark the site of some old temple, partly constructed in stone. No trace of the original temple remains, the modern shrine seems to have been discovered here, but it cannot be precisely said that these belong to Vishnu temple, referred to in the inscription. Anyhow, it is doubtless that they pertain to some prominent Vishnu temple of the Pratihara period raised in that city.¹ About one kilometer higher up on the bank of the stream stood another temple, which forms the existing position of its doorway, appears to have been dedicated to Vishnu.

An old *serai* built along the old Imperial road exists in a dilapidated condition. A palace built by Raja Udai Singh of Kaithal is in good condition and is being used as the Civil Rest House.

Pehowa is famous for Shivji-Ka-Mandir and Kartikeya-Ka-Mandir. Unlike the other temples dedicated to Shiva, the Shiva temple has no linga, instead it has a *panchmukhi* idol of Shiva which is said to be the only one of its type in whole of India. The temple of Kartikeya was built by Marathas during their period of supremacy.

¹ Buddha Prakash, Glimpses of Haryana 1967, p.21.

Shahabad

The town is situated on the Grand Trunk Road (N.H.I.) on the bank of Markanda river. It has also a railway station with the name of Shahabad Markanda on the Delhi-Karnal-Ambala Railway line. It lies at 30°10'04" north latitude and 76° 52'17" east longitude, 22 kilometres north of Kurukshetra.

It was founded in A.D. 1192 after the defeat of the Rajputs in the Battle of Tirawari (Taraori) by the followers of Shahb-ud-din Ghuri, the first Muslim conqueror of Delhi. It came into existence with the reward of 52,000 bighas of revenue free land to the Muslim soldiers for their services. They were also granted the revenue of several neighbouring villages. The site selected was near Markanda at a strategic point along the high road to Delhi and for purposes of administration was attached to the province of Sirhind.

In 1525, the inhabitants of the town assisted Ibrahim Lodi and in the following year, it was plundered by Babar as a punishment. Its strategic position was recognized in the later Mughal period and considerable extensions were made in the town. When the Sikhs came into power during the 18th century, Banda Bairagi (Banda Bahadur) attacked the town which was surrendered to him after vain appeals to the rulers of Delhi. The Sikhs divided Shahabad in seven *Pattis* leading Sirdars of each *Patti* distributing a rough justice.

In 1802, the British suzerainty was established over the town, though the Sirdars of Shahabad retained administrative powers. With the annexation of the Punjab, the British assumed the reigns of the Government and only Jagirs were granted to the Sirdars.

The historical buildings in the town include the Royal Serai and mosque of the Pathan period with the dark square domes. The finest Pathan mosque which shows the marks of Sikh bullets was converted into a Gurdwara known as Mastgarh.¹ The serai is one of the oldest buildings in the town. It was, however, protected in the reign of *Shah Jahan* by a fortified wall like that of Red Fort in Delhi.

¹ Mastgarh is said to be a derivation from masit and masjid. According to another version, it was taken over by the Sikhs who used it as a place for taking *bhang* and wine. As such it came to be known as mastgarh, the place where people got intoxicated.

It was the residence of Mughal Officials. It is probable that the serai was maintained as a strategic landmark lying along the main road to Delhi.

A *Mandi* known as Kahan Chand Mandi was constructed in 1923 on the outskirts of the town near the railway station. This *Mandi* could not flourish and is now serving as a residential colony. The present *Mandi*, at a new site along the Grand Trunk Road (N.H.I.), was constructed in October, 1960.

The places of public utility in the town include a Police Post, Civil Hospital, Post and Telegraph Office, Telephone Exchange, Veterinary Hospital P.W.D. Rest House, Arya Kanya Mahavidyalya, Government Senior Secondary School for boys, a Privately managed Senior Secondary School for boys and 3 privately managed High Schools- one for boys and two for girls, Municipal Library and *Gaushala*.

An account of religious places has already been given under Kurukshetra. The places of historical interest connected with the medieval period comprise an ancient fort and mounds, Sheikh Chehlis' Tomb and Madrasah, Pathar Masjid and Chini Masjid. These are described below:

Ancient Fort and Mounds.- There exists a ruined fort measuring 1,200 square feet at the top, a suburb called Bahari and the town, all situated on three different ancient mounds. Thus three mounds together occupy a space of about 3 miles (5 kilometres), which closely agrees with the 20 (*li*) of Yuan Chwang.² Tradition assigns the construction of the Thanesar fort to Raja Dalip, a descendant of Kuru. Spooner states that it was most probably founded by Harsha Vardhana. The Chief reason for this inference apart from other considerations, is the fact that all visible structures in the fort are composed of bricks measuring 14"x8½"x2½". The fort is said to have 52 towers or bastions some of which still exist. The number of the gates is not ascertainable on account of the later renovations of the fort during the Muslim and the Sikh periods. Besides, there is another important mound situated about ¼th of a mile (2/5th of a kilometer) to the northwest of Thanesar which was said to have contained the relics

² Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1922-23. pp.87-91..

of the Budha and was standing at a height of about 300 feet (91 metres) when Yuan Chwang visited it. The modern town of Thanesar still stands on an ancient mound.

Sheikh Chehli's Tomb and Madarsah.- This tomb along with *madarsah* stands at the northeast corner of the fort overlooking the *serai* built by Sher Shah Suri. It is an octagonal building of white marble, 18 feet (5.5 metres) on each side and about 44 feet (13.5 metres) in diameter crowned by a marble dome and surrounded by a marble-paved courtyard. Because of its lofty position and white mass of marble, the tomb is conspicuous from a long distance. The pear-shaped dome and flower marble lattice work declare it to be of a modern date. The people attribute this shrine to a *Pir* (Spiritual adviser) of Dara Shikoh. There is a difference of opinion about the name of the *Pir*, some called him Abdur Rahim, some Abdul-Karim and others Abdul Razak, but he is more familiarly known by the name of Sheikh Chehli. Cunningham also assigned it to the time of Dara Shikoh, about A.D. 1650.

The *madarsah* is a stone building with a deep arched of nine openings on each side. The building was constructed entirely with the spoils of Hindu temples, the arcades being supported on plain Hindu Pillars. Nothing is known of the date of the *madarsah*, but from its evident connection with the tomb, it must have been built at the same time as a part of the religious establishment of the saint's shrine.

Pather Masjid and Chini Masjid.- Pather Masjid is a small building being only 37 feet (11 metres) long by 11½ feet (3½ metres) broad inside, but is remarkable for its *minars* which are attached to the end of the back wall instead of the front wall, as is usual. Like Qutab Minar, these *minars* are fluted below with alternatively round angular flutes. The Masjid (Mosque) is assigned to the time of Firuz Shah Tughlug or to the end of the 14th century.¹

The Chini Masjid is situated in the town. It has two short stout *minars*, which together with its walls must once have been covered with glazed tiles. Most of the tiles have gone, but as the remaining tiles are of small size and each piece of one uniform colour

¹ Alexander Cunningham, Annual Report of the Archaeological survey of India, Volume-II, 1871, p. 222.

Cunningham assigned the building with much probability to the reign of Aurangzeb.¹

Places of Archaeological Interest

A few more sites of archaeological interest which have not been mentioned in the foregoing pages but have yielded various objects of antiquarian interest and a distinctive class of pottery known as the Painted Gray Ware generally associated with the Aryans (C-1100-500 B.C.) are described below:-

Raja Karan Ka Qila.- It is a small mound about 3 miles (5 kilometres) to the west and southwest of Thanesar. It is about 500 square feet (46.5 square metres) at the top, 800 square feet (74 square metres) at the base with the height of 30 to 40 feet (9 to 12 metres). Sherds of Painted Gray Ware and some other objects such as a flesh rubber, a terracotta reel, a mould for printing cloth, a human head, a double inkpot, a hollow terracotta rattle, a flattened bronze object appearing to be a late derivative of a celt with crescentric circle, an earthen chati (pot) having a line of *trisula* and wheel carved on it, one earthen pitcher ornamented round the shoulder and some pieces of glazed pottery of the Muslim period have been found here. There is also a large step well of the Muslim period.

Excavations show the size of bricks as 14 to 14½" x 9" to 9½" x 2½" to 3". Spooner mentions about the discovery of two wedge-shaped bricks about 2 or 3 feet above the virgin soil in one of the trenches excavated here. He also informs that such bricks had been used in the most ancient times.

Raja Harsha Ka Tila.- Situated in Thanesar Town adjacent to the Sheikh Chilli's tomb, the Raja Harsh Ka Tila dated back to Circa 1st century AD. Found in a circumference of 1 Km. X 750m., its excavation indicates the existence of a settlement before starting a continuous habitation at the site since Christian era. The study of excavated material divides it into six cultural periods from Circa 1st century AD to 19th century AD i.e. Kushana period, Gupta period, post Gupta and Vardhamana period, Rajput period, Sultanate period and Mughal period (upto 1806 AD) etc.

¹ Ambala District Gazetteer, 1892-93, p. 96.

Jogna Khera.- This village lies near the Shekh Chilli's tomb towards north-western bank of the river Saraswati and relates to the period c. 1500-800 BC. Recently the villagers have rendered the mound extensively stabbed, and poked in all over for its soil both for building and agriculture use. The pottery found on its excavation is essentially the red ware. It is as a rule made of well-levigatged clay, backed red, treated in most cases with fine red slip, decorated quite richly with geometric, vegetal and animal motifs executed in black and purple pigments. As is obvious, the importance of the site should lie in properly understanding the nature and use of the kilns which surely formed part of large-scale industrial production during the Bara period.

Nabha House.- Situted opposite to the Sannihit Sarovar at Kurukshetra, this palatial building was constructed by the royal family of Nabha principality during 19th century and was being used by its member for stay during religious performances at Kurukshetra. The building stands on a raised platform, the entrance gate of which is on the eastern side, either sides are decorated with four arched niches. There are two beautiful pillar windows on the 2nd floor of the building. A temple dedicated to God Brahma is constructed on the top of this magnificent building. It represents the Hindu style of architecture in early British era.

Asthipura.- It lies to the west of Thanesar and to the south of the Auja's ghat and marks the place where the bodies of the persons slain in the Mahabharata War were cremated. Yuan Chwang's visit to this place in the 7th century A.D. also bears testimony to this fact. Cunningham excavated the mound which measures about 700 feet by 500 feet (213 metres by 152 metres) and found "an extensive platform of unbaked bricks still 364 feet (111 metres) in length", besides many remains of walls and fragments of terracotta sculptures.

Bhor (Sarsa).- About 8 miles (13 kilometres) to the west of Thanesar towards Pehowa lies the Bhurisrava Tank. Tradition ascribes the place to be connected with the treacherous murder of Bhurisrava by Arjuna during the Mahabharata war. Bhurisrava was son of Somadatta, Raja of Varanasi. The village is named Bhor after him. This small village is situated on an ancient mound. The houses are built of old large size bricks of $12\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ inches.

Besides, Painted Grey Ware have also been found from Bahola, Daulatpur, Jaurasi Khurd, Khera, Morthali, Teora and Urnai and Red Polished Ware from Kohand.¹

Mirzapur.- This small mound located about 200 metres from the east of Raja Karan Ka Qilla contains the remains of late-Harappan settlement is known by a structural complex of mud brick walls consisting of two rooms and the sturdy Red Ware painted in light black colour with geometrical and linear plant, fish and bird designs. The finds of this period are a complete spearhead without mid-rib, a fragmentary parasu in copper: figurines of humped bull and the painted figurines of snakes etc. The mound also shows evidence of early settlements of the Christian era- two moulds of punch-marked coins, the Kushana terracottas, and glazed animal figurines. Another feature of this period, the typical Red Polished Ware, is in abundance here. This site remained uninhabited for a long time. There are also the remains of early medieval habitation at the top of the mound.

Daulatpur.- This site is situated beside a stream branching off Chitang (ancient Drisadvati) at about 15 kms. to the east of Thanesar. Its early period is marked by typical sturdy red coloured pottery, painted in black with geometrical and linear designs the special features of the Late phase of the Indus Civilization (*c.* 2000-1500 B.C.). The next period is distinguished by the Painted Grey Ware generally associated with the Aryans (*c.* 1100-500B.C.). There is then the early historical period covering *c.* 500 B.C. to A.D. 500 marked by the Plain Grey (belonging to the centuries succeeding the Christian era) and Red Polished Ware (Saka -Kushan period). Among other important finds are the clay seals and sealings bearing legends in the early Brahmi script (4th -5th century). One of the sealing has the legend Sthanesvarasya i.e. of Lord Sthanesvara.

Bhagwanpura.- This site, situated on the bank of the river Saraswati (in Kurukshetra district), was excavated in 1976. It denotes the evidence of overlap between the late-Harappans and Painted Grey Ware cultures as reflected in the continuity of pottery types in painted designs and in the terracotta figurines and burials. The major ceramic industry of this period is the sturdy Red Ware Pottery (associated with

¹ Painted Grey Ware are assigned to the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

late- Harappans) similar to that found at Daulatpur and Raja Karna Ka Qila. The late-Harappans, who first settled, on the alluvial deposit of the Saraswati, had used solid mud platforms as protective measures against floods. Further, the excavation throws light on three phases of structural activity of the Painted Grey Ware people: firstly, semi-circular thatched huts and oval shaped structures of highly burnt mud walls; secondly, the mud wall houses (a complete house complex of thirteen rooms, a corridor and a courtyard); and thirdly, houses built of baked bricks. The excavation has also yielded two skeletons of an adult and a child.

Fairs And Festivals

A number of famous festivals and local fairs are held in Kurukshetra round the year, some prominent ones are:-

Shivratri.- It is the night consecrated to Lord Shiva, one of the Gods of Hindu Trinity. The festival has the special significance of being one of the four *Maharatri*s. Legend has it that one who stays awake the entire night deep in meditation of Lord Shiva, is granted *Moksha* or redemption from the cycle of life and death. To be here on this day at the Sthanesvar Mahadev temple is said to be a very special blessing. The festival falls in February or March every year.

Kurukshetra Fair.- This fair is the event held whenever the solar eclipse occurs. This results in the arrival of lakhs of pilgrims. Legend has it that on every *amavas* (moonless night) and during every eclipse, waters of all *tirthas* assemble in the Sannihit tank. By performing Shradha (prayer for ancestors) and taking a holy dip in the Brahma Sarovar on these days, one acquires the fruit of *ashamedah yajnas*.

Somavati Amavasya.- It is another special festival held in the town. Every time when the Amavasya falls on Monday, a festival is held at the holy water tanks of Brahma Sarovar and Sannihit Sarovar when thousands of pilgrims throng for a bath in the waters of the tanks.

Gita Jayanti Celebrations.- It falls in November / December every year. A fair of festivity pervades the town of Kurukshetra. The event celebrates the birth of *Shrimad Bhagwadgita*. Discourses on the *Bhagwadgita*, pageants based on the epic *Mahabharata*, ballets that celebrate Lord Sri Krishna, camps for social service and the unforgettable *deep daan* at the Brahma Sarovar are an experience one has to see.