

Mamata unveils twin gates to honour Vidyasagar's legacy in Birsingha

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Kolkata: Chief minister Mamata Banerjee inaugurated the Barnaparichay Gate at Chandrakona Road, alongside the Birsingha Gate and art wall at Birsingha village on Tuesday. These installations aim to establish Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's birthplace in Ghatal, West Midnapore, as a prominent cultural tourism and pilgrimage destination in the state.

The initial phase involved the restoration of Birsingha Bhagabati Vidyalaya and Vidyasagar Smriti Mandir. "Mud buildings that were 150 years old were strengthened, conserved and restored. A day rest and interpretation centre was built using a mix of existing traditional techniques with modern-day knowledge. A landscape resembling a tapoban in a gurukul was added to tie the elements together and create the necessary ambience of cultural tourism," said conservation architect Anjan Mitra.

The state govt's information and cultural affairs department funded the project which received the 2023-24 HUDCO design award first prize in conservation.

The subsequent phase focuses on developing twin gates as tourist landmarks, directing visitors to Vidyasagar Smriti Mandir, a knowledge centre highlighting Vidyasagar's legacy.

Artist Amar Sarkar created the Barnaparichay Gate on Chandrakona Road as a public art installation. It represents an enlarged version of Barnaparichay, the Bengali primer authored by the social reformer in 1855. He also designed a village art wall in the old vernacular style. "What we tried to do here is create an ambience of a 19th-century Bengal village through the art wall that camouflages the disparate entities like shops, toilets and bus stands without displacing them. The art wall is designed so that everyone present becomes a harmonious part of the overall landscape. A platform or stage has also been created where local performances can be held," added Mitra, the project executor.

Artist Purnendu De designed the Birsingha Gate at the entrance to Birsingha village proper. Inspired by commonly seen forms in rural Bengal villages, this gate, replete with carefully crafted terracotta panels, documents the life and teachings of Vidyasagar. A bust of Vidyasagar has also been sculpted and placed within this gate. The project was executed by the PWD Midnapore division.