

**PATNA –AZIMABAD AS SOCIO-CULTURAL  
CENTRE (PART-1)  
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## PATNA – AZIMABAD AS SOCIO-CULTURAL CENTRE

- After its great days as the imperial capital of the Mauryas (321-185 B.C) and the Guptas (319-550 A.D.), Pataliputra, later re-named Patna and Azimabad, got relegated to the position of a small town and does not figure much in history. Its fortune again revived during the medieval period under Sher Shah (1540-1545) , impressed by its strategic location , ordered the founding of a fortified city at the same site. The town developed since then and it became the capital of Bihar in place of Biharsharif, situated some 50 miles south-east , which had been the capital until then .

During the next two centuries , Patna emerged as an

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important Political, commercial and cultural centre. It was the headquarters of a long line of distinguished *Subahdars* (governors), including princes and close relatives of the Mughal emperors. Many of the *subahdars* added to the civic amenities of the town and got new buildings constructed. Mirza Yusuf Khan (1585) got a *Hammam* (Bath) ‘consisting of several rooms always full of water’ built, and Jahangir Quli Khan (1617-19) got the roads widened . More notable builders were Saif Khan(1628-32)whose famous *Madarsa* and *Idgah* have partly revived , Shaista Khan (1639-43) some of whose mosques are extant and the site of whose *katra* (shopping arcade) can still be

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identified at the eastern end of the town . Additionally , there numerous administrative buildings, such as the *Darul Adl (court of justice)* , in the precincts of the present Khwaja Kalan thana, and the *Darul Zarb (Mint)* , situated close by , on the north near the riverbank. A new shape was added to the town's sky-line by the 'factories' of the European Trading Companies. Only a few of these buildings –mostly mosques, mausoleums and dargahs have survived in some cases, and these have been published.

The town' s peculiar layout –commented upon by many of the foreign visitors too-was conditioned by its geography. It grew up along the southern bank of the Ganges. Another

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river , the Punpun , flows parallel to it , thus leaving a narrow stretch of land between the two. The town could therefore expand only length-wise. Like many other medieval towns , it was walled , and there were several main gates in it and also smaller side-gates or *Khirki*. Some of the mahalla-names , such as Ranipur-ki-khirki, mark the sites of these side gates. Site of the two main, eastern and western gates, is marked by the mahallas named Purab Darwaza and Pachchim Darwaza.

The town's population was estimated by Manrique (16<sup>th</sup> Century European visitor) at 2 lakhs, and it had already started spilling outside the walls since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, if not earlier. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century dargah of Shah Arzan was

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outside the city walls , near the site of an old Buddhist monastery. Later when the European Trading Companies started building their factories and godowns they were careful to locate them outside the city's walls and close to the water-front , so as to be less under the grip of the subahdar's forces. The process of westward expansion gained further momentum during the British period when the civil station and cantonment buildings grew up on that side.

(To be continued)